

Hundreds rally to oppose sale of art at the Detroit Institute of Arts

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Hundreds of workers and youth gathered at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) in midtown Detroit on Friday to denounce plans to sell off art at the museum in order to pay off the city's wealthy bondholders.

The demonstration was called by the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality as part of a struggle to mobilize the working class in opposition to the plans of Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr, a financial dictator appointed to do the bidding of the banks. Orr is demanding that the art be "monetized," while preparing to slash workers' pensions and health care and sell off other city assets.

Wide sections of the population turned out, including students from Wayne State University and other area schools, workers, teachers, artists and retirees. A delegation from the Griswold Tenants Association attended, insisting that the defense of culture be linked to the fight against plans to evict tenants from downtown Detroit as part of the "restructuring" plan overseen by Orr.

Just this week Orr repeated his insistence that art at the DIA be put "on the table" and declared that 35,000 of the museum's pieces were "free and clear" for possible sale. He has hired Christie's Auction House to appraise the masterworks.

Demonstrators carried placards with slogans such as "Cancel the Debt, Tax the Rich" and "The Art Belongs to the People, Not the Rich." Chants included, "Hey, hey corporate vultures, keep your hands off our culture!" and "Art is not for sale we say, hands off the DIA!" Workers and young people brought their own hand-lettered signs, with slogans such as "Gogh Away from the DIA," "Don't Show Me the Money, Show Me the Monet," and "**D**on't **I**ntern our **A**rt."

Local musicians, including the well-known Detroit drummer Efe and the Motor City Golden Boys,

provided music.

Members of the Socialist Equality Party addressed the crowd. Jerry White, the 2012 SEP presidential candidate, referred to the inscription on the front of the DIA building: "Dedicated by the people of Detroit to the knowledge and enjoyment of art." He said, "If you permit me to paraphrase Lincoln, we are rededicating ourselves to this proposition—that the art belongs to the people of Detroit, not the bankers and art speculators."

He continued: "The working class in Detroit has rich traditions of social struggle and egalitarian strivings. As Diego Rivera so powerfully demonstrated in his murals, the future of all humanity is bound up with the collective struggle of the working class to preserve and assimilate all the cultural achievements of mankind."

Larry Porter, assistant national secretary of the SEP, began by thanking those responsible for organizing the demonstration, including the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at both Wayne State University and the University of Michigan.

He said: "Above all, I would like to thank everybody here who turned out to express their opposition to the policies of Kevyn Orr, Governor Snyder and the entire political establishment. This demonstration is a major statement. The working class is advancing *its* interests.

"In all of the discussions taking place, they haven't come to us. They haven't asked working people what they think about what is going on. They have proceeded from the interests of the banks and big business. The people here represent the millions who are opposed to the policy of austerity and social cuts in America and the hundreds of millions all over the world.

"The issue of the DIA is not a local issue. It is bigger than a national issue. It is an international issue. In fact, it is a historical issue."

Pointing to the DIA behind him, he continued: “This building was built by working people. It does not belong to Orr or [Michigan Governor Rick] Snyder; it belongs to working people here.

“You may ask why socialists are calling this demonstration. There is a simple reason. We are the only ones who don’t accept the existing setup. We don’t accept the bankruptcy. We don’t accept the cuts in pensions. We don’t accept the cut in jobs. We don’t accept any of it.”

Porter said the Socialist Equality Party rejected the claim endlessly repeated by Democrats and Republicans that “there is no money.”

“There are 400 billionaires in America who have a combined net worth of over \$2 trillion,” he said. “This government is pouring \$85 billion into the stock market every month.

“There is money. The issue is who controls the wealth. The Democrats and Republicans are united in an assault against the working class. We are here to unite the working class.”

Porter rejected attempts to divide the working class along racial lines. “This is not an issue of black versus white,” he declared. “Or the suburbs versus Detroit. We are all in this fight.”

Joseph Kishore, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party, was the concluding speaker. “For the first time, the working people of Detroit are saying, ‘Enough is enough!’” Kishore declared. “This is where we draw the line. We are not going to accept the cuts or the sell-off of art. We are not going to accept the cuts to pensions and health care or the destruction of our schools. It is time to fight back.”

Kishore related the attack on the DIA to the assault on art and culture taking place across the United States, pointing to the recent closure of the New York City Opera and the one-year lockout of Minnesota Orchestra musicians.

“The ruling class says you have to give up everything,” said Kishore. “You have to give up your health care. You have to give up your pensions. You have to give up your jobs. They want to take everything. The working class has to say ‘No.’

“We are not here to put pressure on Orr or the City Council. We are not here to pressure Snyder or Obama. We are here to give independent expression to the interests of the working class.”

Kishore emphasized that the demonstration was not the end, but only the beginning of the fight to defend the DIA. He called on those attending to take the next step by joining the Committee to Defend the DIA being established by the SEP.

Some 50 workers and youth attended a meeting following the demonstration at nearby Wayne State University. There was an intensive discussion about the political situation, the significance of the demonstration, and how to take forward the fight to defend culture and all the rights of the working class. Those in attendance resolved to organize a meeting to plan further actions and take the struggle into the working class throughout the Detroit metropolitan area.

For more information and to get involved, visit defendthedia.org.



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