

Detroit Urges National Effort to Defeat Banks, Privatization

Objectors to speak out July 15 amid building mass demonstration for July 18

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Massive water shut-offs have drawn attention to the humanitarian crisis in the city of Detroit. Even though the United Nations commission dealing with water resources and access to potable water has condemned the conditions prevailing in the majority African American municipality, the only response to the documentation of gross human rights violations has been a public relations campaign to distribute bottled water.

In a recent press release issued by Gleaners Food Bank which distributes to needy families throughout the southeast Michigan region, the charitable agency says that

“Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan (Gleaners) announced today that it is making 6,000 gallons of fresh drinking water available to Detroit residents. In addition, Gleaners has secured an additional truck load of water from Nestle Waters North America and AmeriCares to make available to Detroiters who may need it.” (July 2)

This same media advisory, which was virtually reprinted on the front page of the Detroit Free Press on July 2, said that “The drinking water will be available at designated Gleaners partner agencies located throughout the city. Residents must call 2-1-1, the United Way help line, to find a water distribution site near them.”

Although this statement by Gleaners was lengthy, there was no mention of the thousands of water shut-offs carried out under the auspices of the Detroit Water & Sewerage Department (DWSD) but in actuality enforced by a private demolition corporation hired by the unelected emergency manager. Kevyn Orr, the emergency manager appointed by right-wing Gov. Rick Snyder, has said very little about the massive termination of water services to residents, however, his spokesperson Bill Nowling indicated in a newspaper article published by the Detroit Free Press that the shut-offs were an integral part of the re-structuring of the city. (June 26)

Nestles Waters of North America is noted as the largest bottled water corporation in the United States. The parent company is a worldwide operation and has been cited as a major proponent of the privatization of waterways and services.

A major challenge to Nestles in Michigan revolved around their efforts to retrieve and bottle water for profit, a process that causes environmental damage. The involvement of such a firm in the current crisis in Detroit should be assessed from the standpoint of the actual

history of the company as well as the role of AmeriCares.

AmeriCares formed in conjunction with the collapse of United States imperialist intervention in Vietnam during 1975, the group says that it provides humanitarian and disaster relief to people within ninety countries. The intervention of both Nestles and AmeriCares speaks volumes on the way in which the ruling class is responding to the international attention centered on Detroit in that it seeks to view the crisis of poverty, dictatorial political rule and economic exploitation as a humanitarian project.

Although it is no question that the situation in Detroit represents a humanitarian disaster but the crisis stems from the systematic corporate devastation of the city through job losses, predatory mortgage and municipal lending and institutional racism which refused to address the problems at their root.

Over \$560 million was paid out in 2012 to four major banks, including JPMorgan Chase and Morgan Stanley, to terminate interest-rate swaps imposed on the DWSD. The emergency manager through the bankruptcy court is not pursuing the financial crimes committed against the residents of the city but attacking the assets, jobs, healthcare programs, pensions and water resources which belong to the people.

Demonstrations, Objections Hearing, and the Way Forward

Activists in Detroit have not been idle in confronting the bank-imposed austerity plaguing the city. Every week there are Freedom Friday demonstrations beginning at the DWSD and spreading out through downtown in order to confront and expose the real criminals behind the crisis.

A press conference organized by the Stop the Theft of Our Pensions Committee (STOPC) took place on July 3 in front of the federal courthouse. City of Detroit retirees from Moratorium NOW! Coalition, STOPC and the Concerned Citizens and Retirees of Detroit spoke out against the proposed plan of adjustment and what they perceived as a rigged voting process that is pressuring retirees to vote yes on cutting their pensions and benefits.

Members of the Moratorium NOW! Coalition have been leafleting at the DWSD payments centers in addition to organizing weekly Freedom Friday demonstrations. On July 2 and 3, hundreds of people were reached through leafleting on both the west and east sides of the city.

Residents told Moratorium NOW! Coalition organizers that their water had been shut-off even though they owed no money. Some refuted the official line from the emergency manager controlled DWSD which says that only those who owe more than \$150 are subjected to shut-offs.

Detroiters said that they owed as little as \$30 and \$40 but they received shut-off notices. Those who are disabled and ill are not spared in the ruthless campaign of terminating services.

The leaflet circulated at the payment centers states that the emergency manager at the aegis of the banks “wants to sell or lease the water department. To make the deal look better to groups who want to buy it, he is getting rid of bills owed to the dept. by shutting off people’s water.”

At the top of the leaflet it says “Water is a Human Right”! “Stop the Water Shut Offs In Detroit! THIS IS OUR WATER DEPT.”

It notes that “The people of Detroit own the water dept. It is worth billions. When a private company owns a city’s water dept. they only want profit. Water rates go up and quality goes down—they don’t know how to run it!”

Private corporations and the city-owned golf course owe hundreds of thousands in arrears but their water services have not been shut-off. At present there has been no announcement by the emergency manager that a moratorium on shut-offs will be enacted.

Two other major developments are taking place in Detroit on Tues. July 15 and Friday the 18th.

On July 15 there will be a special hearing in federal bankruptcy court where 100 of the over 600 people who filed legal objections to the so-called “plan of adjustment”, will stand and address federal Judge Steven Rhodes. The sheer number of legal objections filed by rank-and-file workers is a clear indication of widespread opposition to the banker-inspired restructuring scheme.

Outside between 11:00am-2:00pm there will be a Speak Out for the objectors both inside the court and those in the streets and neighborhoods. People are being encouraged to speak to the crowd outside after testifying against the wholesale robbery of the city by the bankruptcy process.

Later on Friday July 18, a national call in conjunction with the Net Roots Nation conference (netrootsnation.org) being held in Detroit will appeal to the thousands attending the gathering at Cobo Conference Center to come out into the streets and demonstrate in solidarity with the people of Detroit. A rally is scheduled for 1:00 p.m. at Hart Plaza. Later there will be a march through the financial district and in front of the DWSD demanding an end to privatization and water shut-offs.

Those seeking more information on developments in Detroit and ongoing struggles against austerity and political dictatorship can contact the Moratorium NOW! Coalition at the following URL: moratorium-mi.org or call 313-680-5508.

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