The socialist answer to the paltry $600 million Flint settlement

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Workers have every right to view with suspicion the paltry $600 million Flint settlement for victims of the water poisoning.

In reality, even before legal fees are deducted, the deal is barely a slap on the wrist for the massive social crime that poisoned an entire working class city of 90,000 beginning six years ago. Motivated by the mad pursuit of profit by wealthy investors and their politically connected cronies from both capitalist parties, the devastating impact on men, women and children continues today.

The losses suffered by Flint residents are incalculable—dozens, if not hundreds of preventable deaths, countless miscarriages, immense loss of income, plummeting home values and life-long illnesses for adults and particularly children whose rapid growth development can be more severely impacted by neurological and emotional damage produced by lead poisoning.

The Flint water crisis began in April 2014 when the state-appointed emergency manager severed the city's water system from Detroit, its water source for the previous 50 years. Flint began drawing water from the polluted Flint River through a privatization scheme called the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA).

In defiance of even minimal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards, no corrosion control measures were implemented in the switch, causing lead to leach from the aging pipes, along with harmful bacteria. Large financial interests were behind the KWA. In the same month the city changed to the Flint River, KWA sold $240 million in bonds to more than 30 investors, including JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo and firms that played key roles in the 2013 bankruptcy of Detroit. Today, the bondholders are still being paid, while not a single Flint resident has been made whole.

Democratic Governor Whitmer and the corporate media have called the preliminary settlement, which is expected to receive court approval within 45–60 days, "historic" and have declared that it is "bringing closure" to the residents of the city. Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel said it is "a step forward in the healing process for Flint."

It is nothing of the sort. Flint is a microcosm of a society ruled by complete indifference and hostility to the well-being of the majority, the working class. The method applied to the Flint water is now being applied in the coronavirus pandemic. The Trump administration, Michigan Republicans and the Democratic Party are not concerned about saving lives or the well-being of the population, but in protecting corporate profit.

The US is an epicenter of the pandemic, with almost six million cases and more than 180,000 deaths. The policy of both parties has been to end the supplementary unemployment benefits and demand the deadly reopening of the schools to force parents back to work so profits can be churned out for Wall Street.

By late March, in what can be called the Great Wall Street Heist of 2020, the Congress of millionaires passed the CARES Act with a nearly unanimous vote. The bill gave hundreds of billions to corporations and sanctioned the multi-trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street by the Federal Reserve. The bailout was many thousands of times greater than the $600 million settlement in Flint.

Unlike Flint residents who will have to provide evidence-based proof of blood lead levels from six years ago, the corporations got their money with no strings attached and no need to prove their justification for compensation. And while the super-rich did not

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have to wait long for their money, the people of Flint will surely wait months, if not years, as demonstrated from lawsuits surrounding Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, the BP oil spill, wildfires in California, Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, and on and on.

There will also be amnesty for all the criminals who are responsible for the water poisoning and its cover-up. Angry social media posts calling for jail sentences for former Governor Rick Snyder and others prompted Attorney General Nessel to tweet: “To be clear, the Flint settlement absolves the State of MI and its public officials of civil responsibility. Solicitor General Hammoud and Pros. Worthy [Prosecutor Kim Worthy] continue their investigation into criminal actions by state actors and the quest for justice and accountability is not over.” In June 2019, Nessel dismissed all pending criminal charges—including involuntary manslaughter—against eight officials implicated in the water poisoning of the Flint population.

The insulting amount of $600 million begins and ends not with what the people of Flint need but with what the financial oligarchy says they can “afford.” As a matter of fact, it will be the Michigan taxpayers who will be funding the $600 million settlement, not the wealthy.

The Socialist Equality Party fights for what is needed by the working class, not what the capitalists can afford. We call for the following urgent measures:

- Life-time guaranteed medical care for all children and adults free of charge and on a completely equal basis.
- Life-time educational and social programs to provide for special needs children.
- Full replacement—not simply of the lead service lines, but of the entire water infrastructure system.
- Full compensation for declining home values, loss of income and as well as compensation for six years of paying high water bills for water that residents do not drink.
- All those responsible for the water poisoning and its cover-up must be criminally prosecuted.

The claim that there is no money is a lie. The three wealthiest individuals, in the United States, including Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, Microsoft founder Bill Gates and CEO Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, have a combined wealth that exceeds that of the bottom 50 percent of the American population, that is, 170 million people.

While 40 percent of the Flint population lives in poverty, more than one fifth of the American population is now unemployed, and millions are deprived of basic needs and confront an uncertain future of evictions, hunger and joblessness, the fortunes of the ultra-rich have not only recovered, they are improving substantially.

This struggle requires the independent political mobilization of the working class and a complete break with the Democrats and Republicans. To meet the needs of the working class for safe and free water, along with all other social rights, requires ending the economic dictatorship of the corporate-financial oligarchy. The vast fortunes of the ruling elite must be expropriated and used to meet the needs of the majority.

The coming weeks and months must be dedicated not to the election of Biden and Harris, but to the organization and unification of the struggles of teachers, autoworkers and others, into a mass social and political movement against the entire ruling class and the capitalist system. Only through the development of the class struggle can the working class make right in Flint.

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