

# Detroit workers speak on jobs crisis

By Lawrence Porter  
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The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed several of the thousands of workers attending a jobs fair sponsored by the Congressional Black Caucus in Detroit, Michigan on August 16. (See, “Congressional Black Caucus sponsors fraudulent jobs fair in Detroit”). Their comments expressed the immiseration plaguing the Detroit area and the entire country.

Michelle Holland said, “I came here for the jobs fair because I have been unemployed for more than one year. I worked at United Airlines as a ticket reservationist for five years.”

“Looking for a job is frustrating,” Holland said. “It is hard to find something without a car, and the pay is not something you can live with. Most jobs are not paying much more than the minimum wage, maybe \$8.00 an hour. It is hard to live on it.

“They said there was a recovery, but it doesn’t look like a recovery to me. I just took odd jobs or whatever I could get. I didn’t apply for unemployment benefits.”

Melissa Alls, 22, has been unemployed for more than a year. “The only jobs available are fast-food and retail jobs. That’s it. All of them pay the minimum wage of \$7.50/hour.

Melissa’s mother, Tanya Spicer, was also on the jobs line. Tanya was especially upset with the trillions of dollars in cuts that were agreed to by Congress and the Obama administration. “I believe everyone should have a job. If these cuts go through it will be bad. It’s already bad; it’s only going to get worse.

“I went to Herman Kiefer [a city health clinic] the other day, and it was closed because they had a day without pay. They have cut everything, especially for the kids. They used to have recreation centers for kids. Now there is nothing for them to do. They can’t go out and play, so my kids just sit inside at home.”

Troy Blakely, 29, has also been unemployed for more than a year. He was laid off from an adult care home which then closed its doors. “I’m presently working

part-time as a janitor without benefits and at \$8.00/hour,” he said. “It’s terrible conditions out here. I don’t like it. I’m here because I’m looking for something better.

“I lost count in how many applications I put in for jobs. There are days when I do nothing else but put in applications for jobs. I have literally made hundreds of applications. Now, I try to remain optimistic and say it will not always be like this.”

Troy also has a fiancée and a daughter that he is trying to support.

“These places here today [pointing to the companies at the fair], I have applied for a job from most of them. I’ve applied at Target, Home Depot, Ford, Sprint—all of them are saying make your application online. I did that already. That’s all I’ve been doing. I had to learn how to do it because most places are not accepting applications in person. Almost all of them require you to apply online.”

When asked about Obama's right-wing policies, Troy said, “I’m not surprised. It’s politics. They do it to get elected; then there is a shift. I look at my situation and I’ve gone from being in the middle class to being poor.”

Torey Boyd also has been unemployed for a year. He is on disability with unemployment benefits that will expire in December.

Torey arrived around 9:30 am to get in line for the fair and found hundreds of people in line. “You can see from this line that there are so many people looking for work. All of these people are waiting like I did, and now I wonder what it was for. All they did was to give you cards and tell you to apply online. I didn’t need to come here for them to tell me that. It would be better to tell people rather than have them waiting on this long line.”

“They told people that there would be interviews, but they aren’t interviewing.”

“In my old job we started out with 14 people. They eventually cut it down to three of us, and we were doing as much work as the fourteen. That’s what companies are doing these days. That’s why I am on disability. I got injured.”

Torey said he has applied to at least 50 places in the past year with no results.

Monica Ostrander is a mother of two who recently graduated with an associate’s degree in computer electronics, despite giving birth to her second child. “I’m presently doing an internship, but it has been rough looking for work. A lot of people don’t call back.”

Monica graduated in an accelerated program that is considered to be better than a community college, however to get the education she had to take out loans totaling over \$20,000 for two years of education.

“Yeah, that’s tough and I had to do it to get an education. I look at the job prospects for young people, and they are really bad. In my opinion I think young people need to get organized.”

When asked about Obama, Monica said she felt Bush left a big mess for Obama to clean up. When it was pointed out that Obama seized on the budget ceiling as an opportunity to propose huge cuts in social programs, including Social Security, she agreed this was not in the interest of workers.

“You’re right. I’m beginning to see your point.”

Monica is presently on welfare to care for her children. She was especially upset that the Republican governor has placed a limit of four years on welfare benefits for children. “I don’t understand how the state could cut welfare benefits given the state of the economy when so many people are out of work.”

“The situation is pretty crazy. There are just not enough jobs for all of the people out here. We are asked to stand in this long line and 9 out of 10 times all they ask for is a resume. I was told they were doing interviews but I haven’t had an interview with a single person. I left a lot of resumes.

“The other thing that bothers me is that they know a lot of people don’t have cars and have to take the bus. It’s one of the biggest problems I face, not having a car.”