

SEP Detroit mayoral candidate D'Artagnan Collier speaks at candidate forum

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On Sunday, D'Artagnan Collier, Socialist Equality Party candidate for mayor of Detroit, participated in a forum held at the Second Baptist Church in downtown Detroit that gave residents an opportunity to question candidates running in the upcoming Detroit primary election. The building is the oldest African-American church in the midwestern United States and served as the final stop of the Underground Railroad network, hosting 5,000 escaping slaves before their departure into Canada.

In his remarks, Collier began by explaining that the majority of politicians and political parties prefer audiences to leave their critical thinking skills at the door. They would rather not speak about the major issues confronting the population of Detroit. "They would have you believe that this is a fight between white Lansing and black Detroit," he argued, "but this is not the case. What we have here is a war which has been declared on the working class by the rich." He went on to say that the banks and the rich are insured against economic crisis, leaving them uninterested in the plight of workers, who have nothing to protect them from increasing poverty and joblessness.

He continued, "Wall Street is watching what is going on here in Detroit. What is being done to us here will be used as a model for cities across the United States and internationally." Collier also highlighted the fact that the emergency manager is doling out immense salaries to executives such as James Craig, the new police chief, who will be receiving an annual payout of \$225,000. "How can they award such a salary and then state that there is no money for housing, education, or jobs?"

Collier addressed several points elaborated in the SEP program, including expanding education, free health care, fighting against utility shut-offs, providing mass

transit, establishing a public works project, and declaring a 90 percent income tax for anyone who makes more than \$1 million per year. The last point elicited a large reaction from the crowd. Several audience members asked if this was a realistic proposal. Collier replied that a taxation rate of 90 percent of the rich is not unheard of in our history. "Under Eisenhower, the rich were taxed 90 percent of their income. That's how we got the freeway system in our country."

While a small fraction of the audience consisted of supporters of individual candidates, the majority made clear their anger at the current crisis in Detroit, which has come to a head with the barbaric attacks against workers spearheaded by the city's unelected emergency manager, Kevyn Orr.

However, when audience members asked the other candidates what should be done to get rid of Orr and address the crisis, many were evasive and even contradictory in their responses.

Fred Durhal, a candidate for mayor and a current Democratic state representative, exclaimed that he would not work with Orr but, in his next breath, contradicted this statement by conceding that "we will work with him to the extent that we can." Durhal also revealed his plan to lobby the state of Michigan to allow the city of Detroit to have its own sales tax, showing that he expects workers to pay for the financial crisis.

Lisa Howze, another candidate for mayor and a former Democratic state representative, declared that her platform is based on an entrepreneur program for young people, illustrating this idea by relating how she sold candy as a young person. Her literature also calls for improved collections of tax money from workers.

Another mayoral candidate, Angelo Scott, evaded the

question, stating that he would turn his focus onto neighborhoods rather than big business centers. Velina Patterson-Dockery shouted rehearsed slogans about needing change now, but offered no proposals for such change, stating that “we have to be humble and open to ideas.” Albert Aaron, who is running for city council in District 4, went so far as to state that “we are in homage to the emergency manager.”

Opposition to Kevyn Orr did arise in the comments of mayoral candidate Krystal Crittendon, former top city attorney, who exclaimed to great applause that “we have to get Kevin Orr out of here! He is here illegally!” However, rather than expanding on the illegality of Orr’s position, she continued by complaining that “Orr won’t work with us,” and that all candidates should unite to stand up against him. While stating that millionaires owe \$385 million in taxes, she offered no proposals outside of working through the existing corrupt legal establishment to address the attacks being waged against workers in the city.

Demagogic opposition to the emergency manager also came from John Telford, former Detroit Public Schools superintendent. He called the concept of an emergency manager “Nazi fascism,” but offered no proposals how to oppose Kevyn Orr’s wrecking operation.

Andre Spivey, a city council member in District 4, who voted for a recent piece of legislation that called for the layoff of city workers, was also present. When asked to explain his responsibility for cutting the jobs of these workers, he defensively responded that the cuts were felt in his office too. “Our city was an employment agency,” he continued, showing his disinterest in the fates of the displaced workers. “We are here to provide services, not jobs.”

During the course of the forum, both audience members and candidates brought to light several social and political problems. Howze revealed that the fire department in Detroit cannot send out its truck, which contains the Jaws of Life, in emergency situations due to a broken door, which cannot be fixed because a large debt is owed to the vendor. Crittendon highlighted an incident involving a \$4.5 million water bill owned to Detroit by the State of Michigan, which was settled for a mere \$117,000.

Not present was Mike Duggan, former Wayne County prosecutor and Detroit Medical Center CEO,

who was recently removed from the mayoral ballot due to a technicality with his residency. As such, he has decided to wage a write-in campaign in the August 6 primary election.



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