

Sylvia Young addresses The Fight for Socialism Today conference in Ann Arbor

“CAUS says utilities should be a right, not a luxury”

15 April 2011

One of those who participated in the discussion at The Fight for Socialism Today conference, held April 9-10 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, was Sylvia Young, a Detroit mother who lost three small children in a March 2, 2010 house fire, which started after DTE Energy cut off lights and heat to her west side home.

In the aftermath of the fire, the media and authorities launched a witch-hunt against Young in order to cover up the criminal responsibility of DTE. She was accused of abandoning her children because she was at a store buying space heaters at the time the fire broke out, and state officials attempted to strip her of custody of her surviving children.

The tragic house fire was one of several, which claimed the lives of nearly a dozen Detroiters who had heat cut off during the winter months by the energy giant. In response to these deaths, the Socialist Equality Party founded the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs to mobilize the working class to defend the social rights to heat, electricity and water. CAUS played the leading role in defending Young and forcing authorities to drop their legal vendetta against her.

Sylvia spoke on the resolution entitled, “The attack on the working class and the fight for socialism.”

My name is Sylvia Young and I am from Detroit. People are losing their jobs. People are losing their homes. Workers are taking pay cuts because they don’t want to lose their jobs. Now they want to take away our little benefits—what do they expect us to do?

My little boy goes to Emerson Middle School. In one

seventh-grade class there are 46 students. In the other there are 51 students. The governor-appointed Emergency Financial Manager Robert Bobb wants to close another 41 schools so they can turn them over to charter companies.

I agree with the Socialist Equality Party that a job should be a social right. Lights and heat should be a right. Good education should be a right. They shouldn’t take it away.

Last year, on March 2, I lost my three children in a fire that started after DTE shut off gas and lights to my home. I had seven children in the house, in the middle of winter, but they cut off my heat. What they did was a crime. But DTE and the state tried to turn things around and make it out like I was a criminal, like I was a bad mother, because I was poor and a single mom. They tried to take away my kids.

But the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs stood up for me and we fought back. CAUS says utilities should be a right, not a luxury. This is not a black thing, or a white thing, or an Arabic thing. They try to use this race thing for us to fight each other over the tiny piece of the pie we get, while the rich control almost the whole pie. All working class people are facing the same thing, in the US, and around the world. When they were trying to take my kids away I got letters from Britain, Australia, from all over, defending me.

A lot of people voted for Obama thinking that because he was black he would be for poor people. He gave billions to banks but he is cutting money from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. I got a letter in the mail, saying that I was going to get \$1 dollar in assistance for heating. That’s with people

owing hundreds or thousands of dollars to DTE and being cut off every year.

People are going to get together to protest. The money is going to the rich and for wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and now Libya.

They are trying to take away our rights and we have to stand up to fight. I support the resolution and urge everyone here to vote for it.



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