

Defend the DIA! Culture is a social right!

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The announcement that Detroit's emergency manager is considering selling off the masterpieces at the Detroit Institute of Arts has provoked justifiable anger from working people throughout the Metropolitan area and around the US. The DIA is a treasure that belongs to the people of Detroit, not an "asset" to be sold to private investors who want to add the museum's invaluable artwork to their financial portfolios.

I insist that workers and young people have the right to culture, not as a luxury, but an essential necessity for life. The threat to this world-renowned art museum is part of the same process that has seen big business politicians strip the public schools of art, music and literature classes. According to the rich and powerful, the cultural achievements of mankind belong to them, not the working class.

With unbridled cynicism, Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr and his coterie of officials have sought to justify their looting operation by suggesting that the sale of art at the DIA is intended to defend the interests of working people. "The cultural and emotional value of the DIA's treasures must be weighed against the needs of 700,000 largely poor residents of Detroit who desperately need safe streets and a capable city government not drowning in debt," declared Kenneth Buckfire, the investment banker hired by Orr to oversee the plundering of Detroit.

It is hard to express in words the contempt that this statement deserves. The truth is Orr and the wealthy bondholders he represents are seeking to destroy *both* the art museum and the services residents depend on.

The unelected emergency manager is holding the threat of bankruptcy over the heads of thousands of current and retired city workers in order to slash their jobs, wages and pensions. Orr has already outlined a plan to shut off half of the city's streetlights, sell off the public lighting, water and sewerage system and public transit system to private contractors and

accelerate plans to shut down whole neighborhoods deemed too poor for investment.

Predictably, the trade unions are falling in line behind Orr. Ed McNeil, a special assistant to the president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 25, told the *Detroit Free Press*, "You ought to love children and families and think about how they're going to live. You're going to put some artwork over their lives?"

Such statements are aimed at providing political cover for Orr and the political establishment in Detroit and Michigan.

The financial wolves on Wall Street are licking their chops at the prospect of profiting off of the dismantling of large sections of Detroit. On the same day that Orr made his announcement on the DIA, it was revealed that the Belle Isle—the largest island public park in America—is being eyed by New York City real estate developers who want to develop hotels and condos.

Already poor and elderly residents are being evicted from their homes in downtown Detroit to make way for upscale housing and a new sports stadium.

Far from opposing these attacks, AFSCME and the other city unions are engaged in behind-the-scenes talks with Orr to slash the jobs and living standards of city workers.

The defense of culture is inseparable from the fight to defend the right to a decent job, public education, health care, housing and other social rights.

The provision of these social rights is incompatible with capitalism—an economic and political system that sacrifices the needs of the vast majority of the population to the ever-greater enrichment of a tiny minority. Like gangsters and vandals, the corporate and financial elite are seeking to eliminate anything that does not provide them with an immediate profit.

The DIA has a deep history in Detroit. In the 1930s, militant and socialist-minded workers rallied to defend

the murals painted by Mexican artist Diego Rivera, which were threatened with destruction by the right-wing demagogue Father Coughlin.

Then, as now, the only genuine constituency for the defense of culture is the mass of working people.

Once the working class puts an end to the looting by the wealthy few, vast resources for the material and cultural enrichment of society as a whole will become available.

I am running in the mayoral election to provide a political program for the mobilization of the working class, independently of and opposed to the Democrats and Republicans and the profit system they defend. My program for the revitalization of Detroit begins with the needs of the working class, not the banks.

I reject the claim that there is no money for to guarantee essential necessities, which includes access to culture. The auto companies and Michigan's richest residents are hoarding billions, which have been extracted from the labor of the working class. But under the political monopoly of the two big business parties—and the financial dictatorship they have imposed in Detroit and other cities—the working class has absolutely no say-so over the distribution of wealth we create.

I call for the cancellation of the debt to Wall Street, a 90 percent tax on all incomes over \$1 million, and the transformation of the banks and auto industry into public utilities, under the democratic control of working people.

The “choice” is not between culture and the jobs and livelihoods of workers, but between capitalism and socialism. I urge workers and youth who want to defend the DIA to support my campaign and join the Socialist Equality Party.

For more information on the SEP Detroit mayoral campaign, visit detroit.socialequality.com.



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