

SEP candidate for Detroit mayor campaigns among auto workers, city residents

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D'Artagnan Collier, SEP candidate for Detroit mayor, campaigned among American Axle workers, residents of a northwest Detroit neighborhood, and uninsured workers at a free dental clinic last week.

Supporters and SEP members distributed thousands of campaign flyers and statements and spoke to workers on the socialist response to the social crisis in Detroit. The city has an official unemployment rate of over 20 percent, with widespread poverty and a crumbling public infrastructure. Its population has fallen by nearly half, with the decimation of the auto industry and the gutting of social welfare, overseen by the Democratic Party.

American Axle

Collier spoke to workers during the Friday afternoon shift change at the American Axle plant in Detroit-Hamtramck. This was the last day that the plant was in operation before 500-600 workers were laid off. Many of these workers will likely not see the inside of the plant again.

Collier and the WSWS reporters who accompanied him passed out copies of his statement "A socialist strategy for American Axle workers".

Collier said, "The Democrats have overseen the destruction of the auto industry and the destruction of this city. The UAW is worthless. We need new ways to fight, and the struggle in the auto industry has to turn into the political struggle of the whole working class."

There is deep opposition among workers to the

incessant wage and job cuts overseen by the United Auto Workers. "Management and the union; it's all one joint venture," said one American Axle worker as he passed by and took a leaflet.

There was a general sense that the workers were being attacked from all sides of the political establishment. "Somebody's controlling this recession; somebody's making money off of it," said Spencer Torrence, who we had met outside the union hall the day before.

Larry Edmonds, another American Axle worker, said, "Workers all over the world are going through the same things. Why should we be fighting with people from China and Mexico? They should raise their wages, not drive ours down."

Neighborhood Meeting

On Thursday, Collier spoke at the Cheyenne block club, a neighborhood organization in the northwest of the city. Collier was invited there by Robert, a resident of the block. Attending the club were 11 residents, including several city workers.

Prior to Collier's remarks, the club went through its normal business. The residents discussed how multiple calls to the municipality and months of waiting are required to get potholes filled and trees cut back from electrical wire. The group has to hire local children to paint sidewalks and clean streets.

Most blocks in the area had at least one abandoned house, and the group talked about how it is impossible to get the city to do anything to maintain foreclosed houses.

In his remarks, Collier said, “The problems facing residents of Detroit are international; they can’t be solved in this city or just in this country.” After reviewing the economic crisis, Collier said that there were two possible solutions. “The ruling class is seeking to attack workers’ wages and jobs. If workers are going to defend their livelihoods, they must advance their own independent, socialist solution.”

After the meeting, Collier spoke to other neighborhood residents. Jenae, Tyeshia, and Taquanda, students from the neighborhood, were walking down the street and wanted to find out more about the campaign.

Collier talked about the budget cuts to the Detroit school system. Jenae, 18, explained, “I can’t take home books; they don’t have enough supplies. We have to share materials with other students.” She goes to adult education classes in addition to taking care of her daughter.

The City of Detroit announced that it plans to shut down fifty more schools over the next two years, a quarter of all the schools currently open.

Jenae added, “There aren’t enough schools around here, and they want to close more down. People around here don’t have the time or money to drive their kids to other areas. People don’t have time to drive their kids; they have to work; and if they don’t work then they don’t have no money.”

She continued, “I’m 18 and I can’t get a job! Just imagine what it’s like for everybody else.”

Free Dental Clinic

On Saturday, Collier spoke to uninsured and unemployed workers at a dental clinic held at the Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry. Medical students and volunteers provided free dental care to anyone who showed up. While the event’s organizers expected a turnout of 500 people, more than 1,000 turned up according to the *Detroit Free Press*. It was reported that security began turning people away within the first hour.

The state of Michigan recently cut dental care for 500,000 Medicaid recipients as part of an executive

order from Governor Granholm.

By the time the campaign team arrived, all new patients were being turned away at the gate. “I had to take two busses to get here,” exclaimed Mary, a retired worker as she saw the sign, pasted together from sheets of paper stapled onto pasteboard, reading, “SORRY WE CANNOT ACCEPT ANY MORE PATIENTS.”

Tara McClinton, a Dental Assistant from Lansing who volunteered at the clinic, said far more people had showed up than expected. She said people were waiting in line for at least two hours, in some cases more, because the event was inadequately organized.

Our team also spoke to Gretchen Smith, 49, a laid-off public school teacher, and Charles Hutson, who lost his job at Budco, a major mail distributor. Both of them lost their health coverage with their jobs, and both had to take the bus to the clinic.

Collier said, “The health crisis in this city is directly related to the destruction of jobs and the driving down of benefits by corporations, in direct collusion with the Democratic Party and the trade unions.

“The most basic demands of public health require that that society be run in the interest of everyday people, not in the interests of accumulating wealth for the super-rich. Nobody will bring about that change besides the working class, but the working class needs a political leadership. That is why I am running for mayor.”



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