Letters on a tragic death

29 January 2009

Below we publish a selection of letters sent to the World Socialist Web Site *in response to the death of a Michigan man who froze after his electricity was cut off. (See, "*Michigan man, 93, freezes to death after city cuts off electricity*" and "*Video: Bay City, Mich.: 'Shutting somebody's electricity off in the dead of winter is criminal'")

What can we do? This is more than just a hypothetical question. I receive $914/month Social Security/Disability (and I own nothing), with no family to help me. My last two electric bills were $290 and $285, for a water heater, refrigerator, two lamps, and a computer and central heating set at 55 degrees. I will no longer use central heating. I was just given two 220-volt, small ceramic coil heaters by some friends who found them in the barn of a house they bought. Decades ago "modern" homes in this area were built with only this option for heating. Don't know whether this will make a difference, but I will try.

I know a young couple with one child living in a trailer, using wood for heat; their last electric bill was for more than $200. Those of us getting electricity from Sevier County Electric (Tennessee Valley Authority) had a 25 percent increase effective October 2008, plus a "fuel adjustment" charge (variable). And, because of the failure of the TVA "dam"—which had been cited for many years for multiple violations and warnings—that caused millions of gallons of toxic waste to flood the land and rivers that supply drinking water to us, we have now been told that we will have another increase to pay for the "clean-up." We are more than angry. We are trying to survive.

There have been wonderful advances in the last few years in efficiency of solar "gathering." So, guess what, TVA. We are going solar. Sayonara, darlin'!

Barbara P
Tennessee, USA
28 January 2009

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I read with a broken heart your story about Mr. Schur. You see, I'm a firefighter, and we do whatever it takes to save a life—in some cases we give our own.

I can't begin to express my outrage at the bureaucratic indifference that contributed to this old soul's death. Particularly Mr. Belleman by suggesting Mr. Schur's neighbors bear responsibility for looking in on him. Apparently, Mr. Belleman was not alert enough to understand it was in fact Mr. Schur's neighbors who were the ones that found him, albeit too late. Sadly, his concerned and loving neighbors could not acquit Mr. Schur of the death sentence that the city's bureaucratic indifference had already set.

If we had only known, we'd have responded with tankers of cash—from Canada.

L MacDonald
Canada
28 January 2009

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When I read the article about Marvin Schur I was outraged and saddened. It is completely disgusting that this kind of incident can occur in a country like America. The response from Mayor Charles Brunner is cold and inhuman. It is a great tragedy that this man died alone and in extreme discomfort. However, I would like to congratulate you both for publishing the article and ensuring he is not forgotten. What is important is that the public is aware of the contempt the bourgeoisie has for workers and, moreover, human life. Thank you for bringing this to our attention.

Elle
Sydney, Australia
28 January 2009

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I see a real need for neighbors to become mindful of the older neighbors around them, ones that are confined, sick and alone. We as a people are so busy with our own needs that we forget to reach out a hand

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of compassion to those needy ones around us. What if the electricity went out because of a storm or ice on the lines? Who would have been to blame then? God?

Mary P
29 January 2009

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Shame on Bay City Power and the officials who stupidly did *not* check in with the 93-year-old themselves! It's heartbreaking enough that Schur was elderly, but then to find out he was a veteran.... FIRE THEM! Those who are served by this company and officials should pay their bill late so the "powers that be" can see what a "crash" in their pocket book or a "freeze" is all about...in memory of that poor man!

P Mills
Oregon, USA

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