

Striking DSO musicians picket Detroit mayor's state of the city speech

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Striking musicians of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and supporters picketed Orchestra Hall, the venue of Democratic Detroit Mayor Dave Bing's annual state of the city address Tuesday. Musicians were angered by Bing's decision to use Orchestra Hall as the venue for his address in the midst of their ongoing strike.

The musicians struck October 4 against draconian concession demands, including a more than 30 percent reduction in pay and cuts to pensions and health benefits. Last week musicians voted down a contract proposal management termed its "final offer."

Musicians called the picket in the wake of remarks by DSO Vice President Paul Hogle to the *Detroit News* this past weekend indicating that management plans to field a replacement orchestra. While Hogle later claimed he was misquoted, management's pattern of provocations and ultimatums leaves little room for doubt that the DSO administration aims to break the musicians union.

That DSO management feels emboldened to contemplate this course of action is a consequence of the isolation imposed on the musicians strike by the Detroit Metro AFL-CIO. The impact of this isolation was reflected in the limited turnout at the Orchestra Hall picket—about 100 participated. While claiming to support the musicians, the Detroit Metro AFL-CIO did not mobilize any significant delegations from local unions, this despite having tens of thousands of members in the area. The roster of paid union officials alone would have been enough to fill a large number of busses.

The Bing administration's refusal to change the venue of his speech, a tacit endorsement of DSO strikebreaking, underscores the fraud of the claim by the AFL-CIO that the Democratic Party represents a

pro-worker alternative to the Republicans.

The workers who did join the picket indicated strong support for the principled and courageous stand by the musicians. Among those attending were city workers, teachers, auto workers and building trades workers.

The WSWS interviewed several musicians and their supporters on the picket line. Nathaniel Gurin, assistant principal trombonist with the DSO, said, "There is a dichotomy between a business and an arts organization. Running an arts organization is not like a traditional business. It can't be done on pure numbers.

"I am awestruck at the cohesion of our group. We have stuck together. Management did not see this. They thought the strike would last two or three weeks.

"If instead of spending money on media and spin they had spent it on the orchestra we would have it up and running now."

Dave Ivers, a retired operating engineer, said, "We came to help out the musicians. My wife and I have been to a number of their concerts; my son, grandson and their family have gone. We want to support the musicians all we can."

"Friends of mine are already in Wisconsin," Ivers added. "If I weren't busy now I would be going to Wisconsin. We have got to stick together. It is the end for us if we don't.

"And we have got to stop talking about union. We have got to start talking about families, working families; it's families, union or nonunion. We have got to lift everybody up. We have to work for everybody."

Herman Greene, a Ford Rouge worker with 24 years in the auto plants, said, "Mainstream America is not going to classical concerts like they used to. You take it out of the school curriculum and people don't know about it so when people hear that the DSO is in trouble, much of the population can't relate.

“The people who really appreciate an orchestra are the ones who went to private school and got exposure, or maybe studied in Europe. The average poor person, no matter what race or creed, is just trying to get out of school and get a job. When you are working 12 hours a day your listening time is limited.

“There are people across the board who love and appreciate classical music. But when you look at the percentages of people who listen to live music period, it is insignificant. Everyone has an iPod or other form of electronic reproducing instrument, and you miss a lot.”

He remarked on the decision of Mayor Bing to cross the musicians’ picket line. “Bing is a businessman, he makes no bones about it. Bing is attempting to run the city as if it were a business. Unfortunately, a lot of businesses have gone under using the exact same policies and tactics that he is incorporating right now. You sell off this, you sell off that.”

Greene spoke about the situation facing auto workers. “The UAW has set up a lot of what is happening now. It is one of the larger unions, and it has taken concessions that have far-reaching implications. We can’t strike for a large number of years. Up at Lake Orion the union came in and told the guys ‘we negotiated for you, and you don’t get to vote on this, you don’t get a say on this and by the way, you can’t strike—15 years of seniority or less we are cutting your pay in half.’ These are people who survived an entire year on layoff.”



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