Ten thousand unemployed apply for 90 jobs in Louisville, Kentucky

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Reflecting the increasingly desperate economic situation faced by millions, this week 10,000 unemployed workers applied for 90 jobs at a Louisville, Kentucky, General Electric (GE) plant.

The enormous response came within the space of just three days. GE had announced its intentions to add a second shift to its plant manufacturing washing machines in Appliance Park last Friday and began accepting applications on Monday. An earlier announcement by the GE plant calling for 13 maintenance workers who would receive $23 per hour drew 700 applicants.

The GE jobs promised a mere $13 per hour, plus benefits including dental coverage and eye care. The same jobs had previously paid $19 per hour until the decision by the IUE-CWA Local 761 to accept concessions in May, which included cutting wages for new workers and future hires.

Unemployment in Kentucky reached 11.1 percent in August. A total of 3,200 manufacturing jobs were lost in the state in the same month. Over the year ending in August, some 35,300 manufacturing jobs were lost in Kentucky.

Dr. Justine Detzel, the chief labor market analyst for Kentucky's Office of Unemployment and Training, commented after the release of these numbers, "This marks the 14th time in the last 15 months industrial employment has fallen. Job losses were concentrated in the durable goods subsector, reflecting layoffs at a number of automobile parts manufacturers, the closing of another automobile parts producer, and the start of a lengthy temporary shutdown of a durable goods plant."

The loss of better-paying manufacturing jobs will have a sharp impact on poverty in the state, which already stood at 17.3 percent for 2008. According to the latest Census Bureau figures, one in eight families and one in four children live in poverty. Foreclosures, particularly in Louisville, continue to rise due to a spike in unemployment.

A testament to the destruction of the manufacturing sector, no less than 80 percent of the workers applying for the 90 GE jobs were able to claim factory experience on their applications.

The response of the Kentucky state government to widespread unemployment and a major crisis within the state budget has been entirely reckless and shortsighted. Social programs, made all the more necessary by the economic crisis, have been slashed. Upon entering office in 2007, Governor Steve Beshear, a Democrat, almost immediately began a fight to bring casino gambling to the state, a mercenary industry that would only prey on the poor and working class population. Short-term attempts to increase tax revenue include hosting the 2010 World Equestrian Games in the state, as well as a major Nascar racing event.

As federal stimulus funds will have run out by 2012, the governor is preparing the state for further hardships in the future. Hinting at further cuts to social programs, he spoke before a Downtown Rotary Club in Louisville in September, saying the budget crises yet to be faced will "make us decide what we consider sacred and what is expendable."

The rush by 10,000 unemployed workers to claim the small number of jobs offered by GE is a phenomenon not unique to Kentucky. All over the country, workers are desperately trying to find jobs or secure assistance under conditions in which available jobs and resources are completely inadequate.

Thousands have flocked to free, temporary clinics set up in Texas and California in search of health care they could not otherwise afford. In Detroit this week, 50,000

residents sought housing aid, of which there was only enough to assist some 3,400 people in need.

These and similar incidents around the country have made clear the inability of the capitalist system to meet the most basic social needs of masses of people.

At a time when trillions of dollars are available to bail out the banks, workers are told there is no money to provide even the most elementary necessities of life.

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