

Collier says the real source of crime is inequality and poverty at Detroit mayoral forum

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Socialist Equality Party candidate for Detroit mayor, D'Artagnan Collier, spoke last Thursday at a mayoral forum at the Sacred Heart Church in Detroit, which attracted about 100 people on the city's east side. Distinguishing himself from the law-and-order demagogy of the other candidates, Collier explained that the source of crime and other social ills in Detroit was not the product of "evil" individuals but decades of deindustrialization and attacks on public education and other essential services by big business and its political representatives.

The forum was held as Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr was demanding the destruction of pension and health care benefits for tens of thousands of current and retired municipal workers to pay the city's bondholders. Using the threat of Chapter 9 bankruptcy, Orr wants to end employer-paid pension plans, dump workers into 401(k) schemes and medical exchanges set up under Obama's Affordable Healthcare Act and get rid of benefits entirely for those who retire early.

"Crime in Detroit is inseparable from the growth of inequality and poverty," declared Collier. "The answer to this is jobs and a decent standard of living for all—not more police, government surveillance and spying."

Collier pointed to the underlying causes of poverty. "The real criminals are the ones who crashed the economy in 2008. They are the financial speculators and the banks. Foreclosures and the destruction of jobs have devastated the city. These people sucked Detroit dry so that there isn't a penny left for workers. I say the bankers and the real estate speculators should be prosecuted and jailed for the social crime of throwing people out of their homes, cutting their jobs and demanding that the future of their children be sacrificed

for the bankers and rich people."

The other candidates said next to nothing about the social conditions in the city. One after the other, the candidates—all Democrats—proposed a further police crackdown. Former Michigan state representative Lisa Howze proposed to bring Detroit's crime fighting ability "into the 21st century" by "installing crime surveillance cameras in our most high crime driven areas." Krystal Crittendon, the former legal counsel for the city government, said, "we need more police officers, we need to open closed police precincts."

There was significant interest in the audience with the moderator's question pointing to the emergency manager's power to usurp elected officials, including the next mayor. Collier explained that his campaign was aimed at building a powerful movement of the working class from below that would sweep out all of the representatives of the banks and big business, from the emergency manager to the corrupt City Council and Mayor. The seeming omnipotence of Orr, Collier said, was bound up with the suppression of working class resistance by the United Auto Workers and other unions and their political subordination of workers and young people to the Democratic Party and the capitalist system it defends.

"My campaign is to build a new revolutionary leadership, election year or not. What we have seen in the last 30 years are union leaders who have worked in the name of management and big business to suppress and destroy the living standards of the working class. The reason why Orr looks so powerful is because there is presently no organized movement of the working class. Why isn't there a Wisconsin type movement here in Detroit, where the UAW was born in the sit-down

strikes of 1936-37? It's because the union leaders tell the workers, 'You have to support concessions.' The working class needs a new leadership to unite workers—black, white, immigrant—in a common fight against capitalism.”

Even when asked this question, the other candidates returned to the issue of crime. Howze said,

“We've got to be about the business of Detroit. If that means swallowing our pride and talking to the emergency manager, we have to do that too. Because this woman wants police services in the city of Detroit. You want them to come when you call. You can have the best crime plan but without the money to finance it, it won't get done.”

Well aware of the deep hostility to Orr, Crittendon tried to distance herself from the unelected official, while beating the dead horse of law-and-order again. “The emergency manager is here illegally. He was voted down by the people of Detroit and of Michigan. Until he is gone we are not going to be able to do anything about this crime. The police chief said, 'I answer to Kevyn Orr.' How is a mayor going to direct a police chief to do anything about crime when the police chief doesn't even have to meet with you? Mr. Orr has got to go.”

Candidates were also asked what their financial strategy would be if elected. Each of the establishment candidates supplied their stock answers, with Howze proclaiming her experience as an accountant made her best suited to eliminate the city's deficits and to use any spare money to hire more cops.

Collier rejected the whole framework and refuted the claim that there is no money to provide pensions, essential services and rebuild the city in the interests of working people. “According to recent news,” he said, “the banks are sitting on \$7 trillion. Last year, the automobile companies made record profits of \$12 billion. Several years ago, Bush and then Obama bailed out the banks to the tune of trillions of dollars. You have twelve billionaires in the state of Michigan. And yet they say 'there is no money' for the working class when it comes to housing, jobs or education. What I say is stop giving tax breaks to the rich. The factories should be run by workers themselves to use the profits to rebuild the city as well as provide a future for the younger generation.”

Collier concluded with a call to break with the

Democratic Party. “In Detroit, for at least the last thirty years, the political machine has been dominated by Democratic Party politicians. They have all served the rich. I am calling for the working class to build a new political party to fight for social equality. I am fighting to unite black, white and immigrant workers together in a struggle against capitalism and for the reorganization of society for the majority, not the wealthy few.”



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