

Tragic house fire takes three lives in Lincoln Park, Michigan

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Over the weekend, a tragic house fire in the Downriver community of Lincoln Park killed three people and destroyed a home and a family.

The house belonged to Shawn and Kaira Chapman. Kaira, 28, who was two months pregnant, was among the three victims. Neighbors told us that her husband, Shawn, was able to make it out alive only because he was staying on the first floor near the back entrance of the house due to an injury to his legs. Also lost to the fire was a family caretaker, 50, who neighbors said was considered family by Shawn and Kaira. The third victim was a 4-year-old boy, the nephew of Shawn and Kaira.

The Socialist Equality Party extends its deepest condolences to the surviving family members and friends, who have suffered a terrible loss.

Neighbors reported that by the time the fire department arrived around 4:40 am, the house was ablaze from front to back and impossible to enter. Shawn reportedly made several attempts to go in to rescue his family, but neighbors stopped him due to the advanced state of the fire.

While we visited the site, mourners came by to place balloons, flowers and other memorabilia in the yard to express their support and condolences. The neighbors told us that the community is very tight knit. Many have lived in Lincoln Park for generations, including Chapman family.

While the cause of the fire is still unknown, such tragedies invariably illustrate, in the most heartbreaking manner, the need for social planning and the diversion of resources to ensure quality, safe housing for everyone.

The home of Shawn and Kaira Chapman, for example, was among the oldest in the neighborhood, probably built about 100 years ago. It is likely that the age and structure of the home played a role in how quickly the fire was able to spread.

In a rationally planned economy, enormous resources would be allocated to ensure the safety of homes, replace deteriorating infrastructure, fund fire departments and other social services and employ the most advanced fire detection and combatting technologies to prevent such tragedies.

Instead, under capitalism, where human need is subordinate to the accumulation of profit, the working class is subjected to such horrors as the one that occurred on Saturday on a daily basis.

Fire departments in the US respond to an estimated 358,500 home fires per year. These fires cause about \$6.7 billion in direct damage and kill over 3,000 people every year.

The areas most impacted by house fires are poor and working-class neighborhoods, where people are struggling to make ends meet and to find affordable, safe housing and heating, under conditions of poorly enforced housing safety regulations and rampant utility shutoffs.

Deadly house fires have become a distressingly regular occurrence in Detroit and the surrounding areas. The majority occur in the winter months, as families seek to stay warm with space heaters or rig their own electrical circuits after having their utilities shut off from unpaid bills. Just this summer, over a six-week period in June and July, 2,000 households in Detroit had their water service disconnected following the regular winter hiatus.

Among the most tragic of these disasters was that which befell Sylvia Young, who at the time of the fire

in 2010 was a 30-year-old mother of seven. She lost three children when her home in Detroit caught flames from a faulty space heater. Hours before the fire, Sylvia had pleaded with a representative of DTE Energy not to discontinue her gas and electric service, explaining that her landlord was in charge of utilities to her home.

The media, utility company and city authorities sought to foist the blame on the grieving mother. The Socialist Equality Party defended Sylvia Young and wrote dozens of articles on the issue.

Similar cases of needless deaths of workers and youth go unreported every day. And while thousands of working class and poor people are burned to death in preventable fires every year, billions of dollars are hoarded by a fraction of society who control production, and trillions are squandered on wars abroad by Democrats and Republicans alike.

The constant refrain from Democratic and Republican politicians is that there is no money to address such issues. This is a contemptible lie. The only way to unchain the massive resources in society from the stranglehold of the profit system is by overthrowing capitalism and implementing socialism, a system by which the working class can democratically decide how resources are allocated and conscientiously address the issue of how tragedies like the one in Lincoln Park can be prevented.



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