

SEP mayoral campaign wins support in Detroit

Tim Rivers
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Several teams of supporters campaigned on Saturday, July 6 for D'Artagnan Collier, the Socialist Equality Party's mayoral candidate in Detroit. The campaigners won important support as they explained the connections between the assault on the working class in Detroit spearheaded by an unelected emergency manager and the massive, illegal spying operations revealed by former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden.

There was widespread sympathy and support for Snowden and the SEP campaign. The vilification of the young man by the corporate-controlled media and political establishment has produced a backlash among a layer of workers and young people disgusted by years of wars, lies and cover-ups by the Bush and Obama administrations.

A young woman from Dayton, Ohio, Stephanie, denounced the media for attempting to make people ignore the ongoing criminal wars and increasing violations of democratic rights. "More and more the media presents this as normal," she said. "It over-exposes you to something to make you think it is normal. They publicize enough killing and enough violence in general and try to make you believe that this is normal. But this is not normal."

She was visiting the city with her friend Dominique and had stopped by Eastern Market to purchase fresh produce. Stephanie was indignant about the pervasive government spying revealed by Snowden. "We heard about the government recording phone calls and copying emails," she said. "Now all of a sudden, you get nothing about it on the news. What happened?"

"They try to control the American people by making them stupid," she continued. "A better way of saying it would be that they keep people misinformed. Then they starve them and take away jobs. Now they monitor all

of their phones and their e-mails."

Campaigners discussed the connection between the attack on democratic rights, the explosion of social inequality and the growth of financial parasitism as American capitalism lost its once dominant economic position. Stephanie concurred. "If you look at a graph of American economy," she said, "you find a chart of rising technology stocks, but industrial production has become virtually nonexistent by comparison."

She continued, "My question is, 'Hey Europe, hey France and Germany, is it the same over there?' We have to get more information about what is happening in the world." Stephanie and her friend took the Detroit workers newsletter in order to keep in contact with the WSWs.

Many working class people expressed a similar, justifiable outrage over the current state of affairs in Detroit. The wealthy corporate attorney Kevyn Orr, who was appointed Emergency Manager with dictatorial powers, supervises the decimation of jobs, wages, pensions and medical care for ordinary people while developers are looting the public coffers of hundreds of millions of dollars to develop upscale housing and entertainment districts.

The gaping class divide is reaching the breaking point. More and more workers are growing conscious of the increasingly impossible situation they confront as a result of the ongoing economic crisis and the relentless austerity policies.

James has worked for years at Severstal Steel, a Russian-owned multinational, which was formerly part of the Ford Rouge plant. He responded to the campaign against the emergency manager in Detroit and the attack on city workers. "I know some guys who have been working for the city for years," he said. "They are being stripped of everything. They have been starving.

“Everything is changing so quick,” he continued. “They are cutting more jobs. It used to be that working for the city meant a good job for life. But not anymore.”

SEP campaigners discussed the historical role of the unions, which once were identified with powerful struggles for social rights and decent living standards during the 1930’s, but have been transformed into direct arms of the government and the corporations.

James responded forcefully. “I was just telling my wife the same exact thing,” he said. “For 30 years the unions have done nothing. In fact, they have prevented us from putting up a fight.”

Sandy is a restaurant manager in Detroit and was furious at the role of the Democratic Party-controlled City Council in the present crisis. “Look at Gary Brown,” she fumed. “He switched from the City Council to work for the emergency manager. How can he sleep at night? He tripled his salary and just came back and said, ‘I quit the City Council.’”

Campaigners pointed out that all the political forces operating in the city from the Democrats and Republicans to the unions and the pseudo-left proponents of identity politics were aligned against the working class. Workers would have to mobilize independently to defend their social rights, they explained. Sandy said she agreed with D’Artagnan Collier’s call for the City Council to be replaced by a council of workers. “They at least would feel more compassion for the people who live here.

“Politicians will say anything to get elected. I’m going to do this and I’m going to do that. No sooner do they get in office, than they forget all about what they promised. A workers council would have a heart for the people.”

Denouncing the attack on schools and social programs, Scott said, “There’s plenty of money, they gave it away to other rich people.” On the role of the political parties of big business, he quipped, “It’s the Crips and the Bloods,” referring to the violent street gangs that competed for control of Los Angeles. “You get to pick which gang you want.”

Chrystal chimed in, “We have to get rid of the whole government. Look at Snowden. He’s a smart guy. He’ll end up dead, though. They’ll kill him and his family.”

A former shop steward in the Teamsters union added

her assessment of the pervasive corruption and criminality of the unions. “My union boss got a Lincoln and a set of golf clubs when he sold us out,” she said. “I was stubborn, so I put up a fight. My family said I was going to end up like Norma Rae or in a ditch like Hoffa.” She summed up the feelings of many with whom we spoke by concluding, “Forget the politicians and replace them with blue collar people! We’re the ones who know how to run things.”

Vivian agreed, saying, “There’s going to be a revolution. They’re treating us like animals, and the wealthy will be fighting against it. It’s not too far off.”



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