

# “SHUT DETROIT DOWN! SAVE OUR WATER DEPARTMENT! SAVE OUR CITY!” NEXT RALLY AUG. 2

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Part of a large crowd who rallied at the gates of the Wastewater Treatment Plant in Detroit July 24 to demand Detroit control of DWSD, a good contract for workers.

***Over 150 pack protest at WWTP in support of city-wide strike, Detroit control of DWSD***

**By Diane Bukowski**

**July 27, 2012**

**DETROIT** – City of Detroit water department workers mobilizing for a city-wide strike turned out an impressive show of support July 24. A diverse march and rally of over 150 people packed the entrance to the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) on W. Jefferson. It drew media attention and brought hope to many city residents looking for new leadership.

“If we shut this place down, we will settle a contract in one week,” AFSCME Local 207 President John Riehl told the protesters. He and others said that administration of President Barack Obama cannot afford a massive strike in Detroit as November elections approach.



Raymond Love tells workers to “stand up and fight!”

“We have to stand up and fight,” Raymond Love, a water department worker for 10 years, said. “The Detroit water department belongs to the citizens of Detroit, not to Snyder and Bing.” He referred to Michigan Governor Rick Snyder and Detroit Mayor Dave Bing.

“We are representing the whole city, whose people are dying to support someone who is fighting, not just talking about fighting.” Local 207 Secretary-Treasurer Mike Mulholland said.

Under terms of orders issued by U.S. District Court Judge Sean Cox, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department is negotiating with its workers separately from other city workers, who face imposed terms under a Public Act 4 consent agreement.



Sue McCormick addresses meeting during previous tenure as Ann Arbor public services administrator. Photo: AA.com

On July 17, DWSD management, led by newly-appointed Director Sue F. McCormick, presented demands similar to those included in the unilateral “City Employment Terms” document being imposed by state officials, the Financial Advisory Board, and the Bing administration.

They include withdrawal of the Local’s ongoing legal challenge to Cox’s order, inclusion of water department workers in the consent agreement, which bars collective bargaining, a 10 percent wage cut, 12 month probationary periods for new hires and newly promoted workers, attacks on pension and seniority rights, and other anti-union measures.

Speakers at the rally said they are fighting not only for a good contract, but to win back Detroiters’ control and ownership of DWSD, axed last year by U.S. District Court Judge Sean Cox. Former U.S. President George W. Bush appointed Cox, who is a right-wing Federalist Society member, to the bench.





AFSCME Local 207 Vice-President Lakita Thomas represents over 1200 DWSD workers.

Lakita Thomas, Local 207 Vice-President, told VOD, “They want the water department, and they are trying to design it to fail, make it look as dirty and rotten as possible so they can easily take it over. But we are going to fight, and we’re fighting to win. We are trying to protest everywhere.”

DWSD has been decimated by massive private contracting, hundreds of lay-offs, and the departure of experienced staff due to draconian pension proposals. It is also under attack by Wall Street, whose rating agencies have several times downgraded its previously sterling bond ratings in order to have lenders profit from higher interest rates.

“We just came from occupying a woman’s home to stop her from being evicted, and the community-wide efforts are working, they are re-opening her case,” Shanta Driver, head of the national By Any Means Necessary (BAMN) coalition, said. “We must likewise turn the corner on our entire city’s destruction and save Detroit.”



U.S. District Court Judge Sean Cox, a George W. Bush appointee.

Under an initial consent agreement reached in Feb. 2011 between Bing and the leaders of surrounding counties at the direction of Judge Cox, suburban representatives led by Board of Water Commissioners (BOWD) Chair James Fausone now control BOWC votes on contracts and rates. The Detroit City Council’s right to approve contracts has been eliminated. They approve rates only for Detroit proper.

Later that year, Bing and the City Council approved the sale of the mammoth Oakland-Macomb County Interceptor, in violation of the City Charter which requires a popular vote on sale or privatization of DWSD assets. The revised City Charter has maintained that provision for DWSD and D-DOT.

On Nov. 4, 2011, Cox ruled that DWSD would no longer be subject to that Charter provision, a city ordinance limiting privatization, workers' rights under the Michigan Employment Relations Commission, and access to state courts.

He launched an all-out attack on union rights, abolishing seniority rights in many areas, union grievance procedures, and full-time release for the Local's three top officers. Local 207 has over 1,200 members and is the largest AFSCME union local in the city.

His order diminished opportunities for Black-owned businesses and Detroit resident construction workers under DWSD contracting procedures, and opened the door to unbridled privatization.



Mass press conference held by DWSD unions to announce legal challenges to U.S. District Court Judge Sean Cox's takeover of the department.

Michigan AFSCME Council 25, AFSCME Local 207, the city's Senior Accountants, Analysts and Appraisers (SAAA), and UAW Region IA Local 2200 have appealed. AFSCME 207 accused Cox of bias and asked him to recuse himself, which he has refused to do. He also denied motions by the unions to intervene in the case, which originated in 1977 with a federal challenge claiming DWSD was in violation of the Clean Water Act.

AFSCME Local 207 appealed to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, asking the Court to issue a stay of Cox's Nov. 4 order, order Cox's removal from the case due to bias, and approve the unions' intervention.

The Sixth Circuit Court denied the immediate motions Dec. 21, 2011, but allowed aspects of the case as a whole to proceed on appeal.

Judges on the panel were Cuban-born Danny J. Boggs, named in 1986 by President Ronald Reagan, Ronald Lee Gilman, named by President Bill Clinton in 1997, and Richard Allen Griffin, named in 2002 by Bush, but not approved by the Senate until 2005 after partisan controversy, during which he was described as a "deeply conservative jurist."

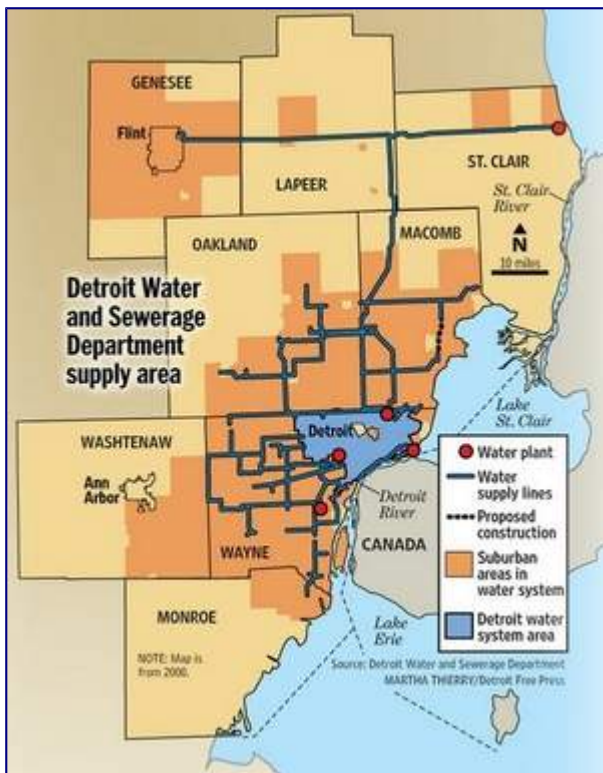


DWSD COO Matthew Schenk

Since then, Cox has ordered the addition of a Chief Operating Officer to DWSD administration. Matthew Schenk was plucked directly from the scandal-ridden administration of Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano to fill that post. His background is primarily in legal matters.

Earlier, the BOWC appointed Sue F. McCormick as department director. She was previously Public Services administrator in Ann Arbor, in charge of the city's entire infrastructure including its water department. There, she established water rates that increased by seven levels according to a tenant's usage of water, as well as privatization initiatives.

As director, she has broad powers under Cox's order to hire, promote and fire workers, outsource services, and further remove the department from Detroit's control.



DWSD service area

“One of the largest systems in the nation, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department has a rich history in public utility service dating back to the early 1800s,” says DWSD’s website.

“DWSD provides water service to the entire city of Detroit and neighboring southeastern Michigan communities throughout Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, St. Clair, Lapeer, Genessee, Washtenaw and Monroe counties. The 1,079-square-mile water service area, which includes Detroit and 126 suburban communities, makes up approximately 40 percent of the state’s population. Wastewater service is also provided to a 946-square-mile area that encompasses Detroit and 76 neighboring communities.”

Detroiters built and paid for the system, known as the primary jewel of the city, through billions in bond issues over the years.

Local 207 is planning another rally Thursday, Aug. 2, 2012 at 4:30 p.m. in front of the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center at Jefferson and Woodward in downtown Detroit. (See flier below.)