

SEP Detroit mayoral candidate speaks at forum on youth and education

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D'Artagnan Collier, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate in the upcoming Detroit mayoral election, spoke Tuesday at a moderated mayoral forum held at a youth development center in Detroit's New Center Area. Collier and other candidates were asked to present their programs, placing specific emphasis on their positions with regards to education and youth development.

The forum was sponsored by YouthVille Detroit. More than 200 people attended the event, most of which were parents of children involved in the private-public organization, which aids young people in some of the city's impoverished neighborhoods.

Of the six candidates on the ballot, all participated in the discussion except current mayor David Bing. Tom Barrow arrived significantly late. Each candidate was given ten minutes to deliver his or her opening remarks. The moderator asked them each to explain their view of the main priorities facing Detroit; their position on education; and their plan to help troubled youths.

Collier started by speaking frankly to those in attendance about the problems youth are facing in Detroit. "Several thousand teachers and school employees were recently given two days notice to reapply for their jobs for the coming fall semester. Many will not be rehired. Thirty public schools have been closed this year, and more will be closed next year. The public education system itself may be facing bankruptcy. These are the problems we are faced with."

Every candidate except Collier continues to promote the fallacy that the crisis in public education can be solved within the pro-business framework promoted by city officials and the Obama administration, which includes the promotion of charter schools and merit pay for teachers. Collier differentiated himself by stating clearly that the only possible solution to the education crisis racking the nation—of which the near bankruptcy of the Detroit Public Schools system (DPS) is merely the most

extreme example—entails the reorganization of the economy along socialist lines and a redistribution of wealth to meet the needs of the majority, not the super-rich elite.

"Capitalism has failed the working class," said Collier. "Other candidates will say they can turn Detroit around, but that is a lie. The world is in an economic crisis as severe or worse than the Great Depression, and Detroit is at the center of that crisis. The capitalist class is trying to use the crisis to push through a right-wing agenda that it has wanted for years. There will be no bailout for the working class.

"We must all unite together," continued Collier, "on the basis of class, in order to address the needs of society as a whole. Once the major industries, including the banks, are under the control of the working class, production can be oriented toward providing the basic necessities of life, including education, for everybody. To achieve this, struggle will be necessary. I am not saying that voting for me alone will solve all your problems. I am calling for the occupation of plants and demonstrations in preparation for a general strike.

"The corporate and financial elite is saying there is no money for Detroit. I reject that. I am totally opposed to all school closures. I am opposed to utility shutoffs and home foreclosures, all of which contribute to the dire situation the youth of Detroit faces today. We need to reopen schools, provide free Internet service for everyone, and build new libraries accessible to everyone. It is not possible to raise children without access to water and electricity. In order for these things to be possible, it will require the break with the Democrats and the Republicans and the building of an independent party of the working class."

As Collier predicted, each of the other candidates presented the social catastrophe in Detroit as the product of an unfortunate lack of having him-or-herself in office.

They invariably abstracted Detroit from the broader economic and social crisis, and presented unrealistic or unsatisfying solutions.

Bob Allman argues that an expansion of the entertainment industry—based on huge tax incentives—will replace the tens of thousands of jobs lost due to the downsizing of the auto industry. Duane Montgomery's entire candidacy hinges *exclusively* on a proposed casino tax, through which, he claims, the poorest big city in the nation can resolve its budget crisis and fund downtown projects. Jerroll Sanders and Tom Barrow offer essentially the same program as one another—slash spending on city services.

Although Bing has yet to attend a single one of the numerous campaign forums that have been held by private organizations and block clubs throughout the city, the YouthVille event on Tuesday is the first in which the hosts of the meeting were outspokenly perturbed by Bing's absence. The moderator announced over the microphone the phone number to the mayor's office, and encouraged everyone with a cell phone in the audience to simultaneously call the mayor and express their disappointment with his failure to appear.

Bing, who enjoys the backing of the city's corporate, Democratic Party and media establishment, has treated the upcoming election as little more than a formality. His disregard for the opinion of the voters is an indication of the reactionary agenda he plans to carry out.

"Here in Detroit," said Collier, "Mayor Bing is leading the attack against education, with the help of Obama. Bing is one of the wealthiest businessmen in the country, and he advocates charter schools, merit pay for teachers and the privatization of education." This elicited a vocal response from the audience, the majority of whom are clearly opposed to such a program.



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