

New York City workers speak out against budget cuts

A reporting team
9 August 2011

For workers in New York City, the ongoing economic crisis has been felt deeply in growing unemployment and cuts at the federal, state, and local levels in education, health care, and other social services. Workers in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn who spoke recently with the *World Socialist Web Site* expressed their anger, frustration, and an understanding that the wealthy are responsible for the crisis.

Davon Bain is in his teens and works as a security guard. He explained, “These cuts are obviously no good, and they are going to affect everyone. The rich are trying to implement a new world order, and you either keep your mouth closed about what is going down or you suffer the consequences. The rich just want to control the world. They want to have more. They want to go from rich to richer, from monopoly to more monopoly to dominate the world. It is just like in the Matrix film when they say ‘What do people in power want? More power.’”

Ronald Armstrong is a retired worker from the New York State court system. He told the WSWS: “I think these cuts are bad things. Look where the money is coming from. If the cuts had to be made, maybe I could see it if it were done in a level manner between the rich and the working people. But it is all from the working people, and nothing from the rich. America is based on capitalism and the banks run everything. That is the way everything is done these days.”

Luis Oyala is unemployed from retail service jobs. His reaction to the trillions in spending cuts was, “It is unbelievable how everything is falling apart. They are only helping the rich. These cuts are always against the poor. This includes cuts in schooling, Medicaid and the funds for tuition to go to school, along with many more cuts. They are cutting these down for the rich.”

Those who were interviewed reported a variety of

experiences with the health care and education systems, but all share a common anger at the deteriorating conditions they and their families confront daily.

Lennox Halstead, who is on Social Security disability, told the WSWS, “I think it is ridiculous for Obama to make these cuts to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

“I need my medicine. When they decided to cut the budget, they decided to make it all spending cuts and not touch the rich. But the money is not in my pockets or in yours. The rich have it.

“I need my red and blue medical card to see my doctor. I am 59 years old and am on Social Security disability. I used to be a plumber and a truck driver, but I had a stroke and cannot work anymore. When Obama cuts Medicaid and Medicare, how am I going to survive?

“Obama froze Social Security. I think these cuts are a very bad idea. Social Security is for all citizens. What are we going to do? How are people going to live?”

Dana who works in the publishing industry told us: “My mother has emphysema. She receives Medicare, and cuts will affect her. I get frustrated because the Democratic and Republican parties are one of the same, and either way we are screwed. They are not working in our best interests.”

Gordon Lee said, “I’m diabetic and I don’t have access to air conditioning. The heat waves are hard for me to take. The cuts to health care are too much. More and more people like me don’t have access to air conditioning. Something needs to change”.

Damion Trent is an adjunct lecturer at Borough of Manhattan Community College, teaching a General Education Diploma program to students who are not regularly enrolled in high school. He expressed his concern about the government policies toward

education.

"My perception in public education is opposed to the Race To The Top. If kids don't meet standard then the schools should not be closed but they should fund them. There is no way to challenge the system. They seem to be privatizing education backed by big businesses. It is an undemocratic system to bring in charter schools. Parents in Canarsie [in Brooklyn] were outraged, but the Department of Education voted and kept them in anyway."

Debbie Hamilton teaches English at Medgar Evers College. "I am in debt with \$100,000 in student loans. It is not only tuition that went up. The book industry rips the kids off. Many students are taking five classes and working full time. I couldn't do that. Now I have a job and teach two classes of literature. Yet I face the landlord taking me to court. If they paid me \$30 per hour, maybe I won't be pushed out of my apartment. I want a job, not welfare. Pay me for the value of the education I worked to get. I am still living a poor lifestyle."

Brooklyn has the second highest unemployment rate in all of New York state, with the percentage of jobless higher only in The Bronx, another New York City borough. Luis Oyala has been unemployed for five years. "What are they doing about that?" he said. "I am married, and I have three kids. Where are the jobs? It is not like they don't have the money. What are the corporations sitting on trillions of dollars for? Nobody is going to stand for this."

James a factory worker, said: "I know a lot of people that are unemployed. I know some who have been out of work for three to four years. They are living on food stamps and public assistance. While this is going on, the politicians work for the rich. And the rich are doing very well."

Disgust with the Democrats and the desire for a new political voice were expressed repeatedly.

James, the factory worker, said: "I have never seen it as bad as it is now. The Democrats are supposed to be looking out for the poor and the Republicans are supposed to be for the people with money. But the Democrats are not for the poor; they are just like the Republicans—for the rich. That is where their money is coming from."

Ronald Armstrong expressed his anger at betrayal by

his union. "I worked for the biggest union in New York state, the CSEA. And when it came down to it, we found out that if some one gave them an incentive, the CSEA sold us out at the drop of a hat."

Bradford Scobie said: "I love the idea that there would be another party. My parents are both social workers, and we all feel this is terrible. However, I feel like the two parties are so powerful and entrenched, I'm not sure a third party would have a chance. But I hope people rise up. There has to be a reaction to this. Look at the people who vote Republican. When so many Republicans are elderly, they cannot support this. I feel like this is going to hit the fan; although I don't know in what form."

According to Davon Bain, "The young people are going to be the ones who push for a change or revolution. The more people who join, the better. The unemployment rates are bad for young people. There is more violence on the streets because the cops are more likely to shoot people. I think there will be civil unrest like before the civil rights movement, but now they want to take all your rights away. I used to watch the news a lot, but I don't believe in the news media so much anymore. I have been at places where major things have happened, and they don't tell the story of what really went on.

"I think the young people are going to form groups to fight what is going on. My friends and I have been into this, and have been thinking about this for a while. We have been wondering what to do when things happen here."

Lennox Halstead, the retiree, said: "I think there should be another party. Someone has to step up to the plate for us. Obama is attacking us. He says he is for the people. Go to the food stamp office. Look at the lines at the food stamp office. People will not stand for these things being cut."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact