Woman severely injured in Detroit house fire

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Early Friday morning another fire in a Detroit home without utilities resulted in severe injuries for a young woman.

The fire at 15772 Parkway tore through a house in a racially mixed working class area on the far west side of Detroit. It started at 5 AM while a man and his girlfriend were asleep. The 20-year old woman is in the hospital with severe burns. Their names have not been released.

This tragic fire followed only three days after another fire killed three children aged 3-5, hours after utilities to the home were shut off by DTE Energy. The state is now attempting to victimize the mother in an attempt to divert attention from the responsibility of utility companies and the government in these horrific tragedies. (See, "State attempts to victimize mother of fire victims")

Darryl Wright-Bey, a neighbor and friend of the most recent victim, told the WSWS that the boyfriend of the woman ran to get help after discovering the house was on fire. "He said his girlfriend was in the house but he couldn't wake her up," Wright-Bey said.

Bey said the first thing he did was to call the fire department; then he went down to the house. "The fire and the smoke were too thick" to get in the house. "So we had to call the fire department again. When we called them again nothing happened, and we had to call them a third time. We called because it was taking them too long."

Bey said they were desperately trying to get into the house to save the young woman, but the smoke was just too thick for either him or his son-in-law, even though they tried several times.

"I wanted to help her," stated Bey. "I wanted to help real bad, but it was just too intense."

Bey said the fire department told them the cause was either a candle or the open flame propane tank that the family was using for heat. The official cause of the fire has not been determined.

Bey said the couple had been living in the house without gas or electricity for over four years. Asked if there were a lot of people living without utilities for that long, he said, "Longer. There are people that have been living without electricity or heat for 10-15 years."

"If you notice the fires and deaths have increased since Bush because people don't have the money to pay it. It's bad, real bad."

Yolanda, a neighbor of the couple, said utility shutoffs were common. "This happens every day," she said. "I have three kids. I had to go without utilities before. A lot of people have to use plug-in heaters like that. You have to. Otherwise, how can you or your kids stay warm if you don't have any help?"

Referring to the death of the three Young children, Yolanda said it was wrong for DTE to cut off the lights and gas of families. "I have lived with space heaters, but I never knew how dangerous the outcome could be. I had space heaters in every room. My kids even had space heaters in their room. So just to hear about what happened to those three kids; it's just wrong."

Yolanda said she went to DTE for help but was told she had to pay $310 to have her utilities on in her name. "I can't do $310. And if you can't pay it, they come and shut you off, whether you have kids or not."

Yolanda said she receives $675 a month and pays $500 a month for rent. "They wanted me to pay $310? How can I do it? It's impossible."

Yolanda said she has service now, "But for how long? I don't know. Who is to say how long that will be? They still want me to pay $310."

On Thursday, about 100 people protested against utility shutoffs in front of DTE headquarters in downtown Detroit. The demonstration, part of a regular schedule organized by the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, drew more people than usual because of

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rising anger to utility shutoffs that have claimed the lives of 14 people in Detroit so far this year.

“I think it is horrific. It’s absolutely uncalled for that three children die in this city in a fire because they are without utilities,” said Fred Brown. Brown, an autoworker, said he came even though he worked until 2 AM that morning.

“Something has to be done. A lot of people are hurting. No one is doing anything to help working people.”

When he was asked about the UAW and their attitude towards the job cuts and utility shutoffs, Brown said, “They don’t do anything for workers any more. They are just people we pay, but they don’t stand up for the working man.”

“They claim their hands are tied. And I suppose they are if you consider that they are in bed with management.”

Solomon Doyle said utilities should be a basic right. “Utilities are a necessity that should be treated like a job or medicine. You can’t live without them, especially in the wintertime.”

Nancy Montgomery, a member of the Welfare Rights Organization, had a sign with the names of 14 people who have died from house fires since the beginning of the year.

“I am just outraged about the death of these children because of the shut off of utilities. How many more deaths will take place?”

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