

SEP candidate denounces wage-cutting attack on Detroit city workers

D'Artagnan Collier
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D'Artagnan Collier is running in the November 2 election as the Socialist Equality Party candidate for state representative in Michigan's 9th District in Detroit. Collier was placed on the ballot in late July, after the SEP submitted nominating petitions with the signatures of 1,129 Detroit voters.

Collier, 42, joined the socialist movement as a Detroit high school student in 1984 and has spent his entire adult life fighting for the working class. He was the party's candidate for Detroit mayor in 2009 and a founding member of the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs (CAUS).

As a city worker in Detroit, he has opposed Mayor David Bing's demands for deep wage and job cuts to be imposed on the city's 13,000 municipal workers. He has fought to mobilize the working class to defend jobs and living standards and oppose public service cuts being demanded by the Democratic Party-controlled city and state governments. He has opposed the treachery of the city worker unions in collaborating in these attacks and fought for workers to organize independently of the union apparatus.

Collier issued the following statement in response to Monday's decision by the state-appointed fact-finder giving Mayor Bing the authority to impose a 10 percent wage cut on 3,600 city workers who have resisted demands for wage cuts for the last two years.

As the candidate of the Socialist Equality Party for the state House of Representatives in Michigan's 9th District, I oppose the decision by the state-appointed fact-finder granting Detroit Mayor Bing the authority to cut city workers' wages and benefits.

The working class is not responsible for the city's budget deficit and we must not be forced to pay for it.

Those who are responsible—the bankers, auto bosses, bribed politicians—continue to rake in huge salaries even as Detroit and other cities sink into mass unemployment and Depression conditions.

As a city worker and lifelong resident of Detroit, I know that these concessions, if implemented, will have devastating consequences for workers and their families, resulting in home foreclosures and car repossessions, a further erosion in health care coverage, and other hardships.

The wage-cutting campaign against city workers is the prelude to the destruction of city services. It is part of Mayor Bing's plan to shrink the city by forcing out impoverished residents and abandoning entire neighborhoods deemed too poor to service.

Bing, a multi-millionaire businessman, said the fact-finder's report confirmed what his administration has been saying all along: "Doing business as usual is no longer good enough." Labor costs, he said, will have to be put in line with "fiscal realities" and city services delivered on the basis of what is "affordable."

What is "affordable" can be determined only in struggle. Workers must prepare for strike action to resist wage cuts and layoffs, and link up this fight with the defense of vital public services. An appeal must be made to teachers, auto workers and all working people and youth in the Detroit metropolitan area to launch a common struggle to defend jobs, living standards and public services.

This fight must be organized and carried out by the workers themselves through the formation of rank-and-file and neighborhood action committees. These committees can be effective only if they are independent of the unions, such as the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and the United Auto Workers. These organizations support the Democratic Party politicians—from Obama on down to

Governor Granholm and Mayor Bing—who are spearheading the attacks on the working class, and oppose any struggle against the corporate elite that controls both major parties.

The fact-finder's report did not come out of a serious examination of the economic crisis in Detroit and its causes. It was a rubber stamp for the mayor to escalate the assault on workers and slash social programs.

What are the real facts?

The fiscal crisis in Detroit did not come out of nowhere. It is one of the sharpest expressions of the breakdown of capitalism in the US and throughout the world. Two years after the collapse of the Wall Street bank Lehman Brothers, the economic meltdown has produced record levels of unemployment and the greatest loss of tax revenues in history. This has led to the insolvency not only of states such as Michigan, Illinois and California, but of entire countries such as Greece and Spain.

Detroit has been hammered by the destruction of hundreds of thousands of auto industry jobs, compounded by tax breaks extracted by big business. The banks and bondholders continue to loot the public treasury with exorbitant interest rates that cost city residents more than \$200 million a year.

While handing trillions to the Wall Street banks, the Obama administration has refused to provide any relief to Detroit or any other city or state. From the White House and Congress to the governor's mansion and City Hall, the refrain is the same: "There is no money" for schools, public health, transportation, repairing neighborhoods or other vital services.

This is a lie! After slashing the wages and jobs of workers, Wall Street and the corporations are celebrating a "recovery" in profits, and CEOs are once again rewarding themselves with multi-million-dollar salaries. While millions remain unemployed and the jobless face evictions and the shutoff of utilities, the super-rich continue to gorge themselves.

If the fact-finder were telling the truth—instead of protecting the interests of the wealthy and the big business politicians who defend them—he would conclude that the corporate and financial parasites who created this crisis should pay for it, not the working people.

Monday's decision is an indictment of AFSCME and its top officials, including Council 25 President Al Garrett, who claimed that workers would get a fair hearing from the fact-finder and the Michigan Employment Relations Commission. From the beginning, this was a diversion aimed at blocking workers from conducting a serious

fight against the Bing administration and the Democratic Party.

Last weekend, Garrett was promoting Democrats like gubernatorial nominee Virg Bernero at a rally co-sponsored by Bing for the purpose of drumming up votes for this anti-working class party. Next he will try to peddle illusions that the wage cut will be stopped by the City Council, a body that is no less in the pocket of big business than the mayor's office.

AFSCME has already agreed in principle to the concessions, including furloughs. The union officials have failed, however, to convince city workers to accept these givebacks. That is why they dragged workers through this months-long exercise with the fact-finder, in an effort to demoralize them and say the union "tried everything" before caving in.

It is time for workers to stand up to this blackmail by the big business politicians and their servants in the trade union bureaucracy. As the candidate of the Socialist Equality Party, I insist that every worker has the basic social right to a job, a decent standard of living and all the other necessities of life. I call for a multi-billion-dollar program of public works to hire the unemployed and rebuild city neighborhoods, construct new schools, houses, public transit systems and recreation centers, and raise the material and cultural level of all the people.

In order to pay for this I call for the ending of tax breaks to big business and the rich and a radical redistribution of wealth by sharply raising taxes on the corporate and financial elite, while reducing taxes on working people. The major banks and critical industries like auto must be transformed into public utilities, owned and democratically controlled by the working class. Only in this way can the economy be reorganized to meet the needs of the vast majority of the people, rather than the wealthy few.

I urge city workers and all workers and young people who agree with this fight to actively support my campaign.

Visit the Socialist Equality Party's election campaign web page for more coverage and to get involved.



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