

Students and workers call for the unity of the working class following meeting on Flint water crisis

Our reporters
23 February 2018

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) hosted a well-attended meeting Wednesday at the University of Michigan-Flint campus on the global water crisis. The meeting had online participation from workers in Puerto Rico and Martin County, Kentucky.

The meeting reviewed the depth and scope of the water crisis and what it reveals about the state of the global capitalist system in the 21st century. Workers and youth from each area made powerful contributions.

The class analysis of the water crisis and the call for an independent movement of the working class to defend the rights of workers received a powerful response from those in attendance. A group of students from the university joined the IYSSE and are taking steps to organize an official chapter of the club on the campus.

The WSWS spoke to several of those who attended the meeting.

Anthony, a second-year computer science student who grew up in Flint, said: “I was in the Navy for eight years. I flew all over the world, to the Philippines, Thailand, Djibouti and Africa. I went to a lot of Third World countries. I really didn’t expect to come home to the same conditions.”

“I came back right in the middle of the water crisis in 2015,” he continued. “It was a couple years after, but nothing had changed. I was stationed in Florida, and you didn’t hear anything on the news about Flint. I knew from my family. The cat they had for a while died, and they found out it was riddled with tumors. They had a dog that died. They quit drinking out of the faucet. The shower made a terrible smell. I’ve seen cleaner water out of the faucet in Third World

countries.”

Anthony spoke to us about his experiences and how they have shaped his political views. “It made me want to do something different. I started going to school. I wanted to be a voice, and I wanted to speak on things. I’ve seen the effects of climate change all over the world. I’ve seen the devastation and poverty. I’ve seen events like what happened in Puerto Rico. Increasingly they are occurring, and it seems like every time it happens, it takes longer to rebuild. It takes more people who are dying.

“We have the means to live an awesome, sustainable life, with renewable energy. But the people, politicians in power like money. With that kind of money backing, it’s almost like votes don’t matter.”

Anthony agreed with our assessment of the social crisis and its relationship to the enormous sums of money spent on the military each year. “It’s about to go to \$700 billion on wars. It’s outrageous. For a fraction of that, you can create something ... We’re spending so much on stuff we don’t need: weapons and bombs. They take all of our money so they can break other countries’ thumbs. Look at Gaddafi ... Then the weapons of mass destruction [in Iraq]. It was bogus. It was all about oil.”

Rashard, a University of Michigan Flint alumnus, said that he attended the meeting because he is interested in “what we can do as a body to help mobilize and gather a coalition of people to fight against the corruption in the powers-that-be as a result of the entire system of capitalism.”

He added that he agreed with the presentation at the meeting that the basic divide in society is class, not race. “It’s definitely an issue of class. When one is

informed about the dynamics of capitalism and how the system really operates, one can understand what's really going on—that capitalism benefits those who are able to take resources from the working class.”

Rashard continued, “Those who are in or affiliated with the ruling class are able to take, take, and take, while the masses of people that make up the working class do not have the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of their labor.”

Maria is a graduate student in anthropology who is originally from Finland. “I came here because I am studying the water crisis,” Maria said. “I found out about Flint from my professor in Finland, but unfortunately it is not something that is widely known or understood in Finland. That is why I think this meeting is so important.”

This pamphlet presents a selection from the record of the WSWS as the crisis unfolded.

Maria spoke strongly in support of the call for an international movement. “I liked that the perspective was so global. That’s a good thing because I know that this is not just Flint, it is bigger than that. I didn’t know anything about what was going on in eastern Kentucky or Puerto Rico either.

“I think the emphasis that all the water crises are bound up with capitalism is a good one. And it’s one I haven’t really heard much of, to be honest. I’ll have to look into it more.”

One Flint worker, Florlisa Fowler, who has been active in the fight to expose the poisoning of the water in Flint, was so moved by the response to the meeting that she made a passionate appeal to workers everywhere on Facebook afterward.

In her post she writes, “Attention, all members of the working class... We are being beat down, we struggle for a living for our families... not 40 hours any more, but 80+ hours.” She went on to list some of those affected by the crisis of capitalism, “Our teachers, our nurses, our factory workers -- auto, coal, steel -- our truck drivers, farmers, sales persons as well as our mail carriers, lawn care workers... all religions, races and creeds!”

Florlisa also drove home the fact that this is a crisis that affects the working class as a whole. “We can’t many times come home and trust our water -- not just here in Michigan, but also across our nation. From Kentucky, Ohio, Missouri, California, to New York...

Even Puerto Rico! This affects EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES! Every day... from our food and cooking to our overall health.

“Water is LIFE. Look at the bigger picture, ask questions...Why are the officials that we have elected into their seats not doing their jobs? You will find the truth - FOLLOW THE MONEY. There truly is an agenda against us, the Working Class. Unless we come together and stand up, this will continue and get worse! Quit letting them divide us... our lives.. our children and grandchildren’s lives... [Our children and grandchildren] all depend on us standing up, together in unity. It’s time!”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact