

Detroit Water Shut-offs Prompts Canadian Solidarity Amid World Crisis

Terminations continue despite announced 15-day suspension by emergency manager

By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

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Efforts by the emergency manager Kevyn Orr to carry out the program of re-structuring favoring the banks and corporations during the bankruptcy proceedings has drawn growing opposition from both inside the city and beyond.

On Thurs. July 24, a delegation from Windsor, Ontario representing the Council of Canadians and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) arrived to a crowd of over 100 people waiting outside the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center (CAYMAC) where the local political officials and the emergency manager have their offices. During the period of waiting a number of community organizations spoke out against the ongoing attacks being leveled against the working class and poor residents of the majority African American municipality.

Representatives from the Moratorium NOW! Coalition, the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO), the People's Water Board (PWB) and others, are calling for an indefinite halt to the water shut-offs which have escalated since the spring. They are also demanding that every household's whose water services have been terminated, should be turned back on and that there should no privatization of the public water system in Detroit.

The Detroit Water & Sewerage Dept. (DWSD) announced in federal bankruptcy court on July 21 that it was suspending shut-offs for 15 days. However, the dreaded Homrich trucks, the private firm hired by the emergency manager to carry out many of the shut-offs, were still on the job this time going after those who have allegedly "turned their water back on illegally."

The slogan for several months in Detroit has been "Water is a Human Right: Fight, Fight, Fight!" With the National Nurses United (NNU) declaring a "public health emergency" in Detroit due to the shut-offs, it only confirmed what many have been saying in the wake of the most recent onslaught by the emergency manager, who works for the right-wing, multi-millionaire Gov. Rick Snyder, with both of them carry out the bidding of the corporations and banks.

After being held up briefly at the tunnel crossing of the Windsor-Detroit border, the convoy arrived to cheers from the crowd. Maude Barlow, Chairperson of the Council of Canadians, spoke to the crowd reiterating the organization's view that the water shut-offs are a complete violation of human rights.

Barlow, a concerned advocate for water rights, was instrumental in bringing attention to the

situation in Detroit to the United Nations. A UN statement saying that the massive termination of water services was inhumane assisted in the political struggle to draw national and international attention to the plight of the people in Detroit.

After the rally was concluded, the convoy headed to St. Peter's Episcopal Church near downtown which is currently serving as a water station. The water convoy then went to other locations to drop off gallons of water.

Although the delivery of 750 gallons of water to Detroit will not make even a minor dent in filling the void left due to the shut-offs impacting 17,000 households, it does illustrate the failure of emergency management and the overall capitalist system in the United States in addressing a problem which is bound to worsen not only in this city but throughout the country and the world.

Freedom Friday, Banks and Gaza Solidarity

The 11th Freedom Friday demonstration took place on July 25 beginning outside the Detroit Water & Sewerage Dept. headquarters on Randolph downtown. After rallying for a half-hour, demonstrators marched to Greek Town entertainment district where they held a street meeting outside the Wayne County Treasurer's Office on Monroe.

This target was selected since there are over 40,000 tax foreclosures that have taken place this year in the county. Money from the federal government turned over to the State of Michigan for the so-called "hardest hit" fund, that is ostensibly designed to assist distressed homeowners to work out terms of payment for mortgages and property taxes, are not being utilized for these purposes.

Instead the resources which should be allocated to keep people in their homes are being appropriated to fund blight removal efforts in Detroit. The Detroit Blight Removal Task Force is being headed by multi-billionaire banker and business magnate Dan Gilbert. It is Gilbert and his business interests, among others, that are deciding the future economic landscape of the city of Detroit.

After leaving the Greek Town district, the Freedom Friday protest moved to Campus Martius in the center of the financial district. Marchers walked around the large park where an officially-sanctioned party was being held to commemorate the 313th anniversary of the French occupation of Detroit beginning in 1701.

Demonstrators chanted "Make the Banks Pay!" They then marched past Chase Bank to CAYMAC where they held another brief rally.

During the course of the march through the financial district, the private security guards of Dan Gilbert's corporations followed the group lining up outside the banks and office buildings owned by the Quicken Loans chief who now owns over 60 building in the downtown area.

The demonstration for Freedom Friday ended back at the DWSD headquarters. Nonetheless, there was another demonstration planned for Campus Martius in solidarity with the people of Gaza suffering under the genocidal aerial bombardments and ground invasion of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

Some of the crowd from Freedom Friday headed back to Campus Martius. At the entrance hundreds of Palestinians and their supporters chanted “1,2,3,4 We Don’t Want Your Racist War.” Links between the attacks on water rights in Gaza and Detroit were made.

Later Palestinian solidarity activists began to march around Campus Martius, as the Freedom Friday protesters had done just 30 minutes before. Participants in the festivities sponsored by the corporate community and their agents in government were not able to celebrate without getting an ear-full of political education on the problems plaguing oppressed peoples from Detroit to Gaza.

Imperialism and the Water Crisis

The following day July 26, Workers World Party Detroit Branch held a public forum entitled “The Water Belongs to Us!” This gathering was chaired by Fight Imperialism, Stand Together (FIST) organizer Tachae Davis.

One of the highlights of the meeting was the screening of the film “Blue Gold: World Water Wars”, a documentary that unravels the global dimensions of the capitalist drive to privatize water resources. Maude Barlow, who had visited Detroit leading the water convoy just two days before, is featured extensively in the film.

In relationship to the impact of the film, Sharon Feldman, an activist with the Moratorium NOW! Coalition who attended the meeting, said later of the documentary that “Even though I had some understanding of the worldwide crisis I am blown away by the plan and the corporations’ existing ownership (the 1 percent) to take over the world’s water that has not already been taken over.”

According to the film, leading corporations and banks are taking control of waterways and systems. The development of agri-business for profit is advancing desertification draining the supply of water needed for human consumption and environmental stability.

A review of the documentary film says that “Corporate giants force developing countries to privatize their water supply for profit. Wall Street investors target desalination and mass bulk water export schemes. Corrupt governments use water for economic and political gain. Military control of water emerges and a new geopolitical map and power structure forms, setting the stage for world water wars.” (topdocumentaryfilms.com)

Consequently, the termination of water services in Detroit is part of a global effort on the part of the capitalist system to use this essential resource to enhance their profit margins and world power. Activists from Detroit to Africa, South America, the Middle East, Asia and other regions of the planet must wage a struggle against the economic and political system of imperialism in order to provide solutions to the water crisis.

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