

Workers at 50th Anniversary of March on Washington speak about Obama, war and inequality

A WSWS reporting team
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Reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to workers who attended the 50th anniversary celebration of the 1963 March on Washington. They expressed disgust with the current political establishment, including the Obama administration and its attacks on democratic rights, and the social conditions facing the working class.

Jesse Reed, a letter carrier who lives on the south side of Chicago, said, “This march should be about jobs, for equal justice and opportunity for blacks, poor whites, people of color. It will help the young people understand solidarity. I saw a bunch of fraternities and sororities.

“It is time for a new party, a people’s party. We need to get rid of the Democrats. The Democrats are selling us out. There will be a war in this country.”

James, the owner of a DC Information Technology firm, gave the WSWS his impressions of the nature of the rally, “All it is, is supporting the Democratic Party. The march is a contradiction. You have all these people screaming democracy, but democracy under the current system isn’t working. College, education, the financial system, the job market—none of it is working.”

James commented on the gains of 100 years of the struggle for equality from the Civil War in the 1860s up to the Civil Rights Era in the 1960s concluding, “Physical slavery is done, but wage slavery is not done. ...The original march was in 1963 and here we are in 2013 with the same things. In fact, we’re regressing.” He added, “A lot of these people [at the march] voted for the current president. Ask them if any progress has been made. If they say yes, they’re lying.”

Referring to Al Sharpton’s National Action Network, James said that they “hold up signs that say ‘no justice,

no peace’ but they’re not willing to fight. Changing the system may come to war.”

Bryan Tammel is a water treatment operator in Wilmington, Delaware and a member of AFSCME Local 320. “We have not had a contract in five years—no raise,” he said. “We are under the old contract. The lower-paid workers like janitors are being replaced by temps. The union workforce is getting smaller. It is getting scary. They have outside contractors to do some of the work of plant mechanics, simple stuff. I have never seen such poverty in Wilmington as now.

“We need some real leaders. I came here to be part of history. We need fresh, vibrant leaders to come out and lead like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did. That might shake somebody up.”

Tyler Horne, college student from Macon Georgia said, “In terms of how Edward Snowden is being treated, I feel that Barack Obama has failed us. I voted for Obama. He said he was not going to go after whistleblowers but he’s doing the exact opposite. I don’t think they need to be collecting the metadata that they are. There are elements within the government that have advocated for their agenda to control the will of the people, to control the economics of the country. It’s something we all know is going on. A lot of it comes back to our two-party system. Even our first president spoke out against the two-party system. The media became consumed by money.”

Colleen a federal worker, said, “The people on the hill are almost all millionaires. They don’t know what it is like to be part of the working poor. They have the sequester cuts. I have taken my furlough days, but they are exempt from them, there are 100 senators and they

each have large staffs, but they don't have to be cut.

"The politicians are all about helping the rich. They gave billions for the banks but they say they don't have money for the people. They just give the rich more money to gamble it away. People lost their pensions, their savings and everything. They got the country into this mess and the government just gives them more money and says, 'here you go, do it again.'

"I supported Obama but what he is doing is also to help the rich. I met someone who had worked on his campaign and I asked her if he couldn't slip something in now and again that helps the people. It is all about the rich getting richer. I am realizing that they use race and gender and all these issues to divide people. They focus your attention over here, but they don't want you to see what they are doing over there. The real issue is class and working people have got to unite together to fight for their rights."

Jennifer, a lab technician at a DC hospital, told the WSWs, "I think King would not have agreed with what is being said here today. He was not for war, but for jobs!

"For many people switching parties is like switching churches, and people think they are betraying their history. Historically we do have connections to the Democrats, but I had to explain to my mom that the Democrats were originally the party of the slave owners and the abolitionists were the Radical Republicans. There were many southern Democrats who opposed King in his day.

"Even in Greece where they have so many other problems, they have many parties. Why can't we? It's about the money. Who you take your money from, is who you are beholden to."

Murray, a nurse from Texas, said he was outraged about the prospects of the US invading Syria. "Are they seriously going to invade Syria? They haven't learned anything!" While he agreed that the US should not engage in another war, he felt that workers did not speak out enough regarding health care. "Concerning Obamacare, enough people did not tell congress what they wanted which was health care for everyone like they have in Britain."

Sylvia a retired teacher from Harlem in New York City stopped by the Socialist Equality Party's literature table. "Socialism is not a dirty word," she said. "For us to build a new political party, we are going to have to

dig our heels in. There are a lot of forces out there that want to keep a new party from succeeding.

"This government historically took over England's place as a major empire. The CIA deposed the Iranian government in 1953 and put the Shah in power, and then there was Noriega in Panama. This country is not a democracy. They don't believe in equality. There are so many people that live on the margins. There are many white communities that are hard hit."

Her friend, also a retired teacher, read the first few paragraphs of the statement that the SEP was distributing and said, "It's not just Obama. It's the whole system that's the problem. It started with Reagan, then Bush, then Clinton, then Bush again and now Obama. You need to educate and inform people of that."

Another friend, a retired nurse added, "Let's not forget Clinton reforming 'Welfare as we know it.' There are so many people working in the Parks Department in New York that were on welfare and are being forced to work for minimum wage, while they got rid of the people that were there making decent wages."



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