

SEP holds election rally capping Detroit mayoral campaign

Shannon Jones
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The Socialist Equality Party held a public meeting Sunday at Wayne State University to mark the culmination of the Detroit mayoral primary election campaign. The event featured SEP Detroit mayoral candidate D'Artagnan Collier and drew a cross section of workers and young people from the Detroit area including firefighters, teachers, students, retirees as well as tenants from the Griswold Apartments who are facing eviction to make way for a new upscale housing and entertainment district in the downtown area.

After the main reports and a wide ranging discussion, attendees voted and approved a resolution calling for a campaign in the working class to build workers committees, independent of the unions and the Democratic Party, to fight the attacks on pensions, health care and jobs. The meeting also received greetings from sister Socialist Equality Parties in Australia, Canada and Britain.

SEP Assistant National Secretary Lawrence Porter opened the meeting, welcoming those who attended and introducing the main speakers. Porter noted that the recent bankruptcy filing by the city of Detroit initiated by Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr was a political decision, not simply a financial one, aimed at rolling back the gains made by the working class over the past 80 years and setting a precedent for attacks on working people across the US and internationally.

In his remarks, Collier stressed that the SEP election campaign was part of a strategy aimed at mobilizing the working class. "Our campaign will not end with the vote on Tuesday," declared Collier. "We see this campaign as initiating a new stage in the fight against the looting of the city by the Wall Street banks, the bankruptcy courts and Kevyn Orr.

"By now it is becoming apparent to city workers that Detroit is being used as a template for a broader assault on pensions and health care benefits that will be used to attack the basic social rights of workers throughout the United States."

He continued, "The only obligations recognized by big

business and the courts are the billions owed to the banks and bondholders. The White House has flatly refused to bail out Detroit, while there are unlimited funds to bail out Wall Street."

Collier welcomed the formation of the Public Safety Workers Action Group by Detroit firefighters to oppose pension cuts and the fight by tenants at the Griswold Apartments, who have issued an appeal to the working class in the Detroit area to support their fight against pending eviction, as important first steps.

"No matter who is selected by big business as the next mayor, the democratic and social rights of the working class will not be secured simply through casting a vote, but through a political struggle," he said. "The working class must build its own independent political party—in complete opposition to the Republican and Democratic Party—which will fight for a revolution and establish a workers' government."

After Collier spoke, Jerry White, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*, gave a report detailing the background to the social crisis in Detroit. He explained that Detroit had lost some 90 percent of its manufacturing jobs over the last six decades. From nearly 300,000 manufacturing jobs in 1950, to about 27,000 today.

Detroit, said White, expressed the failure of the American capitalism and the capitalist system throughout the world. "The rise and fall of Detroit, is perhaps the sharpest expression of the transformation of the US economy," he explained. "The ascension of the Motor City in the first half of the 20th century paralleled the dynamic industrial growth of American capitalism and its rise to world dominance. Detroit's decline was bound up with the historic decline of American capitalism, the loss of its world preeminence and the growth of the most parasitic, semi-criminal and criminal methods of financial speculation and looting."

White reviewed the rich traditions of struggle by the working class in Detroit, from the hunger March on the Ford Rouge plant in 1932 to the formation of the mass industrial unions. However, the unions, White said, had made a devil's bargain, rejecting the road of independent revolutionary struggle against capitalism and instead subordinating the working class to an alliance with the Democratic Party and a defense of the profit system.

"Detroit is an example of what this policy has produced," said White. He pointed to the comments of United Auto Workers President Bob King, who criticized the emergency manager for not following the pattern established by the Obama administration in the forced bankruptcy of General Motors and Chrysler, where the UAW collaborated in slashing the wages of young workers and in return was given a major ownership stake at Chrysler and GM.

"The unions are not opposed to the attacks being carried out, they only insist these attacks be carried out with their participation. The conditions that existed before the unions were built are being reinstated with the collaboration of the unions."

He continued, "There will be struggles, but the critical question is political leadership. Appeals to the courts and so-called justice under conditions in which the US ruling class is dispensing with democracy are wishful thinking that will only lead to disaster."

Following the main reports the floor was open for discussion. Martin McClung, a Detroit firefighter, brought greetings from the Public Safety Workers Action Group, which has been organized to oppose the cuts to the pensions of Detroit city workers.

"We are trying to inform the public that they are not truly safe under the plans that have been enacted. A lot of you have heard about the 'let it burn policy.' ...that is the official policy, but that is not the individual Detroit firefighters, policy. We don't believe in 'let it burn'."

McClung explained that under this policy, Detroit firefighters were under orders to let freestanding vacant structures in the city that caught fire burn without attempting to extinguish the flames. "We are the Detroit Fire Department," said McClung, "not the Detroit Demolition Department." He noted that buildings that appeared vacant often had people living inside them. "We don't just save the millionaires, we save all lives and property."

McClung said he opposed the appointment of an emergency manager over Detroit, noting that the Detroit firefighters'

training was being outsourced with the blessings of Kevyn Orr. "How many firefighters have they laid off to pay the financial manager?" he asked.

There followed an extended discussion over the strategy and tactics required by the working class to defeat the attacks on workers in Detroit by the corporations and their political frontmen in the Democratic and Republican parties.

D'Artagnan Collier stated, "We encourage workers to take action independent of the unions. But we have to be clear that we are not appealing to the Democratic Party. We need to turn to other workers such as city workers and teachers.

"The working class has to break with the illusion promoted by the union officials that the Democratic Party is a party of the working class. We must understand who our friends are and who our enemies are."

Also contributing to the discussion was Barry Grey, WSWs US editor. "The bankruptcy of Detroit shows the failure of capitalism," he said. "A system that cannot provide schools, jobs and a living wage is a failed system and does not deserve to exist.

"What we are fighting to initiate is the Battle of Detroit. We want to prepare the ground for a general strike, not to protest, but to demonstrate the power that the working class has."

A representative from the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at Wayne State University spoke about the conditions facing students in relation to student loan debt, stressing the importance of young people uniting their struggles with those of the working class. "An industry has been made out of the indebting of students and this has had the effect of creating a student loan debt bubble of \$1.1 trillion. This is more than auto and credit card debt combined. Through this indebting of students the government stands to make \$51 billion by 2015 and \$200 billion over the next 10 years.

"What is happening to students is a travesty. But what it demonstrates is the necessity for workers to build a party of their own to represent their own interests. Education is a right. But there is no constituency for this right outside the working class."



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