

Dexter Avenue Fire Inquiry to hold press conference Thursday in Detroit

Andrea Peters
11 March 2010

The Citizens Inquiry into the Dexter Avenue House Fire is holding a press conference today, March 11, at 1:00 p.m. The conference is being held at 8011 Dexter Avenue in Detroit, MI [map], the scene of a January 5 fire that took the lives of three people.

The Socialist Equality Party initiated the inquiry in response to the Dexter fire, which killed two disabled brothers—Marvin Allen, 61, and Tyrone Allen, 62—along with Lynn Greer, 58. The blaze was sparked by a space heater connected to an unauthorized electricity hookup established after utilities had been shutoff at the home. (See “Citizens Inquiry into the Dexter Avenue Fire: Utility Shutoffs and the Social Crisis in Detroit”)

Since January, several more have been killed in similar fires. On Tuesday, a blaze in a home on Detroit’s east side took the life of an elderly woman. She had been living without heat or electricity since 2006, and, according to initial press reports, possibly without running water as well. (See “Elderly woman dies in Detroit house fire”)

On March 2, three children perished in a fire at a home on Bangor Street, where DTE Energy had disconnected the gas and electricity only hours earlier. The areas in which these tragedies have occurred are marred by poverty, unemployment and the absence of adequate social services.

At the press conference, Lawrence Porter, chairman of the inquiry commission, will outline the reasons for holding the Citizens Inquiry and answer questions from the press. He will provide details on an initial fact-finding hearing to be held on March 20.

Family members and friends of recent fire victims will also be in attendance. Charlotte Nash, the sister of Marvin and Tyrone Allen, will make a statement.

Explaining the background to the Citizens Inquiry, Porter said on Wednesday, “Despite the fact that there is a clear connection between utility shutoffs and fire-related deaths, this practice continues and is sanctioned by the state government, which regulates DTE Energy and approves its billing practices and service policies.”

Porter denounced efforts to blame victims of these fires for allegedly “stealing” electricity. “After having lost access to heat and electricity, people will do whatever it takes to try to stay warm in Detroit in the wintertime,” Porter added. “Turning off gas and electricity to homes is a criminal practice, but one that receives very little attention in the mainstream press and is ignored by politicians.”

“The Citizens Inquiry will allow working people in Detroit and experts with knowledge of conditions in the city to testify about their experiences and the scope of the city’s social crisis,” Porter said.

The shutoff of utilities by DTE Energy has assumed devastating proportions. Some 221,000 households in southeastern Michigan were cut off from gas and/or electricity at some point last year.

Thursday’s press conference and the inquiry on March 20 are being held as anger grows in the Detroit area over utility shutoffs and their consequences.

In advertising for the Citizens Inquiry in local neighborhoods and speaking with residents about the city’s social crisis, the *World Socialist Web Site* has encountered many who have had similar experiences to those of the fire victims.

According to an article on *ClickOnDetroit.com*, “community support is pouring in” for Sylvia Young, the mother of the three young children who died in the Bangor Street fire. This is despite the fact that initial media reports sought to

imply that Young was to blame for what happened because she was not home at the time of the fire.

Young was looking to buy a space heater when the fire began. The Michigan attorney general is considering filing charges against Young, and Young fears that her surviving children could be taken away from her.

Firefighters from the city have volunteered to serve as pallbearers for the Young children at the funeral, which will be held Saturday at 11:00 a.m. at Fellowship Chapel on West Outer Drive. The Phoenix Firefighters of Detroit are holding a fundraiser on Friday evening to help Sylvia Young defray the costs of the burials.

The time and location of the press conference are:

Thursday, March 11, 1:00 p.m.

8011 Dexter Avenue

Detroit, MI 48206 [map]

In the event of rain, the press conference will be held at the Dexter Elmhurst Center, 11825 Dexter Avenue Detroit, MI 48206. [map]



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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