

Thousands line up at Chicago job fair for less than 60 positions

Kristina Betinis
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For the first time, on November 9, the city of Chicago held a job fair in the impoverished neighborhood of Englewood. People reported having lined up in front of Kennedy King College beginning in the very early hours of Friday morning. By nine o'clock on Friday, thousands were waiting to get in, expecting to interview, leave a résumé, or fill out an application. More than 3,000 had attended by the time the event closed.

Unemployed and underemployed workers expressed frustration and anger at the organizers for raising expectations about the fair. Workers complained that they had waited in line for hours in the cold, only to learn they would not have the chance to interview or leave a résumé.

No interviews or on-the-spot hires were taking place. Many did nothing more than fill out an online form for one of 55 job openings on one of the few computers available, applications which anyone could have filled out from home or a public library. Some left not even having filled out the online application.

Earlier this year, Chicago Transit Authority held a fair to fill 400 positions, where 4,000 turned out, and the Department of Water Management held a fair to fill 75 laborer apprentice positions, where 10,000 turned out.

While the official unemployment rate in Chicago is lower than that in other metro areas, including its own suburbs, the number of people working service jobs for low or very low wages has risen, which has forced workers to seek out second and third jobs. Unemployment among African Americans in Chicago is third highest in the US, at over 19 percent.

Keyonya Mills said about the fair, "They could have said, go online, fill out the application. If you do not know how to fill out an application, come to Kennedy-

King College and we'll train you. They have people wrapped around this entire building thinking this is a job fair and this is not a job fair."

"This isn't really a job fair, it's just a meet-and-greet. It's nothing, they're just telling you what's going on with their business, but they're not really receiving any applications, or any résumés. It's nothing," Michael Williams told CBS.

Johnta Montgomery, father of two, told the *Sun Times*, "I lost my job at Nordstrom two years ago and have been looking since. I've put in a million applications everywhere. I'm willing to do anything. But there's nothing. It's just dry out here. We need help."

Mayor Rahm Emanuel made an appearance at the fair, where he was met by frustrated people desperate to work.

One worker said, "Excuse me Mr. Mayor, I have a question. I came down here, I stood in line for four hours, expecting to get a job interview, or fill out an application. And I stood in line for four hours to get a flyer telling me to go online."

Emanuel's comments revealed the real purpose of the event. "The reason there's frustration is not for the two to three hours here, it's for the two to three years they've been waiting [for a job]," he said. "My goal was to get us organized ... our job is to help people find a job. Even if we don't have it, to get them organized."

Some expressed anger at being used as props at what was obviously a media event intended to polish the mayor's image, which has been tarnished by his administration's relentless attacks on city services and worker pay and benefits—the most recent of which was an austerity contract imposed on 26,000 Chicago teachers.

The Englewood neighborhood where the event was

held, has been ravaged by deindustrialization and cost-cutting. Long-term unemployment—and the denial of basic services through decades of cuts and closures to schools and medical service providers—has created immense suffering. Since 1980, the population has dropped by half, most forced out through foreclosure. The official poverty rate stands at 44 percent, and official unemployment hovers around 30 percent.



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