

Michigan mother and sons freeze to death

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Monica Cannady, age 35, and her sons Kyle Jr and Malik Milton, ages nine and three, died huddled together on the ground in an empty lot in Pontiac, Michigan on the night of January 14. The temperature was well below freezing, and autopsies show they succumbed to hypothermia.

Their bodies were discovered after Monica's 10-year-old daughter Lilly, the only one of the group to live through the night, awoke in the morning amid her dead family and walked to a nearby home.

Monica and her children were not homeless. Police say the young mother was suffering a mental health crisis, and that she thought her other family members and the police were trying to kill her.

Pontiac Sheriff Mike Bouchard told local news that officers had stopped and questioned Monica multiple times over the previous several days while she was walking outdoors in the cold with her under-dressed children. They claim that she rejected their offers of assistance.

Sheriff Bouchard called the deaths "accidental," meaning they were not the result of a homicide. But horrific "accidents" like the freezing death of nearly an entire family on the street can only happen when social conditions are ripe for tragedy.

For the mainstream media, including the *New York Times*, the freezing to death of the young mother and her two children was treated as unrelated to the broader social and economic catastrophe in Michigan and throughout the country. But how can it not be?

Here, the location of the deaths has more than a symbolic significance. The overgrown lot on Branch Street where Monica and her sons died was formerly the site of the Lakeside Homes housing project, built in 1951 but demolished in the 1990s as part of the wholesale dismantling of social services amidst the beginning of the speculative mania on Wall Street.

Located north of Detroit and south of Flint, Pontiac

was once a relatively prosperous city and a center of auto manufacture in Southeast Michigan. In the late 1960s, General Motors employed nearly 37,000 workers in the city, the headquarters of its Pontiac car brand. In 1976, it was awarded the banner of "All-America City" by the National Civic League.

In the 1980s, GM began shutting down plants in Pontiac as part of the broader campaign of mass layoffs and cost-cutting that devastated major manufacturing regions of the United States. It shut down its Fiero plant in 1988, Pontiac West in 1994, and Pontiac Truck & Bus (formerly known as Pontiac East) in 2009 as part of the Obama administration's restructuring of the auto industry.

The total population of the city fell by nearly 30 percent, to just over 60,000 today. The official poverty rate in Pontiac currently stands at 27.7 percent, a staggering figure that in fact understates the level of social distress. Median household income is \$36,214, barely half the national average.

This was done with the collusion of the United Auto Workers union, as leading bureaucrats were brought onto corporate boards and the unions became transformed into direct tools of management with a large financial stake in the auto companies.

Of course, it's not just Pontiac. After decades of the suppression of the class struggle by the unions, and three years into a pandemic that has been allowed to kill well over a million Americans, social inequality is at unimaginable levels, and the social infrastructure of the United States is falling apart.

There are now centi-billionaires like Amazon's Bezos and Tesla's Musk, but on the other end mothers can't even count on being able to find baby formula at the store. Soaring inflation has contributed to a cost-of-living crisis, and the Federal Reserve is planning to hike interest rates and induce a recession.

Now, the US is waging a war in Ukraine that is

killing hundreds of thousands of people, sucking up billions of dollars, disrupting global food and energy supplies, and threatening the world with nuclear annihilation.

One could go on. Out of this general barbarism come both mental health crises and the collapse of mental health services. Sheriff Bouchard admitted to the *Oakland Press*, “We’re seeing death every day as a result of the mental-health crisis in this country.”

Mental Health America reports that in 2022, 19.86 percent of US adults had a diagnosable mental illness, or nearly 50 million people. And 4.91 percent had severe mental illness.

The US also has one of the highest rates of suicide among developed nations, where it accounts for 14 of every 100,000 deaths. And more than 100,000 Americans are now dying from drug overdoses annually.

Bridge Michigan reports that 77 beds were cut from psychiatric hospitals across Michigan between April and October of 2021, due to understaffing. Understaffing is a major issue in all of health care right now, as nurses and other professionals are leaving the industry in droves after three years of pandemic with no end in sight.

Seen in this context, the deaths of Monica, Kyle and Malik were clearly not “accidental.” The whole capitalist order is in fact dead on its feet.

These issues are also driving workers into struggle, and not only in the US but internationally. After a whole historical period in which the unions were able to strangle and defeat working class opposition, a powerful movement is emerging around the world to put lives over profits.

Seven thousand nurses in New York City went on strike this month to fight against dangerous understaffing and poverty wages. Nurses in the UK have also just been on strike against poverty wages. Two million people in France struck or marched this week to oppose pension cuts. More than 100,000 people protested this week against the fascistic government in Israel.

These struggles can and must be united into one powerful global movement to overthrow capitalism and build a rational society, based on social equality, so that masses of people do not continue to develop mental illness and die needlessly.



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