

D'Artagnan Collier, SEP candidate for Detroit mayor, speaks on the social crisis in Detroit

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The Socialist Equality Party held a public meeting Thursday at Wayne State University where D'Artagnan Collier, the SEP's candidate for Detroit mayor, reviewed the social crisis in Detroit and laid forth a program and perspective for the working class to fight back against the cuts and privatizations being carried out in the city. The meeting was well attended and included retirees, workers, students and youth from the metro Detroit area.

In his remarks Collier stressed that the official "debate" wholly excluded the needs and interests of the working class, focusing instead on tactical differences between the big business candidates over how best to make the working class pay for the bankruptcy of Detroit.

Spearheading these attacks, Collier noted, is Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr, a literal dictator over Detroit, who has the backing of the Democrats, Republicans and trade unions. He is proposing to seize every resource in the city—from the Water and Sewerage Department, the Lighting Department and Belle Isle to the Detroit Institute of Arts—and sell it off to pay back the city's bondholders.

"Financial vultures, vandals, looters" declared Collier. "This is what they are. As if to deliberately prove this point, Orr shocked the entire population last week by announcing that the artwork at the DIA was a city asset that could be sold in the event that Detroit files for bankruptcy.

"Why should workers have access to the works of Degas, Monet, or Diego Rivera when there are bonds to be paid? No doubt there are investors who are salivating at the prospect of buying and selling these masterpieces and making a bundle in the process."

Collier then challenged the idea put forth by Kenneth Buckfire, an investment banker hired by Orr, and a special assistant to the president of AFSCME Council 25, Ed McNeil, that it was necessary to sell of the artwork at the DIA to preserve the living standards of workers in Detroit.

"How stupid do they think we are? That we can't see that their aim is to loot the art of the DIA *AND* slash wages *AND* eliminate city services *AND* shut down our libraries and schools?"

"What they have done, what they are doing, to Detroit is unconscionable. A social crime! People have been thrown into jail for life for far lesser offenses.

"They think that they can get away with what they are doing without a fight. Well, they have yet to hear from the working class. They have yet to hear from the vast majority of the population as to what *they* think of their plan for Detroit."

The other Detroit mayoral candidates such as Mike Duggan, Lisa Howze and Benny Napoleon, Collier noted, are defenders of capitalism. Duggan presided over the restructuring of the Detroit Medical Center and the subsequent job cuts. Howze and Napoleon are both running law-and-order campaigns.

Collier also spoke in favor of uniting every section of the working class—black, white, immigrant—against the racial politics promoted by the Democratic Party establishment in Detroit, including a layer of well-off ministers and trade union officials.

In contrast, Collier put forth a socialist program for the working class of Detroit.

"We call for the emergency manager to be sent packing. We reject his legal right to dictate terms to the population of Detroit. At the same time, absolutely no

confidence can be placed in the City Council or any section of the political establishment in Detroit. They all have their hands in the pot. We call for replacing the City Council with a Council of Workers Representatives, to reorganize and rebuild Detroit in the interests of the working class.

“The SEP insists that every man, woman and child has basic social and democratic rights. We have the right to a job at a decent wage. We have the right to quality public education, to health care and a secure retirement. We have the right to utilities, to not have our electricity and heat cut off in the dead of winter. We have the right to a secure home. We have the right to leisure and culture.

“We fight for a radical redistribution of wealth to ensure social equality, sharp increases in taxes on millionaires and billionaires, and the establishment of workers control over the banks and corporations to meet social need, not private profit.

The report sparked a great deal of discussion.

Usman Clemens, a member of the Wayne State IYSSE, spoke about the conditions facing youth in Detroit and internationally. “Workers, students and youth need to stand up together and fight back against the drive to destroy the educational system.

“In Detroit, a plan was approved at the beginning of this year to close another 28 public schools in Detroit by 2016. This would involve the elimination of 1,688 teachers, administrative and support staff jobs and a reduction of expenditures by nearly \$200 million over the next five years. This will leave the school district with 40,000, a little more than a quarter of the 150,000 students who attended DPS schools in 2000.

“What is happening in Detroit and Michigan is happening elsewhere around the country as well. One simply needs to look at the fact that since taking office in 2009, the Obama administration has overseen the closing of an estimated 4,000 public schools and the destruction of more than 336,000 teachers' jobs, while pursuing a reactionary school "reform" agenda of expanding charter schools.”

Larry, a retired public service worker, noted how Collier's campaign impacts an area much broader than just Detroit. “The point was raised about the outrageous attempt to raise the issue of the selling of the DIA. This is a regional issue, not restricted to Detroit. In fact, the entire tri-county region is taxed for the DIA. At the

very least the campaign should be seen as a spoke, a kernel, as a seed to reach all the workers not just of the region but the whole state at the least.”

After the meeting, informal discussion continued.

“I fully support D'Artagnan Collier's campaign,” said Robert, a student at Macomb County Community College. “I've been following the Socialist Equality Party since 2008 and it is the only socialist group I've found that actually means what it says. I've encountered a lot of other groups, like the International Socialist Organization, but they all give in to identity politics. The issue is the fight for the working class and the SEP is the only group that fights for that.

“I became interested in socialism in high school after reading about the Russian Revolution and because of the financial crash in 2008. That's when I started reading Marx. It was the only thing that made sense.”

Juan, a young worker from southwest Detroit, said, “The social conditions where I live are getting worse and worse. The roads are bad. Three-fourths of the streetlights are out. But it's still a place where people live. That's our home. We want it to be remade, not let go because it doesn't make money for Orr's friends. I think D'Artagnan's campaign is the only way to go.”



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