

SEP mayoral campaign in Detroit wins strong support in first week

By Lawrence Porter
24 April 2013

The campaign to place D'Artagnan Collier, a city worker and long-time member of the Socialist Equality Party, on the ballot for mayor of Detroit got off on a strong start with supporters collecting nearly 500 signatures in the first week of petitioning. The minimum requirement to be on the ballot is 500 registered voters. The campaign plans to collect 1,000 to guarantee ballot status.

Collier's campaign has struck a deep chord with workers opposed to the imposition of an Emergency Manager in Detroit with near dictatorial powers to tear up contracts, sell off public assets and destroy essential services. The campaign has reached workers at auto plants, city work locations and in the neighborhoods. On Saturday, a team campaigning for Collier won wide support among young workers at a Quicken Loan job fair in downtown Detroit where there was overwhelming hostility to the emergency manager.

The new EM for Detroit, Kevyn Orr, has made it clear to the 48 unions with contracts with the city that it is within his authority, under Public Act 436, to end collective bargaining and impose contracts on city workers. The right of government workers to collective bargaining was won 66 years ago, in 1947.

This sweeping measure underscores the reactionary nature of a law imposed on workers after Michigan voters overturned the old EM law last November. Five weeks later Snyder, with the support of Democratic State Treasurer Andy Dillon, passed a new law in a lame duck session, similar to the one that was defeated.

Orr is a bankruptcy specialist and former partner in the Jones Day law firm, which represents many of the Wall Street banks that control Detroit bonds and derivative contracts. His job is to guarantee full payment of the debt on the backs of workers and city residents.

The WSWs and Collier spoke to workers about the emergency manager. A city worker who signed the petition to place Collier on the ballot told the WSWs, "There has been so much corruption and abuse I do feel an outside source needs to help fix it, but I don't like the idea of the outside source being in total control of everything that affects us. They are not here to provide more services. They are here to balance the books. And we are not books, so you can't balance us like that.

"Every section of the city needs something different. The financial manager is not going to recognize that. There are certain sections of the city that need more help than other sections. But they are concentrating on the rich areas like Palmer Park. They give them what they need but don't go to the communities.

"He hasn't said what he is going to do. It's scary because they have given a total stranger control over my life and my livelihood because I work here. I'm wondering if I am going to have a job when he finishes doing whatever it is he is going to do."

LaTonya Giles works six days a week in a suburban city and relies on the bus service that is becoming worse due to years of budget cuts and layoffs. "The bus service sucks. There is a rumor going around they are going to cut the bus service again on May 1 and we will have even less bus service on the weekend."

Giles had heard of the threats against the bus drivers of the Detroit Department Transportation (DDOT) who face privatization. The Democratic-controlled city government has already outsourced management to private contractors.

"It used to be good routes and bad routes," continued Giles. "They are all getting bad now. If you miss your connection or the time you are supposed to be there, be prepared to wait."

“On a Saturday if you catch it early you are good. But as the day progresses, like now after 6 pm, it’s an hour before you get a bus, maybe an hour and a half.”

Giles said she had no confidence the EM was going to improve things. “They are all for the rich.”

Robert Turner, who often rides the bus with Giles, was disdainful of the City Council, which he said was only looking out for itself. “You know, when the City Council had all this power they didn’t do anything with it. Now that they have big brother coming in to tell them how to do to their jobs, now they are screaming foul. ‘Oh my goodness, he is taking our power away.’ You guys had the power but you did nothing with it.”

When Collier explained that the City Council supported the cuts and said they played the role of the Emergency Manager when they cut 25 percent of the workforce during the last year, he agreed that they are also running the city in the interests of the banks.

“I supported the protest of Occupy Detroit and participated in the march that took place up Woodward Avenue,” stated Robert. “I thought it was great. I thought it was beautiful that they did that because who is going to represent the 99 percent? I think we should be represented because our government just seems to be feeding the rich and making them richer and the poor get poorer.”

Collier explained that those protests, while winning sympathy from workers, was based on a bankrupt perspective of appealing to the Democratic Party and redistributing wealth among sections of the upper middle class, not getting rid of the capitalist system that is behind austerity measures from Detroit to Greece.

“This government doesn’t care about the people,” Robert continued. “All they care about is their own interests, which is lining their own pockets. For the rest of us, the small people, we get broken.”

Robert added that the people running the government were now all businessmen. “I said when Bing was elected, if he didn’t do a good job running his business how is he going to do a good job running the city? Now he has proven it.”

“Now, I looked at that and said who would be the best person to serve as mayor? I haven’t seen anybody yet. And if I do get the chance to see somebody I’m darn sure going to vote for them. We need someone who is going to stand up for us.”

To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>