

SEP speaks to Detroit workers and youth about power outages, heat wave

Our reporters
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Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party's 2012 presidential election campaign spoke to workers in metropolitan Detroit Friday about the heat wave and power outages across the area.

As of Friday afternoon more than 90,000 people were reported without power in Detroit. DTE Energy, which controls both the electrical and gas utilities in the city, had announced that power would only be restored by Saturday evening. The temperature reached 97 Fahrenheit (36.1 Celsius) Saturday, with humidity averaging roughly 50 percent.

Unable to use air conditioning and often without any mode of communication in case of emergencies, the elderly and other vulnerable groups, such as the ill and infants, are placed in real danger by this situation.

The power outages have exposed the decay of infrastructure in the US, and Detroit in particular. Decades of social cuts, combined with mass layoffs, particularly in the auto industry, have left thousands without jobs or social assistance. Many homes in the area are burnt out, often the result of people using dangerous space heaters after being unable to pay their utility bills and being cut off by DTE.

Campaign supporters distributed a statement by SEP vice presidential candidate Phyllis Scherrer titled, "The heat wave in the US and the decay of infrastructure," and visited homes on Adeline Street near the Michigan State Fairgrounds on the city's northern edge. Power has been out for the whole street since Wednesday.

Shantinique, 21, told our campaigners, "We have been living here seven or eight months and this is the second time it's happened. [DTE] told us when it went out that it would be back on the same day, but it's still out. We've been taking showers to keep cool. We just went shopping on July 4, and now all of our food is ruined."

"My 60-year-old grandmother lives here," she added. "Yesterday she was so miserable; she could barely breathe. She said she felt suffocated because of the heat. My family is trying to get her away from the house, but she says she won't leave her home. So I won't leave either."

Shantinique said that she recently became unemployed and was looking for a job. "It is impossible to find work in this area. I went to school to be a medical assistant, but I had to stop studying. I hope to go back and finish my course. At the moment I'm just trying to take anything I can get. My last job paid \$7.35 an hour."

She said that she was disillusioned with both political parties. "I don't think it makes a difference between Obama and Romney. I didn't vote in 2008 because I wasn't registered yet. I'm going to vote this year, but I don't know who for. I don't think much of Obama."

The SEP team explained that the campaign of Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer was aimed at providing a genuine alternative to the two parties of big business, through the construction of a new political party of the working class based on the fight for socialism. "Basic

necessities like heat, water and electricity, and a decent well-paying job, are social rights and must be freely available for everyone,” one said.

Shantinique expressed interest in the campaign and said she would carefully study the election material.

Charles Griggs, a retired Ford worker, told us: “I’m going to go to stay with my daughter. They have power lines lying in the roads. They need to bury the lines so when the trees fall they don’t knock out the power. But they won’t do it because it will cost them money. So the power goes when there’s storms, or even when a car runs into a pole. It has happened two or three times in the last year, and it stays off for days.”

A long-time resident of Adeline Street described the cuts imposed on the city. “This was my mom and dad’s house,” she said. “It used to be a beautiful street, and now there’s nothing left. Jennifer Granholm [the former Democratic governor] closed down the local fairgrounds; she closed that school down, and since then our neighborhood has gone to pot. Now Mayor Bing wants to cut this neighborhood off completely. The school had been there since 1917 or 1918. I worked there and all my kids went to school there.”

She said she would be voting for Obama in the elections, despite the SEP campaigners explaining his record as a defender of big corporate interests. She expressed her opposition to the domination of the city of Detroit by big business, saying, “Detroit should never have let DTE Energy take over the gas and light companies.” She added, “They should have kept them separate. It is just a commodity to them. It’s a big monopoly ... The working class doesn’t have a chance any more. Everyone is taking it away from them.”

Her own situation is increasingly difficult. “My husband is a retired GM worker and he’s had two strokes, so he’s stuck in the house,” she said. “My son lives here, but he can’t even get his car out of the garage to go to work because it’s an electric garage door. So he has missed two days already as a custodian in Madison Heights schools.”

The SEP team visited a local store to speak with people who had come to cool off. An ambulance was called for an 80-year-old woman at the store suffering from the heat.

Melvin Redwine spoke to SEP campaigners outside the supermarket. “Detroit is definitely suffering,” he said. “The housing condition is horrible. The buildings, the streets, the schools—they’re cutting services; the police don’t respond when you call. It’s almost unsafe to live here now. It’s like a war zone. A lot of people are moving out now.

“Now DTE wants to increase the electricity rates by \$4 per month,” he added, “but they decrease the services. There’s been an extreme decay in the city.”



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