

State official resigns after using racial slur, expressing contempt for Flint and Detroit workers

Shannon Jones
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A Michigan official who oversaw foreclosed properties in Genesee County, Michigan, which includes the city of Flint, resigned Monday after the publication of a digital recording in which he can be heard venting his hostility toward Flint and Detroit workers. In the recording, he denounces them for not paying their water bills. The remarks are laced with vulgar, offensive language, directed against working people, including the use of a racial epithet.

Phil Stair, sales manager for the Genesee County Land Bank, resigned his post after two female activists with Truth Against the Machine, a protest group oriented to the Democratic Party, released a recording of a conversation with Stair held at a local bar. The women made the recording surreptitiously.

The release of the recording and the resignation of Stair come as state and local officials are seeking to put an end to ongoing protests in Flint over the lead poisoning of the city's water supply. After the passage of more than a year and a half since the revelation that Flint residents had been subjected to dangerous levels of lead in their drinking water, little has been done to repair the city's antiquated lead piping system, let alone compensate residents whose children are suffering severe learning disabilities and whose property values have plummeted.

To add insult to injury, city officials are pressing residents to resume paying their water bills, in effect insisting that residents "pay for poison."

The Genesee County Land Bank is the largest landowner in Flint and handles property acquired from tax foreclosures, including demolitions, rehabilitations and sales. Unpaid water bills can be added as a lien on property taxes. In May, the Flint City Council passed a

one-year moratorium on foreclosures for tax liens following protests by city residents. Local activists have accused the land bank of seeking to drive out poorer residents to open the way for upscale development.

In the audio recording, Stair rants at length against working class residents of Flint, black and white, whom he calls "f**kin' deadbeats." He continues: "when they tear the houses down, they gotta go somewhere, they go on the south side. It just shifts, it just shifts the s**t. The people are still the people, they f**ked the houses up, then they leave and when we tear 'em down, they just go somewhere else and just f**k those houses up..."

The Truth Against the Machine reporter then interjects "So, like, did this used to be, like, a white neighborhood?"

Stair replies, "It's still white. Well, this street isn't so much, but overall, it's still pretty white."

Earlier in the recording Stairs can be heard using a vulgar racial epithet to describe residents of Flint and Detroit who are not able to pay their water bills.

State officials and media outlets such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* expressed shock and outrage over Stairs' remarks, with especial focus on his use of the "n" word. However, little was said about his extensive rant expressing contempt for poor people and working people, black and white. This is in line with the focus on race by the Democratic Party, which is seeking to bury the class issues raised by the Flint water crisis.

Since the inception of the Flint water crisis, political groups around the Democratic Party have attempted to inject the question of race front and center in the

discussion. This is in no small part aimed at covering up the central role of the Democratic Party, which presided over the disaster in Flint along with the Republican administration of Governor Rick Snyder and has been involved in the ongoing attempts at damage control.

The poisoning of some 100,000 residents of Flint, Michigan through the lead contamination of the city's water supply was a crime of capitalism. It originated in the 2008 economic meltdown and the ensuing bankruptcy of Detroit, which supplied Flint its water. Subsequently, the state of Michigan put pressure on Flint to join the ill-conceived, but financially lucrative, Karegnondi Water Authority and disconnect from the Detroit water system. The plan involved switching temporarily to highly corrosive water from the Flint River, a reckless action that set in motion the crisis.

While racial prejudice and backwardness of all kinds is undoubtedly widespread among the state's political and financial elite, that is not the central issue raised by the Flint water crisis. Indeed, many of the officials involved in the poisoning of Flint residents and the subsequent attempt at cover-up were African American. It should be recalled that President Obama traveled to Flint last year to urge residents to resume drinking the city's lead-tainted water.

The contempt for working people expressed by the remarks of Stair reflects the general outlook of the entire political and corporate apparatus. They view the population of Flint as enemies whose resistance to polluted water, utility shutoffs and home foreclosures is nothing short of criminal.

This was expressed in the e-mail remarks of one official from the US Environmental Protection Agency who said, "I am not so sure Flint is the community we want to go out on a limb for," in response to the pleas of Flint residents for help with their lead poisoned water.

Access to safe drinking water, like access to education and health care, is a social right that must be fought for by the united struggle of the working class, black, white and immigrant. All attempts to divide the working class along racial, ethnic or gender lines are reactionary and must be opposed, whether it takes a crude and open form as espoused by individuals like Stair or is advanced in the form of identity politics as promoted by Democratic Party.



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