

D'Artagnan Collier calls for “rebuilding Detroit in the interests of workers” at mayoral forum

E.P. Bannon
22 June 2013

D'Artagnan Collier, Socialist Equality Party candidate for Detroit Mayor, spoke at a forum on Thursday, calling for the mobilization of the working class to rebuild Detroit in its own interests, not the interests of the bankers and financiers who are represented by Detroit's emergency manager, Kevyn Orr.

In his “Proposal for Creditors,” Orr has declared open class warfare on behalf of the banks against workers. The plan, which includes the virtual destruction of city worker jobs, health care and pensions, was released only two days before the unveiling of a proposal to build a new arena and entertainment district in downtown Detroit on behalf of billionaire Mike Ilitch using more than \$280 million of public funds.

“I reject the premise of the financial report of Detroit by the emergency manager that there is no money for lighting and other social needs in Detroit,” Collier said. “My program calls for taxing the rich, those making more than \$1 million, by 90 percent. This money would then be used to restore and upgrade the public lighting system, alleviate blight, institute weekly trash and recycling collection, and create recreational facilities throughout the city open 24-hours a day.”

Other candidates attending the forum included former Detroit corporation counsel Krystal Crittendon; former state representative Lisa Howze; as well as Willie Lipscomb, Jean Vortkamp, Dr. John Telford, Mark Murphy, Angelo Brown, and Herman Griffin.

The forum was hosted by the Detroit Historic Neighborhoods Coalition in the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament. There were roughly 40 people in attendance, including workers and retirees drawn from Detroit's historic neighborhoods. Each candidate was

asked a series of questions on “neighborhood issues”—lighting, crime, blight and recreation in the city of Detroit—and given two minutes to respond. Reflecting the general mood of the working class in Detroit, the first audience question was, “How will you fight against the EM (emergency manager)?”

Every establishment candidate accepted the framework of financial dictatorship, claiming that at best, they would do as much as they could under the emergency manager or simply wait him out, no matter the devastation he will wreak on the city in that time. Howze went so far as to state, “Detroit has an emergency manager. This is necessary.”

In contrast, Collier categorically rejected the emergency manager. “I am for rejecting and *throwing out* the emergency manager,” he declared. “Rather than having a city council of celebrities and career politicians, I am for a council of workers. The only way to genuinely guarantee the full participation of the people is to establish a government of workers, for workers, and by workers.” His comments were met with loud and spontaneous applause.

The other candidates advanced law and order demagoguery and appeals to the ruling elite. Crittendon demanded that the “billionaires of this city give the money that's owed to us” to fund a greater police presence. Mike Murphy proposed placing surveillance cameras on light poles throughout the city. Lisa Howze claimed she would go “even further” than Murphy by placing a “surveillance emphasis on ‘high-crime’ [i.e., working class] areas.” Vortkamp called for a complete militarization of the city, where police officers are to be assigned by street. “I want police at our schools,” she said. “I want police officers to make friends with our

students.” Griffin went as far as to claim he would plant “hidden” police officers throughout the city.

The mayoral candidates’ obsession with flooding the city with police officers and surveillance equipment takes place in the context of recent revelations of massive government spying on American citizens by the Obama administration. In Detroit and nationally the ruling elite is aware of the growing anger and opposition of workers and is responding with the buildup of the repressive forces of the state.

The lack of discernable differences between the establishment candidates was striking. Throughout the forum the various candidates frequently patted each other on the back. They complimented each other on their “common vision” for Detroit, and more than once issued invitations for the other candidates to “join their cabinet” in the event that they were elected. As members of Detroit’s Democratic Party establishment, they are jostling not just for mayor, but positions within the new administration.

Collier was the only candidate who did not call for police state measures in Detroit. He noted that while there are fewer police officers in the city, they are extremely well-equipped and funded more than ever as a result of the “War on Terror.” He then pointed out that crime in Detroit is a direct result of the extreme levels of poverty and hopelessness the majority of its residents are forced to endure. Instead of a police surge he proposed the right to a job. “If people have decent paying jobs they aren’t interested in robbing someone else.”

“Moreover,” continued Collier, “the real crimes are social crimes. I am against the maiming and killing of workers by employers who deliberately violate safety rules and regulations. Employers who do this should be thrown in jail and their wealth should be confiscated to compensate the injured, and their companies placed under public ownership by the workers themselves who will democratically decide how the profits made will be used. Workers are not interested in maiming and victimizing other workers.”



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact