

D'Artagnan Collier, David Walsh speak in defense of the DIA and culture as a social right

Bryan Dyne
15 June 2013

D'Artagnan Collier, the SEP's candidate for Detroit mayor, and David Walsh, arts editor for the *World Socialist Web Site*, spoke at a public meeting held by the Socialist Equality Party on Thursday attended by workers, retirees and youth from the Metro Detroit area.

Collier and Walsh discussed the threats by Detroit Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr to sell off the artwork at the Detroit Institute of Arts. The defense of culture, they said, must be part of a program for the working class to fight back against the assault on jobs and living standards.

"The art at the DIA belongs to the people of metropolitan Detroit," declared Collier, opening the meeting. "It is not the property of the banks and hedge fund managers to loot, nor their bought-and-paid-for flunkies to seize. They are estimating that the monetary value of the art is several billion dollars. From the standpoint of the ruling class, this is several billion dollars that should be in *their* pockets, not housed in a public museum available for the education and enjoyment of the people of the city."

Collier said, "We say that the working class must not be forced to pay for a crisis that it did not create. The wealthy created the crisis, and *they* should pay for it. It is their bankrupt system, capitalism, that has plunged the world into depression, that is driving the world towards more wars and that is creating police state measures, including the massive spying operations that were revealed by Edward Snowden."

"Our campaign," Collier declared, "is dedicated to educating the working class about the real social relations in society, to politically mobilize the working class in a struggle to reorganize the entire world

economy on the basis of social need, not private profit."

David Walsh's presentation reviewed the historical foundations of the development of museums in the United States.

"The driving force in the present crisis is the effort of the super-rich to retain its wealth, to drain the population of Detroit, to reduce it to a state of pauperism," Walsh said. "The bankers have driven the country to the edge of abyss and they want the working class to pay for that."

Walsh described what he called "the return of the aristocratic principle: that is, the idea that the people have no basic right to hospitals, schools, museums, that if they are to have such elementary social necessities it will be the result of the generosity of the super-rich. If Bill Gates or Warren Buffett or Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook decides to keep the DIA open, for example, or perhaps buys a city or even a small state, and keeps it going, we should all be grateful and tip our caps.

"Of course, if Bill Gates decides to withdraw his money and close the museum, or put the art work in his basement, well, we're simply out of luck. This runs counter to the progressive social thought of several centuries, which found expression in the US in the basic documents of the American Revolution and the Civil War eras."

Walsh then reviewed the history of the DIA and public cultural institutions in the US and internationally. "The opening of art and science museums was associated in the US in the 19th century with the ideals of the Enlightenment, with the development of public education and the general socially and culturally progressive agenda.

“The generation, the population that emerged from the Civil War, which had gone through tremendous hardships to defend the Union and defeat slavery, was hungry for knowledge, progress, culture.”

Walsh also referred to the impulse given to art and public museums by the Revolutions in France in 1789 and Russia in 1917. “The Louvre, the largest and most visited art museum in the world, was the direct product of the French Revolution... The revolutionary government brought to power by the Revolution of 1789 took decisive steps—one year after the arrest of the king, the museum was opened to the public.”

“The Russian Revolution took this process to a higher level, took far more decisive and revolutionary steps. The Bolsheviks, with the assistance of the left-wing and avant-garde artists in the early days of the revolution brought the artwork of Moscow to the surrounding provinces. Not only did they bring workers to see art, they brought art to the workers!

“In short, the opening and accessibility of art (and science) museums has been associated with democratic and revolutionary social movements, or their consequences, with the effort to raise the cultural level of the population, with confidence and interest in human progress.

Walsh concluded, “Taking all this into account, is it possible to imagine a situation in which the anti-democratic, crisis-ridden, aristocratic ruling elite in the US, which cares only for its own wealth, which hates and fears the population, could permit the Detroit Institute of Arts, with its vast artistic richness, to continue operating as a museum open and accessible to the public?”

Both reports initiated a great deal of discussion.

Jeff, an adjunct teacher at Wayne State, has been following Collier's campaign for a long time. “It was good to meet D'Artagnan in person. Of all the candidates, I'd vote for him. He's the only one that actually speaks to the needs of society *vs.* the rich. The other politicians focus so much on racial politics. That's not the central issue at all.

“One of the reasons why I like his perspective is that capitalism has so much control. Look at the NSA. It's disgusting that they watch everything. That's not freedom. I see Collier's campaign, and socialism, as fighting for something where the people who actually know what they are doing are in control of that aspect of

society, not some banker.”

Wardell, a retiree, commented, “The discussion at this meeting was on target. I've come to meetings of the Socialist Equality Party before, and what they say is always *a propos*. They do their analysis with due diligence. It's true that the attack on the DIA is bound up with capitalism. I think it is the height of hubris. That he [the emergency manager] even poses the question is not something you joke about. It's like joking about selling your own mother. The question shouldn't be posed.

“He's testing the waters. Orr and the bankers do want to sell the art, and they want to know what the reaction of people will be if they go through with it.

“This isn't a revenue issue. They just had the Grand Prix at Belle Isle. Why not tax that? You could generate all the revenue you need. The banks just don't want people to have anything good in life.”



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