

# Socialist Equality Party to hold demonstration in defense of the Detroit Institute of Arts

Our reporter  
16 September 2013

*For more information on the campaign to defend the Detroit Institute of Arts, visit [defendthedia.org](http://defendthedia.org).*

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality will hold a demonstration on Friday, October 4 to mobilize popular opposition against the sale of artworks at the Detroit Institute of Arts as part of the city bankruptcy plan. The demonstration will be held at 5:30 pm in front of the DIA on Woodward Avenue in Detroit, Michigan.

“This art belongs to the people. Culture is a basic social right,” said Lawrence Porter, assistant national secretary of the SEP. “The sale of artworks at the DIA,” he continued, “can be stopped only through the independent intervention of the working class and youth of this city. Absolutely no confidence can be placed in any section of the political establishment, Democratic or Republican.”

The threat to the DIA comes from Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr, who last month contracted Christie’s Auction House to appraise the museum’s artwork. Orr, an unelected official with dictatorial power over the city’s finances, has, with the support of the local and state governments and the Obama administration, thrown Detroit into the bankruptcy courts.

He is acting on behalf of the bankers and the city’s major bondholders, who are determined to rip up all of the rights and gains of working people. Just last week, Orr announced plans to eliminate health care for retired city workers, replacing it with a minimal cash allotment to purchase private insurance. Plans are in place to slash pensions, gut city services, eliminate thousands of jobs and sell off public assets, including the Water & Sewerage Department and Belle Isle.

The preparations to sell masterpieces from the museum’s collection pose a threat to the existence of

the DIA itself. The museum’s director, Graham Beal, has said that the sale of any art would lead to a cut-off of funding and the closure of the DIA.

“We absolutely reject the position of the unions that selling off the art is necessary to save pensions and health care,” said Porter. “That is a capitulation to the bankers and their front man Orr that will lead to the destruction of the DIA *and* the jobs and living standards of working people. A stand must be taken!”

The Detroit Institute of Arts is one of the premier art museums in the US. In the 1920s, German-born director William Valentiner elevated the museum to world-class status with acquisitions that included Pieter Bruegel’s *The Wedding Dance*, Vincent Van Gogh’s *Self-Portrait* and *The Window* by Henri Matisse. Valentiner convinced Diego Rivera, well known for his revolutionary socialist sympathies and one of the premier artists of his day, to paint the famous murals of the auto industry in the DIA’s Garden Court.

“The development of the DIA was bound up with the conception that art should be broadly available to the people,” said Joseph Kishore, SEP national secretary. “This democratic conception is under attack. The corporate and financial elite, along with the politicians in both big-business parties, are seeking to impose the aristocratic principle that only the rich should have access to great art.”

Kishore said the SEP will reach out to workers, young people, artists and professionals to build the campaign in defense of the DIA. It will be the spearhead of a struggle to halt the bankruptcy, remove Orr, and restore all of the cuts in jobs, wages, pensions, health care and public services. The SEP plans to distribute leaflets at factories, workplaces and schools and in neighborhoods throughout the Detroit Metropolitan area.

A central focus of the campaign will be Wayne State University, located adjacent to the DIA in midtown Detroit. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) chapter at Wayne State will play a central role in the campaign.

“The attack on culture goes hand in hand with the dismantling of public education and the drive to take away every other social right of young people,” IYSSE National Secretary Andre Damon said. “The IYSSE will be fighting among students and youth to help mobilize the entire working class against the looting of one of the world’s great cultural treasures.”

SEP Assistant National Secretary Porter said: “We are not seeking to pressure the Democratic or Republican parties, or to make an appeal to the City Council or the trade unions. Our turn is to the working class, the only social force that can defend culture and the DIA.” He called on all people to get involved by visiting [defendthedia.org](http://defendthedia.org).

**Demonstration Details:**

Friday, October 4, 5:30 pm

In front of the DIA on Woodward Avenue

Detroit, Michigan

[Map](#)



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**