

“It’s like we are going back to the early 1900s before workers had any rights”

Amazon job applicants speak on social crisis in US

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Amazon, the world’s largest Internet-based retail company and tech giant, held a jobs fair in several cities and towns across the US on Wednesday. The scenes of tens of thousands of economically struggling workers lining up for low-paying jobs were reminiscent of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The corporate media, however, had nothing but praise for the company, which is supposedly providing 50,000 workers it is hiring with new economic opportunities.

As the cars piled into the Amazon facilities’ parking lots, it was common to see husbands and wives or multiple generations of the same family come out to compete for jobs with minimum medical benefits that pay roughly \$12.50 an hour.

Despite the low pay, many people told reporters from the *International Amazon Workers Voice* (IAWV) that the job would be an improvement on their current jobs or would be their only opportunity to receive any medical coverage.

One of the fairs was in Etna Township, Ohio, just east of the state capital of Columbus. “We’re here because the pay is good,” Laurie told the IAWV. “Currently, I’m a grounds keeper at Zane State [College] and a student there. I’m working for \$8.50 an hour. It is good that they are offering jobs here. I don’t know of anything in Zanesville [Ohio] that pays well.”

Thirty-one percent of the residents in Zanesville live in poverty, according to the July 2016 US Census.

Asked about the social situation in the US, she added, “The rich get richer and the poor keep getting poorer. I think Trump is going to hurt us. People didn’t know what they were getting into when they voted for him.”

Zack, who was also applying at the Etna facility, said, “I’m here to try out warehouse work because I have done call center work. I’ve been out of a job for a month now. Around here, there are few jobs outside of working in fast food restaurants.

“When it comes to politics, I don’t get too involved. In the last election, I voted for Hillary Clinton just as a lesser-of-two-evils decision, but I wasn’t thrilled with anyone.”

Thomas, a retired newspaper publisher who was bringing a family member to an interview, stated, “Workers didn’t like Clinton or the Democrats’ message.

“Nobody is stopping these billion-dollar corporations, the unions today are weak. In the 1930s and 40s, there were people in government who actually cared about the working people. Today, none of them do. The Democrats just want their votes. Nobody really believes they will do anything they promise anymore. It’s like we are going back to the early 1900s, before workers had any rights.”

Ohio, which went to Trump in the last election, has been heavily impacted by decades of deindustrialization and betrayals by the unions. The state was once associated with the militant strikes of the 1930s, such as the Toledo Auto-Lite strike and the rubber industry sit-down strikes in Akron, but is now synonymous with the abandoned industries and the opioid epidemic.

On the same day as the jobs fair, Attorney General Jeff Sessions was speaking in Columbus, Ohio, about the ongoing opioid crisis. According to the Health Department, more than 3,000 Ohioans died from opioid-

related overdoses in 2015, with the numbers expected to be substantially higher for 2016.

Fall River, Massachusetts, where Amazon was hiring 700 new employees, is also one of the hardest hit by the economic crisis. The town of 89,000 people last year experienced 934 opioid-related deaths. In 2015, the poverty rate for Fall River was roughly 23 percent, compared to 11.6 percent in the rest of the state.

Devon Green, a 23-year-old who recently graduated college, described his work experience. “I had a job at one of my friend’s restaurants for a while. Now I’m working doing some landscaping and construction work for my mom’s clients. I turned down my first job out of college, in financial advising, because I didn’t really have a lot of money to relocate.

“I can’t really speak for all people, I can only speak for myself. What held me back is not having enough money to find a place for myself at that particular time.”

Lindsey Fennel, who just received a tour of the Amazon facility, said, “It was really shocking to see what was in there. It was so big and people are working hard. When you’re going on Amazon to shop, it’s just ‘click and buy,’ ‘click and buy.’ With work like this it’s going to be a tough, but I don’t think it will be anything anybody can’t handle.

“I work retail for Christmas Tree Shop. I like the company. But I’ve been there for almost a year, and it’s time for something new. I just moved here from Virginia about three or four weeks ago. I went from making \$8.50 to \$11-something, still for Christmas Tree, and we get time and a half on Sundays.”

Landsy, who has worked for Amazon for three months, stated, “People aren’t staying at Amazon because it’s hard work. It’s 10 hours, four days a week, and you’re on your feet. And when you’re working on the pick machine, you have to get the products: up-down, up-down. That’s why people are not staying. My team, there were maybe 16 or 17 people when I started, now there’s like 3 people. They are hiring every day, but they’re not staying.

“[Amazon CEO Jeff] Bezos is making so much money because we’re working and we don’t get enough pay. The harder they can make you work, the more they make.”

Bezos has a net worth of approximately \$90 billion.

Landsy described conditions in which workers are

regularly fired at the whim of a manager. “If they send you to get something and you don’t see it, like five times, and they go and find it, you might get fired.”



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