

Detroit workers and youth speak out against attacks by emergency manager

Our reporters
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On Friday, Detroit's emergency manager Kevyn Orr is holding a closed-door meeting with the city's bondholders, bond insurers, pension trust fund trustees and unions on the eve of a \$40 million payout to the banks. He will outline a more concrete plan for sweeping cuts in services, city worker jobs and pensions and to sell off public assets using the threat of Chapter 9 bankruptcy. Orr has said there is a 50-50 chance he will put the city into bankruptcy, making it the largest municipal insolvency in US history.

The threat to sell off the artwork at the Detroit Institute of Arts is the most provocative of Orr's proposals. He is out to strip workers of this cultural treasure on behalf of the banks, which are already salivating at the prospect. An article in *Bloomberg* asserts, "The cause of art would be better served if they [the artwork at the DIA] were sold to institutions in growing cities where museum attendance is more substantial and the visual arts are more appreciated than they've ever been in Detroit."

D'Artagnan Collier, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Detroit mayor, opposes these attacks and is fighting for the independent political mobilization of the working class in the metropolitan area to defend jobs, education, pensions and culture as social rights.

Over the last several days, supporters of the campaign spoke to transit workers and bus riders at the Rosa Parks Transit Center, students at Cass Technical High School, the Detroit School of Arts and Wayne State University, as well as auto workers, sewerage workers and firefighters across the city. They drew the connection between the threat to sell off the artwork of the DIA with the overall attacks on the working class and invited people to attend the Socialist Equality Party meeting in defense of the DIA being held today.

"They shouldn't sell what doesn't belong to them,

including the art and Belle Isle," said Ryan Choate. "That's not a way to get the money. You don't sell off prized possessions. It's priceless. That's just not a way to get revenue." Referring to all the workers waiting for a bus at Rosa Parks, he added, "Look at all the people here. Get them jobs and then there would be tax revenue [for the DIA]. I want to take the kids to the DIA. You don't sell what's going to educate the kids."

Maxine Nails expressed frustration with Detroit's existing political establishment. "I love the DIA. I've been going there since I was a little girl. My kids go. It's ridiculous that they're thinking of selling art. I just don't understand it. We elected the mayor who was supposed to solve this but they bring in someone else and pay him with money we don't have. They need to leave the DIA alone and focus in-house. Take from the city council, not the art."

"It's not a race thing, it's rich versus poor," said Drew, a young food delivery worker, commenting on the social conditions in Detroit. "That racial angle, it's for people who aren't really thinking it through."

Rod, a US marine, described disillusionment with the United States in the military. "I was deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, and I learned my lesson there. It was not about spreading freedom or stopping terrorism. You see that a lot in the Marines. You go in and when you come back the blinders are off."

"I can identify with [NSA whistleblower Edward] Snowden. Some people in the military say 'you should just follow orders' but others are more sensitive and more thoughtful and deeply troubled by the ongoing drive for more wars."

"I've been to the DIA since I was a kid," said James Raymond, a literature major at Wayne State University. "I bring all my friends from out of town to the museum, and they all say it's the best museum they have ever

been to. The DIA belongs to the people and it's really disappointing that they are trying to sell it."

Alex, a history major, defended the cultural value of the DIA. "Something has to be done for Detroit, but you can't just stop funding art. It brings happiness to the people. The claim that there is no money is a lie."

Auto workers and sewerage workers also expressed deep sentiments against the selloff of the artwork. Workers at the Detroit Wastewater Treatment Plant connected the attack on the DIA to the threats to privatize the water department. One worker noted, "What is happening to the DIA is happening to us, and all the city services."

A firefighter stationed in downtown Detroit spoke on a variety of issues. "I think what the emergency manager is doing is a test for the rest of the country. We voted for the art at the DIA and against the emergency manager, but he still came. I see him [Orr] as a dictator. This is going to happen everywhere.

"The Declaration of Independence says that when government becomes like this, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it. That's what we need. People should stand up for their rights."

Pointing to the social problems in Detroit and nationwide, he added, "I agree the issue isn't a black versus white issue. That's used to divide us. You see the real problems when you look at college graduates who can only find work at Home Depot. Why did they go to school and get debt only to work at Home Depot? Why are there no jobs for people who study science or art?

The firefighter also commented on problems facing teachers. "We just went to a school's career day to talk to little 1st and 2nd graders. The teachers have it hard. They each have 30-40 kids who come to school hungry, some with special needs. They can't really teach. And then the teachers are blamed for those problems. That's not right.

"As for pensions, for teachers or anybody, it's the worst thing to take those away. How do old people survive? They can't get a new job. You shouldn't be able to just take pensions away, but that's what the banks want to do."

When asked about their reaction to Kevyn Orr's plan to sell off the artwork at the DIA, one firefighter at the Dexter Avenue fire station replied, "The emergency manager is trying to rape and pillage what we have. It's

like we have no rights, no power."

Another firefighter described the parallels that exist between the era of the robber barons and today. "Like in the late 1800s, when there was like five people who ran everything—all the major industries—today it's the same story. There exist massive global conglomerates that control all the major industries."

A discussion developed between the firefighters where the issue came up of how the ruling class utilized the Boston bombing to test out martial law on the population, and now they are exploiting Detroit's financial position to test out a dictatorship. One firefighter responded, "I don't even look at it as a Democrat and Republican issue or a black and white issue; it's all about money—the haves and the have-nots and nothing is going to change without a revolution."

His fellow firefighters echoed those sentiments, responding, "It's going to take a revolution."



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