

“The art at the DIA belongs to the people, not to the rich!”

SEP and IYSSE hold press conference to announce October 4 rally to defend the DIA

2 October 2013

The Socialist Equality Party and the Wayne State University branch of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality held a press conference on Tuesday at the Woodward entrance of the Detroit Institute of Arts.

At the press conference, SEP Assistant National Secretary Lawrence Porter and others involved in the campaign spoke about the demonstration being held in defense of the DIA on Fri day October 4th at 5:30 pm, in front of the DIA. Also present and speaking at the conference were Eli, a Detroit retiree; Greg Near, a Michigan Opera Theater Musician; and Zac, a member of the IYSSE at Wayne State University. (For more information, visit defendthedia.org)

The press conference was covered by local media, including Fox 2 News Detroit, whose report can be found [here](#).

Porter's statement is reprinted below.

In August, Detroit's unelected Emergency Manager, Kevyn Orr, hired Christie's auction house to appraise the value of the Detroit Institute of Arts' collections. Despite a public outcry, Orr has repeatedly said “all options are on the table,” making clear his contention that he has the legal power and is prepared to sell the artwork.

We are here to say, the art at the DIA belongs to the people, not to the rich! We are also here to say that if the art is to be defended, it is the working people and youth who must come to its defense.

For this reason the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality will be holding a demonstration on Friday, October 4 at 5:30 pm to mobilize working people to defend the DIA. We call on Metro Detroit residents to attend and

organize delegations from your factories and workplaces, neighborhoods and schools to attend this rally.

To take forward this struggle we are calling for the formation of the Committee to Defend the DIA to lead the campaign to defend culture and all the rights of the working class.

The possibility that the DIA could be fundamentally transformed, its collections cherry-picked or its accessibility to broad masses of people undermined, is a clear and present danger that no one should take lightly.

A column published Sunday by *Detroit News* editorial page editor Nolan Finley confirms that top officials involved in the bankruptcy proceedings are determined to sell at least a portion of the art. The column is titled, “DIA artwork will be sold.” Finley writes that he has spoken to “three people at the top of the decision-making in the bankruptcy process. All said, without question, that at least part of the collection will have to be—their word—‘monetized’ before the bankruptcy is resolved.” He makes it clear that Orr is reported to want a minimum of \$500 million in artwork sold to satisfy creditors.

The DIA is one of the truly great cultural gems of Detroit, the US and indeed the world. It is the soul of the city. The people of Detroit cannot stand by while financial barbarians pillage this priceless treasure trove of human culture!

No one should believe the claim that sale of the artwork will save workers' pensions, as certain union officials have stated. The money will go into the pockets of Wall Street creditors, including many who were bailed out with public funds in the financial crash of 2008.

Indeed, Orr has already announced plans to scrap the existing pension system for retirees, turning it into a 401(k) stock market investment scheme, while eliminating all cost of living increases. The emergency manager also aims to destroy the retiree health care program, sending retirees to Medicare (if they are over 65) or Obama's private insurance markets with a minimal stipend (if they are under 65). In opposition to the claims that Kevyn Orr is here to "help" Detroit, it is now evident that every gain and right that workers had won from decades of struggle is under attack by this representative of the banks and bondholders.

The attack on the DIA and culture is not solely about the money that can be confiscated by gutting the institution. Well aware of the growth of social opposition resulting from its policies, the ruling class in America is determined to keep the working class and youth in a state of ignorance so that poverty and subjugation are seen as the natural order of things, not the product of our present system, capitalism, and the exploitation of one class by another. Not only are the DIA, museums and libraries around the country under attack, funding for art and music classes in the public schools has been slashed to the bone.

We reject the claim that there are no resources to fully fund art, pensions, healthcare and public education and decent paying jobs. There are plenty of resources available to guarantee all the rights of working people, but these resources are monopolized by a tiny layer of the population at the top of the economic ladder.

We do not believe that any section of the corporate or political establishment can be relied upon to defend the DIA, or the pensions and rights of working people in Detroit. While bailing out the Wall Street banks, President Obama has refused to bail out Detroit, looking instead to use the "restructuring" of the city as a model for the entire country. In fact, the visit of top administration officials to Detroit last week confirms that Orr enjoys the full backing of the federal government. It was accepted by all of those on the platform that the pensions should be slashed and the artwork sold. The Democrats, from Obama on down to Detroit Mayor Bing and the City Council, are, no less than the Republicans, participants in the massive cuts against working people.

If the plans of Orr in Detroit and the ruling class

throughout the country are to be opposed, a struggle will have to be waged from below. It is the working people who will have to lead this fight.

We say to all working people who are concerned about education, culture, our history and our future a stand must be taken. Drawing the line here in Detroit can be the starting point of a nationwide counteroffensive of the working class.

Again, we urge all workers, youth and Detroit metropolitan area residents to join the campaign in defense of the DIA. The demonstration will give a voice to the vast majority of the population whose views are ignored.

Again, we urgently encourage you to join this struggle today. As a city worker told me the other day, "Once you lose it you will never get it back."



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