

SEP Detroit mayoral campaign wins support from workers

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13 May 2013

On Saturday, D'Artagnan Collier, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for mayor of Detroit, campaigned with a team of supporters at Eastern Market in Detroit. The socialist campaign evoked a strong response from workers and young people angered by the ongoing attacks on jobs, social services and public education in the city.

The Detroit mayoral campaign is taking place under conditions in which an emergency manager armed with dictatorial powers to cut spending and rip up union contracts has been put in charge of the city. Workers already confront the collapse of basic services such as fire protection and public transportation due to massive and ongoing budget cuts.

Collier emphasized that the SEP was the only party that represented the interests of the working class. The purpose of the campaign was not simply to win votes but to mobilize the enormous opposition to the attacks on jobs and social conditions in a conscious political movement of the working class against the capitalist profit system and both political parties that defend it.

One of those who stopped to speak to Collier was Latoya, a single mother. "It is all going downhill," she said. "Someone has got to stand up to fight for us. They are evicting people, people are freezing."

Allena, Latoya's sister who is a student at Baker College added, "I wrote a paper on welfare. They don't help educate people properly. The whole system is designed to keep people down. They don't give people the opportunity to advance."

"Yes," said Latoya, "education is going down."

Collier replied, "300,000 teachers have been laid off. Many teachers are forced to spend out of their own pockets for school supplies. We believe that the working class has basic social rights, including the right to decent public education."

"They should make these big corporations donate their money to the schools," replied Allena.

Agreeing, Latoya said, "They want everything for the rich. If they are reducing the education level for the poor, how far do you think you can get?"

Steve Briscoe, a worker on disability, said, "The city has been going downhill for years. Now the emergency manager has come in and brought his whole crew from out of town with him. He is going to do the same thing as the previous gang. He is paying the mayor and the city council their salaries to shut them up."

Collier responded, "We are for throwing out the city council and replacing it with a council of workers. The working class should run society. We are for a government of, for and by the workers."

Collier said workers had to organize independently of the unions, the Democratic Party and all of those who tried to keep the working class tied to the profit system. "We are saying the working class must fight back against utility shutoffs and the closing of schools. We are running in the mayoral election to help organize mass demonstrations and strikes to oppose the attacks being carried out by the rich."

John, a worker with the state of Michigan stopped to speak with Collier. He said he agreed with many points that the socialist candidate was making. "They are trying to eliminate the middle class. I am a caseworker and a social worker. I see the evictions every day. It is sad when you see people with a decision between eating and paying for prescriptions. People don't have health insurance; it is a crime."

Barbara, a retired teacher from Dayton, Ohio who is now living in Detroit, agreed with the fight against school closures and school privatization. "It is pitiful what is happening to education. I don't agree with charter schools and for-profit schools."

“I started teaching in the 1960s. You didn’t have to worry about being laid off back then. Now teachers are being bounced around so much.”

Collier replied, “Teachers have become migrant workers. They are being forced from place to place in search of work. We are saying stop spending money on war and the propping up of Wall Street and put it towards education and social programs.”

Sabrina, a real estate agent, said she agreed with much of Collier’s program. “The emergency manager is crap. You don’t need to tell me what to do with my money. It is basically about the dollar. Everyone has taken the money and not done right. I agree with you personally, but there are many people who don’t know what you are talking about.”

Collier said during the course of the campaign the SEP had already won a significant audience for its policies. “We turned in 1,000 signatures to get on the ballot. But society can’t be changed by people voting,” he said. “They overturned the vote by the people against the emergency manager law. Then they went behind closed doors to impose an emergency manager on Detroit.”

James Bailey, a disabled worker who formerly worked at Budd Wheel told Collier, “It is depressing seeing on the news all the things they are doing against the workers. There are no jobs for kids.

“Replace the City Council with a council of workers; I like that. Look at what they are doing.”

“Yes,” agreed Collier. “Look at the present City Council, it is made up of ex-police, ministers and other corrupt types looking to cash in from their positions. We say there should be representatives of teachers, retirees, firefighters, all sections of the working class.”

A former auto worker, Gwen, stopped to speak to Collier, explaining the bitter experience workers have had with the United Auto Workers union. “I used to work for Chrysler. The union owns part of the stock, so how are they going to negotiate against themselves when they are the bosses? There is a conflict of interest right there. How are they going to represent people and the company? They are the company.

“I took the buyout because I couldn’t take it. We were doing 78 vehicles per hour during 2009. That line was flying. Then they cut jobs and doubled it up and tripled it up. You were doing the job of five people. They used the intimidation tactic, saying you had to

keep up. It didn’t scare me but it did a lot of people. I never asked the union to do anything. I didn’t waste my words with them.”

Collier noted that the emergency manager over Detroit, Kevyn Orr, had overseen the bankruptcy of Chrysler. Now he was being brought in to do the same job on the city of Detroit.

“How is he going to solve our problems when he has got problems?” Gwen said, alluding to reports that Orr owed back taxes on his home. “I wonder if people are blind?”

Collier noted that all of the emergency managers that had been appointed in cities across Michigan were Democrats. “The union leaders are the ones who hogtie the workers by blocking any political break with the Democrats. Yet the Democratic Party has carried out policies that only benefit the rich. It is no accident the stock market has been going up since Obama has been in office.”

Gwen agreed, “There is no difference between Democrat and Republican. I have seen that for years. You jump down this hole, into a tunnel, only to end up at the same place. The Republicans and Democrats are jumping in that same hole. What is the difference?”

Collier responded, “Wherever workers have begun to fight, the union leaders have come down on the side of the employers. At the Chrysler Dundee Engine Plant the workers voted down the contract, but the union came back and forced them to vote again until they ‘got it right.’ Workers do want to fight back, but they are saddled with this bloated bureaucracy that is seeking to preserve its perks and salaries. We are saying the working class needs new forms of organization and a new, socialist, political strategy.”



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