

Defend Education! Stop the shutdown of Detroit!

Statement of D'Artagnan Collier, SEP candidate for mayor of Detroit

4 June 2009

The proposals being put forward by the Detroit Public School Board and “emergency financial manager” Robert Bobb, backed by the Obama administration, will have devastating consequences for public education in our city. Teachers, students, and Detroit residents must take a united stand against the latest round of school closings and budget cuts.

Nearly 1,000 jobs will be cut immediately, along with the closure of 29 more schools. By the time this latest round of closures is over, nearly a quarter of existing schools will be shut down—coming on top of decades of budget cuts. Bobb is pushing through the reorganization of many more schools to put in place principals who will support his right-wing proposals, including increased testing and merit pay for teachers.

Behind the guise of “fighting corruption” and increasing efficiency, what is taking place is the virtual destruction of public education in Detroit.

The attack on education follows a massive restructuring of the auto industry, including the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs, the closing of factories and dealerships, and the driving down of wages and benefits. The corporate and financial elite sees the economic crisis as an opportunity to carry out a wholesale attack on jobs and living standards, to increase exploitation and boost profits.

Detroit and the entire state of Michigan are in a state of economic meltdown. Nearly 800,000 jobs have been destroyed in Michigan this decade, and the official unemployment rate is 12.9 percent (22 percent in Detroit). One-third of the population of our city lives in poverty.

The claim that there is no money to provide decent jobs and education for everyone is a contemptible lie. The \$300 million budget deficit faced by Detroit schools is a tiny fraction of the money handed out to Wall Street, by Bush and Obama alike, with no strings attached. Hundreds of billions—more than a thousand times the Detroit school deficit—are spent every year on the military in order to prosecute criminal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. When it is a matter of saving the banks and hedge funds, of covering the gambling debts of the wealthy, literally trillions of dollars are found. Where is this money when it comes to saving our schools and communities?

Every gain workers have achieved has been won through struggle. I am running in the mayoral elections to encourage resistance and give voice to the deep opposition that exists within the working class to the attack on jobs and living standards. I urge teachers, students and Detroit residents to consider the following program:

1. Reject all concessions and school closures! Rebuild Detroit! The entire framework of the discussion as it is presented by Bobb and the DPS, the city government and Obama administration, the Detroit Federation of Teachers and the American Federation of Teachers, must be categorically rejected. It is not a question of what concessions teachers will accept or what schools will be shut down, but the necessary strategy to oppose all cuts.

Billions of dollars should be spent to rebuild Detroit schools, purchase education materials, modernize technology, lower class sizes, expand school curricula, and fund after-school and cultural activities. Our teachers, who perform some of the most difficult jobs, should be paid a much higher salary, with benefits and job security.

There is no solution to the crisis of education that does not address the broader social crisis. The city of Detroit has been devastated by the dismantling of manufacturing and the destruction of jobs to meet the profit interests of a tiny corporate and financial elite. Students cannot get a decent education when they are hungry, homeless or sick. The defense of education must be linked to a public works program to guarantee employment and decent living conditions for everyone.

2. For the unity of all workers! The wealthy are using the economic crisis that has engulfed world capitalism—the product of their own reckless speculation—as an occasion to restructure class relations in the United States. Anything that takes away from the profit interests of CEOs and big investors is a target: from workers' wages, to health care and other benefits, to education and social services.

To fight for its interests, workers throughout the city, across the country and around the world must unite on the basis of their independent class interests. In every country, workers face the same conditions: economic decline, the destruction of jobs and social program,

war and the attack on democratic rights. Only through coordinated action and united struggle can workers combat the power of the wealthy elite.

3. For independent neighborhood and rank-and-file committees! Workers need organization, but the existing organizations are complicit in the attack on the working class. The DFT and AFT are collaborating with the city administration in the destruction of education, putting up no fight against school closures and layoffs. These so-called “trade unions” are no different from the UAW, which is working actively to impose concessions on auto workers. The outcome of the collaboration will be the same as well: more concessions, closures and job cuts.

The SEP calls on Detroit residents to form independent committees to oppose the shutdown of Detroit. These committees will establish the closest bonds of unity between all sections of the working class in the city and reach out to workers in the suburbs, throughout the country, and internationally.

4. For the preparation of mass resistance and a general strike! We must declare: any attempt by the city to implement education cuts will be met with mass resistance. The period between now and September must be used to educate and mobilize all sections of workers, parents, and students in preparation for a general strike against school closures in the fall.

Detroit workers, do not underestimate your strength! Determined resistance will win mass support throughout the country and internationally. The same conditions you face are also faced by workers throughout the world. You will not be alone if you resist these attacks, but you must take decisive action.

Break with the Democrats and Republicans! For equality and socialism!

If the struggles of workers and youth are to be successful, they require a political program. It is time to break decisively with the Democratic Party, which has overseen the decay of Detroit for decades. The city has been ruled by one corrupt administration after the other, governments that serve the interests of a parasitic corporate elite.

While many workers and young people looked to the Obama administration as a source of change, these hopes are being quickly shattered. The Obama administration's attack on education is of a piece with its entire policy, which is based on defending the interests of the rich.

To workers who ask “Why is it necessary to adopt a socialist program?” we answer: Because the capitalist system has failed! It has failed in Detroit as it has failed throughout the country and around the world. Capitalism is a social system whose fundamental premise is the accumulation of profit by the wealthy and the accumulation of poverty by the working class. Such a system is incapable of providing for the needs of workers and youth.

The alternative to capitalism is socialism. Socialism means that decisions about how the wealth of society is utilized are arrived at rationally and democratically by working people. This requires the nationalization of the banks and large corporations and their transformation into public utilities under the democratic control of the working class. Through the democratic ownership of the foundations of the world economy, working people can direct the resources of society to the satisfaction of social need, not private profit.

This is the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party. I urge all workers, teachers and students who agree with this program to support my campaign for mayor and join the Socialist Equality Party.

Public Meeting

Stop the shutdown of Detroit! A socialist response to the economic crisis

June 16, 7 p.m.

First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit • 4605 Cass Ave., Detroit
Main speaker: D'Artagnan Collier, SEP candidate for mayor of Detroit

To contact the Socialist Equality Party, visit **www.wsws.org**
or write to **sep@socialistequality.com**

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