

Washington, DC workers, youth speak out against federal shutdown

Our reporters
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The federally mandated furloughs that began with the government shutdown on October 1 affect as many as 800,000 workers across the country, many of whom live within the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia area. On Thursday, reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed federal workers and other residents of the Washington, DC area about the consequences of the shutdown and who is responsible.

“I’m tired of the actual people who live and work in this country being used as puppets in political games,” said Keith, a lifelong District resident who was protesting the shutdown outside the US Capitol building. “The people up there on that balcony—every one of them—they don’t know what the real world is,” he added. Though having voted for Barack Obama twice, Keith admitted, “Maybe that was a bad decision. I hate to say it, but nothing has really changed, and I’m beginning to get disenchanted and hopeless.”

The day before, federal employee unions had organized hundreds of workers in a rally on the steps of the Capitol building. However, this event was largely to allow workers to vent frustration rather than provide a strategy and a way forward in their struggles. This latter conclusion could be attested to by the fact that, one day later, the Capitol building and the workers currently hit by what is in effect a massive pay cut were abandoned by their unions and other rally leaders.

“There’s a real lack of understanding, a real lack of sympathy, from most of our politicians,” stated Erin, a federal employee who requested anonymity as far as identifying the name of the agency for which she worked. Continuing, she said, “I’m tired of what these politicians do. None of it makes any sense. The people responsible for this are actually hurting the economy they profess to love so much.”

Matt, a former intern for the department of Housing

and Urban Development, spoke with a WSWWS reporter, saying that during his time working for the federal government, he had seen both Democratic and Republican administrations attack vital programs for the poor. “The government’s basically become a jobs program for the military and the NSA, everything else is being de-funded.”

In reference to the current debt ceiling and budget disputes among the political establishment, Matt stated, “You know, I have a longer memory than many people, and I remember how back in 2011, it was Obama and the Democrats who offered to put a lot of important programs on the chopping table, even after a lot of the Republicans began to back down.

“I agree with what you’re saying. We need a mass movement. Everyone knows the corporations run everything, politics today is all kabuki theater. To a certain extent, you might even say that the political system doesn’t even exist. Or it exists in the sense that the Roman Republic still existed in the first days of Caesar and the Empire.”

Rula, a student at the University of Maryland, said, “I am going to school to become a teacher, and I’m hoping that it’s good job security, but I’m a little worried because I know that teachers are losing their jobs in some places. I know they’re even closing schools in some places.

“I definitely agree that the rich control everything,” she said, adding, “How do you change that? Not many people know.”

When asked about the issue of socialism, Rula said, “A lot of Americans really don’t know anything about what socialism is. I’d say I’m a little educated about it, but people should really learn more about it. It might be what we need, but it’s hard to say without knowing more. It’s an idea that should be given a chance.”

Rula expressed interest in becoming a member of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, and mentioned that several of her friends may also be interested in joining.



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