

Demonstrators speak out: “Heat and gas are necessities for life”

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed workers and young people who participated in the March 12 demonstration and rally against utility shutoffs in Detroit. (See also, “Demonstration in Detroit demands end to utility shutoffs”.)

Pauline, a senior at Central High School, is the friend of the daughter of Marvin Allen. Marvin was killed in the Dexter Avenue fire on January 5, 2010. “It was wrong that they didn’t give him more time to pay his bills,” she said. “He was a senior; he should have had a discount. They should have worked with him.”

“Utility shutoffs are very common in Detroit,” Pauline said. “They affect many people, including people you might not think are affected. Most people have either been cut off or are on the verge of being cut off. My mom is on a DTE budget plan. She is unemployed.

“I agreed that nobody should have their utilities cut off. If people have no job, they still have to pay their bills, but they have less money. They have to stretch what they have. Something has to give.”

Speaking about the fact that so little is done to help people, Pauline said, “Most politicians don’t care. They are looking out for themselves. The Republicans don’t worry about the more needy, but I don’t think the Democrats are any different. They are all the same, just with a different party name.”

Kevin Sanford was a neighbor of Marvin and Tyrone Allen. He said that he was awakened on January 5 by his wife, and “saw the house totally engulfed in flames.”

Sanford said, “Three people lost their lives that day because the government wants to look at utilities as a

luxury, when they should be considered a necessity like food and water. That’s why we are here marching today.

“There was a very good turnout for the march,” Sanford added. “It was very successful if you ask me.”

Sanford spoke about the transformation of the city over the past 50 years. “I have lived on Dexter since 1960. I was born and raised here. When you drove down Dexter Avenue there were so many trees, there was hardly any sunlight coming down. It was like driving through a tunnel. The city is not what it used to be. You only have a few people who own their homes and are really trying to maintain them. It’s like a jungle. There are no jobs.

“Heat and light, I rank it up there with oxygen—you are going to have it or you are going to die. It is as simple as that.”

Arkan, a retired small business owner from Sterling Heights, said, “My electricity was shut off because I didn’t make enough of a payment. It never happened before. I want to put in my voice so that it will be heard. We need more people to get involved.

“It looks like the rich all over the world are getting richer. Look at gas prices. They are up every day. It is not because of Libya. The oil companies are behind it.”

Tim Merrick, a young warehouse worker, said he was attending because he saw the demonstration “as a chance to be proactive in a cause that is new to me. I see that it is part of a bigger picture of exploitation.

“This is all new to me,” Tim said. “This past week I was reading articles on CAUS. It is infuriating how ineffective our say in the federal government is as far as putting pressure on these corporations. This seems like one case in many where people stand up against

corporate oppression.”

Gregory Jones is retired from the military and is currently teaching in Lansing. He said, “I want to be supportive of equal opportunity of resources. I think that utilities and other essential resources should be fundamental human rights. I don’t believe that rich individuals should be able to monopolize gas and electricity. It should belong to the community.

“The situation in the United States reminds me of the revolutions in the Middle East. People there are fed up with Arab princes hogging all the resources as though they belong to them personally. The people say that the oil belongs to the whole nation, not just the princes. It is time for the resources to be spread equally.

“I never made over \$100,000 a year, and that was enough to lead a comfortable middle class life. But you have people making millions. It is not even about money any more. It is about power. It is sociopathic behavior, where they don’t care about their fellow man suffering. They have contempt for everyone below. You see it here. They pit those who are working against those who are living in poverty. They try to get working people fighting against each other.

“I want to be part of any cause fighting for people’s rights,” Jones declared.

Doretha Chapman, a nurse, currently unemployed, said, “I sure hope we are effective today. It is sad to lose the lives of young kids due to utility shutoffs.

“I have not had my heating cut off, but I have lost my job. It’s like a treadmill. No one calls you. No one is hiring. All the hospitals are merging.

Speaking about the broader social crisis in the city, Chapman said, “I saw in Detroit, in Allen Park, they are laying off the firefighters. I am left almost speechless. The money is there. Maybe it’s not being put to good use or distributed where it would do the best. The United States can’t just be completely broke. But, when it comes to social programs, they are telling us there is no money.”

Luthereen Meoton, a 52-year-old disabled worker, said, “I know how it is to be cold at night, to have no heat or gas. I had to join with people who are standing for something that is right.”

“People are being cut off in the winter. They are forced to use electric heaters and such, and houses burn up.”

Meoton summed up the sentiment of many who attended the demonstration by concluding, “These things should be free. Heat and gas are necessities for life.”



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