

Video: Dexter Avenue area residents express anger over utility shutoffs

A reporting team
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The WSWWS has been campaigning in the neighborhood where the house fire which killed Tyrone and Marvin Allen and Lynn Greer on January 5. The statements of neighbors confirmed the widespread character of utility shutoffs and anger with the utility company, DTE Energy.

Jennifer J., a young mother in her early 20s was recently laid off from her job as a medical receptionist. She has been renting a house several blocks from the fatal January 5 fire that killed three people on Dexter Avenue in Detroit.

The week before Christmas, her heat and electricity were cut off. The landlord apparently had not paid the bill since 2005. Her lease—\$650 a month for three bedrooms—is supposed to include the utilities. DTE is now holding her responsible for the entire amount owed, despite the fact that she is not the home owner, has only lived there since 2008, and the lease she signed clearly says her utilities are included in the rent.

Facing the cold Detroit winter with a 6-month-old and a 5-year-old at home, she and her partner paid “another indigent person” to jerry-rig utilities to the house. Monday through Friday she turns off the heat so that if someone from DTE comes by, they won’t see the smoke coming out of the furnace.

She learned just days before we met that the house has gone into foreclosure and the landlord has disappeared. She is being threatened with eviction by the mortgage company. She has no place else to go. She talked about the strain that her situation was putting on her relationship, noting that things had been really good between her and her boyfriend, but that the financial pressures on them caused a lot of tension.

“No one wants to help me. I’m listed with the state of

Michigan. They know my situation. But the only thing they’ll give me is food stamps. At least I can feed my children. No other assistance is being given to me.

“I tried to go to the madhouse at Cobo Hall [when 50,000 lined up for utilities assistance last fall. See our report.] But what was given? Nothing! Just another piece of paper. How many pieces of paper have I been given and filled out?!”

Referring to the conditions she faces, Jennifer said, “I can show you streets and streets and blocks and blocks of homes where people are living just like me.

“I’m not asking for a handout. I’m not asking for any freebies. I’m just asking for some help. I’m not a crackhead or a drug fiend.

“I paid taxes—to the city, to the state. But I can’t get shit from the government.”

Jennifer is afraid that if she is evicted, the social service agencies may try to take her children away from her. She began to weep when sharing this.

Growing increasingly angry, she said, “Mothers have a basic instinct to provide for their children. This is all I’m trying to do!”

“Nobody wants to put this on the 6 o’clock news. They don’t care about the little people. You take my interview. You tell somebody what is going on here.”



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