

Detroit job fair draws thousands

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Thousands of Detroit area residents lined up downtown Friday at a jobs fair, waiting in long lines to apply for some 400 positions. The event was moved to the Cobo Hall conference center after organizers recognized that the potential size of the fair would far exceed space at the city's Work Place Building, the originally scheduled location.

Yet another indication of the deepening economic crisis in the region, the jobs fair is the latest in a series of jobs and assistance events that have drawn large crowds to Cobo Hall this year. In March, the city sponsored a similar job fair, which attracted as many as 10,000 residents. Last month, as many as 50,000 residents turned out to try to secure heating aid intended to serve only 3,400 people.

The city's population is confronted by increasingly dire employment prospects. Presently the official unemployment rate in Detroit stands at 28.9 percent, and more than a third of the population lives in poverty. These depression-level conditions have driven thousands to desperately seek out any means of financial subsistence.

Officials from the Detroit Workforce Development Department, Neighborhood Legal Services Michigan, and Mayor David Bing's office told the WSWs the fair was a joint effort to create job opportunities in Detroit. Mark Jones, a spokesman for the joint operation, said the fair was "the fulfillment of the commitment of Mayor Bing to bring jobs to Detroit."

Far from "bringing jobs to Detroit," Bing has spearheaded an assault on teachers and city workers, while presiding over the continued economic collapse of the city.

People looking for work were frustrated that the event had been billed as a fair where employers would be accepting resumes and interviewing for positions. Once they got through the long lines, however, job seekers were told to simply apply online and given web

addresses.

Most of the jobs advertised at the fair were for low-wage service jobs. Wal-Mart offered 300 job openings, which applicants told WSWs reporters were mainly entry-level part-time and temporary work (see accompanying video).

"It's a waste of time," Movita Gresham told WSWs reporters as she exited the conference hall. "I have a masters degree and am overqualified for most of those positions. I need work, but 'Go online,' that's all they have for us. It's a waste of time."

A representative for Kmart told the WSWs that the company was offering only part-time, seasonal work—stocking shelves at night, manning customer service during the holiday season, and running registers. While the company was advertising only 20 to 40 positions, the representative estimated they would receive between 3,000 and 4,000 applications.

The WSWs spoke to Freddie Kelley, who said he had recently been released from jail and found it extraordinarily difficult to secure work. "I think Obama should create more jobs. To find openings you have to fill out a lot of applications online, and I don't know a lot about computers. I've been looking for work for a month. I have a job interview with a temp service, but I've applied at Wal-Mart, Kmart, Farmer Jack's, all the fast food chains, and got nothing. I'm in skilled trades, in welding, but there's no work. I have to feed my family."

Anthony Screen told the WSWs, "The government can bail out the banks with \$23 trillion. Look, are there 23 trillion people in the United States? They could give every single one of us a million dollars. What they're doing doesn't make any sense. You can't find balance in the economy by cutting people's jobs."

Dwayne Harris, who's on probation for a nonviolent offense, expressed frustration over applying for numerous jobs. "I've been out of work now for one-

and-a-half years. I worked at security jobs around, but there aren't a lot of jobs out there."

Dwayne added, "I went to apply at a Popeye's Chicken and the manager told me, 'We have hired everybody we can hire, and we'd rather hire high school kids so we can lower the wages.'"

Ryan Haire, a 20-year-old unemployed Taylor man, recently moved to the area from Kentucky in search of work. He told the WSWS that of the employer tables he had visited, perhaps five companies were actually hiring. Most were merely handing out web addresses. "I've been looking for work since March. I want to go to college," he said, "but I'm afraid I'll just come out with a lot of debt and still not be able to find a job."

Ryan Caruso, 23, of Canton, said he had recently filled out 20 applications, most of them in person, but was told no position was available for his skill set. He expressed exasperation at the fact that the fair had been billed as an event where job seekers could apply on the spot. "It's a joke," he said. "People get all dressed up and come down here, wait in line, and are handed a sticker with a web site on it."



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