

SEP Detroit mayoral candidate D'Artagnan Collier in televised debate

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On Tuesday, July 30, the final debate of the 2013 Detroit mayoral primary election campaign took place at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History before an audience of about 300. The forum, which was broadcast live on Detroit Channel 38, brought together 13 mayoral candidates, including Socialist Equality Party candidate D'Artagnan Collier.

The debate was held under extraordinary conditions. Less than two weeks earlier, Detroit Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr took the city into bankruptcy, the largest municipal bankruptcy filing in the history of the United States. Orr, appointed by Michigan Republican Governor Rick Snyder in March, is acting as a financial dictator to ram through massive cuts directed at the working population of Detroit. However, both the format of the debate and the questions from the moderators were designed to conceal the national and international significance of bankruptcy for the working class and keep the discussion on the lowest possible level.

The election itself is essentially an insult to Detroit voters, since whichever big business candidate is elected mayor will be entirely under the thumb of the emergency manager—who is in charge of all political and financial decisions—and the Wall Street banks he represents.

The candidates took the stage in three groups, with the media-anointed frontrunners, including Wayne County Sheriff Benny Napoleon and former Detroit Medical Center CEO Mike Duggan, going first. Each candidate got a one-minute opening statement then took turns fielding questions from a three-member panel. Those on the panel included insiders from the political and corporate media establishment, including *Detroit News* Editorial Page Editor Nolan Findley, a rabid right-winger, who penned an editorial last year calling for a

“dictator” to run Detroit. Other panelists included *Detroit Free Press* Editorial Page Editor Stephen Henderson, who supports attacks on city worker pensions, and Debbie Dingell, wife of Michigan Democratic Congressman John Dingell and a former executive and lobbyist for General Motors.

A striking feature of the debate was its narrowness and provincialism. With the exception of Collier, all of the candidates offered little besides empty demagoguery and platitudes, expressing their contempt for the popular opposition to the assault by the banks and Wall Street on jobs and social services.

In their opening remarks, Duggan and Napoleon made it clear they did not oppose the bankruptcy filing of Detroit or the savage attacks being carried out on city workers. Duggan called the present situation a “time of opportunity” for Detroit, while Napoleon, the favorite of the United Auto Workers bureaucracy, offered empty bombast, declaring the “tougher it gets, the tougher we are going to be.”

Krystal Crittendon, former city of Detroit corporation counsel, made repeated verbal jabs at the emergency manager. But she did so with the tacit agreement that the massive cuts being demanded by the city's Wall Street creditors must be carried out.

In his opening statement, Collier briefly outlined the platform on which his campaign was based. “Unlike my opponents, I am running to mobilize the working class against the bankruptcy and looting of the city by the Wall Street banks and their representatives in both big business parties.”

Collier stressed that the bankruptcy filing was the product of a bipartisan conspiracy against the working class. “After bailing out the banks, President Obama has flatly rejected any rescue package for Detroit. Instead the administration wants to use the city as a

model for the destruction of the pensions and health care benefits of tens of millions of teachers, firefighters and other public workers around the country.

“This is a damning indictment of the UAW and the AFL-CIO who peddle the lie that the Democrats represent working people. In reality, they defend the capitalist profit system and the financial aristocracy no less than Snyder and the Republicans.

“The working class must draw a battle line in Detroit. I am calling on workers and young people to organize action committees in every workplace, neighborhood and school to prepare a general strike to throw out Orr, repudiate the city’s debt and replace the City Council with a council of workers, which will rebuild the city in the interests of working people, not the rich.”

In the question and answer portion of the debate Collier further elaborated the program of the SEP, calling for a break with the Democrats and Republicans and the building of an independent political party of the working class. “The working class has to build an independent political party of its own that will fight to unite black, white and immigrant workers together in a common struggle against capitalism, which is the source of poverty and unemployment. These conditions are being continued under the Obama administration and will continue whoever is elected as mayor of Detroit.”

In response to a question about jobs, Collier advanced the call for a massive public works program to hire hundreds of thousands of workers to rebuild the city. “The social rights of workers have to be protected,” he said, against the demands of the capitalist market.

Later, answering a question about public funding of private projects such as the new hockey arena being built by Detroit billionaire Mike Ilitch, Collier called for a 90 percent tax on incomes over \$1 million. This proposal drew an audible gasp from many in the room, in particular the supporters of Duggan, whose corporate backers include a who’s who of the corporate elite in Detroit, including Quicken Loans founder Dan Gilbert and Penske Corp. CEO Roger Penske.

Gilbert, Collier noted, was in the process of buying up properties in downtown Detroit, including the Griswold apartments, which were purchased by a real estate services company working closely with the Quicken Loans billionaire. Griswold tenants are currently facing eviction to make way for a new

entertainment district, including a new taxpayer subsidized stadium for Ilitch’s Red Wing hockey team. “These projects,” said Collier, “are not about revitalizing the city but selling it off.”

In response to a question about pensions Collier insisted that pensions were “contractual obligations, not simply a promise. The ruling elite wants workers to be conditioned to a new lower standard of living.” Collier said workers must reject this.

Instead he called for the public ownership of the banks and giant corporations under the democratic control of the working class. With workers in control of the economic levers of society, said Collier, “They would find that there is plenty of money both to fund pensions and rebuild the city.”

In so far as other candidates addressed the question of the appalling social conditions in the city, the poorest big city in America, it was primarily from the standpoint of advancing law-and-order demagoguery and private “entrepreneurship.”

The night did not go by without several candidates appealing to race, in particular Tom Barrow, a former favorite of the trade union bureaucracy, who called for “black empowerment,” in the city. The reactionary and absurd nature of this demand is self evident, given that the present mayor, the majority of the City Council, the emergency manager and the president of the United States are all African Americans.

In the final days of the Detroit mayoral primary campaign the SEP is planning aggressive interventions to bring its socialist program to the widest layers possible of workers and young people. The SEP will be holding a pre-election rally on Sunday August 4 at Wayne State University, at 2 p.m. in General Lectures room 100. We urge all those interested in supporting the fight to mobilize the working class against the bankers’ dictatorship in Detroit to attend.



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