

Democratic Whitmer administration stonewalls Flint residents on dropping of water prosecutions

By James Brewer
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Michigan Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer's Flint Water Prosecution Team held a meeting Friday evening ostensibly to "provide updates... and answer questions from the residents of Flint" about the criminal investigation into the water disaster.

It quickly emerged that the so-called "community conversation" had been called on false pretenses. There was no "conversation."

Instead, Solicitor General Fadwa Hammoud and Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy refused to explain why they had dropped the remaining charges against Flint and Michigan officials implicated in the lead poisoning of 100,000 residents of the largely working class city, once the center of GM production. They stonewalled residents who asked whether the charges would be reinstated and higher-ups in the water conspiracy, including former Governor Rick Snyder and his Democratic state treasurer Andy Dillon, would be prosecuted.

The real character of the event was demonstrated by the presence of dozens of armed police in and around the venue, the headquarters of UAW Local 659. The police were there to intimidate residents and arrest any who got out of line. In April of 2017, police arrested six residents who sought to press their demands at a "town hall" meeting in a church that was addressed by Democratic Flint Mayor Karen Weaver.

They were backed up by Local 659 union officials, who threatened supporters of the Socialist Equality Party and sought to block the distribution of a statement published by the *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board denouncing the cover-up and calling on Flint workers to organize in opposition to the big business parties and the union bureaucrats and fight to unite the working class across the state and the country against both parties and the corporate-financial ruling elite.

Resident Cynthia Lindsey described the large police presence on her Facebook page: "Well the AG'S office must be expecting so explosive behavior at their Town Hall Mtg tonight, because there are at least 20 State Police, in addition to several local Sheriffs and Local Police... The people standing in line now and waiting to get in say they are Offended that the AG's think they are animals that need to be controlled... 1st the

State poisoned them, now they want to sanction and arrest them if they speak out or become too emotional... Shameful."

On June 13, Whitmer's prosecutors announced that they had dismissed all eight remaining cases "without prejudice," claiming those cases could be refiled later and declaring that no further statements would be made until after the meeting with Flint residents. Last February, the Attorney General's Office added Wayne County Prosecutor Worthy to the team of prosecutors and in April it fired Special Prosecutor Todd Flood, who had been appointed by the previous Republican administration of Governor Snyder.

The democratic posturing of Worthy and Hammoud at Friday's meeting was belied by the fact that they had not bothered to consult with the people of Flint when they dropped the charges, including manslaughter, against officials involved in the water conspiracy.

Some 100 residents showed up for Friday's meeting. Many more stayed away, having sat through similar events under Snyder at which politicians and officials, Democratic as well as Republican, lied to them about the poisoning of their water supply and refused to commit to any measures to compensate for their financial losses or provide health care and social services for men, women and children who suffered irreparable physical and emotional damage as a result of the decision to switch the water supply from the treated Detroit system to the untreated and polluted Flint River.

The moderator was Marseille L. Allen. Billed as a "community advocate," she is an official with the Michigan Department of Corrections and legislative liaison for UAW Local 6000, which covers Michigan state employees.

Hammoud and Worthy used slides to show that the prosecution under former prosecutor Flood and former Republican Attorney Bill Schuette had made bargains with private law firms representing various state agencies to determine which evidence would be turned over to prosecutors. They claimed that they had now obtained search warrants allowing them access to all documents.

They refused to be pinned down on their prosecutorial plans, repeatedly declaring that they would follow the evidence

wherever it took them. Hammoud announced that the seven defendants who had been allowed to plea-bargain to lesser charges were now untouchable due to double jeopardy protections. They did not name any of the defendants.

Emails and testimony which have been made public show that among those allowed to plea bargain:

* Stephen Busch of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) falsely reported to other agencies that corrosion control measures were being applied to Flint River water.

* MDEQ District Engineer Michael Prysby ordered that corrosion control not be used in violation of federal drinking water laws.

* Liane Shekter-Smith, the MDEQ director of the Office of Drinking Water, who told Flint residents that a whistle-blowing Environmental Protection Agency expert was being silenced for exposing the malfeasance of the MDEQ, was fired in 2015.

* Adam Rosenthal from the MDEQ ordered the collection of falsified samples to supposedly prove that Flint water met federal safety standards.

With the exception of Shekter-Smith, the fired MDEQ official, the state government is negotiating the return of all of these people to their jobs.

Hammoud told the residents that due to statute of limitations laws, the prosecution team had only nine months left to file new charges.

After the 45 minute presentation, the meeting was opened for questions from the floor.

The first questioner asked if their investigation was a “coverup of the coverup.” Worthy responded once again by saying the prosecutors could not comment on what they were doing, but that they would follow the evidence. The next questioner called for the indictments of Schuette and Flood.

A resident asked why the people of Flint weren’t informed or consulted before prosecutors announced the dismissal of all charges, and why state officials then waited 15 days before meeting with residents.

Another asked if the prosecution was going to issue charges in connection with the illegal bond issuance for the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA) pipeline, pointing in particular to the roles of KWA head Jeff Wright and former state treasurer Andy Dillon. Worthy replied, “We’re going to say this over and over again. We’re going to follow the evidence.”

The KWA was a money-making scheme hatched by corporate interests and financiers to build a new pipeline from Lake Huron to bring water to Flint and the surrounding area, replacing the Detroit water system that had supplied the city with water for decades. Because construction of the pipeline had barely begun when the water switch was scheduled to take place, state and local officials, with the blessings of the Obama administration’s EPA, decided to draw water for the interim from the Flint River. This was despite the highly polluted state of the river and the obsolescence of the Flint water plant.

One resident told the WWS: “In the capitalist system, money always wins and workers always lose, and workers are given the false hope that the same system than oppresses them is the one that can save them.” That is to say nothing of the overwhelming display of police power, sent to intimidate people attending the meeting. “Step out of line, the man comes and takes you away,” as the old song goes.

The “expansion” of the investigation by the Democrats is a fraud. As the WWS statement passed out at the meeting said: “Five years after the water supply was switched to the toxic Flint River in order to make a financial killing for the corporations and investors behind the Karegnondi Water Authority, with a cut going to their political stooges in both parties, not a single official has been criminally convicted. No charges have even been lodged against the prime movers in this criminal conspiracy: Rick Snyder, Andy Dillon, Dayne Walling, Jeff Wright, to name a few...”

“The dropping of all charges in the water crisis by Whitmer makes crystal clear that the working people of Flint cannot secure justice by appealing to either the Democratic or Republican Party or any section of the political establishment. They are all beholden to big business and the financial oligarchy...”

“The solution to the crisis facing the working class, including securing justice for the crimes against the Flint population, lies in turning to the massive power of the working class in Michigan, throughout the US and internationally.”

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