

# Masses of US workers apply for low-wage jobs at McDonald's

James Brewer  
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McDonald's restaurant, the world's largest hamburger fast food chain, declared April 19 their "National Hiring Day" in the US. The company is seeking to fill 50,000 positions throughout the country, citing an uptick in business and a need to increase the number of stores that stay open 24 hours a day.

An effort is being made in the media to portray the McDonald's hiring day as a positive indicator of the state the US economy. Local news outlets throughout the US have been promoting the event, directing job-seekers to McDonald's' online application web site and local restaurants, where they can apply.

In an interview with a local ABC news reporter in Chicago, John Challenger of the outplacement consultancy firm, Challenger, Gray and Christmas, was asked if he viewed Wednesday's event as an indication that the job market is recovering.

"It certainly is," he said. "Think back in the recession, when we heard about big mega-numbers it was usually about layoffs. Now we're seeing these big hiring announcements by companies like McDonald's and it supports what's happening in the Labor Department data. We've seen now two consecutive months with over 200,000 new jobs created and that is driving unemployment down for the first time."

The effort to portray the creation of 50,000 low-wage jobs—McDonald's' starting salary hovers around \$8 an hour—as a positive sign is an insult to the millions of Americans struggling to make ends meet.

The dead-end character of this type of job is aptly summarized by Merriam Webster online dictionary, which defines the term "McJob" as: "a low-paying job that requires little skill and provides little opportunity for advancement."

McDonald's is notorious for keeping an abundance of workers at less than full-time status, in order to

preclude the possibility of overtime pay or having to offer substantial benefits. Even if a McDonald's new-hire were to work 40 hours a week, his or her gross income would be less than \$15,000 a year—roughly the figure that the US Census Bureau defines as the "poverty threshold" for a household of two people. This figure is itself absurdly low.

The number of applicants who responded to the hiring day event reflects the desperate conditions facing US workers. Broken down on average, each McDonald's store in the country had four new positions as a result of the expansion. Nonetheless, at many locations hundreds applied.

News media interviewed workers of all ages who were seeking work in the restaurants. Some workers had been laid off for years and were hoping for a chance to have any form of income. Jobs once reserved for teenagers are now attracting people of all ages.

When Challenger was asked if the McDonald's event was an indication that the economy was improving, he replied, "Well, let's hope that we can continue to see companies like McDonald's stepping out, putting out more jobs, responding to the fact that consumers are beginning to spend again, the economy is ticking again. This is what will drive, not only first-time claims coming down, but the real unemployment market coming down. And these are good jobs."

This is a lie. Workers and youth who have applied at their local McDonald's know better, but they have no other choice.

The addition of thousands of positions at an employer such as McDonald's is, however, indicative of a significant trend taking hold throughout the US economy; to whatever degree large manufacturers and service companies are adding jobs, they are doing so on the basis of poverty wages. In the auto industry, for

example, the major companies are in the process of increasing the number of employees at their plants who work for \$14 an hour, as opposed to the average \$28 an hour previously earned by workers at these enterprises. They are doing so with the active support of the trade unions.

The WSWS spoke to job seekers outside of McDonald's restaurants in the Detroit area on Wednesday.

Keysia Wynn recently graduated from a course at Evers Institute in Southfield, where she studied to be an administrative medical assistant. She said, "I don't like the idea of working in fast food, as far as getting a job, but the hospitals want you to have experience." Her mother works for Chrysler and had talked at home about the company's efforts to cut wages of the workers.

Keysia arrived at a local store with family members who also wanted to apply at about 2:30 p.m. They were told that they were too late. "They said it was supposed to be from one-to-five, but they ran out of applications."

A laid-off worker from Technicolor, a DVD manufacturing company, complained that there were only two managers to conduct the interviews and that queuing process was unfair. "They told me to come back at one o'clock, but then they had people lined up since twelve." She added "I'm here from Michigan Works [the state workforce agency]. They had us do applications and sent us here, but when we get here, they won't accept them. We have to wait in line and fill out their applications. I'm still waiting to get an interview."



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