Detroit workers at SEP election meeting speak to WSWS

Our reporters
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On Sunday, August 4, the campaign of D'Artagnan Collier, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Detroit mayor, held a public meeting at Wayne State University to discuss the way forward in the fight against the demands of the city's creditors to slash workers' pensions and social services.

The meeting was attended by students and workers from throughout the city, including representatives from the Public Safety Workers Action Group (PSWAG), a rank-and-file organization of firefighters and public safety employees, and tenants from the Griswold Apartments near downtown Detroit who are facing eviction.

"The meeting was good," said Martin, a firefighter and member of PSWAG. "You are getting people together for a battle."

"I'm dealing with a dictator in my hometown," he said, speaking of Detroit Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr. "They say on the news that Orr is in negotiations with the workers. But they are not negotiating: they are handing us dictates."

"They have the bully mentality. The school bully comes over and snatches your lunch money. If you don't fight back, he will come back tomorrow," Martin concluded.

Speaking about PSWAG, he said "We are trying to educate the public about how the attack on public safety workers affects their own safety." He added that "people know something has to change; we're going to have people in the streets like Egypt, Greece and Spain."

Sozer Ahmad, a firefighter and member of PSWAG, said: "The media is disseminating bad information. I think all the networks are in cahoots with the corporations and the government."

Gimbu Omowale, a retired Chrysler worker, said he attended the meeting "because of the devastation of Detroit and the attack on pensions. The financial manager is taking power from the people."

"I was there at Mack Stamping when they had a sit-down strike," he continued. "The company brought in goon squads from all the surrounding plants all over the city of Detroit. Then once they began the deindustrialization of the 1970s, the whole manufacturing sector went down—steel and auto."

"I read the *World Socialist Web Site*," Omowale said. "It deals with a lot of issues, more issues than other news outlets on the Internet. Workers are being attacked on so many different fronts.

"People need to mobilize and organize. Workers are being penalized for the capitalists' criminal behavior, and they are trying to make the us pay for the recession.

"I think D'Artagnan Collier is the best candidate. The others don't have class consciousness. They are going to go after concessions from the workers. But that is the reason Detroit is in the shape it is in—concessions.

"Collier is saying we should have a general strike. I don't know if that will materialize, but there needs to be some unrest here in Detroit. If they get away with the bankruptcy here—and they are going to go all over the country with it—LA, Chicago, St Louis—it will set a precedent.

"I believe in the class struggle. Socialism is definitely better than capitalism, no ifs, ands, or buts. We now have the stock market at its highest level in history, but it doesn't trickle down to the working class."

Debra Miller is one of the 120 mostly elderly and retired residents who are being forced out of the Griswold Apartments to make way for upscale real estate development, including a new hockey stadium. The tenants were given eviction notices in May after their building was sold to a real estate firm working

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closely with Detroit billionaire Dan Gilbert, who owns and controls some 30 properties in and around downtown.

Speaking about the tenants' fight against the eviction, she said, "We are going to make sure that this never happens to another Section 8 building. Tenants can run the building, we don't need the owners."

She added, "I loved what D'Artagnan Collier said. I wasn't going to vote. No one was telling the truth, but Collier knows what our city needs.

"I have had enough of these unions giving in to management. The unions weren't built so that these union presidents go beg (Governor) Snyder 'please talk to us.' I am going to tell you the truth: I used to be a Democrat. But I am switching. What are they doing for us? I am a union member, but I don't believe in the unions anymore."

Davell, an unemployed worker, said the meeting "was the start of a real change." He continued, "We need to understand the divide-and-conquer strategy. It's like chess: they always use race and religion to separate us, but we should all come together as workers.

"Like D'Artagnan said, people don't know how to fight at first. First of all, people have got to know who is at the top. They've got to see that the system is broken and it needs to be destroyed in order to be rebuilt."

Davell agreed with the call for a socialist program. "I think it's a great idea, and it's a long time coming. I saw the need for it in 2008 when everyone was drinking the Obama Kool-Aid. They have money to bail out the billionaires, but then we don't have schools and firefighters. It seems pretty obvious to me."

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