

“This isn’t even a band-aid”

Thousands line up for jobs fair in Los Angeles

A WSWWS reporting team
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Thousands of unemployed and underemployed people converged on a Los Angeles church Wednesday in hopes of finding work at a jobs fair sponsored by the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC).

The jobs fair was the last that the CBC has held as part of their “For the People” jobs tour. The principal aim of these job fairs, which offered very few actual jobs, has been to attempt to bolster support for the Obama administration, which has done nothing to address the chronic jobs crisis in the US.

Similar events have been held in Cleveland, Miami, Atlanta and Detroit, attracting a total of 20,000 people. They followed a standard pattern. CBC members held town hall meetings to promote Obama and the Democratic Party, blaming the jobs crisis on “Tea Party Republicans.” Jobseekers showed up early for the fair and waited long hours in line. There were workshops on job preparation, resume writing and other topics. Would-be applicants later found that many of the businesses were not even accepting resumes.

In Los Angeles some CBC members held a meeting Tuesday night, where they touted the “jobs bills” they have proposed and which would not even make a dent in LA County’s 12.3 percent unemployment rate, over 20 percent for the county’s black population. Representative Maxine Waters made tepid criticisms of Obama while nonetheless urging attendees to support him in the 2012 elections.

People began lining up Wednesday at the entrance to the Crenshaw Christian Center at around 4:00 a.m. By 7:00, the line had already wrapped around a city block. Jesse Jackson and some CBC members came by before the 9:00 opening to give a pep talk and lead the crowd in chanting. After registering, attendees were directed into the church in groups of a few hundred at a time. There they heard motivational speeches, after which

they were led outside into an open area where businesses had set up booths.

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting crew spoke to some of the jobseekers.

Essex, 21, is a recent university graduate who returned to his native California from Louisiana. He complained about the organization of the event. “They could have told us at least that we were going to be given just a lot of web sites, so we would have to go back and apply first. You come all the way thinking that you might be able to talk to someone from the company, get an interview, but all they do is forward you to a web site.”

Brian also criticized the perfunctory practice of giving out web sites. “Some people don’t have computers. I don’t have a computer!”

“Right now I have three jobs, side jobs, but I don’t have an actual 9 to 5. That’s what I need, and I need something that will help me take care of my family. And I don’t have benefits or anything! It’s a struggle. I’m willing to do whatever it takes for me and my family to survive.”

Josue Sierra said that his unemployment benefits just ran out after 99 weeks without a job. “I used to work for a high-end furniture store. After four and a half years, they started laying people off slowly, one by one. Things were getting so slow, we were working only two or three days a week.

“We need to get jobs. The banks got bailed out. That was our money that was just handed to them. Why can’t we get bailed out too?”

Letisha Dickerson said, “I got a cosmetology certificate and was only able to get part-time jobs. My teacher used to work five days a week, six hours a day. They took away her hours, and now she teaches three days a week, four hours a day.”

Linda Luhrsen came with a group of young people wearing California Conservation Corps uniforms. They all were coming to the job fair to find jobs. The youth explained that the CCC was for young people between 18 and 25 years of age. A one-year contract involves working with emergency response agencies, receiving training in dealing with floods, fires, and other natural disasters.

Linda works in the VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) national service program. “I’m finishing my second year in VISTA on September 8. I’ve been an advisor to these young people in the California Conservation Corps. I get paid the same as they do, \$12,000 a year. That’s the government for you! It’s only minimum wage. I’m here because I’m only allowed to do two years service. After that, I’m unemployed.”

Asked about the budget situation at CCC, Linda replied: “We’ve been cut. It used to be that Sacramento funded the Corps. Now, a large part of the funding comes from working for other agencies like CalTrans or CalFire. What the state government pays has gone down just in the two years that I’ve been in VISTA. It keeps getting worse and worse.”

Characterizing the jobs fair as “smoke and mirrors,” Linda added, “This isn’t even a band-aid, and the people who are really responsible for this situation are so far beyond our being able to talk to, that this is probably the best we can expect.”

Simone is a recent graduate with a sociology degree. She had started off seeking a degree in nursing, but the wait list was four years. She changed her major to sociology after taking a class on social inequality. She has been looking for a job since June.

“Almost for half the people here, it’s really no help. They just tell you to go online to apply. Yeah, everybody’s trying to go ‘green’...

“The issue to me is greed. I think if we spread everything out and made it more equal, I think even the rich would benefit from it. I feel like equality just makes more sense to me.

“I think people at the top, they want to stay at the top, they’re afraid of losing what they have, so they just take as much as they can. I don’t know what people can do. It’s looking pretty grim right now.”

Asked about her opinion of Obama, Simone said, “I think Obama kind of fell through on a few things that

he promised initially going into office, but I feel like Obama is only one person, there are so many things that go into government affairs, for us to just say Obama is the reason why, I think that’s unfair.”

Paul Marshall, a producer of a local radio program, had a different evaluation. He told the WSWs, “This is a big ripoff by the black politicians in the Congressional Black Caucus. They’ve sold us out. There aren’t any jobs. They only talked to you about preparing for jobs, and you only get referrals. They’re telling people a lie. Nobody has any confidence in Obama either due to the fact that the jobs situation is getting worse.”



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