

Water Issues and Local and Global Interconnections

By Elizabeth Walters, IHM

Water issues are frequently headline news at the local level and in cities and countries worldwide. For example an issue that draws passionate attention within Detroit neighborhoods, across the country and around the planet is how we Detroiters will provide access to water for low-income people among us. Will we continue to shut off water to thousands of people every month, or will we implement a fair, affordable, sustainable rate structure that makes water reasonably available to all? In our sister city, Flint, Mich., the issues are water manageability, contaminants and water quality; in California it is drought; in Gaza it's denial of access to the aquifers beneath Gaza; in other areas of the world aquifer depletion is the issue.

That water crisis is worldwide is a very serious challenge. At the same time, people's efforts responding to water issues at a systemic level provide some good news even though this news is rarely reported in mainline media.

An amazing local-global event happened in Detroit May 29-31. Michigan Welfare Rights Organization and Detroit People's Water Board Coalition hosted an International Gathering of Social Movements on Water and Affordable Housing that attracted a large crowd from Michigan cities and representatives from 46 states and three other countries.

One of the participants, Detroiter Darryl Jordan, describes the International Gathering of Social Movements on Water and Affordable Housing in this way:

The gathering provided helpful information and lots of connections to be made. I was surprised to learn that our struggles are so very similar; so are the interconnections in these struggles. It's important that we come together and learn from each other.

Another participant, our own Barbara Beesley, IHM shares:

I am especially taken with the idea of nationalizing the water as an issue of national security. Why can't each person in the United States and world have access to clean water as a basic human right recognized by most countries through the United Nations? This issue has me thinking about all the various services that don't come to us with a bill ... among those I brainstorm are the various sectors of safety – a safety net of departments and personnel responsible for health and well-being, such as fire fighters, food inspectors, police (and more at the federal level), economic regulators, environmental protectors; and government itself – administrative, legislative and judicial – at city/township, county, state and federal levels. None of these come with an individual price tag based on usage. So why refuse a basic necessity of life to those struggling to survive?

One practical action I plan to take is to encourage locals to study Daniel Hunter's *Strategy and Soul*, a book about successful community organizing written by a

practitioner who succeeded in stopping big gambling interests in Philadelphia. I would like to see more united "smart" community organizing efforts in the metro area. The Affordable Housing and Water Summit did a great job in gathering us and focusing efforts. Given governmental resistance, this will be a long struggle calling for long-term relationships and strategies. I hope that we can involve some social justice students joining us. And I do hope that we'll connect in the near future and collaborate on the water issue.

The responses of Darryl, Barbara and other participants are encouraging. As I ponder the gathering and the responses, it strikes me that interconnecting and experiencing oneness in the struggle are transformational processes that lead us to unexpected resilience and creative power. May there be many more gatherings and much more communal study-reflection-action-evaluation efforts.