

Support the socialist campaign for Michigan House of Representatives

Of D'Artagnan Collier
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The following statement has been issued by D'Artagnan Collier, a member of the Socialist Equality Party who is running in the Detroit area for state representative in Michigan's 9th District in Detroit. The WSWS encourages all its readers in the Detroit-area to support the campaign. Click here to get involved. For a leaflet version of this statement to download and distribute, click here. For more information on how to join the SEP, click here.

I am a member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) running for the Michigan State Legislature in Detroit's 9th District. I am fighting for an independent political movement that advances the social rights of the working class—including the right to a job at a good wage, health care, decent housing, and an education.

The crisis in Detroit is the sharpest expression of the breakdown of the global capitalist system. A city whose name was once synonymous with the auto industry and the industrial might of the US is now the poorest big city in America.

Officially, about a quarter of the workforce is unemployed, but the real number is close to half. More than 100 schools have been shut down in the past two years. Tens of thousands of families live without heat, water, and electricity. The population has almost no access to health care, grocery stores, public transportation and other essential services. Hunger and homelessness are rampant. The infrastructure and housing stock are in shambles.

Many Detroit workers hoped that the election of Barack Obama would bring a change in the decades-long devastation of the city. The Democratic Party establishment in Detroit promoted his candidacy, insisting that Obama was a voice for working people, particularly African-Americans. Two years on, what is the record?

The Obama administration has been the spearhead of a ruling class offensive against jobs, wages, and social spending. The financial crisis has been seized upon to redistribute wealth to the very Wall Street banks whose reckless greed set the disaster into motion in the fall of 2008.

Now all agree—the White House and the state governments, Democrats and Republicans, the AFL-CIO and big business—that the working class must foot the bill for this bailout.

Detroit and Michigan have been at the center of the attack. Obama's so-called "auto bailout," which the United Auto Workers (UAW) forced down the throats of their membership, was based on plant closures, layoffs, gutting benefits, and slashing wages for new hires in half, to \$14 an hour. This attack on the living standards of autoworkers foreshadowed a sweeping assault on the jobs and wages of the entire working class.

Working hand-in-hand with Obama's Secretary of Education and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Detroit Public Schools administrator Robert Bobb has shuttered schools across the city. Bobb and Detroit Mayor Dave Bing scapegoat teachers for the school system's bankruptcy and the city's social crisis. They demand that teachers accept massive wage cuts and stand aside while new semi-private "charter schools" further starve public schools of funds.

For his part, Bing is pushing a "revival" plan for the city that will destroy entire neighborhoods and forcibly relocate residents. One of the principal beneficiaries of this plan will be energy giant DTE, on whose corporate board Bing sat for years! The utility company will no longer have to pay to maintain services in areas where its profits are small.

The Democratic governor of Michigan, Jennifer Granholm, and the Republicans and Democrats who control the state legislature, have likewise cut funding for education and social programs year after year. At the same time, they have continuously rubber stamped DTE's demands for rate hikes and a legal crackdown on so-called "energy theft."

The situation in Detroit and Michigan is not unique. All over the US, cities and states—whether run by Democrats or Republicans—are taking the knife to social spending.

The Obama administration has ruled out any new stimulus to lessen the suffering engulfing the working class, and has even imposed a long-term freeze on social spending. But the

“new era of responsibility” Obama has declared for the working class does not apply to the big banks, which have received untold trillions from the Treasury and the Federal Reserve.

The principle that now trumps all others, whether it is in Detroit, elsewhere in the US, or indeed the entire world, is the “right” of the capitalists to profit.

Against this, the Socialist Equality Party and my campaign call for workers to fight for their own set of rights—the social rights of the working class. These include:

- ***The right to a job at a livable income.*** The SEP calls for an emergency public works jobs program to provide employment for all who can work. This program will rebuild schools, hospitals, and Detroit’s infrastructure, including the creation of a vast public transportation network serving all of Southeast Michigan. These jobs must be paid at a level that can support families in comfort.

- ***The right to decent housing.*** The public works campaign must address itself to rebuilding the housing stock in Detroit, which is in an advanced state of decay. There must be an immediate end to all foreclosures and evictions, and decent housing must be made available to all.

- ***The right to public utilities.*** Every year fires kill people in homes where utilities have been suspended by DTE. Access to gas, water, and electricity should not be determined by people’s ability to pay! In place of DTE’s “right” to profit, the SEP and the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs (CAUS), of which I am the chairman, insist that everyone has an inalienable right to heat, water, and light.

- ***The right to health care.*** In Detroit, where about a quarter of the population is handicapped, there is almost no health care infrastructure. Dozens of hospitals and clinics must be built, and thousands of doctors and nurses must be brought to the city at high wages. High-quality health care must be made freely available to all, regardless of their ability to pay.

- ***The right to education and culture.*** The city’s public school system must be rebuilt and all closed schools reopened. Teachers must have their salaries and benefits dramatically increased. The state’s universities and community colleges must receive a huge infusion of funding, making attendance free. Libraries, parks, museums, theaters, and natural areas must be dramatically expanded.

The SEP rejects with contempt the claim that there is “no money” to meet the needs of working people. If there is not enough money, it is because resources are being hoarded by the financial aristocracy and squandered on US-led colonial wars all over the globe!

To make available sufficient resources for the satisfaction of the needs of all workers, the giant banks and major corporations must be taken out of the hands of corporate

executives and wealthy speculators, and placed under the democratic control of the working class.

These rights cannot be won by appealing to the Democratic Party and the trade unions. They can only be realized through the independent mobilization of the working class in opposition to both parties of big business and all the political groups and organizations that defend capitalism. The SEP encourages workers and youth to form independent neighborhood and workplace action committees to organize resistance and unify workers in a common struggle. Nothing will be won without a fight!

This political fight requires the unity of the entire working class: black, white and Latino; citizen and immigrant; city, suburb, and small town; young and old. I reject the position of the black Democratic establishment in Detroit, which promotes race as the fundamental social category. Barack Obama, like those who have run Detroit since the days of Coleman Young, has proven that when it comes to pursuing the interests of corporations, it is not race, but social class that counts.

This fight also requires the international unity of the working class. All over the world the capitalists are pressing a ruthless offensive, insisting on austerity—which applies only to the working class, not the wealthy.

The interests of workers can be won only through the building of a new political party of the working class based on the fight for socialism—the democratic control of production on the basis of social need, not private profit.

I call on workers in Detroit and Michigan to make my campaign for the 9th District their campaign. Vote for me, D’Artagnan Collier, on November 2. If you are not a resident of the 9th District, you can become involved by supporting my election campaign, and joining CAUS and attending its meetings. I encourage workers and youth to read the *World Socialist Web Site* (www.wsws.org) and study the program of the Socialist Equality Party. Join the SEP and take up the fight for socialism!



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