

Pittsburgh Symphony musicians' strike ends with pay cuts and concessions

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After a 55-day strike, musicians of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (PSO) were forced to accept massive concessions, including a 7.5 percent pay cut, the elimination of defined benefit pensions and the effective elimination of positions.

The defeat is part of a growing attack on the arts and orchestra musicians throughout the country in particular, as public funding is being cut and private funders are demanding more control in exchange for their contributions. Musicians of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra are still on strike, and musicians of the Pacific Symphony Orchestra, located in the San Gabriel Valley near Los Angeles, have been without a contract since August 31.

Details of the five-year contract with the PSO reveals the extent of the attack. Musicians will see their pay cut by 10.5 percent in the first and second year of the contract, although a donor has agreed to provide additional compensation reducing the wage cut to 7.5 percent. There is a 3.3 percent and a 2.0 percent raise in the third and fourth year, meaning that musicians' pay will be cut by 4.0 and 2.0 percent in each of those years. Only in the final year of the contract are wages restored to the current level.

Over the course of the contract, the cumulative impact of the wage cut will mean that musicians will have given up over \$22,000, not accounting for inflation. This amount grows to more than \$40,000 if even a modest inflation rate of 2 percent is figured in.

Current pensions will also be frozen, and the defined benefit pension will be replaced with a 401(k) plan. Three currently vacant positions will remain unfilled for the life of the contract, although the PSO has agreed to maintain the current number if further musicians leave.

While not part of the contract, 10 other staff positions

will be eliminated. CEO Melia P. Tourangeau will take a pay cut, although the amount has not been made public.

This is the fourth concessions contract that the musicians have accepted. In the run-up to the current round of negotiations, PSO management prepared a report that showed the organization would lose some \$20 million over the next five years.

In seeking to present the cuts to musicians and staff as equality of sacrifice, PSO Board of Directors Chair Devin McGranahan said, "There is no question that it is necessary for the management team and the musicians to embrace a significant amount of shared pain so that we can find a way forward."

It is easy for McGranahan to call upon musicians and staff to accept "shared pain." He himself is a multimillionaire and president of the Billing and Payments Group at Fiserv Inc., a company that specializes in corporate cost-cutting.

Both Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto and Allegheny County Chief Executive Richard Fitzgerald supported the attack on the musicians. Both Democrats, Peduto and Fitzgerald sit on the PSO Board of Directors that sanctioned the cuts and pressured the musicians to accept the cuts.

The attack on the PSO musicians underscores the class character of funding for the arts and arts education under capitalism. Foundations and large donors that account for about one third of the PSO's budget withheld or threatened to withhold donations until cuts were made. Music, art and the humanities are considered a privilege for the rich to enjoy rather than a basic human right.

For most workers, tickets to attend a PSO concert are out of everyday reach. Even tickets high in the balcony are more than \$40 each. A trip to the Carnegie Museum

for a family of four costs well over \$100.

Since 2009, cuts to education in Pennsylvania have meant that in most schools in the Pittsburgh region, art and music education has been cut to only one day a week or eliminated altogether.

Under the Obama administration, funding for the National Endowment for the Arts has been cut by nearly a third and is likely to be completely eliminated under the Trump administration.

The \$1.5 million annual deficit of the PSO is less than a third the cost of a single Predator drone. The PSO's entire \$32 million annual budget is roughly 1 percent of the cost of a single Virginia Class nuclear submarine.



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