

Jesse Jackson, UAW hustle votes for Democrats at Detroit “jobs” march

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The “Rebuild America: Jobs, Justice and Peace” march held in Detroit August 28, had nothing to do with rebuilding the devastated city, creating jobs, or achieving peace.

The event, called by UAW President Bob King and the Reverend Jesse Jackson, was little more than a campaign rally for the Democratic Party, which has overseen wholesale job and wage cuts in Detroit and nationally while escalating military violence around the world.

The demonstration was carried out under entirely false pretenses. Presented by Jackson, the UAW, and their backers among middle class ex-radical groupings as a focal point for popular opposition to mass unemployment and social devastation, the march was in reality quite the opposite. It was in fact a demonstration in support of the American ruling class drive, spearheaded by the Obama administration, to put in place a permanent lowering of wages and living conditions in the US.

The relatively small turnout, perhaps 2,000, in a city where the real unemployment rate is close to 50 percent, speaks to the high degree of alienation of the working class from the Democratic Party, the trade unions and the establishment civil rights organizations.

Many of the marchers were lower-level union functionaries or members of various middle class protest groups. There was only a relative handful of working class youth and students, those hardest hit by the jobs crisis. The miserable turnout came in spite of a buildup for the event in local television, newspapers, and radio, and appeals from Jackson and prominent

Detroit politicians at local churches.

The date selected, August 28, coincided with the Michigan Democratic convention in Detroit and provided a convenient platform for hosts of local, state and federal politicians, including the Democratic nominee for governor of Michigan, Virg Bernero.

In addition to Jackson and King, prominent speakers included: Congressman John Conyers from Detroit, chair of the Congressional Black Caucus; US Senator Debbie Stabenow; Congresswoman Maxine Waters from California; and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) President Mary Kay Henry, whose union is heavily bankrolling the Democratic midterm election campaign.

The appearance of SEIU President Henry alongside King on the platform is a signal that the rival bureaucratic factions, the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win Coalition, are putting aside their unprincipled differences to gear up for an intense election campaign on behalf of the Democrats.

In 2005 the SEIU and several other unions left the AFL-CIO to form Change to Win. Recently the SEIU has made overtures towards a rapprochement, negotiating an agreement to pool financial resources to support “pro-union candidates”, i.e. Democrats, in the midterm elections, funded by \$88 million in union dues taken from their “members.”

Notable for his absence from the speakers list was Detroit Mayor Dave Bing, a sponsor of the event. Organizers evidently felt his appearance might be risky given widespread anger over his attacks on city workers and teachers.

Speakers made no mention of the policies of the Obama administration, which have patently failed to ease the jobs crisis. Indeed, there was hardly a reference to Obama. The typical speech consisted of a

rhetorical jab at Wall Street, an invocation of God and American nationalism, followed by the inevitable call to get out the vote in November.

In opening his remarks King underscored the UAW's craven subservience to the auto corporations, declaring "I am not here to divide anyone, I am not here to tear anyone down." In fact in a recent speech to auto executives King explicitly rejected the concept that the union had any role in defending the conditions of workers, declaring, "The 21st-century UAW recognizes that flexibility, innovation, lean manufacturing and continuous cost improvement are paramount in the global marketplace."

King, like several other speakers, attempted to divert attention from the manifest refusal of the Obama administration to take any significant action to create jobs or relieve mounting social misery by blaming Republican obstruction. "Everyone here worked to elect Obama." King declared, "The mistake we made is we did not keep marching against the outrageous Republican policies."

In fact, Obama has explicitly and repeatedly rejected any measures by the government to create jobs, declaring that job creation is the role of the private sector. In the face of record long-term unemployment and with one out of six Americans either unemployed or underemployed, Obama's incessant invocation of "recovery" is reminiscent of President Herbert Hoover's promises at the beginning of the Great Depression that "prosperity is just around the corner."

To the extent the administration has a "jobs plan," it is to boost exports by driving down the wages of US workers toward Third World levels.

The White House's reorganization of the US auto industry served as a trial run. With the indispensable role of the UAW, the threat of bankruptcy was used to force massive wage and benefit cuts on workers in plants that were not shuttered. On this basis, the "revival" of the US auto industry—the relative increase on returns for major investors—is seen as a blueprint for the entire US economy.

The UAW is currently attempting to force workers at a GM stamping plant in Indianapolis to take a 50 percent pay cut to facilitate the sale of the facility to a corporate raider. Workers there have courageously

rejected the union executives' demands, on August 15 chasing UAW officials campaigning for the cuts out of a union hall.

In his speech, Jackson appealed to residents of Detroit to support Democrats and to pray—while providing no indication of which activity was less likely to work. He also called for "fair trade" policies—that is, economic nationalist policies that center on tariff protection and cheap wages in the US. Jackson also chastised city workers and teachers for moving to homes outside the city, calling for the enforcement of residency rules for public employees.

This brazenly right-wing agenda did not dampen the enthusiasm of a host of middle class ex-left groups, including Workers World, Labor Notes and the Democratic Socialists, who hailed the event as "historic" and as the "rebirth of the labor and civil rights movement." Under conditions where millions of workers are moving to the left, these organizations seek to prevent the mounting social anger from finding any independent expression.

The ex-radicals' rosy portrayal of the likes of King and Jackson is no accident. Members of these groups occupy leading posts in the unions in Detroit and are closely linked with the black elite in the Democratic Party.

A genuine struggle for jobs requires that the working class break from the Democratic Party and the two party system and establish its own political party. This requires a struggle against all those middle class apologists for the Democratic Party that seek to sow illusions that this party of Wall Street can be pressured to act in the interests of working people.

The militant traditions of working class struggle must be revived. This will not take place through the existing unions, which function as arms of corporate management in the factories and workplaces. Workers must build new, mass organizations based on intransigent opposition to the capitalist system.



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