

Jesse Jackson promotes Democratic Party at Flint rally

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A protest called by Reverend Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition drew some 500 people Friday in Flint, Michigan. The turnout was a pale reflection of the seething anger in the community and around the state over the lead poisoning of the city's residents. The fact that the event was scheduled in the middle of a workday indicates that the organizers were in fact not interested in a large turnout that they might not be able to control.

While the anger expressed by march participants was genuine, the political forces assembled by Jackson sought to channel outrage behind the very same politicians responsible for the lead poisoning of Flint residents and the ensuing cover-up. March organizers promoted the state's Democratic Party establishment, diverting all blame for the crisis onto the shoulders of Michigan Republican Governor Rick Snyder.

Rather than expose the lineup of banks and corporations along with Democratic and Republican politicians against the residents of Flint, Jackson and his supporters sought to sow maximum confusion. Joining these efforts were assorted organizations around the Democratic Party, such as the neo-Stalinist Workers World Party and the International Socialist Organization. They sought to divide the working class of Flint, a racially mixed community, by injecting racial politics.

Marchers assembled at a Baptist church on the north side of Flint and then marched about a mile to the city's water treatment plant. The route passed the former site of GM's Buick City complex, which once employed some 28,000 workers. Today it is a barren field, a testament to the role played by GM in the impoverishment of the once prosperous city.

Jackson is the latest in a long line of prominent Democratic Party operatives that have descended on

Flint in the wake of publicity over the leaching of lead from Flint's antiquated piping system by highly corrosive water drawn from the polluted Flint River. Jackson brought in tow a pack of television celebrities, preachers and local politicians. These included Judge Greg Mathis, from the court TV reality show by the same name, and Phaedra Greg from *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. Also present were several local ministers, State Representative Ryan Neeley and Scott Kincaid, a former Flint City councilman who is now a community health liaison for the United Auto Workers.

None of those speaking at the brief rally following the march to the water plant shed any light on the social or political roots of the water crisis in Flint. The only policy initiative advanced by the speakers was to plug for the \$600 million Flint aid package being promoted by the state's Democratic Congressional delegation. The amount is totally inadequate in the face of the scale of the crisis, with conservative estimates of the amount required to rebuild Flint's water system placed at up to \$1.5 billion. This does not include a price tag on the incalculable damage done to Flint residents, particularly children, from drinking Flint's tainted water.

The rally featured a heavy-handed dose of religion. It began with a Christian prayer. Speakers included several ministers, one who sang a gospel hymn.

Only one Flint resident, Melissa Mays, founder of *Water You Fighting For*, was given a very short amount of time to speak. She and her children were sickened from drinking the lead tainted water, and she currently suffers from seizures.

Jackson himself spoke last. Time has taken its toll on Jackson, a corrupt remnant of the former civil rights movement and a tireless promoter of minority set asides and a spokesman for an aspiring layer of black

businessmen.

After leading a series of chants, his trademark, Jackson went on to blame workers in Flint for the water crisis due to their failure to vote for Democrats. “Those of you who didn’t vote elected Snyder. If you don’t vote, you are going to elect problems,” he declared.

In fact the entire political establishment, Democrat and Republican, at all levels, was involved in both the original decision to shift Flint’s water supply from Detroit to the polluted Flint River and the subsequent cover-up of health dangers facing Flint residents. None other than Democratic Michigan Treasurer Andy Dillon gave the official go ahead to the switch. The series of emergency managers that presided over the city during the crisis were all Democrats, as were the mayor and members of the Flint City Council.

The Obama administration’s Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) played a particularly criminal role. The top EPA official in Michigan for months suppressed warnings about the lead dangers facing Flint residents. The lower level EPA official, Miguel del Toral, who tried to raise an alarm, was gagged. Gina McCarthy, the EPA head administrator, to this day defends the agency’s actions in relation to Flint.

Before closing with his standard “Keep Hope Alive” mantra, Jackson issued a call for President Obama to come to Flint. The appeal to Obama expresses Jackson’s well-founded fear that the Flint crisis has deeply discredited the entire political establishment. In the wake of Flint, revelations have surfaced of high incidents of lead poisoning in cities across the United States. While Congress is debating over a few hundred million dollars in aid to Flint, it spends as much on a few F-35 fighter aircraft. The White House approved trillions to bail out Wall Street.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to several participants in the demonstration. Many of those attending the protest expressed a healthy distrust of the entire political system. Diane, a retired GM worker, said, “I am here to show support. I grew up here. I have relatives living here.

“I think it is about greed and money. The government felt Flint wasn’t intelligent enough to realize what was going on. I am here to show we are not going to take it.

“General Motors needs to help. They took money out of the community, and what they have donated is a drop in the bucket. At one time this was a GM factory,”

she said, pointing to the site of the former Buick City complex.”

Michael, a substitute teacher, said, “It’s affected everyone I know. My kids have friends attending the Flint public schools. They have issues with hair falling out and behavior. They are unable to do their homework or even stop and listen.

“I think a lot of people are responsible. It starts at the top. The emergency manager, all those involved should be held accountable.

“Ultimately you have to follow the money trail. It was not worth saving \$2 million a year to poison all those families. There was the (Karegnondi) pipeline. There was so much going on. There needs to be a full investigation to find out who was making the moves.

“We are collateral damage. I really think this goes deeper than race. It is about the haves and have nots. Flint happens to have a black majority, but there is a lot going on in other places. There are a lot of cities finding out they have the same thing going on. Lansing has already started switching their pipes. Lead poisoning is an epidemic.”

Aaron came from Lansing to attend the protest. He is with the environmental group Clean Water Action. He said, “It is something I personally care about. Healthy and safe water is a human right.

“These decisions were made to save money. It was deliberate. It has opened a lot of eyes, and now we are hearing of other places that have similar issues.

“Now we have a national crisis. This is a city in the middle of the largest bodies of fresh water in the world. What is happening here is unacceptable.”



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