

End all utility shutoffs! Electricity and gas must be social rights

Committee Against Utility Shutoffs
13 December 2010

The Committee Against Utility Shutoffs (CAUS) demands an end to all utility shutoffs. Those living without gas and electricity must have their services immediately restored.

Today's "Energy Customer Assistance Day" has nothing to do with guaranteeing the basic right of all residents to gas and electricity. It is a public relations stunt by DTE and the city government.

On its web site, DTE proclaims that during its "Weekend of Giving," it aims to raise \$1 million from Detroit residents to put towards emergency assistance. This sum will do nothing to address the crisis facing hundreds of thousands of people in the Detroit area.

DTE, after milking as much money from residents as possible through outrageously high rates, is offering a small amount of charity—which will simply be funneled back into the company. It is an insult to the people of Detroit.

The \$1 million that DTE boasts of raising is tiny when compared to the profits that the company has made in 2010 alone—about \$500 million. It is a fraction of the total compensation paid to DTE's top executives. These profits are a direct result of its policy of shutting off utilities to the city's residents.

The cold weather has now begun in Detroit and so has DTE's killing season. Last winter, 11 people perished in house fires after DTE shut off utilities. There will be more deaths this year, as desperate households do whatever they can to avoid freezing. The health and safety of hundreds of thousands is under threat, as families are forced to choose heat over food, medicine and other essentials.

DTE has organized Monday's event so that it can claim that there is "plenty of help available" for all those willing to seek it. This is a lie. As it has done in the past, the company will blame the victims of its

policies for their own suffering. Already a campaign in the media has begun about the dangers of "illegal hookups," while the media barely mentions the mass shutoffs taking place in Detroit.

The political establishment in Detroit, Lansing and Washington—including both the Democrats and Republicans—is just as responsible for this crisis as DTE.

Detroit Mayor David Bing sat on the company's board of directors for 20 years. On Thursday, the mayor announced plans to deprive one-third of the city of essential services—schools, transportation, water, sewage, public safety, etc.—in order to force the population living in these areas to move. This plan is entirely in the interests of DTE, which will no longer have to maintain power lines in areas of Detroit where its profit margins are slim.

In October, the Michigan Public Services Commission, which was appointed by Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm, approved an additional rate hike for DTE. The state agency issued a report absolving DTE of any responsibility for the fires that occurred throughout Detroit on September 7, when aging DTE power lines came down in high winds and burned down dozens of homes.

At the federal level, the Obama administration and Congress have worked out a deal to extend tax cuts for the wealthy, even as Washington is preparing to slash public funding for emergency heating assistance by \$2 billion.

The utilities crisis facing Detroit-area residents is part of the broader assault against working people, who are losing their jobs and their homes, seeing their wages cut and funding for social programs slashed. In the face of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, big business is demanding that workers

sacrifice so that the rich can become even richer.

The Socialist Equality Party initiated the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs (CAUS) to mobilize working people in opposition to DTE and its backers, the Democrats and Republicans. We call for:

- End all utility shutoffs! Restore services to all those cut off from gas and electricity!

- Turn DTE and other utility companies into public enterprises, run democratically for social need not private profit!

- Hold DTE and its executives legally responsible for the deaths caused by utility shutoffs!

- Establish a multibillion-dollar public works program to put residents back to work and rebuild Detroit!

- Build an independent working class movement! No support to the Democrats and Republicans, the bought-and-paid-for representatives of the corporations!

These demands can be won only through the mobilization of the working class on the basis of its independent interests. We urge all Detroit-area residents to join CAUS and take up this fight!



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