

“I’ve read about revolutions. If you ignore the lower class long enough they’ll rise up”

Amazon Jobs Day applicants speak out

Our reporters
3 August 2017

As Wall Street celebrated a record high yesterday and the rich saw their money stack even higher, tens of thousands of people in need of a job lined up at Amazon Jobs Day fair sites across the United States. Lauded as one of the largest hiring events in US history, Amazon is projected to hire on some 50,000 people to its workforce.

The workers who lined up constituted a cross-section of the working class, young and old, black and white, native-born and immigrant. Their comments and views reflected the impact of the social crisis in the United States—the lack of full-time work and medical coverage, stagnating wages, the growth of poverty, student loan debt and other social problems. There were also expressions of growing radicalization, which has been generated by immense levels of inequality, endless wars and a corporate-controlled political system, which is oblivious to the concerns of working-class people.

For those hired, grueling working conditions and a yearly net pay of \$15,000 to \$25,000 per year awaits them. As one Kenosha, Wisconsin Amazon worker put it, “A lot of people like myself are very frustrated with working here. Management is trying to hide the truth from the applicants. But they’ll see soon enough once they start.” She added management had covered up employee communications boards where workers had written down suggestions and complaints for applicants touring the facility.

Applicants in Illinois, Wisconsin, New Jersey, New York and Ohio spoke with reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* and *International Amazon Workers Voice*. Over the next several days the WSWWS will post additional comments from workers at these and other locations.

Kenosha, Wisconsin

Austin, who grew up in the Kenosha, Wisconsin area, just south of Milwaukee, told reporters the area declined dramatically after the Chrysler auto factory closed in the 1980s. Unlike at Amazon, the jobs there paid relatively well and provided good benefits. He said, “The fact that Amazon is constantly having job fairs in the area and pretty much all across the country isn’t very reassuring. It means they have a high turn-around. People are coming and leaving.”

Romeoville, Illinois

Joe, a 22-year-old, came looking for a full-time job with benefits. When asked why he was at the job fair, he said, “Trying to get out of my parents’ house.” He was laid off from a call center a few weeks ago and worked in warehouses before that.

Reporters met friends Tahaj and Angel. “We just graduated high school and are looking to start our careers,” said Angel. “A lot of our friends are working part-time jobs, sometimes two or three. We’d really like to get something full time. There’s been a lot of cuts at the schools. We’ve got 20-30 kids in each class and it’s all about memorizing for the standardized tests.” Tahaj, her friend, said, “In the election I liked Sanders the best but I don’t really trust him. People only looked to Hillary as a last resort.”

Eric, from Peoria, Illinois, said he was at the job fair “looking to get a better job,” preferably full-time with benefits. He currently works full-time as a cook. When asked about Caterpillar moving its headquarters from Peoria, he said people were “not too happy about that” and couldn’t find jobs. “I watched a lot of people lose a lot of stuff, people who worked at Caterpillar. Houses, cars, families broke up over it.” When asked about the

political situation and the 2016 election, he simply said, “I think it’s a mess.”

Dylan, who is about to be a father, recently moved from Charleston, Illinois, a small town hit hard by the opioid epidemic. He said there are very few jobs in Charleston. Dylan worked in the food industry, which has a cap of about \$11 per hour, and is currently working as a roofer part-time without any benefits. “Something’s got to give.” He currently gets health care from the state, which covers minor expenses, but is worried about what would happen in a health emergency: “I’m sure if I had some kind of heart problem, I’d be screwed.” When asked about the election, he said, “It was a lose-lose.” “Which snake do you want in the office?” He added, “I’m hoping the guy [Trump] doesn’t serve his full term.”

Christian told reporters, “I’ve had the same job since I was 16. It’s part-time and after six years I really want something better. No one my age has good work. It’s either full-time at minimum wage or piecing together part-time jobs. I heard Amazon has full-time positions with good benefits and that’s why I came. Out of anyone in the election I would have voted for Bernie Sanders. Our current administration is just putting a lot of money in politicians’ pockets. They’re representing wealthy corporations and not the people. I’ve read a lot about revolutions and if you ignore the lower class long enough they’ll rise up. If this situation keeps going there will be a revolution.

“We’re a country that was founded on a revolution. It’s been almost 250 years with the same constitution and that’s a good run but things have changed. I think the system that constitution made is good but the people running it are corrupt. A lot of people look at immigration the wrong way. We all descend from immigrants at some point. It’s a very scared way of thinking to just try and kick people out. It doesn’t matter what your skin color is or where you’re from.”

Etna, Ohio

Charman, another applicant, told reporters, “I don’t think this is the best time to be alive especially with my situation. I’m an immigrant from the Dominican Republic. It’s not an easy step up, me and my family are starting from nothing trying to go somewhere, hopefully university. If I fail it goes to the next person to try and help.”

Another applicant, Malik, came looking for full-time

work with benefits, and was called in for the job fair. He was a seasonal temporary worker for Amazon for a month around Christmas. As a temp, he had no benefits and made less than \$11 an hour. When asked how much the temp agency took from his work, he said he didn’t know. “That’s why I wasn’t too mad about not working for them.” When he was a temp, he worked eight-hour shifts with mandatory overtime. He’s applying for a job with ten-hour shifts.

Tina, who works at a Bob Evans restaurant, said that life for workers is really different from when she was younger. “Poverty today is horrible,” she said. “I didn’t grow up with a silver spoon in my mouth but today it’s just awful. Jeff Bezos’s pay (\$23,000 per minute) irritates me. I make \$4.08 an hour and that’s not enough. It’s not like it was in my day. It’s a lot less safe, there are less jobs now, and you used to be able to get a job with regular paychecks and benefits. Today I’ve worked jobs that have withheld six weeks of pay and I’m wondering where my money is!”

Robbinsville, New Jersey

Dweekan said, “I used to work at Amazon, and it was good. But then they kept switching managers and it was hard to keep track of the rules. I was an ambassador, but the new managers took away that title. Then I wound up getting hurt at work. I went to the medical center and they sent me to some doctors, but then human resources told me I lost my job because I had already used up all my sick days. They didn’t pay the bills or pay me for medical leave like they were supposed to.”

Buffalo, New York

Marty, a former warehouse worker with 28 years of experience, said of the employment situation in Buffalo, “Jobs are bad here and it’s definitely tough for older workers to find jobs. They were essentially offering only part-time work with no benefits and the chance to maybe advance. He also said, “I’m not here to get rich. I just want a decent job. Everyone should have one.”



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