

Democrats use Flint residents as props to push phony infrastructure plan

Sheila Brehm
10 June 2017

A coalition of protest groups in the orbit of the Democratic Party called a press conference last week attended by Flint residents to promote the Congressional Progressive Caucus' (CPC) infrastructure program being advanced as a supposed alternative to the Trump administration's infrastructure proposal.

The CPC, a self-styled "progressive" faction of the Democratic Party, is pushing its 21st Century New Deal for Jobs which it claims to be "a bold jobs and infrastructure package."

The CPC proposed \$2 trillion budget over ten years ostensibly will cover everything from rebuilding roads, bridges, waterways, ports, dams, levees, public schools, transportation and even high-speed internet facilities, and updated Veteran and Federal Aviation Authority facilities.

The CPC says the effort would be paid for by closing unspecified corporate tax loopholes, enacting other tax reforms and by repatriating funds held by US companies overseas.

Minnesota Democratic Congressman Keith Ellison is quoted on the CPC's web site: "It's about replacing the pipes in Flint that poisoned an entire community, making our roads and bridges safer, and rebuilding crumbling schools.

"As Democrats, we believe we must improve the lives of millions of hardworking families, putting millions of Americans to work at good jobs, and make our tax system fairer by making the wealthiest pay their fair share. The Republican infrastructure plan is nothing more than another tax break for millionaires and billionaires."

What hogwash! The CPC plan has no chance of being enacted. Further, the proposal to close tax loopholes is a dodge that has been used by Democratic and Republican administrations going back to Ronald Reagan to avoid any real inroads on the income of the super rich.

Funding for a serious infrastructure program could only be secured by a sharp rise in taxation on the incomes of

the wealthy elite and the dismantling of the bloated Pentagon budget. Of course the Democratic Party will never advance such a program, tied as they are to the apron strings of Wall Street.

This is demonstrated by the records of successive Democratic administrations going back to Jimmy Carter, which have carried out a continuous assault on the jobs and living standards of the working class. Indeed, no serious infrastructure investment has been carried out for decades.

One would think from the CPC's proposal that the Democratic Party has been in the forefront of government funding to repair and replace the crumbling infrastructure instead of a policy of starving funds to public works projects. The record shows that both Republican and Democratic administrations since 1998 have never received a report card higher than a D+ according to American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). In 1988, the National Council on Public Works warned of "convincing evidence that the quality of America's infrastructure is barely adequate to fulfill current requirements and insufficient to meet the demands of future growth and economic development."

The 2017 report issued by the ASCE on the condition of infrastructure in the United States gave the country an overall grade of D+, the same as in 2013. The latest ASCE report is a damning indictment of the state of American society under capitalism, and particularly the Obama years, which saw essential social needs starved of funding while the stock market tripled in value and vast public resources were squandered on war. This is only accelerating under Trump.

According to the American Water Works Association, an estimated \$1 trillion is necessary to maintain and expand service to meet demands over the next 25 years. Many of the over one million pipes that carry the nation's fresh water were laid in the early and mid-twentieth

century, with an operational lifespan of 75-100 years.

Three years after the poisoning of their water, Flint residents confront an entrenched political establishment, determined to bury the water crisis. In addition to the pressing issue of the infrastructure, the immense health care and educational needs of children, adults and seniors are not being addressed.

City and state officials claim that tap water can be used with filters and have been pressing to stop the free distribution of bottled water and “move forward” to “normalcy.” All the Democratic and Republican politicians—from Flint Mayor Karen Weaver to the City Council to Governor Snyder and Congressional Democrats—are abandoning the pretext of sympathy for Flint residents. Instead, they are demanding payment for undrinkable water. Using the threat that back water bills will be attached to property taxes, the city is holding the prospect of home foreclosure over the heads of thousands of Flint residents, whose property values have already plummeted due to the disaster. Desperately needed health care is still being denied to many, and residents are discovering that the supposed program to rebuild the city’s water infrastructure is little more than a public relations ploy.

To tell Flint residents to once again put their faith in the Democratic Party serves to conceal the actual record of this party. One of the defining moments for Flint families was Obama’s visit to the city a year ago in May, when he spoke at a rally at Northwestern High School. He did not propose replacing the pipes that poisoned the city’s residents, nor any resources for education, health care, nutrition or counseling. Instead his message was, ‘Shut up and drink the water. Your kids will be okay.’ This was a slap in the face to residents who know that lead remains within the body for thirty years leaving young children particularly damaged.

The Democrats were deeply involved in the ill-conceived and criminal decision to switch the city’s water supply to the polluted Flint River, the ensuing disaster, and the cover-up that followed the poisoning of the population. Under conditions of growing opposition by the working class to the entire political establishment, calls to once again pressure the Democratic Party are bankrupt and aimed at forestalling an independent political movement of the working class.

Three years since the water crisis began the politicians and media are gone. What are the lessons of this bitter experience? The enormous anger and hostility to the entire political establishment is growing in Flint as part of

a wider process of social opposition. Those who are promoting more protests to the Democrats or the Republicans are setting a dangerous trap for workers.

There exist ample resources—human, material and technological—to rebuild the nation’s infrastructure and create millions of new good-paying jobs. But these resources cannot be marshaled under a system that subordinates social needs and human life itself to the ever-greater enrichment of a modern-day aristocracy. Clean water, along with decent schools and housing, and health care, are not privileges, but social rights. Securing these rights requires a struggle against the capitalist system and all its parties and political representatives.

A new way forward must be based on organizing the working class—the overwhelming majority of society—to fight for its own class interests. Workers and young people—black, white, and immigrant—must organize independently from both Democrats and Republicans, the representatives of the financial oligarchy.

As part of its fight to build such a leadership, the Socialist Equality Party and International Youth and Students for Social Equality will be holding a public meeting Thursday June 15 at the University of Michigan, Flint. We encourage all those interested in finding out more about the socialist answer to the Flint water crisis to attend.

3 Years on: The Flint Water Crisis and the Case for Socialism

Thursday, June 15, 7:00 pm
University of Michigan - Flint
Murchie Science Bldg, Room 306



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact