

SEP mayoral candidate speaks at two Detroit election forums

Bryan Dyne
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D'Artagnan Collier, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Mayor, spoke at candidate forums Friday and Saturday, calling for a mass movement of the working class to fight the drive by Kevyn Orr, the city's emergency manager, to cut city workers' wages and benefits and to slash city services.

"The attack on the working class of Detroit is a social crime that will be used as a model throughout the United States," Collier said. He laid the blame on both political parties, saying, "We call for a break from the Democratic and Republican parties, both of whom are attacking the living standards and rights of working people."

The Friday evening forum, entitled "Candidates in the NeighborHOOD," was hosted by the Detroit Department of Elections and took place at the New Center Park. The Saturday forum, entitled "Putting the Neighbor Back in the Hood" was held by the Congress of Communities in Southwest Detroit in Clark Park. Between 75 and 100 people attended each event, including workers and youth from across the city.

Orr announced last week that all of the city's assets are "on the table" to be sold off to pay bond holders. Such assets include Belle Isle, the largest city-owned island park in the United States, the Detroit Zoo and even the artwork of the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Last month, Orr presented a "comprehensive restructuring plan" for the city involving savage cuts to city workers' jobs, wages and pensions and the shutdown of services to a large section of the population.

In contrast to the other candidates' acceptance of the framework of the city's debt crisis and the necessity for slashing services and attacking wages, Collier called for the vast expansion of social services in the city and throughout the country. "I call for the creation of a

multi-billion-dollar program of public works to rebuild the city. I reject the claim that there is no money. Rather than spend \$6 trillion on the wars overseas or \$23 trillion on bailing out the banks, that money could be used to meet pressing social needs."

Collier called for a break with the entire political system and for replacing the emergency manager and city government with "a council of workers' representatives that would be made up of workers, retirees, students. Its basic principle must be a commitment to the social needs of the vast majority of the working people and not of the multibillionaire bankers and corporate executives."

Other candidates attending the forum included Mike Duggan, the former CEO of the Detroit Medical Center; accountant Tom Barrow; former Detroit corporation counsel Krystal Crittendon; former state representative Lisa Howze; as well as Fred Durhal Jr., Jean Vortkamp, Dr. John Telford, Mark Murphy, Sigmunt Szczepkowski and Herman Griffin.

Aside from Collier, the candidates largely accepted the legitimacy of the emergency manager and focused on proposals to further slash social services and impose a law-and-order agenda. Duggan sold himself as a candidate with a "long turnaround history" both at the Detroit Medical Center and as the Deputy Executive for Wayne County, bragging about his experience slashing workers' jobs and benefits.

In contrast to the other candidates, Collier categorically rejected any suggestion of downsizing city services. "I am against the shutting down or the carving up of the city of Detroit. The properties that have been bought up by the real estate companies and the large landowners should be seized and taken over to provide shelter for a growing number of families that are homeless."

Asked, “What initiatives do you feel can reduce crime?” Collier replied, “The only way to end crime is to end poverty. It can not be resolved by throwing more people in jail and having more police on street corners spying on people.”

Candidate Lisa Howze took the exact opposite position, calling for the Detroit police department to deploy surveillance drones. “It’s about having eyes in the sky. We can co-ordinate our crime fighting efforts with cameras in the sky.”

“The real criminals are the ruling class,” replied Collier. “As we speak, the government is illegally wiretapping untold thousands of telephone and internet lines. It is ironic that the Democratic candidates don’t mention the spying the federal government is conducting on Americans citizens by following their emails and phone conversations.”

Collier called for the unity of all working people against the attempts to shut down sections of the city and strip workers of their wages and pensions. “I am for the unity of black and white workers against the attacks on their social rights,” Collier said. “Everyone has a right do a decent job, housing, and healthcare.”

Collier spoke to workers and young people after his appearances. Kyra Nichols, a student whose high school was recently shut down told him, “Something has to change. I’m really opposed to the closure of schools.” When asked why the schools were being shut down, she responded, “It’s all about the money.”

Henry Schneider said that he was impressed with Collier, and applauded his claims that the Democrats and Republicans were essentially the same. “It used to be that the Republicans under Reagan were neo-liberal. Now both the Democrats and Republicans have moved to the right.”



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