

Strike at New York's Museum of Modern Art enters fifth month

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This week marks the end of the fourth month on strike for several hundred white-collar workers at New York's Museum of Modern Art. The workers, including assistant curators, librarians, archivists, bookstore employees and others, walked out on April 28 in a dispute over a new contract.

The workers, who average about \$28,000 in annual pay, with many earning just \$17,000, have been reduced to routine picketing by a handful of strikers outside the famous mid-Manhattan museum. Spokesmen for the museum claim that attendance has not been affected, and that more than half of the 250 workers in the bargaining unit are crossing picket lines.

Major issues in the strike include salaries, health care and job security. The museum is about to begin a four-year, \$650 million expansion project that will involve the long-term layoff of many employees. The administration also refuses to offer significant wage increases, especially for the lower-paid staff such as bookstore employees, who earn \$8.50 an hour. It is planning cuts in medical benefits, and it will not consider a union demand for an agency shop, in which employees who do not join the union are still required to pay dues.

From the start of the strike the Professional and Administrative Staff Association (PASTA), Local 2110 of the United Auto Workers (UAW), has followed the path of the discredited "corporate campaigns" inaugurated by sections of the trade union bureaucracy in the 1980s. The tactic is based on largely ignoring the working class, while seeking to apply pressure to trustees, financial backers and business partners of the institution.

Along these lines, Teamsters president James P. Hoffa recently sent a letter to Goldman Sachs, apparently at the request of the UAW, claiming that the

union was reviewing its pension fund accounts with the investment bank because Goldman Sachs is one of the underwriters of bonds issued to raise funds for the museum's expansion.

The most recent effort of the UAW was the publication of an open letter signed by 125 artists, performers and intellectuals urging the museum to return to the bargaining table. The letter was signed by artists Robert Rauschenberg, Sol LeWitt and Art Spiegelman, filmmakers Pedro Almodovar, Quentin Tarantino and Martin Scorsese, dancer Bill T. Jones and musician David Byrne, among others.

The individuals involved may be sincere in their effort to assist the workers, but the call for "good-faith bargaining" amounts to little more than a gesture, which the museum's lawyer, Robert Batterman, quickly dismissed, saying the signatories had "no knowledge of the facts."

Some developments earlier this summer indicated broad support for the Museum of Modern Art workers. The Summergarden concert series, which has been organized in collaboration with the Juilliard School of Music and conducted in the museum's sculpture garden for two decades, was cancelled. A summer film series was also called off after First Run Features, the film distribution company that was organizing it, said it would not cross the picket line.

Nevertheless, the strikers have been left stranded on the picket lines, while millions of workers in New York are not even aware of the walkout. The isolation of the museum workers in one of the cultural capitals of the world, a city with an enormous history of working class struggle, is testimony to the degenerate state of the official trade unions, as well as the widespread indifference of their liberal supporters to the actual conditions of the working class.



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