

# Detroit Symphony management threatens to replace striking musicians

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In the wake of the rejection by striking Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians of management's provocative "final offer," DSO officials have issued threats to permanently replace strikers. In a statement issued Sunday, DSO Vice President Paul Hogle said management is prepared to go forward with a new group of musicians that would include only those strikers who accept the DSO's terms.

Hogle has indicated that the DSO plans no further negotiations and that musicians must accept terms even more onerous than the ones they have already rejected.

DSO musicians struck October 4 after management imposed massive cuts, including a 33 percent salary reduction, 42 percent for new musicians, as well as cuts in health care, pensions and other benefits. Management further insisted on "reinventing" the orchestra, that is imposing changes in work rules that would essentially convert the DSO into a part-time ensemble, with musicians saddled with all kinds of non-performance-related responsibilities.

The musicians union responded with its own proposal for deep pay cuts, 22 percent, but management rejected these concessions as inadequate. In December DSO negotiators rejected a compromise proposal brokered by outgoing Michigan Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm and US Senator Carl Levin that would have split the difference between management and the musicians.

Negotiations resumed in late January, but soon bogged down again. It became increasingly evident that management was not interested in a settlement as each offer it presented was worse than the one before. Management increased its rhetoric, saying it would

cancel the season unless musicians caved in to its demands.

Last week resumed talks mediated by Levin and Quicken Loans Chairman Dan Gilbert ended after DSO management abruptly demanded musicians hold a vote on what it called its final offer. Management provocatively inserted terms in its proposal it knew would guarantee rejection, including an 800 percent increase in insurance deductibles. DSO negotiators also insisted musicians sacrifice one of their own number, principal librarian Robert Stiles, who management wanted removed from the union, a move players interpreted as a prelude to the elimination of his job.

In a further provocation, an additional \$1 million put up by Gilbert to bridge the gap between management and the players did not even show up in management's proposals.

Following the unanimous rejection of management's final offer by the musicians, DSO officials announced the cancellation of the balance of the 2010-2011 concert season and declared negotiations at an end and.

Musicians reacted angrily to the threat by DSO management to field a replacement orchestra composed of strikebreakers. DSO cellist and player spokesman Haden McKay called management's announcement the equivalent of "an atom bomb."

Reacting to the actions of the DSO, the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians issued a statement in support of the striking musicians. The ICSOM declared, "There has been an historic and unprecedented show of support from musicians across

North America for the musicians of the Detroit Symphony. At this moment they are the most admired musicians in the world as they face this difficult challenge from their management. The commitment and artistry of the musicians during this difficult time has been nothing short of extraordinary, and has inspired people across the world.”

DSO musicians have called for a mass picket and rally outside of Orchestra Hall at 6 p.m. Tuesday, the venue for Democratic Mayor David Bing’s annual state of the city speech. Musicians have called on Bing and members of the Detroit City Council to find another venue for the address due to the ongoing strike. “Holding the State of the City address essentially means the mayor, city council and guests are supporting the management of the DSO in this strike,” said Gordon Stump, president of Local 5 of the American Federation of Musicians.

Mayor Bing’s office has rejected calls by musicians to change the venue.

DSO trombonist Kenneth Thompkins told the WSWS, “Now the public can see what we have been dealing with over the past months. They never had any intention of reaching a contract. They planned to bring in younger, cheaper musicians without regard to quality.

“I am hopeful we will have a terrific turnout [at the picket]. It is not just about individual musicians, it is about workers everywhere.”

A Michigan Opera Theatre musician said, “I believe they geared all the proposals so that the musicians would reject them.

“I don’t believe they will create an orchestra that the people of Detroit will want to support. I am skeptical that DSO Conductor Leonard Slatkin would agree to conduct with replacement musicians, that would be career suicide.”

Plans by Mayor Bing to go ahead with his state of the city address in Orchestra Hall in the midst of the strike by musicians amounts to open support for

strikebreaking and tears the mask off the pose by Democratic Party politicians as “friends of labor.” The escalating attacks by DSO management on musicians abetted by the Democratic Party poses a collision between the working class and the apparatus of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win Coalition who are striving to isolate and defeat their struggle. It also exposes the politics of the unions, who have long insisted that workers have no choice but to support the Democratic Party.

Musicians confront the need for a new strategy and new organizations. The assault by DSO management on art and culture coincides with attacks being levied against the working class by Corporate America and its political representatives from the Obama administration to the state and local level. DSO musicians must work to unite their struggle with that of young people and working people seeking to defend jobs and living conditions. This means breaking with the Democratic and Republican parties and taking up a conscious fight against the capitalist profit system.



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