

“All the beautiful things are being taken away from us”

## Workers speak out against threat to sell off the DIA

Tim Rivers  
1 October 2013

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) from the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University campaigned at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) Saturday against the threat to sell off the museum's collection. The SEP and IYSSE will be sponsoring a demonstration Friday against the selloff. (See [defendthedia.org](http://defendthedia.org))

Workers and young people visiting the museum voiced their opposition to the threat from Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr to sell off the collection of the DIA, as well as the drive to gut city workers' pensions and sell off city assets, such as the water department, street lights, and Belle Isle Park.

Mike Dover, who works in the film industry, was visiting the museum with his wife and two daughters. He said he grew up in Detroit and had come to the museum as a child with his parents and classmates. “I think it is crazy for them to get rid of the DIA,” he said. “This was my first introduction to art when I was a kid.”

“I had never been taught anything about art until I came here. I think it is important for every generation. It is important for our kids and for the future,” he said. “They will bring their kids here.”

Mike's wife, Tanesha, who works for the city of Detroit, agreed. “The museum brings history and knowledge to the youth. I think they need that,” she said. “This is something that I have begun to expose them to, the rich culture that is here. Later on they can bring their kids.”

“It is really important that it stays open. If they take the art now, what will be next? They are trying to decrease the quality of our lives as city workers,” she

added. “They are cutting pay, pensions and medical benefits.”

Mike added, “Instead of selling things off, the city should restore its old buildings and not tear them down.”

Jayda, Mike's daughter, commented, “I liked many different exhibits. In the Egyptian rooms, you can see things that were made thousands of years ago.” Her sister Madison said she enjoyed the way the museum presents its exhibits. “They make you think,” she said.

Returning to the crisis gripping the Detroit, Tanesha said, “The City Council is looking out for themselves more than the people they are supposed to represent. All that is happening now started years ago when the City Council started taking away from city workers.”

Toriano Pugh studies fine art and entertainment at the Center for Creative Studies, located just north of the DIA. He was on his way to sketch portraits and figures in the museum. “Ever since I was a child, I have been enamored with the human figure and how to draw faces,” he added. “Since I learned how to do it, I have kept doing it over and over again.”

“The crisis in Detroit goes back to the financial crisis of 2008,” he explained. “The crisis is really nationwide and worldwide. The banks are making billions of dollars on Detroit. Instead of the banks going under, they were bailed out. While many people think this is limited to Detroit, it is not. All the big cities are in the same position,” he said. “What happens here will affect other cities.”

“The city has to sell everything it owns so the banks can get their money back on their investment. That is not right,” he added. “That is capitalism.”

Toriano grew up in Detroit, and his cousin, who

worked for the city for 30 years, has been forced to leave work because of health problems. “The city is not giving him his pension or his healthcare,” he said. “I do not think that is right.”

He said he plans to attend Friday’s demonstration, adding, “We have to educate ourselves about what is going on. If this happens here, it will happen in New York, Chicago, Indiana and New Jersey.”

Enny Chang and several friends were leaving the museum after it closed at five o’clock Saturday. They all grew up in Detroit and have come to the DIA for many years. “We love this place,” she said. “It has so many memories for us. It would be such a tragedy if we were to lose it.”

Enny explained that growing up in a working class neighborhood near Eight Mile Road, they would not have had access to the international and historical consciousness that emanates from a great museum had it not been for the Detroit Institute of Arts. “This place is epic,” she said. “It is such a part of history. If we did not have it, there is so much that we would never know.”

“Inner city kids like us would not be able to see these things from all over the world. It really is a remarkable place where, beginning with the Rivera Court. One can have intimate experiences with great works from the twentieth century, the fifteenth century and many ancient civilizations. It is an honor to be among art like this.

“We read about these things in books, but when we come here, it is right in front of us. To hear that it could be taken away just blows my mind.”

Responding to the demands of the Emergency Manager that pensions, jobs, wages, medical benefits and the museum itself must be cut to pay off bondholders, she asked, “Why do we have to pay for it? All the beautiful things are being taken away from us.”

The Socialist Equality Party also campaigned against the selloff of the DIA’s collection Saturday in the Detroit suburb of Ferndale. Donald McCuin, a disabled worker, said, “I think the art should stay there where it has always been. I like seeing wonderful things, and art is wonderful.”

Nancy, an office worker in the restaurant industry, echoed his sentiments. “It is disgusting. Everything is being sold off to the highest bidder. The city hasn’t been run efficiently, but the creditors are interested in

nothing but money. If you take away culture from the people, what do we have? We need art, libraries and museums.”

She added that she was opposed to Orr’s threat to slash the pensions of city workers. “The pensions belong to the workers because that is what they were promised; that’s all they have. The police and firefighters don’t have Social Security. If someone works 30 to 40 years how can you just come back and say, ‘Screw you’?”

“In my industry, they are making a lot of money, yet they refuse to raise the wages for the people who work for them. The whole thing is out of control. You have to pay the people. It’s the haves and the have-nots, and the gap is getting wider.”

Marcus Johnson, a young worker, said he was strongly opposed to the threat to sell the art. “To me art is more than paintings. It tells how the generations before us saw civilization. For example, the paintings by Diego Rivera of the Ford plant. It tells how Michigan was built by the working class.”

*The Socialist Equality Party and International Youth and Students for Social Equality are holding a demonstration on Friday, October 4 to oppose the selloff of the art at the Detroit Institute of Arts and the attack on Detroit workers. To learn more, visit [defendthedia.org](http://defendthedia.org).*



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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