

This is a congregational letter to the St. Peter's Episcopal, uh... congregation in the Summer of 2014.

Dear Friends,

Fifty years ago, in his Kentucky hermitage, the monk Thomas Merton wrote, "Let me say this before rain becomes a utility that they can plan and distribute for money. By "they" I mean the people who cannot understand that rain is a festival, who do not appreciate its gratuity, who think that what has no price has no value, that what cannot be sold is not real, so that the only way to make something actual is to place it on the market. The time (when they...) will come when they will sell you even your rain. At the moment it is still free, [00:02:00] and I am in it. I celebrate its gratuity and its meaninglessness." It's from an essay called "Rain and the Rhinoceros" in Raids on the Unspeakable.

So stick with me here, Friends. Rain is a gift of grace, falling on the just and the unjust. Its waters are also a necessity of life. In the 1990's under structural adjustment imposed by the World Bank, water was privatized in Cochabamba, Bolivia. When Bechtel corporation tripled the water rates, people began collecting rain water off their roofs and in cisterns. Whereupon Bechtel claimed that all the water belonged to them and tried charging people for the rainwater. This sparked an uprising that drove out the corporation. A decade later, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared water to be a human right.

In Detroit at present, Governor Snyder through the Emergency Manager has hired dozens of private contractors to shut-off water to 120,000 to 150,000 homes - any which are more than \$150 in arrears. Several things are at work. This is clearly an attempt to make the Water Department cash rich, altering quickly its bottomline, so as to make it more valuable for sale or regionalization. The Water Department is a public trust serving a human right and cannot, must not, be sold to service the banks. Water is the emblem of the commons, not to be privatized and commodified. Families without water risk losing their children to Child Protective Services. Most of these shut-offs are for black folks, compounding the predatory loans and foreclosures driving them out of their homes [00:03:48] and out of the city.

Currently the Emergency Manager is targeting higher-density communities to the north for the fast cash, but one can envision the day when water shut-offs become the final boot to folks... to folks trying to hold on to a place having survived foreclosures and withdrawal of schools, churches, fire, police and other services in neighborhoods marked for termination.

Meanwhile, corporate-types like Mike Illich, who owes \$80,000 in water bills for Joe Louis Arena, is getting a new stadium, the land for \$1. If you add Ford Field,

the Golf Course, and other corporate water users, their indebtedness is twice that owed by residential customers.

Please forgive so many facts. Another friend of ours, Charity Hicks, was arrested mid-May for resisting the cut-off of her water and that of her neighbors. She is yet to be charged, but we are following her case. I think of other movements which started when one person said NO and others rallied to non-violent action. We need direct action teams ready to move on neighborhoods under the assault of the shut-off key. She would also be a great plaintiff in a Human Rights action with the United Nations. These are invitations.

Next summer our congregation will assist in hosting a Word and World school, a biblical learning village, focused on land and water in Detroit. Another invitation to help. At St Peter's one of our members, Erinn Fahey has been trained as a water engineer, with an eye to these and similar issues of environmental justice. She and others are exploring what's been called Watershed Discipleship. We need to see ourselves increasingly as part of the Great Lakes basin as a bioregion. The Rouge watershed is our parish. These waters belong not to the banks and the corporations, but to the people, to all earth's creatures. And so we must be allies to the poor in this moment.

Let justice roll down like mighty waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream. [00:05:59]

[It's really beautiful... That's a... Um... I notice that... there's this sort of like keep it in the family, sort of, like, just keep your head down and pull your wait, because we're all getting strung out to dry by the corporations. So then it's like this, sort of, Frantz Fanon thing that happens where somebody else gets their water shut off, and the person who's trying just as hard to keep it on resents them more than empathizes with them because they're also getting exploited by high rates... What do you... what do you think about the, sort of, community...]

Say that again. The people who are getting shut-off...

[Ok.]

Ya, I'm sorry....

[So]

I didn't follow it actually...

[No, it's ok, I'm not always very articulate so it's definitely not you. Today I talked to a lady who lived on, um, who lived off Oakland and Davison, sort of that... And, um, she told me that my next door neighbor got her water shut-off and I don't understand why she can't keep her water on because I have just as many

bills as she does and I keep my water on. So instead of getting angry at the corporations, people revert to the, "Just pay your bills, dude." Even when they know just as much that it's hard to pay... [00:07:59] you know? And it's not a reasonable thing to ask of people when these are the circumstances.]

Right. Well, I think that it was a similar phenomenon in a lot of ways with the foreclosures. Uh... where, you know, people were... would end up, you know, sort of buying the story that people went in over their heads... they borrowed more than they could pay back... and now they're decimating our neighborhood because they, you know, over reached. That... That was the... That was the story of the banks, when in fact they were set up. They were targeted for sub-prime loans that then had suddenly... I mean, it was set... it was a set up for people to lose their homes... to enter into mortgages that would suddenly be... unpayable. And, uh, and that happened massively. And I think a similar logic applies, and part of it is buying the... we've got corporate media that, you know, give the corporate line and the impression, you know, people are behind in their bills... you know... People caught up in these sweeps by the police... on Belle Isle, or wherever... you know... And have parking tickets in arrears... you know... It's... It's really a very targeted, uh, criminalization of everyone. They're not just looking for... they're not just taking driver's licenses from the driver... they're... they're getting I.D.'s from everyone in the car because it's a sweep, you know. Um, so I think that same logic applies in many ways and... seems like something we have to resist... resist both, uh, spiritually, and politically. To say, we're in this together. Water is... water is part of the... it's the gift, you know, that's under everything. It's the commons... And that should link us together not divide us with resentment. Maybe the churches have a particular in that. [00:10:19] I mean, I think any institution or community that's concerned with, you know, the value of community itself, you know, needs to be working on that.

[What did you think about what... what, um, some of the people at the meeting... I think it was Monica who said, "I go to NAN and it's the same people... I go to the People's Platform and it's the same people... Like, when everybody is affected.]

Uh... I think there's truth to that — agonizing truth to that... Uh... I mean, there's a double phenomenon there because then, you know, uh... you know, each of those organizations, even though you look around and see many of the same faces, they're also, you know, treading their own paths and plan, you know... So you have this... people in the same room doing different, you know, counter things. Not... not... not acting together. So, I think there are two dimensions to that. One, she's absolutely right that we need to be, uh... organizing in neighborhoods, you know, going door-to-door is right on time and, uh, being at the... the uh... pay stations for the water... Ya, uh, we really... we need to be getting information into people's hands that are directly affected. Not just talking over and over to ourselves. And! We need to figure out ways to, uh, work better together. I mean, I... I think the meeting today [00:12:03] um... uh... well it had some facilitation issues. Uh... and, but maybe the right people were in the

room... some of the right people were in the room to try to think all together. Maybe this strategic meeting goes on all through the week, I don't know... Um... It's a little... takes a lot of time.

[I just... I wonder ya... how, how is it... to get people to stop. You try something for thirty years and then you have to come to terms with the fact that it's been screwing you for that long. That's sort of the way I look at it... As why people who are... directly affected by privatization or rising rates or swapped termination fees that jack up their rates... or... you know... crumbling infrastructure because of all foreclosures... or disinvestment... all of these... it's like, it... if... they'd rather take care of it themselves and just try to stay afloat and see it as a good or a bad... or it's sort of an ebb and flow... than see it as, like, no, you got royally screwed by this system that you worked for... your entire... your entire... I mean, that's how I see it but I'd like to hear it... sort of, if I... I don't know.]

Mmhmm. Um... Well, I hate to put it... in some ways I hate to put it in these terms, but that's the logic of uh... capitalism that individualizes, not only commodifies, uh, water, but commodifies people. They end up acting and thinking of themselves economically in isolation. You know? That's by... by design... [00:14:04] that's what, uh... a consumer culture is design to... break... break down community and break down solidarity. Um... So.

[That's a really good way of putting it. So what are some of the, like... what do you feel is a good route for the direct action committee for the, on the, um... I mean was that even the, that wasn't even a people's water board meeting, I'm not even sure if that was part of Solidarity Saturday or it was People's Water Board or if it was People Plat... Like, what?]

Today?

[Ya.]

Ya.

[What was that?]

That was Solidarity Saturday... it was supposed to be. Um...

[And so the direct action committee of Solidarity Saturday, like, what do you... what do you see the best course of action?]

I think that... I think that there's... I think there's gonna be layers and what's nice... there were people that came to that meeting with direct action ideas, some of them are... they're... at different levels and at different ways. But people are beginning to think about it in a... in a more serious way. And frankly I credit Charity and her act of resistance with sparking that. You know, people saying

this needs to go to uh... a deeper level or a higher level, you know, of intensification. And her simple no saying and resisting has... has sparked that. So I think there are a range of actions and we were hearing some of 'em that are direct actions that are around the, uh... the water keys, you know. Uh... Getting in the way, covering them with your body, covering them with your cars. [00:16:02] Um... It seems like we need a, uh, one step in that process is that we need a hotline that people can call... that would... that one, it would garner stories, two, it would... it would, uh, begin to build a... a base of information and about where things are happening, but thirdly, at a certain point, it could be the shut-off is happening and if there's a team of people, you know, ready to.. to jump in the car and head to the neighborhood, um, I think that the kinds of things that eviction defense has been doing... Uh, that have that sort of, uh, you know flying squadron notion to it, uh, could be happening with direction action around water.

[It seems like that's extremely affective in terms of resisting the current... system and at the same time going about it in a way that's, sort of, um, persuasive]

Right.

[When you have a whole... But the problem is that they're not informing people... it's like, you don't know... you don't have a date... like, 10 a.m. on the 31st. It's like, we're coming in the middle of the night.]

Right. I think that's why... that's why some sort of hotline system needs to... needs to get working at one level and that it can become something, you know, even within weeks from now it could become something... become a different thing...

I also think that there are targets, like uh... uh, the Water Board itself where blockades or occupations inside, um, could happen. Um... Uh, those are certainly worth considering there are, uh, there are... there're distribution of water possibilities using fire hydrants or other public sources of water to gather water and distribute it to people. And that can be done as a quiet direct action or it can be done as a... as a very public, you know, calling a press conference at a fire hydrant.

[Depending on what you want to accomplish.]

Right. [00:18:31] Ya... And I mean, there would be different, uh, ways to, uh, go about that. Um... The DECATS (?) people have some, uh, creative, uh... I was going to say, in some ways they're more symbolic actions, but creative ones in mind... Uh... that involve that involve public fountains or actually these days many of the fountains that used to be in public parks are now on privatized, uh, land ether in the control of conservancies or corporations. Um... But accessing them... treating them as public entities is reclaiming them as public um... access to the commons is, you know, a potential idea there.

[Um... tell me what... what... I mean, maybe just for the... for the sake of the recording what.. can you talk about the differences between a direct action that is symbolic and a direction that has some... that has the purpose of meeting utilitarian needs.]

Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Um... Well, there's an interplay between the two and I guess that needs to be said, I mean, you think of, uh... [00:20:00] the history of the freedom struggle there were lots of direct actions where people said you should be able to sit on the front of the bus, and they sat down in the front of the bus. Or you should be served at the lunch counter and they sat down at the lunch counter and placed an order. That's a form of direct action. And the equivalent of that is, again, it's... it al... it almost invariably involves your body — where you put your body and how you act... and it involves going directly to what's at issue, you know. So, um... in this case, you know, if you want to stop shut-offs you block shut-offs. If you want water turned back on, you turn water back on. Again, both of those... such things as that can also, say in Rosa Park's case, become the spark for a wider campaign involving economic boycotts, which is an indirect action. You know, its... it's saying alright, we're... we're walking, refusing to use the bus when actually what you want is access to the bus but you're, you know, the boycott, uh, furthers the campaign and brings economic pressure to bare. The symbolic action, um... and I... I've actually done things that which I call symbolic direct actions, or liturgical direct actions, things which involve, uh... church traditions, uh, biblical stories, feast days... those are part of a... kind of a common culture store, uh... which have political meaning... Good Friday, you know, Jesus' executed in a Roman imperial act of torture and execution. Uh, and to... to in Detroit we, on Good Friday, this is a symbolic action, but we do the stations of the cross through the city where we go to places where Christ is being crucified today. So... we go to the Emergency Manager... We go to the prison... We, you know, we go to the river... [00:22:16] We, uh... and do meditations. And that's... that's symbolic. There's... there's also a sense in which a lot of this is... has a spiritual dimension to it. People... Whether you're talking about not being in spiritual solidarity with your next-door neighbor or despair that nothing can be done, there are... spiritual dimensions to politics and they take, uh... drawing on the store of liberation history in the scriptures and making a way out of no way... or, uh... you know, Palm Sunday, doing a march into town and a direction at the currency exchange in the temple. You know, this is part of our... this is part of our story but it's not often... not read politically and in a way that's spiritually energizes people who have lost hope. So there are ways in which symbolic actions can also be directly addressing kind of an invisible dimension of things, if that makes sense.

[It does. Um... Does... do you feel like the Detroit Water and Sewage Department has much of a choice? Like, what... like, how much choice did they have, I guess? What are your thoughts about their situation?]

Ya, you may know more about that than I do. I mean, it sounds like you've been gathering, uh, um... gathering stuff. No, I... I think [00:24:01] it's an incredible resource which is why people do want it. Why it's been privatized piecemeal. Um... You know... Craig Fahle can say, "We're not talking about privatization," but it's been, you know, piece-by-piece... it's being... sold... it's being... the departments and the... and the pieces of it are being contracted out, you know, so the privatization at that level has already been going on for a long time. Um, I think it's... I think it's an asset that the city of Detroit, if it's going to be... a city of the people of Detroit, needs to be hung on to. Not given away, uh... to the suburbs or corporations. Um...

[I guess that, sorry... I guess what I'm more asking you is, like, in terms of... knowing that we have an Emergency Manager... how much say does the Water Department have... having an Emergency Manager...?]

Right. Well, the Emergency Manager is, uh, unconstitutional and illegitimate. It's only because people act like he has authority that he in fact authority. Um... and, uh... the legality, constitutional legality and legitimacy question has been pushed off by the, you know, by the bankruptcy process... You know, he had no authority to bring the bankruptcy. That's being challenged in federal court. But the bankruptcy judge says, "First we'll do the bankruptcy then we'll figure out whether he had the authority to bring the... bring the bankruptcy." Right? So this question of [00:26:05] the bankruptcy is legitimating the Emergency Manager. The judge acts like he has the authority to bring it even though it's an unresolved question and treats him like, what he has to say is honest. Uh... and truthful... and uh, uh... that, you know, that whole process has legitimated the Emergency Manager. Or it's one of the pieces that has legitimated it. Um, the media also being a, you know, primary legitimating force. So...

[What do... Say more about what you mean by legitimating. What does it mean when the media legitimizes something?]

Legitimation of authority, I mean, the, you know, political sociologists that try to talk about, you know, how does government get authority, you know, it's this very ephemeral thing. It's because people obey. It kind of comes down to that. You know, it's almost a... a spiritual matter and, um, and the Roman empire understood that. That's why worship of the imperial genius was part of the process. They sort of called it into, um... attention. You know, we had a president, uh... who was not legitimate, thinking of George Bush, who was not legitimately elected, you know, selected by an imposed and probably illegitimate Supreme Court action [00:27:58] and his legitimacy for the first period of the presidency was... was in question. I mean, there were... there were... like, is he really president? You know? Um... His democratic opponent didn't help by kind of caving into it. Um... but it was a question. And it really wasn't until uh... He acted with authority of the Commander and Chief and started a war that the war and his functioning as commander and chief, ordering... ordering military

violence... ended up legitimating his political presidency. Um, once he functioned at that level and intensity. And for... I mean, that's sort of another level of... what is literally fascism, right? And we have another version of that with emergency management, where, uh... a... um... a person appointed by the government under a law, repealed by a majority of Michigan citizens, um... is appointed to supplant the mayor and the city council and, of course, the same thing... they came for the schools first. Uh... And even though it's illegitimate from the get-go, I mean, you can trace the legal illegitimacies of it. It gets accepted and by the media fawning over, uh... uh... the emergency manager taking his words seriously, you know, acting like the bankruptcy process, you know, this is what's going to happen... this is... [00:30:05] all of that gives a political sanction... gives the appearance of, um, this is legitimate. Uh... I remember I, uh... hate to think of Craig Fahle again here, but, uh, at the time that Robert Bob was, uh, over the emergency manager... over the public schools... and, uh, Russ Bellant had done an amazing piece of research, he's a really good researcher, and he had tracked who he was and his history and what he was doing as the emergency manager, you know, which was... was so destructive of public education. And, uh... Craig Fahle had him on the show and for four minutes and only asked him about the... the, uh... population change in Detroit at the... uh... So I talk... I emailed Craig Fahle and say, "This is a guy who has the goods on Robert Bob and you're asking about... Uh... demographics statistics." And he said, "Well, I am vetting his... I'm still vetting him and his paper," you know? It's like...

[Who made Craig Fahle the decider?]

Right. And...

[God...]

And I... Ya. What about... wouldn't an actual reporter... investigative reporter vet Robert Bob? You know? As opposed to having him on the show and just, you know, fawning over his decisions, you know, and everything he says... So that's.. that, you know, that legitimated Bob at the time [00:31:58] and in the same way that... that this whole thing of... of emergency management... Uh... It's... And it's the same with the banks... you know? We... We don't owe the banks this money, you know? It's fraudulent, illegal loans but it keeps getting paid. You know? It's treated like this is a... as long as they can get away with it, it's treated like it's legitimate. And the media keeps saying that, "Oh, Detroit has an 18 billion dollar debt." You know... does it? You know, is anyone questioning that? Part of it is questions authority, you know?

[Ya... Um... I... Ya... Maybe I could just film you, sort of, with your back turned to the garden, or something.]

Do what?

[With your back turned in the garden.]

I could be watering...

[Ya, you should be watering. You should be, um... How did you become a pastor?]

What's that?

[How did you become a pastor?]

Um... Well, when I was young I thought I would be. I mean, I... I... I went forward at alter calls when I was growing up. But then there was a point where I decided I, uh... uh... that I wanted to teach literature and, uh, uh... and so I, that was the direction that I was moving, was much more in terms of writing and poetry. And then I... I really had a political awakening in college, I played football, too, in college, and, uh... and it was particularly the fascination with Martin Luther King and so I'm dating myself, here. I played... I graduated from Cooley Highschool in '67 and went to college that fall. So, uh, and I played football in the fall. But in the spring, um, April of '68 he was killed and it just... it kind of sent a shock wave through my life and I pulled out of... I quit football in a very public way and, uh, just didn't feel like I could... when such movement things were happening that needed, you know, political commitments. So I... I had a... I had a political awakening and some of the folks that I looked to most as mentors and guides were doing political work but they were also pastors. So I decided I would go to seminary, which I did in New York, and, um... Uh... I figured I would be a community organizer with a theological perspective. And my second year in seminary, Daniel Berrigan, who's a Jesuit priest, who was doing federal time for burning draft files he had really brought the church into the antiwar movement, at about the same time that Dr. King was bringing freedom struggle and antiwar movement together. He did this action at Catonsville, Maryland with eight others and, uh, and he'd been underground for, uh, six or seven months... was on the ten most wanted lists and driving J. Edgar Hoover crazy and underground... underground, uh... very public underground time [00:36:02] where he would emerge and speak, you know, he'd be on national television and then slip out the back door. Uh... and, um... anyway, he eventually did the time a couple of years in Danbury Prison but he got out... and came to the seminary where I was teaching and I... I fell in with him and it was partly the way that he read the Bible, certainly the way he lived his life, as though this stuff were a matter of life and death and he was willing to, you know, he put his life on the line many, many times for the sake of nonviolent resistance and, I would say, the Gospel. And that kind.. that... it called... it called me back into... suddenly I'm thinking I should be doing resistance but I should be doing it from within the church. And, uh, so I'm actually am a Methodist, and that's a good... that's a good tradition for this stuff. Um... serving an Episcopal congregation at the moment.

[Hwuuuuuh... Um...]

I t... I told the... I did one of the... the, uh... the Twisted Storytellers — do you know that thing?

[Uh-uh.]

Oh, it's sort of like the Moth...

[It's like the Moth? Ya...]

It's at the... uh... the Charles Wright Museum of African American History. And, uh, and I told... I kind of told my Berrigan story and the story of the arrest at... I was arrested at City Council the day that the Jones Day contract was...

[Right... Right... Oh, God!]

So I told that story.

[Um... you were arrested at, can you say that one more time when it's no...]

Ya, it was the day that Jones Day, which is the third largest law firm in the world, was being contracted by the city, uh, we were already under emergency management, I believe... Ya! We were... because the city council hadn't done it, Kevyn Orr could have done it himself... And it was his [00:38:19] law firm. And they're the ones that are doing the bankruptcy. And, uh, every time the... Judge Rhodes says now it's... the city of Detroit's turn, he's looking to Jones... the third largest law firm in the world to, you know, come to the... come to the podium, and they represent Bank of America and Chase... All the big banks are their clients.... Their primary clients. The City of Detroit as a client is a minor one in their, uh... in the pantheon of their, uh, of their clients. And it's a huge conflict of interest... Anyway, on the day that they were... the contract was voted... which, the city council eventually did do, um... which gave the legitimacy again to...

[Hang on. One second...]

What's that?

[One second.]

Ya.

[Ok. Try again.]

The city council eventually did vote on the contract and passed it.

[And what happened to you?]

Ya... At the point where they were about to vote, a group of us, probably, uh... eight or ten, knelt down in the aisle and began to sing We Shall Not Be Moved. And that point, uh... actually, the whole... the whole room, who... folks that were there to testify on that and other things... uh... stood up [00:39:58] and began speaking. We... we effectively shut down city council for an hour and a half. We kind of expected we would be arrested pretty quickly, uh, but they... the cops were conflicted... the council was conflicted... they had different... different... they had people that were clearly staying in the room, like Joanne Watson and Brenda Jones, who were staying in the room to witness what we were doing. And then you had other... other council people trying to push the cops to arrest us and, uh, what they did... they only arrested two of us in the end. Uh... which was Elena Herrada and myself. They had a big, uh... school bus, blue school bus, police department school bus out front... so we thought they were going to arrest a lot of folks. And there were... there were people who hadn't been part of the organizing of our group... older, African American women and Korean War veterans who held out their hands, you know... when the cops came. They weren't... they weren't taking anyone, uh... like that. You know? They only... So anyway, we were the only two arrested. We asked for a jury trial, on the premise that, at this point, uh, a jury is the last vestige of democracy in the City of Detroit. That's really true... I mean, a jury has way more power than they're generally allowed to understand. You know, they're given instructions that say, "You can consider this, but you can't consider this." But, they actually can consider anything they... they can consider conscience, they can consider history... I mean all they really have to do is say guilty or not guilty. It's a... it's a powerful democratic, um... uh... entity, a jury. Anyway, in the end, [00:42:08] on the day of our trial, the cops did not show and... uh... so, the charges were dropped against us and we... we never got our day in court. Joanne was prepared to testify. Monica Lewis was going to testify. Tom Stevens... was going to testify. People were present and ready to go.

[That's an amazing story. Um... God, that's so intense... That, I mean, the cops didn't show up. They're not getting paid enough to show up for that...]

They hugged us when they released us.

[Oh!]

You know, they thanked us. I mean, they know it's their pensions that we're... you know, were about to go on the line.

[I mean, it seems like that's sort of, like, what the Water Department, at least the workers, are under to. They don't want to shut... They, it's... It's like for, you know... It's... It's... It's sort of, in a way, exploitative to make a water department shut-off their own community's water.]

Right. And they're not. I mean, that's why they're paying contractors to do it. It's not Water Department employees. It's... I mean, this is... This is all...

[Well, some are but not many... More are... More are... uh,]

Contracted?

[Homrich]

Uh-huh.

[Um, but htat's a good point. That the contractors do the bulk of it.]

Uh, ya, you were probably not around when there was a wild cat's strike at the water department. That was like two years ago.

[I wasn't, no. Um... So, can I film you watering?]

Ya. Ya...

[Thank you. Keep, keep... I'll tell you when to stop.]

I'm actually not sure if this is a good idea in the heat of the day, but...

[I'm almost done.]

Now you're getting the bees in.

[This is great.] [00:45:01] [I don't want to get...]

You know, I think I should apologize to you. It seems like early on when you came, you cam eot the D-REM meeting and I think you contacted me and I was slow to...

[No, don't worry!]

We could have had this conversation a long time ago.

[Ya, no, it's fine. Um, it's... things are always evolving... so at any point.]

[Do you... are there any, um, homes on your block that you... that are vacant that have water pouring into them, that you know of?]

Homes on the block?

[Ya, or in the neighborhood? It's sort of one of the hypo...]

You know, they track down who the bank was and they said, "We're not interested in selling." And that week it burned.

[Who burned it?]

Very savvy question...

[I mean, it could either be, um... I don't know, it could be citizens, sort of, vigilante...]

I don't feel like we had that going on here.

[It could be the...]

It could be that someone was staying in it and, I forget what time of year this was... they may have had a fire...

[It could have been the bank, they just want to hold on to the land... They want to collect on insurance]

Uh... A lot of the way... the way that arson worked in Poletown... there were a lot of fires in Poletown. And arson was happening everywhere and also driving people out of... out of Poletown. You know of that story?

[I... I mean, from what period of time?]

This is 1980.

[So the... when Ken Cockrel to vote against the GM development.]

Right. Um, there's a film on that that my wife made.

[Really?]

Called Poletown Lives!

[I want to see it really bad.]

Ya, you should see it. It's.. It has, uh, she and George Corsetti made it. And there are... there are things that I would be critical of, both of the film and some of the struggle... but anyway the way that the arson worked that the city was contracting with demolition companies to take down homes. And it's a lot easier to take down a burned out shell, which is already, you know, half of it's been carried away into the atmosphere and half barely stands up [00:48:14] and it's

less to carry. So... they would pay kids ten dollars a pop to start fires and, um, so it was actually, you know, the city had condemned the land, was taking the property, contracting with the demolition companies, and they were paying kids... No body was ever caught or prosecuted, except for someone in retaliation, a community resident, burned the construction demolition company, I think, their... portable... their office trailer and he got caught.

[Was this in response... was this before, um, Coleman Young okayed the deal... the GM expansion?]

No, it was after.

[After... So when they were actually trying to remove people.]

There was a struggle of more than a year, uh, where the community was trying to resist that... they were resisting actually out of one of the Catholic churches and, uh, the diocese and turned around and sold the church to the city for 1.6... two churches! for 1.6 million dollars, something like that...

[At that point?]

Ya, right at the point the Supreme Court had hal... the state Supreme Court had halted the projects because it was the first time that eminent domain had ever been used on behalf of private corporation. It wasn't a public purpose. The "public purpose" was jobs. So the project was halted temporarily and the archdiocese, [00:50:10] right at that moment, probably to weaken the resistance and demoralize people — sell the churches right from under them, the church where they were meeting. And evicted the priest...

[Sounds a lot like the Ilitch deal.]

Ya, it does. And it was the beginning of Devil's Night.

[Was it?]

You know Devil's Night?

[Ya! That was the... that was when that started, when it was private corporations selling kids ten... you know, houses for ten bucks.]

Right, you know, there was such a kind of a configuration of fires and the next year on Devil's Night began. And at that point it was still insurance fires were more common than they are now. So Devil's Night also had an economic impetus to it initially. But then it was unleashed, you know? A tradition.

[So, um, if you think of anything... any ideas... or if you come across any media that's out there that, um, could be sort of hijacked and... because I like to hijack mainstream media. I like to kind of take the paradigm, make fun of it and reveal the truths that are kind of intense.]

Ya.. Ya.

[Then it feels good to know the truth. You know? If you're like, oh wait...]