

SEP candidate D'Artagnan Collier speaks to Wayne State students in Detroit

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On October 20, D'Artagnan Collier, Socialist Equality Party candidate for the Michigan House of Representatives in the 9th District, spoke to history students at Wayne State University in Detroit to outline the policies of his campaign.

Students attending the class, titled "Science, Technology and War," listened attentively to the presentation by the socialist candidate. A lively discussion followed.

"We are running to provide a conscious expression to the strivings of the working class to oppose the spread of unemployment, poverty and war," said Collier. "There are no individual solutions to these problems. The working class requires a new orientation and strategy. It has to break with the Democratic Party and build a new mass political party fighting for social equality."

Collier explained that the present economic crisis was not a temporary downturn, but represented a systemic crisis of the capitalist system. The ruling class responded to the crisis on Wall Street by making available trillions of dollars to bail out the very banks responsible for the economic disaster. Now the Republicans and Democrats agree that the working class must pay for this bailout.

"The Great Depression of the 1930s led to the rise of fascism and war," said Collier. Unlike the 1930s, "The United States is the largest debtor country. It does not have the resources to provide another New Deal. The policies of the Obama administration are to keep unemployment high and wages low. Meanwhile, nothing has been done to halt home foreclosures, mass unemployment and the spread of poverty."

The Obama administration, said Collier, was

continuing the policies of the Bush administration of military aggression overseas; expanding the war in Afghanistan while threatening Iran and stoking up conflict with China.

"The working class is once again moving into struggle," said Collier. He pointed to the ongoing strikes and protests by the working class in France and the growing strike wave in Europe. "You are beginning to see opposition by the American working class to the attempts to make them pay for the crisis of capitalism. In Indianapolis GM stamping plant workers have formed a rank-and-file committee to fight to defend their jobs and overturn a two-tier wage structure. In Detroit, symphony musicians are on strike."

In the ensuing discussion, one student asked about the composition of the working class. Collier replied, "The events in France shatter the myth that the working class doesn't exist." He continued, "In the United States, the Democrats pushed identity politics based on race, gender and sexual orientation to deny the fundamental conflict in society between the working class and capitalists. While the composition of the working class has changed, the working class has grown both in the United States and internationally."

Another student wanted to know how the working class could combat a system that had been "entrenched for centuries." Collier replied, "The capitalist class is outnumbered." He explained that in addition to the police it had to rely for its survival on the trade union bureaucracy and social-democratic parties, which promoted illusions that capitalism could be reformed. "Now those illusions are being shattered as workers are forced to take wage cuts and accept mass unemployment while companies make record profits," he said.

A student told Collier that his father had been a union

organizer. He agreed that the unions no longer spoke in the interests of workers: “Now the unions have become very much like big business. It has gone from a movement for the worker to a movement lining its own pockets with cash.” He asked the socialist candidate to explain how that happened and how something similar could be prevented in the future.

“In the 1930s the CIO movement aligned itself with the Democratic Party and opposed the building of a labor party and rejected a struggle against capitalism,” Collier replied. “In the Cold War period the unions joined the anticommunist witch-hunt, purging socialist and militant workers who had played a decisive role in the struggles of the 1930s.”

Their response to the present economic crisis has been to join together with big business to drive down the living standards of the working class. Collier said the aim of the SEP was based on a fundamentally opposed perspective “to put an end to class society, to make the majority, the workers, the ruling class.”

In answer to a question posed about the SEP position on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Collier replied, “We are for ending all the wars and removing all US troops from overseas. The victims of these wars should be fully compensated by the United States and massive resources devoted to rebuilding the countries that have been destroyed.”

Another student asked about the response to the SEP campaign. Collier said there had been an enthusiastic response to the formation of the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs (CAUS) and the exposure of the criminal role of energy monopoly DTE and the Democratic administration of Mayor Dave Bing for creating the conditions for the recent fire disaster in Detroit.

“The SEP rejected the claim by Bing that the fires that swept wide areas of the city on September 7 were a ‘natural disaster,’” he said, adding that the fires were the result of “budget-cutting by the city and the ruthless profit drive by DTE, which had neglected basic infrastructure while cutting off record numbers of homes from gas and electricity.”

Other questions dealt with the forced bankruptcy and government takeover of General Motors, the foreclosure crisis and the talk of cuts in Medicare and Social Security. The discussion continued until the end of the class period and a number of students expressed

interest in the International Students for Social Equality and the SEP campaign.



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