

SEP campaigns at Detroit job fair

A WSWWS reporting team
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A Socialist Equality Party campaign team spoke to workers and young people Saturday attending a job fair in downtown Detroit about the policies of SEP candidates Jerome White for president and Phyllis Scherrer for vice president. Thousands of job seekers packed the Compuware building to apply for positions with mortgage lender Quicken Loans. The company said it is seeking to fill 1,000 positions, including information technology and mortgage banking.

The high turnout at the event, despite the relative lack of publicity, speaks to the depth of the jobs crisis in the United States. New economic data show that US economic growth slowed in the first quarter of 2012, rising by only 2.2 percent, well below the consensus forecast by economists of 2.6 percent.

The rate of economic growth is below the level needed to reduce overall unemployment, which officially stands at 8.2 percent nationally and 8.5 percent in Michigan. The official unemployment rate in Detroit is now 17.8 percent. These figures do not include workers that have either dropped out of the labor force because they cannot find work or are underemployed. When those factors are taken into consideration, the real unemployment rate in Detroit is closer to 50 percent.

Unemployment in Detroit is expected to push higher in coming months as city officials prepare the layoff of thousands of workers. The proposed cuts will hit broadly, targeting the fire department, libraries, parks and cultural centers.

SEP campaigners explained that the right to a job is the most basic social right, and that White and Scherrer have called for an emergency public works program to put the unemployed to work. They noted that the Obama administration was using mass unemployment to enforce drastic cuts in wages and benefits in order to turn the US into a low wage producer able to compete with countries such as Mexico and China.

Kevin Rhodes said, “My field of study is business management. I pick up jobs here and there to make ends meet. I do a lot of shipping work, building, but I am trying to get a job in my field. It is a competitive market. It has been many years since I have been in my field. That was 2007 with Sears. When Sears combined with K-Mart a lot of jobs were eliminated.

“It has been like a seesaw with me. I am from Chicago originally. I have been here since 2005. I have probably been in 9 different jobs in six years. In my last job I actually got promoted just before they went out of business.”

Kevin said he supports the policies of the Obama administration. SEP campaigners explained that the Obama administration had made unlimited funds available to bail out the Wall Street bankers who were responsible for the financial catastrophe in 2008, but rejected any direct role for the government in reducing unemployment. The Obama administration opposed public works programs to put the unemployed to work, insisting that all job creation had to come from the private sector.

Kevin replied, “The working class people get the raw end of the deal. It is all the big companies that are benefiting.”

Darlene works part time as a janitor. “It is hard. I am still fighting for my unemployment. Everybody needs a job. I don’t like it. Too many people are out of work.”

Sonya Bell said, “I have been out of work since February. My field is account management and customer support. I have sent out 50 resumes and gotten one interview.

“I am living on unemployment. If I had a family it would be tough. I can’t go out to dinner, it is just maintenance. There are a lot of unemployed people out there. It is like there are 1,000 people applying for one job.”

Sonya commented on the bank bailouts. “The big

boys get their payoffs and got to keep everything. I think the (CEO) bonuses are disgusting. They dictate their own bonuses. The little people get nothing.”

She also expressed opposition to the continuing war in Afghanistan. “I think it is time for the troops to come home. Enough money has been spent. Enough people have died.”

She agreed with the call by the SEP for a public works program to hire the unemployed. “If you leave it to private industry to create jobs, you are not sure they will ever do it. If you have a road to build or a dam to build, the work has to be done, so why not let the government do it?”

Charisse Collins spoke on the situation facing job seekers. “Across the country as a whole it is bad. I am still working, but people are leaving and being let go. You have to be prepared. They are cutting hours. When you are used to working 40 hours a week and get cut to 25, it is bad. I am in IT customer service. There is a high turnover. It is very repetitive. It has been difficult.

“I don’t have benefits, and I work full time. I went from paying 50-50 to paying everything. Medical is so expensive. Everyone needs medical. My mom needs many different medications.

“I am helping my sister maintain her household. She has two kids. I moved in with her. She just went back to work. Not everyone has that kind of support.”

Referring to the big turnout at the jobs fair she commented, “This is just a piece of what is going on.”

“I think those who created the crash should be held accountable. I don’t see how they got bailed out when so many people needed it more than they did.”



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