

Workers and youth speak at Detroit Labor Day

“We are spending billions on wars, and we have people who have no jobs.”

Shannon Jones
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Thousands of workers marched down Woodward Avenue in Detroit Monday in the city’s annual Labor Day parade.

Although there are still 600,000 union members in Michigan, including tens of thousands of auto workers, the official union delegations were relatively small and the parade attracted only several thousand marchers. The turnout reflects both the overall decline in union membership and the alienation of wide layers of workers from the union apparatus under the impact of decades of betrayals.

Among the larger delegations were the United Auto Workers and Teamsters as well as local, state and federal government workers. Union officials hailed President Obama—who spoke after the conclusion of the march—even as his administration continues to attack auto workers and teachers, and slashes social programs, which tens of millions of workers and retirees depend upon. (See: “Obama on Labor Day: No measures to address historic jobs crisis”)

Leading the parade was a contingent of Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians, who waged a six-month strike against massive concessions in 2010-2011. The UAW and Metro Detroit AFL-CIO isolated the strike and the musicians ultimately had to accept pay cuts of more than 20 percent.

While the march attracted large numbers of union officials and their supporters, the *World Socialist Web Site* encountered many critically minded workers and young people who were troubled by the policies of the Obama administration and its indifference to the jobs crisis.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party distributed a SEP statement headlined, “Labor Day 2011: The failure of the capitalism and the Obama administration.”

Outlining a socialist program to defend jobs, the statement called for an emergency public works program to put 20 million back to work in high-paying productive jobs; a halt to evictions and foreclosures and the rescinding of all budget cuts.

Many workers purchased copies of the SEP program, “The Breakdown of Capitalism and the Fight for Socialism in the United States” and the pamphlet *Thirty years since the PATCO strike*.

WSWS reporters asked a number of workers and young people who attended the march to give their views on the social crisis in the United States and the policies of the Obama administration.

Linda Smith is retired and lives in the Detroit enclave of Hamtramck. She told the WSWS she was concerned about the cuts in Social Security, “I draw my husband’s pension. If there is a cutoff for work, it should be above \$700 per month. Those are not very many hours of work and the cost of living is high.

“I think the job situation is terrible. I think history is repeating itself. It is going back. We need to be going forward. They should reduce the cost of living. The rent is high and so are utilities and food.”

Joaquin Hoolison, a self-employed musician in Detroit, told the WSWS:

“I am a victim of the jobs situation. I went to Specs Howard School of Arts. Graduated, I hit the streets for a job and couldn’t find one. My wife is currently unemployed. We are considering moving out of Michigan, which hurts, because this is home. I was born and raised right here in Detroit. I don’t want to have to leave my home. But we just might have to in order to find work.

“I voted for the president as a low-income father. And understand they are selling tickets to hear him speak. You can vote for the president free of charge, but you have to pay to hear him speak? I think it’s a shame. We are in Detroit, this is the capital of broke, the capital of ‘I don’t have a job’; the capital of ‘I have to do what I have to do to feed my family.’

“We are spending billions of dollars on wars, and we have people in this country who have no jobs, who have no food. A lot of people are hungry and we are spending billions of dollars to stabilize or destabilize nations. It’s about helping those in power.

“As I recall this nation was built by the people. We got tired of being misrepresented and we decided to form our own country, one for the people by the people. What’s going on right now is a shame. Because it is no longer ‘for the people by the people.’ It’s all about the rich and the poor. It’s not about black and white.

Mike, a sheet metal worker said, “It was bankers who carried out the whole bailout during the Bush administration. They brought in bankers, they all got together and they made this \$700 billion bailout that was all for the banks. All this deregulation lets these corporations and banks run wild. They need watchdogs and they need watchdogs to watch the watchdogs. I hate to be that way. But, it is necessary.

“The separation of wealth here in the United States is bigger than Europe. It’s 40 times there where it’s a thousand percent here, but they are trying to catch up.”

His friend added, “I can’t meet my house payment and I can’t get a new loan because I am below 125 percent underwater on my house. I have never been late on a house payment. They talk about stimulus packages but if they would just let the honest people who make their house payments on time and faithfully have a reduction in principal there would be a stimulus for the country.

“It is crazy, everything my parents taught me doesn’t work.”

Tia Horner and David Brown, students at Henry Ford Community College, spoke to the WSWS.

Tia said, “It is horrible in Detroit. There are little to no jobs for anybody right now. Everywhere you look it is either you are not qualified or you are overqualified and they don’t want you. There are so many good, hardworking people who are out here unemployed. When they lay off people at the schools, students get the worst impact of it. My nieces and nephews are in the Detroit

public schools and a lot of the good teachers they used to have got laid off.”

She added, “I wish Obama had more of a job plan, especially for us in Michigan and Detroit. When they had the auto bailout that hit the economy hard. We have to take action and go for it.

David said, “It is terrible to think that youth can’t get jobs nowadays. No matter what your education, it is really hard to even find the smallest form of work. They don’t want to train you so it is not working if you don’t have any job experience.

“They claim teachers make too much so they lay them off and bring in these younger ones without much experience at all. Instead of keeping experienced teachers they are looking to give lower paychecks to people. It is ridiculous.”

David spoke about the wars in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan. “I don’t even know what they are fighting for anymore. After we got the people we are looking for, what is the point of staying over there now? I don’t get it.

Tia concluded, “The way the president describes it, the troops are over there to control civil order. But, we are losing more and more people every day. Are we fighting because of their freedom or because of their oil?

John, a retired teacher said, “As a schoolteacher, we were always fighting the administration. Especially in Grosse Pointe, they didn’t give up anything. I was attracted to Marxism by my father. When he emigrated here from Russia, he found that with what we faced we were always going to be in a struggle. He passed that down to me.

“His family was actually better-off peasants. But when he came here, he recognized that society was divided between the haves and the have-nots; and we were part of the latter.

“The unions are impotent. Unless I’m wrong, the only recourse is socialist revolution.”



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