

SEP mayoral candidate outlines socialist program at Detroit election forum

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D'Artagnan Collier, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Detroit mayor, spoke Thursday at a mayoral forum held at the North Rosedale Park Community House on the city's northwest side. Collier outlined a socialist program for the working class and distinguished himself from the array of Democratic candidates at the forum. These included Liza Howze, former Detroit Medical Center executive Mike Duggan, former police chief Benny Napoleon, state legislator Fred Durhal Jr. and Tom Barrow.

Initially, Collier was not invited to participate in the forum, despite the fact that he is on the ballot. It was only after the SEP pressed the issue, demanding Collier's right to speak at the forum that the organizers relented.

About 200 people were in the audience, including supporters for each of the candidates as well as workers, young people and retirees from the area. They were drawn from the Grandmont-Rosedale communities. Each candidate was allowed a three-minute opening statement, two-minute responses to five questions prompted by the moderators, and a two-minute closing statement.

The first question asked how the candidate, if elected, would deal with the emergency manager. Collier stated that Kevin Orr's appointment represented the imposition of a dictatorship on the city of Detroit, against the will of the working class, aimed at "turning the economic clock of history backwards, to the 19th century." Against the financial dictatorship, Collier stated, "the SEP seeks to mobilize all workers—white, black, immigrant—in a struggle to defend their own interests: the right to jobs, housing, utilities, education, healthcare and pensions."

Collier also rejected working with the City Council. Instead, Collier proposed to replace the City Council

with a Workers' Council "which would include workers, unemployed, college students and single mothers."

Every other candidate sought to promote the fallacy that the pro-business emergency manager can be opposed within the framework of the existing establishment or the courts. Durhal's proposal was to sue in federal court until the emergency manager's appointment was declared illegal. Mike Duggan said the emergency manager could be gotten rid of if city officials carried out the requisite cuts in social programs to eliminate the deficit. He suggested that because of his experience at the Detroit Medical Center—where he slashed jobs and benefits of medical workers—he would be an excellent "turnaround" mayor, rendering the emergency manager unnecessary.

In response to the question on whether bankruptcy is a viable option for Detroit, Collier pointed out that a tax of a mere 10 percent on the wealth of Michigan's 12 billionaires, a number which has risen from 8 billionaires since 2008, would be sufficient to cover the city's deficit and fund a vast public works program. Collier stated it was absurd to claim that the city faces an unavoidable bankruptcy given the massive profits reaped by the auto industry from the "blood and sweat" of workers every single year.

Every candidate except Collier advanced a law-and-order agenda. Crime is a social problem, Collier pointed out, bound up with the immense poverty in the city. But "there are petty crimes and there are social crimes," he said, "such as the closing of factories, and utility shutoffs." Collier declared that he would call for the prosecution and jailing of the financial criminals responsible for the economic crisis. Instead, Obama bailed them out and they are doing better than ever.

Napoleon and Howze distinguished themselves for

having the most worked-out plans for increased police repression in Detroit. Napoleon's arguments focused almost exclusively on a plan to flood the city with police, with one officer dedicated to each square mile of the city and more precincts to oversee them. Howze's plan was more three-dimensional; she demanded "eyes in the sky" and "monitors" over Detroit. Instead of more officers, Howze implied that drones are necessary for the police force of Detroit.

Near the end of the forum, Collier raised the issue of school closures, declaring the necessity to defend and expand public education. He raised the connection between the destruction of public education and the drive by the ruling class to undermine basic democratic rights protected by the Bill of Rights. Collier then compared the situation in Detroit to that in Greece, and pointed to the deployment of militarized police forces in the wake of the Boston bombing as an indication of the ruling elites' plans for how to handle any resistance to their agenda of war and austerity. No other candidate spoke to these issues or any issue of broader national and international significance.

In his concluding remarks, Collier pointed out that his perspective was totally unique from that advanced by all of the other candidates—a remark that provoked murmurs of acknowledgment throughout the audience. The basis of the Socialist Equality Party campaign, he said, is "to tell the working class the truth." Unions, such as the UAW and AFSCME, had betrayed the working class and subordinated workers to the Democratic Party and the capitalist system, under conditions in which Obama has waged criminal wars, trampled over constitutional rights, and overseen the destruction of more than 300,000 teachers' jobs.

The SEP, he said, called for a government of, by and for workers, a vast redistribution of wealth and the socialist reorganization of economic life. He called on workers and young people to support and join his campaign because it was the only campaign to defend the working class.

Olivia, who is home-schooled by her mother, spoke to Collier after the meeting. She said, "It was interesting to see the contrast between you and the other candidates. You drew out the history of how we got to where we are." Referring to social contradictions that led to the American Civil War, she said, "It seems like that history is paralleling what we are seeing now."

"This goes back to when cars were first made. Back then, the idea was to have wages that you could buy the cars with. Not anymore."

Evan Bitzarakis, 32, is a worker at Wayne State University and has lived in Detroit all his life. He spoke to the WSWS after the forum. "I was glad to hear DC's comments. He made a lot of excellent points. The corporate media allows only narrow viewpoints. There is virtually nothing to the left of the Democrats.

"My father is from Greece and I appreciated D'Artagnan making comparisons between the situation in Greece to the situation in Detroit. Corporations move from country to country. They want a race to the bottom. States compete for jobs by lowering wages and safety regulations. What they want is to create conditions like the factory collapse in Bangladesh."



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