

DSO musicians hold spirited picket in week seven of strike

James Brewer
17 November 2010

Monday night, in the seventh week of the strike, more than 50 Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians and their supporters picketed Orchestra Hall, where a performance by the Vienna Boys Choir was being held.

Picketing at a previous concert by jazz singer Dee Dee Bridgewater, on November 5, was called off by the union on the promise from DSO management that negotiations would resume. The picket on Monday evening was strong and spirited, largely animated by the feeling among the players that calling off the picket ten days ago proved to be a mistake, since the DSO promise of returning to the table was a ploy. (See “Striking Detroit Symphony musicians hold another well-attended support concert”.) Management has been inflexible in its demand for a 33 percent cut in wages and a severe undermining of work rules.

Nearly all the DSO players were on the picket line and many brought their children along to help convey their message. Signs read, “Keep the DSO Great,” “Keep the quality, not the leadership,” “33% Pay Cut for DSO Management.”

Susan Barna Ayoub, an official from the Detroit Federation of Musicians Local 5 told the WSWS, “This isn’t just about Detroit. The League of American Orchestras is calling management’s plan, ‘The Detroit Model.’ They’re determined to implement these measures here, so they can influence negotiations in other important orchestras in the country. They’ve already broken the Memphis Orchestra, but that isn’t as important as this one would be.”

Ken Thompkins, a trombonist for the DSO, said,

“Management is inflating their financial projections based on an orchestra of 96 musicians. We currently have between 82 and 84 musicians, so our orchestra is smaller than that of Chicago, New York and Boston. We’ve already offered a 20 percent cut for this year alone. Management is trying to present the financial crisis worse than it is in order to scare the public. I believe the money is there, but it depends on who you’re speaking to. How can they say there is no money, when they are talking about building new stadiums? Besides, Oakland County is still one of the wealthiest counties in the country.”

Thompkins said that after seven weeks on strike, DSO management hasn’t budged from its position. He described their posture as “arrogant.” The musicians have been holding their own series of concerts that have attracted a core of supporters from the regular patrons. This is now the second-longest strike by DSO musicians in the orchestra’s history.

WSWS reporters were greeted warmly by the strikers. Several players thanked the *World Socialist Web Site* for its continuing coverage of the strike. “You write the best articles of anyone out there.”

Several noted that the Socialist Equality Party meeting in Ann Arbor on the DSO strike and the defense of culture was going on at the same time as the picket. The players sent an official delegate to the meeting. A full report from that meeting will be forthcoming.



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