

As cold weather blankets Midwest

Detroit: Leland House tenants forced to evacuate due to power outage; Alden Towers residents without heat for one month

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As a December cold wave continued to grip much of the US Midwest, residents of Leland House in downtown Detroit were forced to evacuate after the building lost power. Meanwhile, tenants at Alden Towers on the Detroit riverfront have been without heat for one month.

Tenants at Leland House had been threatened with eviction the day after Thanksgiving when utility monopoly DTE Energy threatened to cut off electricity over an unpaid bill owed by the apartment owners. A last minute financing arrangement allowed the bill to be paid, but then on Wednesday fire officials forced residents to evacuate due to a power outage caused by a malfunction in the building's electrical equipment. The outage knocked out lights and elevator service in the historic 22-story building that was in disrepair after years of neglect.

At Alden Towers, residents in one wing lost power November 4. Tenants in the A Tower report that while the landlord is stalling on repairs they have been forced to rely on unsafe, costly space heaters for warmth. Temperatures fell into the single digits earlier this week.

The City of Detroit's Buildings, Safety Engineering and Environmental Department finally issued an emergency correction order on November 24, but the most recent report says the building still lacks heat. Tenants say building management, Friedman Real Estate, delayed turning on the heat until November 1 and it went out three days later.

Alden Towers, built in 1922, was once considered one of the premier residences on Detroit's riverfront.

Decades of neglect has taken its toll. According to a report in the *Detroit Metro Times*, residents complain of "broken elevators, mold, flooding, overflowing trash, roach infestations, unsafe hallways, and a management company that tenants say is indifferent and punitive."

At Leland House fire officials forced evacuation of the building Wednesday night. The city building department said it is helping tenants with alternate housing and claimed DTE Energy is paying for rent, although the *Detroit Free Press* said it could not get confirmation of that from company officials.

Leland House owners told the *Free Press* that water from melting snow on a city sidewalk leaked into the basement of the building, shorting out a transformer. The basement extends under the sidewalk.

On Thursday a property manager at Leland House confirmed those facts to a *World Socialist Web Site* reporter. He could not confirm that tenants would be allowed to return to the building.

The Leland House is located in a prime downtown location in a major commercial corridor. The building was built in 1927 and is on the National Register of Historic Places. In all likelihood investors will snap up the now vacant property at fire sale prices and repurpose for upscale development.

DTE Energy is demanding that the building owners replace the costly transformer. It said that workers cannot safely access the transformer due to structural hazards. The building owners claim they do not have money for repairs.

Leland House resident Anthony Howard told WXYZ

television: “I went and sat on the edge of the bed and I was watching television and then all of the sudden, the electricity went off.” Howard said he has lived at the Leland House for 15 years.

Another resident, William Clark, said, “I’m trying to get as much as I can, that I need. But, I won’t be able to get it all.” He told WXYZ he had to climb 19 flights of stairs with the power out and elevators non operational.

Elsewhere in the city, 1,140 workers at GM’s Factory Zero on the Detroit-Hamtramck border face imminent layoffs as a result of management’s decision to pull back on electric vehicle production. GM recently re-categorized those layoffs as permanent. The cuts are part of cuts across the global industry due to Wall Street demands for cost cutting and restructuring. They also follow more than a year of steady downsizing at Detroit-area auto plants, imposing extreme hardship on thousands of working class families.

Outgoing Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan and mayor-elect Mary Sheffield, both Democrats, have said nothing about the layoffs or the hardship facing working class residents. Duggan, a multi-millionaire former hospital executive, took office in 2014 six months after Detroit filed for bankruptcy. He acted as a front man for the corporate interests that profited off the bankruptcy, which slashed pensions for retirees and handed over tax breaks and prize city assets to the rich.

Sheffield, current Detroit City Council president, was hand-picked by Duggan to succeed him. During her tenure Sheffield voted for Duggan’s tax handouts while seeking to deflect opposition with token gestures such as “tenant protections.”

Under Duggan’s tenure the city handed out massive tax breaks to the likes of Ford and billionaire Quicken loans CEO Dan Gilbert, while starving funding for vital city services for working class residents. Gilbert and other billionaires snapped up prime real estate on the cheap and converted it into stadiums, high class lofts and other amenities for the corporate elite and upper middle class.

The revaluation of downtown neighborhoods in the aftermath of the bankruptcy produced evictions of long-term residents, including elderly tenants in from the Griswold Building in downtown Detroit in March 2014 to make way for “The Albert” luxury apartments.

The process has continued. Rising downtown

property values due to gentrification have put pressure on low income renters as property values and rents rise, forcing renters out of areas that were once relatively affordable. While the city has touted the construction of affordable housing units, the reality is that most of the rents are out of the price range for working class families in a city where the median household income is about \$35,000.

The housing crisis in Detroit was highlighted by the horrific deaths of 9-year-old Darnell Currie Jr. and his 2-year-old sister, A’millah in February 2025. Their mother, Tateona Williams, had been unable to get housing assistance from public agencies. She parked her van inside the Greektown Casino parking structure near downtown hoping to shield her family from the cold; her children died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

The fight against tenant evictions, affordable housing and rising layoffs are part of the same fight against a ruling class intent on self-enrichment of the backs of the working class while funneling ever greater resources in the military and police intelligence apparatus.



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