

The Washington Socialist
Articles from the September 2014 Issue
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[DC Election choices, labor issues and the growth puzzle, local DSA action and more in our third Labor Day issue...](#)

Saturday, September 6th, 2014

Welcome to the Labor Day 2014 issue of the *Washington Socialist*, the email newsletter of the DC Metro Local, Democratic Socialists of America. This issue marks our second year of monthly publication, and the 16 articles (the most in any issue so far) we publish this month brings the total to 220.

Whether we are simply long-winded or profound (and we have been both) this has been two years of keeping the socialist cause, ideals and analysis before a national capital that is ill-served by its capitalist media. We will keep it up, and want to remind the reader that she or he, DSA member or not, is welcome to submit articles, reports on local action and the like. Add to the chorus. Articles to woodlanham@gmail.com

Coming up in September: the local will meet September 13 in a regular membership meeting at which it will consider endorsements in local races. The meeting will be held from 1:30-2:30 pm at the Watha T. Daniel/Shaw Public Library, 1630 7th St. NW (Shaw/Howard Metro).

DCDSA has [weighed in](#) on the debate over common carrier status for the mega-cable broadband providers. September 10th has been declared “[Internet Slowdown Day](#)” by at least one activist group; check it out and see if it’s something you want to get in on.

Our articles begin with Kurt Stand’s account of the birth of Labor Day, an oft-told story that gets richer in this tale of the twists and turns of the US labor movement that made the day both important and distracting for the interests of working people. [\[read complete article\]](#)

Next, some pieces on local actions and DSA work. Jose Gutierrez reports on the Young Democratic Socialists conference in Pennsylvania [\[read complete article\]](#) and Bill Mosley provides a rundown on the upcoming DC elections. [\[read complete article\]](#) Kurt Stand details a local DSA event exploring the New York trial of DSA member Cecily McMillan for assaulting a policeman and the implications of official attacks on the Occupy Movement. [\[read complete article\]](#) and Dan Adkins assesses the ways to fight utilities that resist sustainable energy sources. [\[read complete article\]](#)

Labor issues for Labor Day: and they begin with an article on Ukraine and the consistent subtext of this and other current disputes: workers and their families under fire from authoritarian capital

on all sides, despite the guise of sovereignty. [\[read complete article\]](#) Jose Gutierrez reviews a new book asking why the US doesn't have a labor party. [\[read complete article\]](#) Dan Adkins reviews another book on the sources of creativity and how they can democratize the workplace if nurtured. [\[read complete article\]](#)

National issues are engaged by Andy Feeney, who reviews four differently left books on the financial crisis; [\[read complete article\]](#) Cecilio Morales examines Paul Ryan's alleged reforms of the welfare system and finds them – spoiler alert – wanting; [\[read complete article\]](#) Dan Adkins looks at dangers to both US workers and families and their EU counterparts in the latest trade pact proposals; [\[read complete article\]](#) and Bill Mosley details the nation's total failure to address transportation problems realistically and with an eye to the future. [\[read complete article\]](#)

The knotty problems of labor, economics and growth are on the agenda too; Andy Feeney traces the concept of economic growth as necessary to capitalism from Adam Smith to today's steady-state theorists; [\[read complete article\]](#); Lucy Duff analyzes the central role of Karl Polanyi in the development of a sustainable alternative to growth-hungry modern capitalism; [\[read complete article\]](#) the bellwether role of the passenger pigeon in the rapacious growth of the US economy provides a metaphor for Bill Boteler's account of habitat and species loss. [\[read complete article\]](#)

And something completely different: Carolyn Byerly walks us through some tasty, lefty mystery novels by Donna Leon that have the additional advantage of taking place in Venice [\[read complete article\]](#)

Last but never least: Good Reads, stories on the left you may have missed; links you can use. [\[read complete article\]](#)

[Commodified Nature – Capitalism's \(Most\) Fatal Error](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Lucy Duff

For Labor Day, a look backward at thoughts Red and Green, on the intertwined fortunes of working people and the natural and social worlds we all inhabit, starting with Karl Polanyi from 70 years ago.

Long before Thomas Piketty's acclaimed *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013; English translation Belknap Press, 2014) came Karl Polanyi's path-making study of capitalism, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, first published in 1944 and reissued by Beacon Press in 1957 and again, with a foreword by Joseph E. Stiglitz, in 2001.

A scholar in Budapest and then a reformist journalist in Vienna, Polanyi wrote his masterwork while an intellectual refugee in England and later the U.S. Surveying European history from the late 18th through the mid-20th century, he developed and documented his theory that the classical-economics idea of a self-regulating economic system had always been a fantasy. The crucial error lay in having reduced human life, the natural world and the social inheritance – elements manifestly not produced for sale— into the “fictitious commodities” labor, land and capital, respectively. Yet the fantasy held real power, as a capitalist prop under the Industrial Revolution, to wreck the land, exploit the labor force, and generally dislocate traditional “organic society.” That society – which had previously subordinated small local markets – was thus transformed into the market *system*, “one big Market,” that became the “basic organizing principle of society” dominating peoples and places rural and urban, domestic and foreign.

“There was nothing natural about *laissez-faire*,” Polanyi writes; it took the intervention of deliberate state planning to pin that airy idea to the ground. And politics maintains it in the real world. What *was* spontaneous, in his view, was the long “social protection” countermovement to restrict the damages of the policy, very slowly and but partially successful in “the conservation of man and nature as well as productive organization.” He sees the countermovement as based on a changing mixture of class and common interests. Today, of course, we find the competing sides of what he termed this “double movement” still very active worldwide. Thinkers crossing varied disciplines have continued to apply Polanyi’s thesis to the accelerating juggernaut of capitalist accumulation in our tightly interconnected global economy. And they propose varied channels, revived or new, for a continuing multi-faceted countermovement.

Recently sociologists Margaret Somers and Fred Block revisited *The Great Transformation*. In [“The Return of Karl Polanyi”](#) (*Dissent*, Spring 2014) they introduce their book *The Power of Market Fundamentalism: Karl Polanyi’s Critique* (Harvard University Press, April 2014). Henry Farrell’s July 18 *Washington Post* interview with the writers – [“The free market is an impossible utopia”](#) – aptly picks up Polanyi’s own ironic catchword for the fantastic undergirding of the capitalist system.

In their article Somers and Block characterize Polanyi as “a heterodox thinker—even among fellow socialists. With some significant exceptions, it has taken decades to recognize the extraordinary theoretical contributions to socialist thought that he made in his masterpiece He is regularly invoked by both scholars and activists who challenge unfettered free-market globalization, and his writings are increasingly part of the core canon for sociologists, political scientists, historians, and heterodox economists. Last November the *Atlantic* invoked Karl Polanyi, not Karl Marx, as the social thinker most relevant to Pope Francis’s widely circulated moral injunction on the evils of social inequality and the limits of unregulated markets—just one sign of Polanyi’s recent fame.” Not a dogmatic Marxist, he did not prejudge the necessity for collective ownership of all means of production: “Polanyi, in contrast, insists that since the economic order is constituted through political decisions, politics can effectively redefine the meaning of ownership.” Looking through his eyes, Somers and Block take fresh hope for “revitalizing the democratic socialist tradition.”

Also in tune with Polanyi are a number of environmental scientists, economists and activists. Ecological economist Herman Daly, proponent since the 1970s of a “steady-state

economy” and a professor emeritus at the University of Maryland, draws explicitly from him. In *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Beacon Press, 1989), Daly and co-author John B. Cobb cite Polanyi’s observation that since the Great Transformation “social relations are embedded in the economic system.” They go on to say “an economics for community cannot tolerate” that reversal, and to point out that capitalism deals with Polanyi’s “fictitious commodities” as though humanity, nature and the social inheritance were merely products, rather than the means of production. By the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” mainstream economists hide the full, true foundations of social well-being with overly abstracted concepts; since “money is the common denominator for land and labor as well as capital” the priceless realities disappear from their analyses.

After admiring reference to Polanyi’s theory and a nod of respect to others’ discussion of labor and capital as commodities, Daly and Cobb focus mainly on issues around land, “a very peculiar commodity” given its inseparability from the Biosphere with no surveyor-laid borders. Yet they acknowledge that the three fictions at root form one problem. Concluding with recommended policies for the U.S., they return to Polanyi’s insistence that “separating labor from the rest of life” so as to subject it to market laws created a system that “could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society.” And their key policy goals – equity of distribution, sustainability of natural resources, and efficiency in maintaining wealth- relate to all three factors.

German economist E. F. Schumacher, also a 1930’s refugee in England, echoes Polanyi when he speaks of how modern economics disturbs our whole reality by its illusory separation of its elements. In his classic work, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (Blond & Briggs, 1973; reprinted by Harper, 2010) he reminds us that “man-as-producer and man-as-consumer is in fact the same man, who is always producing and consuming at the same time.” The disconnection is clearest in the case of industrialized agriculture: a farmer feels driven to cut costs and raise cash even if that means he “destroys... the health of the soil and the beauty of the landscape.” Confusion arises “as long as the land and the creatures upon it are looked upon as *nothing but* ‘factors of production,’ ...but this is their secondary, not their primary, nature.” Despite the beliefs of those “alienated from living nature...any society can afford to look after its land and keep it healthy and beautiful in perpetuity.” Schumacher too sees the market in the modern world as having reversed tradition, putting means over ends. All goals other than accumulation of wealth “take second place.” In fact, this ‘logic of production’ is and should be seen as, “neither the logic of life nor that of society. It is a small and subservient part of both.” Beyond an end to exploitation of people and nature worldwide, he calls for restoring the balance of “wealth, power, culture, attraction and hope” between city and countryside, by developing an “agro-industrial culture” with diverse occupations in each locality.

Over his long career Wendell Berry – farmer, activist, poet, storyteller – wrote various essays republished as *Bringing It to the Table* (Counterpoint, 2009). He starkly contrasts two economies, analogous to Polanyi’s traditional society and the big market system. Daly and Cobb refer to Berry’s “Great Economy” of nature, sustainer of the web of life and rightful container of the human economy. It is at odds with the “Totalitarian Economy” of industrial agriculture, based on “the fantasy of the free market.” In the short term, Totalitarian Economy ruins the self-sufficiency of local communities, drives out their labor force, and allows monopoly capital to

value fast profits over the “claims of posterity.” Farms become factories; in a process “closely akin to mining” much of rural America has become a colony, like coal country at an earlier stage of capitalism. That profit-based system cannot possibly function in the long run. Like Polanyi, Berry perceives the clash of reality and fantasy, and relies on the good sense of ordinary people working together re-create farms, forests, towns, their workplaces and homes, somewhat in the mold of traditional society, aiming for a secure, sustainable subsistence and neighborly justice.

In *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford, 1949), Aldo Leopold succinctly defines “the basic concept of ecology” as understanding land not as a commodity but rather “a community to which we belong.” It seems fair to say he was restating a key idea of Polanyi, Daly, Schumacher, and Berry.

This country-born English major and amateur naturalist is content to leave off there. What follows are a few bare quotations from the greener side of Marxism, offered for the scientific-socialist readers of DC-DSA. She awaits with interest to hear what they make of them.

From Wikipedia entry on eco-socialism: “The ‘second contradiction’ of capitalism”

“Building on the work of Karl Polanyi, along with Marx, James O’Connor argues that capitalism necessarily undermines the ‘conditions of production’ necessary to sustain the endless accumulation of capital. These conditions of production include soil, water, energy... As the conditions of production are exhausted, the costs of production for capital increase. For this reason, the second contradiction generates an underproduction crisis tendency, with the rising cost of inputs and labor... Like Marx’s contradiction of capital and labor, the second contradiction therefore threatens the system’s existence.”

O’Connor presents this line of thought in “Capitalism, nature, socialism a theoretical introduction,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* (vol. 1, no. 1, 1988) and published online 2009 at <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcns20>

Decrying a certain “crude class theory” of popular Marxism, Polanyi alludes in a side remark to “the essential philosophy of Marx centered on the totality of society and the noneconomic nature of man” (p. 151, 1957). He may have had in mind these lines from Capital, vol. 1 (1867), quoted by Chris Williams in Ecology and Socialism (Haymarket Books, 2010):

“[Man] can work only as Nature does... constantly helped by natural forces. We see, then, that labour is not the only source of wealth.”

“All progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil... Capitalist production disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth.”

Williams also quotes some plainer lines from Engels’ The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, 1884:

“In relation to nature, as to society, the present mode of production is predominantly concerned only about the immediate, the most tangible result.”

“[At] every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature...but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage of all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly.”

[Cross-national Dangers of Fast-Track Trade Treaties](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Daniel C. Adkins

The potential damage of fast-tracking trade deals is great because they may supplant congressional legislation. These trade deals include the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). If Congress is not able to fully debate and, if necessary, amend the language of these all-encompassing trade pacts, the environment, our climate, and our families could suffer as a result of multinational lobbyists. Introduced early this year, the Camp-Baucus bill limits transparency to the public and maybe even to the Congress. It has not gotten traction in Congress. However it is being revised and replaced by a new bill this November. Trade bills like NAFTA have increased our exports, but they have increased our imports much more.

In the rush to do away with trade barriers, these treaties can eviscerate hard-won gains of labor and consumers. The trade bills would undermine unions internationally and sharply diminish U.S. allies by stopping citizens' right to information, consultations, and remedies. Below are some of the possible outcomes that are dangerous to Americans and Europeans.

Lori Wallach of *Le Monde Diplomatique* [wrote in June](#) about the risks of these trade pacts for those of us in the US; her list is adapted here:

[TTIP Risks to Americans](#)

1. **Financial reforms:** European Union (EU) negotiators have called for the rollback of the Volcker Rule and other Wall Street reforms thus jeopardizing our economic stability.
2. **Mad cow issues:** The European lobby BUSINESSEUROPE has called bans on beef products a trade barrier. They were not happy with the U.S. ban on mad cow disease and would endanger our health.

3. **Alternative Fuels:** BUSINESSEUROPE and BP have asked to eliminate tax credits for alternative climate-friendly fuels and slow our move to a sustainable economy.
4. **Unsafe medicines:** European pharmaceuticals have asked that the US government automatically approve European determinations for drug safety.
5. **Cost of medicines:** Pharmaceutical companies are pushing to limit governments' ability to negotiate prices of medicines and thus keep health costs from growing.
6. **Data privacy:** US tech companies want to limit barriers to collection of personal data and make it easier for them to make personal profiles. We could lose control of our life's story.
7. **Local job creation:** EU officials want to block local governments' "buy local" policies and thus threaten our jobs.
8. **Genetically modified food:** Monsanto and others are pushing to ban labeling of genetically modified organisms (GMO) and thus pave the way for us to eat GMO food without our knowing it.
9. **Dangerous toys:** The toy industry of Europe wants the safety of European toys to be trusted.
10. **Subordination of state laws to multinational interests:** This is the basic intention of multinationals and would mean our elected representatives will not be able to overturn treaties designed by multinationals.

[Threats to Europeans were enumerated in another listicle by Wolf Jaklein in the same issue of *Le Monde Diplomatique*: again they are summarized here:](#)

1. **Workers' rights:** The US. has ratified two out of eight labor conventions protecting workers of the International Labor Organization while the EU has ratified all eight. European labor fear that their rights will be lost.
2. **Collective representation:** The main influences to the trade talks are business interests that see labor rights as barriers. Rights to information and work councils could stop at the border.
3. **Worker and consumer standards:** In Europe products are tested for safety before they are released, whereas in the US products are released and the consumer has the right to sue for product damages. In Europe, risk assessment is not confined to products but also includes working conditions. In the US, workplace safety is limited by weak enforcement and a lack of unionization. The creation of a transatlantic Regulatory Cooperation Council free of democratic control and cognitively captured by multinationals is a real danger for European workers.
4. **Limits of free movement of people:** The TTIP only focuses on the movement of people for business reasons and misses the opportunity to harmonize laws for travel permitting people the rights of goods and capital.

5. **Sustainable development:** The TTIP may include a chapter relating to social and environmental law. Such chapters generally do not have sanctions to enforce environmental goals while economic and technical sanctions are quite specific. One might be sued for a law limiting profit but not for one violating the environment.
6. **Public services loss:** Negotiations may list all services not to be privatized. Everything else is up for grabs. Experience has seen the definitions challenged leading to more privatizations and loss of public control. New service needs would by definition be in the private area.
7. **Increased unemployment:** In the EU all businesses, foreign and domestic, are given public support. The US doesn't have this kind of support but often requires a minimum of "local content". This inequality of business markets favors the U. S. businesses and will lead to unemployment in Europe.
8. **Personal data confidentiality:** Europeans have concern about their personal data but US rules and courts are unconcerned by non-US regulation. Also cloud-based data storage makes national ownership of data difficult.
9. **Intellectual property rights:** There is a risk to European freedom of publication and distribution to US-style property rights. This may open Europe to counterfeiting and an author's or producer's control of their products' use. This includes access to generic medicines.
10. **Subordination of states to multinationals:** Treaties can trump rights and the massive lobbying of multinationals on trade issues threaten citizen's interests.

[DC Mayoral Race Gets the Press, but Open Council Seat Draws the Crowds](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Bill Mosley

Readers of the *Washington Post* and other mainstream local publications can be forgiven for thinking that the only contest of interest in this fall's District of Columbia election is the contest for mayor. And indeed, that race has become more than the usual quadrennial coronation of the Democratic mayoral nominee, with two prominent independent candidates challenging Democrat Muriel Bowser.

But of at least equal interest is the race for the at-large DC Council seat being vacated by David Catania, who has chosen to run for mayor rather than for re-election to his seat. The prospect of

capturing an open seat has sparked a gold rush for the office, with 15 candidates qualifying for the ballot.

With serious contests for both mayor and councilmember-at-large, the 2014 election should generate greater-than-usual interest among DC voters, as well as progressive activists and organizations seeing an opportunity to elect candidates sympathetic to their causes. Metro-DC DSA is one of these organizations, keeping an eye on candidates in preparation for its **September 13** membership meeting at which it will consider endorsements in local races. **The meeting will be held from 1:30-2:30 pm at the Watha T. Daniel/Shaw Public Library, 1630 7th St. NW (Shaw/Howard Metro).**

At its February endorsement meeting, held in advance of the April DC primary election, Metro DC-DSA made endorsements in three DC Democratic Primary races, voting to back Andy Shallal, owner of the Busboys and Poets chain of restaurant/bookstores, for mayor, as well as two incumbents: Eleanor Holmes Norton for delegate to Congress and Phil Mendelson for chair of the DC Council. Norton and Mendelson won their primaries and are expected to cruise to victory in November, while Shallal finished fifth in a field of eight.

Also to be chosen by voters in the November 4 election are councilmembers from DC Wards 1,3, 5 and 6; a statehood (or “shadow”) senator and representative; a DC attorney general; members of the Board of Education from each of the eight DC wards; and approximately 200 Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners, as well as a ballot initiative on legalization of marijuana. This article will briefly discuss the more high-profile races.

Mayor

In addition to Bowser and Catania, the other well-known candidate in the race to succeed outgoing Mayor Vince Gray is Carol Schwartz, a former Republican councilmember and four-time unsuccessful Republican candidate for mayor, running this time as an independent. Trailing the big three is a crowded field of independents and minor-party candidates – including Faith, the Statehood Green Party nominee and perennial candidate. Also on the ballot are Libertarian Bruce Majors and independent Nestor Djonkam. No Republican ran in the party’s primary.

It’s safe to say there is no true “progressive” among the top three candidates. Bowser was a protégé of former Mayor Adrian Fenty and a supporter of his takeover of public schools. She has been a cautious centrist who, among other actions on the Council, opposed the Large Retailer Accountability Act (LRAA) which would have required Walmart and other big-box stores to pay a higher-than-minimum wage. Perhaps more than any other recent measure before the Council, the LRAA exposed which candidates were willing to go to bat for DC’s low-wage workers and which supported the corporate agenda. Bowser was the principal author of recent ethics legislation – coming in the wake of criminal convictions of three councilmembers and a federal investigation of Gray for campaign finance violations. But her ethical image has been tarnished by charges that she helped a political supporter, the head of a nonprofit apartment complex, avoid public scrutiny of the company’s failing finances and the dilapidated condition of its building. In her general election campaign thus far, Bowser has emphasized her Democratic

Party affiliation and mostly avoided both the issues and engagement with other candidates. [Bowser has been endorsed by the Metropolitan Washington Council of the AFL-CIO.](#)

Catania, the Council's first openly gay member, is liberal on social issues but business-friendly on economic issues. He has promoted himself as an expert on education, with a record of supporting charter schools, and opposed the LRAA. He initially opposed sick-leave legislation (Bowser and Schwartz consistently supported it) before later changing course and backing it. He is a self-styled "maverick" whose would bring a prickliness and combativeness to the mayoral suite that would pose a stark contrast to Gray's self-styled collegiality.

Schwartz, who has been out of office since losing her re-election primary in 2008, compiled a fairly liberal record of the three on the Council, despite her Republican affiliation. She was strong on tenants' issues and was an early champion of requiring employers to provide sick leave for their workers — putting her at odds with Catania, who helped engineer her 2008 primary defeat.

When Catania entered the race, he was looking forward to a head-to-head contest with a compromised Mayor Gray, who would have to fight ethics charges with one hand and electoral opposition with the other. Bowser's defeat of Gray in the Democratic primary has made Catania's path to victory much steeper, and Schwartz's entry has two prominent white ex-Republicans competing for the same limited pool of voters, while Bowser is running on the strengths of her being a member of the city's largest demographics — African-American and Democratic. Catania has even asserted that Schwartz entered the race on Bowser's behest to carve into his support, which both Bowser and Schwartz deny. Whether or not this is the case, Bowser has the wind at her back, and it's her race to lose.

At-Large Council

Unlike the mayor's race, the at-large Council race provides real choices for progressives. Under an oddity of DC election law, each biennial Council election includes races for two at-large seats, but no party may nominate more than one candidate in each election — effectively carving out a seat for a non-Democrat in this overwhelmingly Democratic city. Catania's decision to vacate the non-Democratic seat to run for mayor has attracted a large field of would-be successors.

The Democratic primary was won by incumbent Anita Bonds, who can be charitably described as an undistinguished party hack. (She initially voted for the LRAA but then changed sides and voted against overriding Mayor Gray's veto). However, no winner of a Democratic primary has ever lost a general election during the District's 40-year history of home rule, and Bonds is not expected to be the first.

It is the field of non-Democratic candidates that is generating the most heat. Most of the hopefuls are political newcomers with thin or nonexistent records, drawn to an election where a candidate could win one of the two seats with a tiny percentage of the vote. However, several candidates have established records and/or are running campaigns that raised hopes among

progressives that the Council's center of gravity could be pushed to the left. These candidates are:

Graylan Hagler (Independent) — The minister of Plymouth United Congregational Church of Christ is a long-time activist in progressive causes. He has worked with DSA on a number of projects and events, most recently on the 2010 jobs event at which he spoke and which was held in his church. Among the progressive organizations and causes he has worked with are United for Peace and Justice and the union UNITE HERE. He also has emphasized community empowerment, opposed attempts by Congress to impose a death penalty on DC, and opposed school vouchers. In 1991, before he moved to DC, he ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Boston.

Eugene Puryear (Statehood Green) — He's a younger candidate without much of a past in DC politics, but the Statehood Green Party is working hard for him to become the first candidate from their party to win a Council race since Hilda Mason. Puryear identifies as a socialist and is a member of the Party of Socialism and Liberation, whose outlook and history was summarized in [DSA's guide to organizations](#) of the socialist left. Puryear was the 2008 PSL vice-presidential candidate and has been active in the antiwar ANSWER coalition. His website emphasizes a more progressive DC budget, tenants' rights, fairness for ex-prisoners and pursuit of DC statehood, as well as advocating a name change for Washington's football team and national issues such as the Iraq crisis and immigrant rights.

Elissa Silverman (Independent) — Silverman, a former journalist, ran unsuccessfully in the 2013 special election for Council, losing to Anita Bonds. She has built a profile as a favorite of DC's "young progressives" who are largely newcomers to the District, to the left on social and livability issues but far from united when it comes to economics and social justice. Her principal true "progressive" credential is being a leader of the unsuccessful effort to ban corporate contributions to DC election campaigns.

Michael D. Brown (Independent) — Brown has been a DC Statehood (shadow) senator since 2006 and a strong advocate of statehood while lobbying Congress and promoting the cause outside of DC. Brown would be expected to use his council seat to continue to promote statehood. However, he doesn't have much of a record on other issues. He ran unsuccessfully against Phil Mendelson for the Democratic nomination for DC Council in 2010.

With the exception of Puryear, all of the above Council candidates were previously identified as Democrats, changing their registration to take advantage of the open seat reserved for non-Democrats.

The other at-large Council candidates qualifying for the ballot are less well-known: Republican Marc Morgan; Libertarian Frederick Steiner; and independents Wendell Felder, Calvin Gurley, Brian Hart, Eric Jones, Khalid Pitts, Kishan Putta, Courtney Snowden and Robert White.

Ward Councilmembers

In addition to the at-large councilmembers, the District is divided into eight voting wards, each of which elects one councilmember. Four of the ward seats are on the ballot this year; the other four will next be up in 2016.

In all of the ward races, the winners of last April's Democratic primary have no opponents or at best token opposition. They are:

WARD 1: Brianne Nadeau, a newcomer who defeated Jim Graham in the primary, mostly stressing ethics. She is largely a blank slate on other issues.

WARD 3: Mary Cheh, incumbent. She has something of a mixed record. Significantly, she opposed the LRAA.

WARD 5: Kenyon McDuffie, incumbent. McDuffie is running for his first full term after winning the special election to replace Harry Thomas Jr. He supported the LRAA, but otherwise his political profile is still being developed.

WARD 6: Charles Allen, newcomer, a staffer for outgoing Councilmember Tommy Wells (Wells left his seat to run unsuccessfully for the nomination for mayor). Allen is expected to carry on Wells' record as a proponent of a livable, walkable city and a representative of "young progressives" (see description of Elissa Silverman, above).

Shadow Senator and Representative

In addition to having an officially recognized delegate to Congress (currently Norton), the District elects two "shadow senators" to six-year terms and a "shadow representative" for a two-year term. The sole responsibility of these unpaid officials is to lobby Congress for DC statehood.

This year, one of the two shadow Senate races is on the ballot, with two-term incumbent Democrat Paul Strauss is being challenged by David Schwartzman of the Statehood Green Party. Strauss has been fairly visible, and has been mostly known for getting celebrities to endorse statehood. As the Democratic nominee, he is a prohibitive favorite to be re-elected. Schwartzman is a longtime Statehood Green activist and member of the socialist organization Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism, also described in [DSA's guide to socialist organizations](#). He has been especially active in the DC Fair Budget Coalition, which advocates for greater spending by DC government on human needs and alleviating poverty. John Daniel, a Libertarian, is also running, as is Glenda Richmond, an independent.

In the race for Shadow Representative, Franklin Garcia, a first-time candidate, is the Democratic nominee and prohibitive favorite. He's president of the DC Latino Caucus and a party activist. No candidate ran in the Statehood Green primary, but afterwards the party selected Joyce Robinson-Paul for their slot on the ballot. She is a longtime statehood activist (she is currently vice president of the Stand Up! for Democracy in DC Coalition, a nonprofit

organization that performs public education on DC statehood) and a former ANC commissioner. Mark Moulton, a Libertarian, is also running.

Attorney General

This race was just added to the ballot and there was no primary. In 2010 DC voters chose to convert this office from an appointed post to an elected office beginning this year, but the DC Council tried to postpone the first election to 2018, claiming the duties of the office needed to be clarified. Attorney Paul Zuckerberg, former DC Council candidate and advocate of marijuana decriminalization, led the successful court challenge to force the election to be held this year and, unsurprisingly, is himself running for the position and favored to win. The other candidates are Mark Tuohey and Edward Smith.

Council Chair and Delegate to Congress

Running against the DSA-endorsed incumbent Phil Mendelson for Council Chair is Republican Kris Hammond and independent John Cheeks. Incumbent Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, also endorsed by DSA, is opposed by Republican Nelson Rimensnyder, Statehood Green Natale Lino Stracuzzi, Libertarian Sara Jane Panfil and independent Timothy Krepp. Neither's opposition is serious.

Ballot Initiative

In addition to races for elective office, the November ballot will have an initiative that would legalize marijuana for recreational use in the District. This goes beyond a recent law that decriminalized (but did not fully legalize) marijuana. A 1998 initiative legalized marijuana for medical use in the District.

With all of this action, the 2014 election in DC provides a seldom-seen opportunity for progressives to have an impact on the outcome, especially on the composition of the DC Council. Some elections force the left onto the sidelines; this one beckons us to become players.

[GOOD READS FOR SOCIALISTS on Labor Day 2014](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

From **Bill Mosley**: In his blog *Keep On Keepin' On*, Carl Davidson – co-chair of the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism – offers a new perspective on political alignment in U.S. politics. Where there is a formal two-party system, and many progressives see a “one-party” system – the party of big money that dominates both major parties – Davidson sees a “six-party” system representing tendencies from the Tea Party right to the progressive, social-democratic Left. This leads to ideological wars that prevent unity within both Democratic and Republican parties and make effective governing nigh-impossible. Davidson, while sympathetic to the need for a major left party to emerge over the long-term, argues that the short-term task for the left is to work to strengthen the existing progressive tendencies.

<http://carldavidson.blogspot.com/2013/04/strategic-thinking-on-us-six-party.html>

Luke Abel sends along “a journalistic look at poverty in the heavily suburbanized Atlanta metro region, which, the writer argues, differs in some key ways from the urban variety that tends to dominate the American imagination around poverty. A good follow-up to the conversation around 20th century urban housing policy that predominated the discussion.

http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/sprawled-out-in-atlanta-106500.html#.U_8wm_mwL-s

Thanks to a Facebook post by **Andrew Holt Williams**, here's a smart piece on Democrats' problems with the white working class by Andrew Levison, who wrote a book on same <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/118960/democrats-white-working-class-problem-isnt-just-south>

A review from *In These Times* on Naomi Klein's new book, with subhead: “You can't fight climate change without fighting capitalism...”

http://inthesetimes.com/article/17079/this_changes_everything_naomi_klein_lessons

A hundred-year goodbye to the passenger pigeon from *National Geographic*, a complement to **Bill Boteler**'s article in this issue... <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/08/140831-passenger-pigeon-martha-deextinction-dna-animals-species/>

[How to Turn Freezing Social Spending into a Kind and Gentle Anti-Poverty Plan](#)

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By Cecilio Morales

To Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis), chairman of the House Budget Committee and former Republican candidate for vice-president, solving the problem of poverty in America can be simplified to the case of “Andrea.”

Speaking at the American Enterprise Institute in late July, Ryan spoke of 24-year-old Andrea, mother of two children, 2 and 4 years old, abandoned by her husband six months before we come across her. Andrea has a high school diploma, worked briefly behind the counter in retail, lives with her parents in a two-bedroom trailer and has been looking for work for five months without luck. She dreams of becoming a teacher.

Under the Ryan “Opportunity Grant” pilot program proposal he has begun to float around Washington, she would go to a service provider, which could be a nongovernment group, the welfare office or something else. Taking a page out of every known antipoverty intervention, she would sit down with a case manager and develop an “opportunity plan” specifying immediate, intermediate and long-term goals that would become part of a “contract” she would fulfill with some help. The deal comes with penalties and rewards built in.

“So she might find a job in retail to pay the bills. Meanwhile, her case manager would help pay for transportation and child care so she could take classes at night,” Ryan explained. “Over time, Andrea could go to school, get her certification and find a teaching job.”

Essentially, Ryan is proposing to help a typical welfare mother get her the master’s degree needed to be a certified public school teacher in most states by doing in Congress nothing more than merging 11 existing programs and holding their funding flat. To their credit, his House panel’s Republican staff filled in the picture somewhat more in their paper *Expanding Opportunity in America: A Discussion Draft*.

Under this plan, the Opportunity Grants pilot would include the billions from welfare, food assistance, and the never-fully-funded child development grants, several smaller housing programs pots, plus the few nickels from job training money. (*See full list at the bottom of this article*)

The proposed all-purpose block grant in the document is simple and in its broad intent remarkably similar to a plan proposed by AEI political scientist Charles Murray published in 2006 as *In Our Hands: A Plan to Replace Welfare*. However, the controversy-seeking Murray – whose 1994 work *The Bell Curve* essentially argued that ethnic minority Americans who are poor just happen to be unintelligent – proposed abolishing all social programs, including Social Security and Medicare, and replacing them with a universal cash grant.

The House Budget Committee GOP staff is more moderate than that. Indeed, in their paper they added to Andrea the case of “Steven.” Unlike Andrea, who is described as in “Situational Poverty,” Steven is in “Generational Poverty.”

He is 19 years old, the noncustodial father of a three-year-old he has not seen in “over a year” and lives with his 38-year-old mother and 55-year-old grandmother in a subsidized two-bedroom apartment, where he sleeps on the couch. Both his mother and grandmother were single parents,

he does not know his father and his 20-year-old older brother is in prison. He dreams of going to college and getting joint custody of his child

“Steven faces much tougher circumstances,” the paper states. “He is struggling to avoid drugs, he doesn’t have a high-school diploma, and worst of all, he can’t rely on his family for support. Instead he will need to rely on others — preferably other people in his community who have overcome the same challenges.”

The paper outlines an “opportunity plan” (the contract in Andrea’s story) for Steven, but offers no happy ending, as Ryan did with Andrea.

But the paper is not merely a brochure about a proposal. The document devotes two-thirds of its pages to revisions to programs other than these, some 92 “fragmented and formulaic” programs, which per Ryan’s assertions cost \$800 billion annually to “help struggling families” and coexist with a poverty rate that is “the highest in a generation.” That last bit of stiletto-tongued innuendo is true if one does not count Baby Boomers; of course, he does not mention that the rate most recently began to rise under President George W. Bush.

The words “block grant” figure prominently in the Ryan plan for education, from Head Start to postsecondary aid, for which the paper proposes a mix of expansion (Pell Grants) and funding caps (financial aid), and for other areas.

The two words are a longstanding Republican legislative strategy: first, you merge everything you don’t like; second, you block grant it (essentially passing the baby and its dirty diapers to the states), then you sit back as the states either go crazy trying to perform the redistributive federal functions or throw in the towel and the (Republican) governors simply refuse to take the money. Some creative state governments have even used block grants as general revenue substitutions: For example, in the 1990s, Virginia cut gasoline taxes and recovered the revenue by trimming federally funded welfare checks. It was all perfectly legal.

The Ryan plan did not emerge out of nowhere. It sprang from a series of June hearings and papers sponsored by Ryan’s committee in the guise of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty. Both policymakers and wonks seemed to be in a frenzy, like children before Christmas, to be the first to adorn the celebration of the half-century.

There was a minor problem. President Lyndon Johnson did indeed state before Congress, “This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America.” But the date was Jan. 8, 1965. Fifty years from that will come next year.

Never mind. In June 2014 the House Budget Committee held a hearing on the subject and the Brookings Institution issued 14 antipoverty proposals with explanatory essays, all complementing the House panel’s own report and an economic evaluation of poverty by the National Bureau of Economic Research earlier this year. The material produced is voluminous, in large part repetitive of studies and political speeches of the last half century, and too unwieldy to summarize in one fell swoop.

Consider instead two representative views.

“When poverty is measured in ways that take the War on Poverty programs into account, researchers find that they cut the poverty rate almost in half,” said Olivia Golden, executive director of the liberal-leaning Center for Law and Social Policy, in her testimony before Ryan’s panel. “One recent estimate by researchers at Columbia University finds that government tax and transfer policies reduced the share of people who are poor by 13 percentage points, from 29 percent to 16 percent in 2012.”

She acknowledged the drawbacks in reforms that she helped implement as HHS assistant secretary for children and families under President Clinton, but added, “Unfortunately, however, changes in the economy, particularly in the availability of secure, decent-paying jobs and the nature of low-wage work, created an enormous headwind for public programs. Despite the accomplishments of the War on Poverty and the large increase in work effort by poor parents themselves, about one in five children remain(s) poor today.”

Before and after her stint the federal government, Golden had specialized in administering welfare systems and she brought that perspective as she called on Congress to strengthen “economic security for low-wage workers” and help them “move up on the job.” Golden urged boosting child care and early childhood education to help parents stay on the job, improve access to Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly food stamps) and child care subsidies, strengthen the safety net for youth and childless adults and help families “with less than \$2 per person in household income per day.”

The NBER report Golden cited was one of several papers by five specialists who analyzed poverty from the 1960s to the present.

Authors of one study said: “We find that historical trends in poverty have been more favorable — and that government programs have played a larger role — than [the official poverty measure] estimates suggest. The OPM shows the overall poverty rates to be nearly the same in 1967 and 2012 — at 14 and 15 percent respectively.” In *Waging War on Poverty: Historical Trends in Poverty Using the Supplemental Poverty Measure*, they continue: “But our counterfactual estimates using SPM show that without government programs, poverty would have risen from 25 percent to 31 percent, while with government benefits poverty has fallen from 19 percent to 16 percent. Thus government programs today are cutting poverty nearly in half (from 31 percent to 16 percent) while in 1967 they cut poverty by only a quarter (from 25 percent to 19 percent).”

Take, in contrast, Jason Turner, currently executive director of the Secretaries’ Innovation Group, a networking group for GOP state health and welfare cabinet members, who blamed “the fix we are in” with federal spending (meaning the deficit) on 79 “welfare state” federal means-tested programs.

“What have we gotten for all of that spending? The poverty rate fell sharply after World War II until it reached 12 percent in 1969,” Turner asserted. “Then, as the negative effects of

dependency and other induced problems reduced labor participation and family cohesion, the rate in 2011 ended up higher than when the war on poverty began, at 15 percent.”

(According to the Census Bureau, the poverty rate fell to an all-time low of 11.1 percent in 1973, rose to 15.3 percent in 1983, declined to 11.3 percent in 2000 and in 2011 was 15.0 percent, down from a high of 15.1 percent the previous year.)

Turner’s perspective is easily explained by his curriculum vitae. He goes back to Ryan’s home Badger State, whence he emerged from running Republican Gov. Tommy Thompson’s Wisconsin Works welfare reduction program to become HHS director of family assistance under the elder President Bush. He was later New York City Commissioner of Human Resources — essentially the welfare programs chief — under Mayor Rudy Giuliani; there he was investigated several times concerning improprieties involving welfare contracts but was only once forced to admit a conflict of interest and accept a \$6,500 fine. Now he counsels fellow Republicans on how to cut social spending.

In his testimony, Turner hailed the Clinton Administration’s 1996 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program as a model. “The adoption of TANF and the energy its reforms unleashed — adults newly finding and taking jobs, caseworkers oriented to work-first, time limits inducing urgency, and new program purposes such as the promotion of two parent families — is an example of how states can operate under the proper federal/state partnership,” he testified.

TANF reduced a federal entitlement for low-income families to a program dispensing aid for up to a five-year lifetime maximum, so long as the recipient makes bona fide efforts to work.

Admittedly, TANF did reduce what Republicans call “dependence” on welfare during what remained then of the 1990s economic boom, the longest and most broadly felt in U.S. history. TANF’s record under the persistently depressed economy since the financial crash of 2008 is, incontrovertibly, that welfare rolls did not grow to match the swell of poverty and unemployment; scholars are still assessing whether the program itself is to blame.

Overall, Ryan’s plan offers nothing so ambitious as a major reform. Instead, an antipoverty experiment is pitched to deliver results that current programs cannot, using no more resources than present efforts receive. None of the palaver of Ryan’s allies explains how the same old programs at the same level of underfunding will perform new miracles.

List of programs Ryan would include in the “Opportunity Grants”:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program

- Section 521 Rural Rental Assistance Payments
- Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance
- Public Housing Capital and Operating Funds
- Child Care and Development Fund
- Weatherization Assistance Program
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program
- Community Development Block Grant
- Workforce Investment Act, Title II Dislocated Worker Program

[Is Economic Growth the Cure for the Jobs Gap? Or a “Catch 22” Setting Greens & Labor at Odds?](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Andy Feeney

As the U.S. and the world both struggle to recover from the lingering after-effects of the 2008 financial crisis, commentators from across the political spectrum are focusing a good deal on economic growth.

Are today's growth rates fast enough to keep bringing down U.S. unemployment levels? How about fast enough to bolster federal income tax revenues, so the Obama administration can start to pay down the huge debts that Washington racked up a few years back to keep the financial crisis from leading to a full-fledged depression?

Is the U.S. economy seeing enough growth this year, and enough job creation with it, that the Federal Reserve Board can safely end its “qualitative easing” policy that was largely designed to fend off another recession by slightly inflating the currency each year? Will the Fed now feel confident enough of healthy growth that it will soon begin raising short-term interest rates again, so as to slightly reduce the growth rate and new job creation to keep workers from growing so secure that that we demand big pay increases that will spark serious inflation?

In terms of the troubled economies of the Eurozone, is economic growth starting to return to Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, all of which were pushed into recession by a flap over government debts, and all of which have been pressured by European bankers to adopt austerity

policies that have generated high unemployment and sometimes violent street protests, not to mention rightwing political backlash?

The usual experts quoted by the capitalist media sometimes disagree on how to measure economic growth, not to mention how best to promote it. But the vast majority, and many labor leaders and political progressives who do not always get media exposure, agree that economic growth is not only good, but essential for achieving economic health and long-term political progress in our system. Most economists are especially insistent that growth, or at least the right kind of growth, is especially crucial for organized and unorganized labor. When healthy growth is occurring, they agree, jobs are usually more plentiful, consumers are more optimistic and likely to buy things, which helps support the creation of new jobs, employers tend to be a little more generous, and voters and politicians are kinder towards the poor.

“A rising tide lifts all boats,” is how John F. Kennedy put it, and a large majority of this society’s labor economists agree.

From one admittedly radical Green perspective, however, the capitalist West’s near-worship of economic growth is tragically, suicidally wrong. The radical Green logic here is simple – if not simplistic, which is what some critics say about it.

The earth, the atmosphere and the biosphere of living things that earth and atmosphere support are all, according to this viewpoint, parts of a single physical system. That physical system is big, and has been capable of supporting a great deal of human endeavor to date, but it is finite.

Green radical logic says that by definition, no constituent element within a finite system, regardless of how big the system may be, can grow in size indefinitely without eventually bursting the system’s boundaries – probably fatally. As the controversial environmentalist Paul Ehrlich once wrote, from a Green viewpoint, “The belief in endless growth is the ideology of a cancer cell.”

Some 40 years ago, in its highly publicized *Limits to Growth* report, a think tank called the Club of Rome argued that both the population growth rates and the economic growth rates that prevailed around the world in the early 1970s were environmentally unsustainable, and the report cited a computer simulation indicating that the continuation of such growth rates in world economic output and human population would trigger serious disasters by the close of the 20th century. Critics questioned the validity of the computer simulation at the time, and some of the report’s gloomiest predictions turned out to be wrong.

But from the perspective of some Green radicals today, the growing scientific concern about global climate change is an indication that the basic logic of the *Limits to Growth* report was valid. Human civilization’s apparent inability or unwillingness to place limits on both economic and population growth, they argue, is not only feeding dangerous climate change. Growth of various kinds also drives forward the ongoing destruction of tropical rain forests, among the most genetically diverse environments on the planet. Growth, at least the wrong kind of growth, also is generating the depletion of major ocean fisheries, the creation of “dead zones” in the ocean caused by excessive agricultural runoff, the destruction of productive farmland, the

contamination of important food chains and the fatty tissues of many human beings by long-lasting chemical wastes, and what evolutionary biologists call the “[Sixth Extinction Event](#),” a spasm of extinctions of plant and animal species during our lifetimes that promises to rival the one that ended the dinosaur age in 65 million B.C.

Sooner or later, the Green radicals argue, our society and all other societies on the planet have to move from a growth-dependent economy to a “steady state” or no-growth economy, in which humanity’s total physical impact on the natural world will not increase but remain roughly constant from year to year.

Yet modern capitalism since its origins in the British Industrial Revolution of the late 1700s and early 1800s has essentially been a system devoted to infinitely prolonged growth. Adam Smith, the intellectual founder of capitalist political economy and the thinker who coined the phrase “the invisible hand of the market” for the delight of future libertarians, explained some of the reasons for this in his masterwork *The Wealth of Nations*. In that book, Smith noted that continuing economic growth is quite beneficial for private investors and business owners, for in a steady-state or non-growing economy, he argued, profits would fall to a very low level. But he thought that growth was even more important for the working class. Why?

In primitive economies with little or no division of labor and no class divisions, Smith reasoned, “the whole produce of labour belongs to the labourer. He has neither landlord nor master to share with him.” But this state of affairs, to Smith, “could not last beyond the first introduction of the appropriation of land and the accumulation of stock.” In other words, it was incompatible with modern private property.

In advanced market societies that rest on private property, Smith observed that landlords demand a share of almost everything that is produced from their lands in the form of rent. Also, “In all arts and manufactures the greater part of the workmen stand in need of a master to advanced them the materials of their work, and their wages and maintenance until it be completed. He shares in the produce of their labour ... and in this share consists his profit.”

In the basically pro-capitalist analysis of Adam Smith, it followed that in advanced market societies, the average wages of labor are determined everywhere by a “contract usually made between ... two parties, whose interests are by no means the same. The workmen desire to get as much, the masters to give as little as possible.” Moreover, Smith thought, “It is not ... difficult to foresee which of the two parties, must, upon all ordinary occasions, have the advantage in the dispute, and force the other into a compliance with their terms.”

Because employers are usually fewer in number than workers, they can generally organize more easily to present a united front against wage increases. They also are generally richer than the workers, and can withstand the economic pain of a strike or work stoppage longer than most workers can. To Smith, it followed that employers generally can force workers to accept wages that are barely adequate to keep the workers themselves alive, and to raise families of future employees who will one day go to work for the employers. Below this minimal level, Smith thought, wages usually do not fall.

Yet there are “certain circumstances,” Smith wrote, “which sometimes give the laborers an advantage and enable them to raise their wages considerably above this rate, evidently the lowest which is consistent with common humanity.” When demand for labor exceeds the available supply, market forces will allow its price to rise, and in Smith’s view, this can only occur under conditions of rapid growth. As he put it, “The demand for those who live by wages ... necessarily increases with the increase of the revenue and stock of every country, and cannot possibly increase without it.” Thus “It is not the actual greatness of national wealth, but its continual increase, which occasions a rise in the wages of labour. It is not ... in the richest countries, but in the most thriving, or in those which are growing the fastest, that the wages of labour are highest.”

For Smith, accordingly, “The liberal reward of labour ... is the natural symptom of increasing national wealth. The scanty maintenance of the labouring poor, on the other hand, is the natural symptom that things are at a stand[still], and their starving condition, that they are going backward.” And since the “labouring poor” were the vast majority of the population in every society, Smith concluded, it is only the rapidly growing capitalist market society – or what he called the “progressive” society – that can offer a good life to most of its people.

Today’s apologists for unregulated capitalism don’t seem to cite *The Wealth of Nations* quite as frequently as they did in the 1950s, perhaps because many conservatives have grown more aware of Smith’s almost proto-Marxist thinking about how working people can normally be exploited by private landlords and capitalist employers. However, it’s clear that Smith’s ideas about the capitalist job market and the effects of economic growth on it still apply to contemporary market societies.

This is one reason that liberal Democratic politicians who rely on the support of organized labor, and some who merely give lip service to labor, regularly promise to “grow this economy,” and why Keynesian economists such as Paul Krugman sometimes call for higher deficit spending to spur economic growth in hopes that in the long run, reinvigorated growth will allow the U.S. government to expand its way out of its [hopefully temporary] debt problems.

Today, just as in Smith’s time, average wages are determined by contracts made “between two parties, whose interests are by no means the same,” and today in the U.S. just as in 18th century Scotland, advocates for working class interests generally call for faster growth to give employees some advantage in negotiating with capitalists over pay. Whenever growth stops, whenever the increase in total U.S. output of income and investment capital reaches a “stand,” as Smith would have it, professional economists declare our economy is in recession, and labor economists predict that if the recession continues, job creation and wages both will fall.

It naturally follows that virtually all politicians, labor leaders, mainstream economists and media commentators in our society think further U.S. economic growth is necessary. They probably do not say this because of the low output of our system. The U.S. last year had a Gross Domestic Product of \$15.92 trillion, according to the government’s Bureau of Economic Analysis. In constant dollars, adjusted for inflation, the nation’s GDP in 1972 when *Limits to Growth* first appeared was roughly \$5.25 trillion. In short, our national economic output, already high compared to that of the rest of the world in the 1970s, has apparently tripled in the last 42 years.

Yet as Adam Smith put it, it is not the total wealth of any capitalist market economy that determines whether members of the “working poor” are paid adequately. It is how fast the economy is growing. Last year the Bureau of Economic Analysis recorded a growth rate in GDP of just 1.9 percent, which almost everyone agrees was inadequate to spur healthy job growth and decent pay for all Americans. So presumably, our \$15.9 trillion economy, after expanding threefold over the past 40 years, now needs to grow faster than an average rate of 1.9 percent annually for indefinitely far into the future, if we want conditions for working people to improve. Presumably, our national GDP must double to – say — \$31 trillion a year in another 40 years and double again to \$62 trillion or so before 2100, to keep jobs available and wages at decent levels for all.

When radical Greens object that such economic expansion is almost certain to be environmentally disastrous, accordingly, advocates for continued growth usually simply ignore them. Sometimes, when the “no growthers” are too loud to be ignored, as they were in the early 1970s, advocates for growth criticize the alleged alarmism of the Greens, their alleged class biases, and their imperfect research methods. Judging from the failure of some of the Club of Rome’s 1972 computer predictions, it should be admitted that some anti-Green criticisms, at some times, have been at least partly valid.

But at least in this society, the real problem with “steady state” or “no-growth” economics is not primarily that its advocates are methodologically careless or committed to supposedly elitist values that privilege tree-hugging at the expense of human welfare. The fundamental problem with no-growth environmentalism in the United States is that it appears incompatible with capitalism, and capitalism is the political coin of the realm.

Can democratic socialists inside or outside of DSA have any useful contributions to make to debates over “growth” versus “no growth” economics? Can we prevent open or hidden conflicts over the desirability of growth from driving destructive political wedges between the Green groups and organized labor? Can we find ways to work for a future in which the U.S. economy does not need to embrace serious environmental risks to prevent poverty from worsening? Maybe, but maybe not.

In 1974, in a book of interviews with prominent thinkers on reactions to the *Limits to Growth* report, the great Marxist economist Ernest Mandel, a member of the Trotskyist Fourth International, reported “an impression of satisfaction and an impression of irritation” with the Club of Rome’s findings. Some solutions the report’s authors had proposed would be worse than the problems they hoped to cure, Mandel stated, but he basically agreed that “capitalist economic growth threatens human survival.”

Similarly, U.S. anarchist Noam Chomsky told interviewer Willem Oltmans that without commenting on the accuracy of the Club of Rome’s computer model, he agreed that physical and chemical laws would eventually set some limits to capitalist growth in the U.S. at some stage in the future, and “probably not a very distant stage.” The Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse, an inspiration to many New Left radicals during the 1960s, declared that *Limits to Growth* “shows from a new angle the destructiveness and aggressiveness which is inherent in the capitalist system.”

Yet democratic socialist Michael Harrington, who would later help found DSA, told Oltmans that “if the projections of the Club of Rome study are true, then it seems to me socialism becomes an impossibility.” Harrington explained that socialists have traditionally believed that many of capitalism’s worst features arise from competition over scarce resources, and “the problem of the *Limits to Growth* hypothesis is that if it is true, then one has removed permanently the possibility of abolishing that fundamental scarcity which is at the root of so many of the basic human emotions.”

Besides that, Harrington added, he basically believed that the future is impossible to predict, and given the impossibility of prediction, he felt compelled to be an optimist about it. He therefore opposed the “no growth” position, and he continued to do so until his death in 1989.

Today scientific warnings about climate crisis appear to have persuaded a sizeable number of people on the U.S. left that Marcuse, Mandel and Chomsky were right about capitalism’s environmental destructiveness, but there are probably large numbers of progressives within DSA and the U.S. labor movement, particularly, who still embrace Harrington’s position – and Adam Smith’s – about the importance of economic growth to human welfare in our society.

One possible short- to medium-term way for progressives to finesse this divide rests on advocating for new definitions of growth and new technological methods for achieving it. If the U.S. and world economies can switch from dirtier, more resource-intensive industrial methods to cleaner, more environmentally frugal and environmentally sustainable ones, for example, economic growth can continue for some time, even in a capitalist context, without necessarily triggering eco-disaster.

This is the logic behind the Green Party’s 2012 call for a “Green New Deal” and is being proposed in a more economically mainstream form by would-be “green capitalists” and entrepreneurs who propose to reinvigorate the U.S. economy through private investments in renewable energy and conservation. It is also the course advocated by some business economists who argue that through technological innovation, capitalism already is developing new and more efficient ways to use resources to create economic value and generate profits, supposedly without too many nasty side effects.

A second possibility suggested by Marx in the third volume of *Capital*, and echoed within the last few generations by the French anarchist Andre Gorz and by some U.S. radicals, is to weaken the links among growth, job creation and wages by legislating a radical reduction in the average work week. The goal would be to reduce the economy’s physical impact on nature by stabilizing both output and resource use, but to prevent higher unemployment and wage losses by distributing work, leisure and income more equally in the economy. Historically, the demand for a shorter work week was central to U.S. labor radicalism in the late 1800s and into the 20th century, although it was eclipsed within the mainstream labor movement following World War II. Today, labor radicals might find common cause with environmentalists by working to revive the notion, this time with a Green twist.

A third possibility suggested by Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* is to change the capitalist labor market so that growth is no longer a precondition for higher wages. How? If worker-owned and

worker-controlled enterprises could eliminate the role of private employers in production, say, so that every working person reaped the full economic value created by his or her labor, without needing to share it with a landlord or a capitalist boss, wages would no longer be set by “a contract between two parties, whose interests are by no means the same.” Then the scarcity or non-scarcity of labor, and with it the rate of growth, might cease to have much effect on average incomes, and working people might prosper even when growth slows or ceases entirely.

David Schweickart, author of *After Capitalism*, has suggested something like this arrangement in his plans for a system of “economic democracy” or market socialism characterized by widespread worker ownership and worker control over production. Leftist economist Gar Alperovitz has implicitly proposed something rather similar in several recent books on the importance of worker-owned enterprises, producer coops and other alternative business models in the place of today’s capitalist workplaces.

In order to avoid debates over growth becoming a chronic “Catch-22” problem for the left, in which progressives cannot embrace the labor movement’s goals without alienating the Green groups and vice versa, DSA members might want to spend some time studying these potential part-solutions to the growth dilemma.

Meanwhile, we can undoubtedly expect conflicts over growth to continue. Thomas Picketty’s best-selling new book on inequality actually identifies the expected slow growth of all the developed capitalist economies in the future as a key factor that he believes will make inequality ever worse. In the U.S. economy at this writing, meanwhile, the nation’s fastest economic growth and job creation is probably occurring around the shale oil deposits of North Dakota, as well as through the production of natural gas through “fracking.”

Some readers of Picketty’s work are sure to argue that faster growth is the best or the only way to raise U.S wage levels in the near future, while the CO2 emissions and water pollution associated with fracking and shale oil production seem likely guarantee that for the next generation, as in the past, a great deal of U.S. economic growth will be associated with severe environmental destruction. Can democratic socialists help organize a movement to do something about this?

[Is the Recession Over Yet? Four Left Visions of What Comes Next for American Labor](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

By Andy Feeney

>>Greg Albo, Sam Gindin and Leo Panitch, *In and Out of Crisis: The Global Financial Meltdown and Left Alternatives* (2010, Spectre/PM Press, Oakland, Calif., \$13.95), 140 pp.

>>David McNally, *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance* (2011, Spectre/PM Press, Oakland, \$17.00), 230 pp.

>>Jeff Faux, *The Servant Economy: Where America's Elite Is Sending the Middle Class* (2011, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, N.J., \$27.95), 298 pp.

>>John Bellamy Foster and Robert McChesney, *The Endless Crisis: How Monopoly-Finance Capital Produces Stagnation and Upheaval from the USA to China* (2013, Monthly Review Press, New York, \$25.00), 320 pp.

This year's media attention to Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* has put an official stamp on some bad news long familiar to democratic socialists: income equality in the U.S. and other western market societies is growing and has worsened significantly since the 1970s. Meanwhile, the U.S. labor movement is embattled and has lost political influence over the past half-century. Unemployment is still at near-crisis levels in Europe and is a serious social problem in our society, although Democrats campaigning for reelection and some Republicans, too, may try to pretend otherwise. And six years after the global financial crisis of 2008, which had many in Washington and on Wall Street worried about a possible collapse of the entire banking system, economic growth in the U.S. and elsewhere is still precarious, although the Obama White House and Janet Yellen of the Federal Reserve Board are beginning to sound cautiously optimistic about it.

As progressive activists ponder these trends and what they might mean, what does the capitalist system have in store for labor in the coming years? No one knows for sure, of course: as *New York Times* economics writer Leonard Silk once observed, capitalism as a system is a "moving target" whose dynamism and flexibility have often surprised both critics and supporters in the past. The current cult of "disruptive" innovation in the high-technology sector along with business enthusiasm for what Joseph Schumpeter called "creative destruction" make prediction even harder than it might be otherwise.

On the progressive U.S. left, however, and to a large extent within DSA, there seems to be a view emerging that pins many of the problems now plaguing American working people on "neoliberalism," the anti-Keynesian free-market fundamentalism that powerful corporations and members of the economic elite have been promoting for decades now. The biggest problem that working class and/or "middle class" Americans face today is not that capitalism has turned into a "winner-take-all economy," this school of thought contends; the main problem is what political scientists Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson have called "Winner-Take-All Politics." Both major political parties have been captured in part or whole by wealthy corporate campaign donors since the 1970s, and they have succeeded in pushing Washington to adopt anti-egalitarian policies – tax cuts for billionaires, huge Pentagon budgets, painful cuts in social spending, weak enforcement of labor laws and deregulation of finance – that privilege billionaires at the expense of the rest of us.

Educate most Americans about neoliberal "winner-take-all politics" and mobilize them to demand change, the theory goes, and with an admittedly huge expenditure of effort, members of the U.S. middle class/working class may be able to resurrect at least some of the key features of

the so-called “golden age” of U.S. capitalism, between 1946 and 1971, when income was better distributed, unions were stronger, and Keynesian fiscal policies helped the government head off recessions before they got really serious.

There are at least a few dissenters on the left, however, who argue that a progressive focus on fighting “winner-take-all politics” and neoliberalism, although essential, is too optimistic concerning the inner dynamics of capitalism. The four books addressed in this review are largely written from this more pessimistic perspective, although one – *The Servant Economy*, by Jeff Faux, a founder of the Economic Policy Institute – actually supports what many optimistic progressives think needs to be done. Like the optimists, Faux focuses his analysis on the sins of the neoliberal rich, but he differs from some other progressives in the bleak outlook and the barely concealed anger he brings to the discussion.

It is impossible in this review to offer a really comprehensive account of any the four books mentioned here. But for DSA members interested in doing more reading on the subject of economic crisis and its possible cures, here are some highlights of what the different authors say on the subject.

Faux, in *The Servant Economy*, offers the least “Marxist” account of how U.S. capitalism has evolved (and devolved) over the past 150 years or so. One of his central points is that U.S. economic success since the early 1800s has depended heavily on the system of protective tariffs that Alexander Hamilton invented for the purpose of shielding “infant industries” from ruinous foreign competition. The increasing abandonment of protective tariffs in favor of global free trade, notably by a surprisingly coalition of Bill Clinton’s White House and the Republicans in the 1990s, is a key to why this nation’s working class is now facing hard times, in Faux’s view.

Despite the economic growth facilitated by the tariff, Faux acknowledges, the U.S. economy suffered through several major economic crises and some bitter class wars in the 60 or 70 years leading up to the start of the 1929 Depression. However, the progressive economic programs of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, followed by the temporary destruction of most foreign competition to U.S. industry thanks to World War II’s impacts on Western Europe and Japan, then set the stage for the “golden age” economy of 1946-1971. The creation of the Bretton Woods system in the late 1940s, which stabilized global trade patterns and currency values by turning the U.S. dollar into a global currency, with a guarantee that foreign holders of dollars could redeem them from the U.S. Treasury at the stated value of \$35 per ounce of gold, further supported general prosperity.

Ultimately, though, the Europeans and Japanese rebuilt their industrial economies and began to challenge U.S. dominance in major world markets again. Meanwhile Lyndon Johnson’s refusal in the 1960s to raise taxes to pay for the Great Society and the Vietnam War had the effect of reintroducing serious inflation into the economy. Inflation plus an increasing flow of U.S. investments overseas led foreigners who were accumulating large numbers of dollars to try to redeem them at Fort Knox, thus threatening to deplete the entire U.S. gold supply and trigger disaster.

To head off that risk, Faux writes, Richard Nixon in 1971 abrogated the Bretton Wood Agreement by ending the convertibility of dollars to gold and allowed the dollar to “float” on global currency markets. This saved the U.S. from a gold-related default, but at the cost of encouraging renewed speculation in national currencies and supporting the growth of an increasing large volume of financial speculation in derivative securities that helped businesses and governments to hedge against currency risks. The decoupling of dollars, the main currency used to purchase Middle Eastern petroleum, also triggered the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries to raise the dollar prices of oil dramatically, triggering two separate “oil shocks” in the 1970s that further destabilized the world economy.

Faux’s analysis of the last 30 years is rather complicated, but he makes two or three main points about how the U.S. government responded to the crises of the 1970s that together support his charge that the U.S. elite today is in fact betraying the middle class/working class to neoliberal austerity politics and untrammelled globalism. Unless Americans mobilize to prevent this, he contends, neoliberalism and globalism together will condemn most of us to lives in a “servant economy,” as well-paid or badly paid servants to the globally minded rich.

First, Faux argues, the U.S. political elite decided after some debate not to meet the economic challenges of the 1970s through the creation of a national industrial policy, as some progressive Democrats urged at the time, and opted instead to rely on market forces to determine which industries would live or die. Secondly, the U.S. Federal Reserve took strong action to end inflation in the early 1980s by triggering a deep global recession and putting millions of Americans out of work, thus drastically weakening organized labor. The Reagan administration, by brutally breaking the Professional Air Traffic Controllers’ strike in 1981, then signaled to corporate employers that they could take strong anti-union actions without much concern for prevailing labor laws, further weakening labor.

Large national debts that the Reagan administration incurred in the 1980s meanwhile undercut the financial foundation of the New Deal welfare state, and then in 1994 Bill Clinton joined with corporate America and pro-business Republicans to push through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which helped end the tradition of Hamiltonian tariff walls that had protected U.S. industrial jobs for more than a century.

There are more economic misdeeds that Faux attributes to mainstream U.S. political leaders over the past generation, too, but these are some of the key ones.

Underlying most of these bad economic decisions, he argues, is one central flaw: the growing domination of our national politics by big money. Although Faux in his closing arguments states that overall, the Democrats are still mostly better for labor and the middle class than Republicans, he sees Obama and Clinton as well as their Republican rivals as all carrying out the wishes of the economic elite, especially on Wall Street. Indeed, he writes, proving one is willing to serve the elite at the expense of ordinary Americans, if necessary, has probably become an essential qualification of being elected to the White House.

The Servant Economy therefore ends with a call to U.S. progressives to focus on one objective above all others: amending the U.S. Constitution to end the Supreme Court’s treatment of large

corporations as “persons” under the law, as demonstrated recently in the Citizens United and Hobby Lobby cases. The political process of amending the Constitution, especially against the wishes of the establishment, is enormously

difficult, Faux writes, but it is the only reform that can save us from a future as lackeys to the global elite. He adds that if progressives can organize for a constitutional amendment intelligently, we will probably win a good fraction of the Tea Party’s supporters to our cause.

Unlike Faux, the Canadian labor economists Greg Albo, Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin are open socialists and Marxists. In their book *In and Out of Crisis* they agree that the roots of our current labor market problems are political as well as economic. However, one striking feature of their analysis is they do not identify neoliberal politics with “free market” extremism alone, and they reject the arguments of some left-liberal commentators who seem to believe that one problem with the U.S. is that the political state here is “weak” as compared with the governments, say, of the social democratic nations of Europe. Corporate neoliberalism actually requires a strong political state, they write, but one that privileges elite interests over all others.

They also reject what they see as an irresponsible and “populist” tendency by North American politicians and some progressives to blame all economic problems on the financial sector. The financial sector did trigger the global crisis of 2008, this book notes, but the financial sector has always been an essential feature of industrial capitalism; it is not just a parasitic outgrowth that has emerged since the 1970s to cannibalize the “real” economy. Moreover, it was the financial sector that offered working people an apparent way out of the crisis of the 1970s and the massive losses of industrial jobs that have occurred in the early to mid-1990s. As working people lost good jobs and decent pay, the book reports, many have turned to financial products – credit card debt, speculation on securities during the “dot.com bubble” of the 1990s, and more recently home equity lines of credit and the refinancing of home mortgages – as the best way to maintain their incomes and their families in very hard times.

Accordingly, Albo, Gindin and Panitch see U.S. and Canadian workers as being increasingly entangled with the financial industry, which limits real political support for populist campaigns to punish “evil bankers.” Indeed, “The American Dream has always materially entailed promoting the integration of the popular classes into the circuits of commodity capital” – whether as indebted farmers demanding free coinage of silver, as industrial workers with paychecks deposited in banks and old-age pensions dependent on the stock market, as consumers running up credit card debt, or as homeowners trying to stay afloat through home equity loans and subprime mortgages.

Too often in the past, this book adds, North American progressives have cemented working class incorporation into the financial economy by employing the “democratic” state to improve popular access to credit – a strategy that has indirectly bolstered the neoliberal order. To respond to the aftermath of the 2008 crisis and build a better foundation for the left, the authors offer a handful of brief suggestions for an alternative politics. One of their recommendations is a major push to nationalize the banks, or create new publicly-owned ones, rather than calling on an elitist-dominated state to improve regulation of the private banking sector that now exists.

In *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance*, Canadian political scientist David McNally argues that neoliberalism, despite its elitist biases and its painful effects on working people, is not simply a pathology: instead, McNally contends, it offered capitalism an apparent solution to the economic crisis of the 1970s, which is why it initially won such support. Beginning in around 1980, it supported a 25-year wave of new economic growth – the achievement of the Reagan and Thatcher years. But the financial crisis of 2008 has signaled the end of that capitalist growth wave and “the transition to a protracted period of slump.” The crisis triggered by the 2008 financial meltdown continues still, McNally adds, despite claims by politicians, business leaders and the mainstream media that the world economy is now on a path to renewed prosperity.

The prolonged period of austerity politics that lies ahead, McNally writes, will be characterized by “a new period of social conflict and class struggle. For our planet’s rulers, this conflict takes the form of a war against indigenous lands, public services, unions, and communities of color. For the world’s workers, it is expressed in factory occupations, general strikes, land seizures, street protests, and mass demonstrations for migrant justice.”

McNally’s economic analysis, which reflects some traditional Marxist concepts about the inevitability of capitalist business crises and how they are resolved, is not easy to summarize. But essentially, he rejects what some left-liberal labor economists in the United States have written about the Keynesian idea of governments running up large debts in times of crisis so as to “jump start” stalled economies, then relying on renewed growth and improved tax collections to pay down the debts later. Following the 2008 financial crisis, McNally argues, capitalist governments, especially in the Eurozone, rescued failing banks by taking on enormous levels of debt that are unsustainable.

To shrink the debts and insure continuing corporate profits despite the cost of doing so, he believes capitalist governments will be compelled to wage a vicious war against the working class and the poor. The leftwing response must be insurrectionary or nearly so – the building of a “culture of resistance” that will do battle against the austerity and privatization drive of capital, from street demonstrations against job losses and pension cuts in Greece, to factory takeovers in Chicago, to “intransigent” fights against racism, to militant anti-globalization protests in Toronto and Bolivian campaigns against the privatization of public water systems. Citing the revolutionary legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, McNally writes that socialists who help to link together such fights will embody “the conviction that we are mobilizing ... to create something new – a vigorous, dynamic movement of opposition to capitalism and all its multiple oppressions.”

In *The Endless Crisis*, John Bellamy Foster and Robert McChesney focus far less on activist responses to capitalist crisis, far more on plumbing its dimensions from the perspective of the “monopoly capital” school of Marxism associated with the journal *Monthly Review*. Their conclusions are implicitly as pro-revolutionary as McNally’s, but their account of how capitalist crisis has evolved since the 1960s is radically different. This book is a relatively scholarly

exploration of the monopoly capitalism theory, complete with footnotes to a host of different leftwing and some rightwing authorities – e.g. Milton Friedman.

One common Marxist explanation for economic crisis is that it results from a “tendency” for the rate of corporate profits to fall over time, basically in response to business competition reducing the proportion of labor employed in production, as opposed to machinery and other forms of investment capital. When profit rates fall far enough – as McNally and many other Marxists argue they did in the mid-1970s – capitalism goes into crisis, which invariably entails large-scale job losses and falling wages and usually ends with workers being exploited more intensively than before.

The theory of monopoly capital, though, is that economic crisis today results from too many corporate profits, not too few. The development of enormous global corporations in the place of the more competitive small businesses of 19th century capitalism, the theory asserts, has reduced or at least radically altered competition among corporations. They no longer compete through price-cutting, but through advertising, marketing and the creation of planned waste in the economy to absorb surplus production capacity. The oligopoly structure of the market and the avoidance of price-cutting mean that even in times of recession, corporate profits for large firms remain high. However, this then leads to a crisis of “over-accumulation” – investors have too much capital on hand and too few profitable outlets for it.

According to Foster and McChesney, this over-accumulation crisis is the root of the massive “financialization” of U.S. and arguably the world economy since the 1980s. With huge sums of investment capital on hand and existing surplus capacity in the economy making new investments in commodity production unattractive, capitalist money managers have turned instead to financial speculation – to gambling on asset prices – as the best use for the money. This process has generated a series of financial crises and a chronic problem of economic stagnation in western economies since Reagan’s time, *The Endless Crisis* argues, and the recent appearance of industrial over-capacity in China, too, suggests that the entire world now faces a prolonged slump.

Enormously adding to the woes of working people everywhere, meanwhile, is the recent incorporation of tens of millions of poor Chinese peasants and millions of displaced African and Latin American peasants into the global working class. Along with the 1989 collapse of the Soviet Union, which soon led to Western investors being able to penetrate Eastern Europe, the ongoing proletarianization of the global South and the flow of Western corporate investment to Asia have enormously expanded what Marx called “the reserve army of the unemployed” – the pool of unemployed workers that employers can now call on to “discipline” the old industrial working class of the West through the threat of worldwide competition for jobs.

The long-term implications for workers everywhere, and not just in the West, are potentially disastrous, Foster and McChesney indicate, and leftists need to mobilize a vigorous political

movement to meet the challenge. Far more than Faux, Albo, Gindin and Panitch do in their respective analyses of the present crisis, Foster and McChesney imply that to succeed, that politicized labor movement will need to be global in scope.

Unfortunately, Foster and McChesney offer few guidelines on how such a movement might be built. But by broadening the scope of how socialists and labor activists need to think about current capitalist trends, *The Endless Crisis* along with the other books may help organizers develop practical strategies for addressing the slump in years to come.

[Labor Day's Forgotten Roots](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Kurt Stand

Labor Day, like other holidays and traditions in the United States, has largely been stripped of its content over the years. Often ignored except as the last summer holiday weekend, perhaps most people no longer recall its connection to the trade union movement. Where rallies and parades are held, they are generally no more than occasions for politicians to salute those who work without speaking to the need for changes in law and public policy to restore labor rights, promote social insurance, and establish “jobs for all,” economic policies. Exceptions exist, of course, but fewer and fewer, the exhaustion of the labor movement after decades of losses making it harder to use the day as reason to celebrate, making it harder to use the day to mobilize for militant action.

Perhaps this is only natural, for Labor Day itself has an ambiguous history, having been used to divert support from the working-class radicalism and international solidarity associated with May 1st. That shift took place during the 1950s, because May Day's association with Communists made it suspect during the McCarthy era (an association all the more disturbing to the Red-baiters because its roots – just as with March 8th International Women's Day's roots – lay in class struggles that took place in the United States). Our history, however, has not only erased May Day traditions from our collective memory; it has also erased the true legacy of Labor Day. For it too was initiated by socialist trade unionists and conceived as a means of militant demonstration against a rapacious capitalist class that seemed to know no bounds or limits in the push to expand and exploit. A popular 1880s poem about railroad robber baron Jay Gould (who famously claimed that he could hire half the working-class to kill the other half) gives some idea of the prevailing mood:

Jay Gould's Modest Wants

“My wants are few; I scorn to be
A querulous refiner;
I only want America
And a mortgage deed of China;
And if kind fate threw Europe in,
And Africa and Asia,
And a few islands of the sea,
I'd ask no other treasure
Give me but these – they are enough
To suit my notion –
And I'll give to other men
All land beneath the ocean.”

It was against this background that Peter J. McGuire – General Secretary of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and a leader of the Socialist Labor Party – proposed to the New York Central Labor Union in New York in 1882 that a day be set aside in early September for workers to show their strength through public rallies. Slogans issued in the marches held those first years show the issues which most concerned unionists of the time. These included “We must crush the monopolies lest they crush us,” “Strike with the Ballot,” and “Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours for what we will.” This last reflected the focus on the demand for the 8-hour day, a demand that, although advocated by individual unions, was a demand that could only be won through political means by becoming universal.

Labor Day reflected a transition phase in US labor; the 8-hour day demand was central to the formation of the American Federation of Labor, which was to rapidly outgrow the Knights of Labor as the principal organization of US workers. The Knights embraced the values of collective organization and brought together black and white, women and men, unskilled and skilled (but had one blind spot: Chinese workers were excluded), whereas the AFL was rooted in craft unionism and eventually came to stand for division embracing white not black, men not

women, skilled not unskilled (sharing only the Knights' prejudice against the Chinese). But this was not inevitable: The drift toward a unionism of exclusion was contested by socialists and other labor radicals, contested by the excluded themselves.

The path not taken until the rise of industrial unionism and the birth of the CIO can be seen in some of the calls for those early Labor Day parades. In 1884, the New York Central Labor Union established the first Monday of September as the date of the parade, urging Central Labor bodies in other parts of the country to similarly act. It called the celebration "a universal holiday for workingmen," in which all who toiled for a living would be welcome, stating "No distinction of color will be made; race prejudice will be ignored, religious differences will be set aside; but all men will be on an equality provided he earns his daily bread." The Chicago Trades and Labor Assembly that year made it clear that women were welcome too, passing a resolution stating: "That the first Monday in September of each year be set apart as a laborer's national holiday, and that we recommend its observance by all wage workers, irrespective of sex, calling, or nationality."

Showing another connection lost through the years, Labor Day demands and actions in 1884 and 1885 were used to build support for the subsequent call in 1886 for May 1st as a day for strikes and marches demanding the 8-hour day. The outlook of the early craft union leaders, for the most part, reflected the radicalism of the era's labor struggles. Decentralized action by local groups seemed to them to be the basis for a more self-sustaining working-class movement – and a socialism rooted in worker's organization — than the large mixed assemblies of the Knights or the local mixed skilled and unskilled locals built by revolutionary anarchists (a strong force in Chicago and other industrial centers at the time). If we learn from a history forgotten we should remember how militancy betrayed itself when the potential for unity was not made a priority, when decentralization was set against solidarity rather than becoming its complement.

That said, those early Labor Day marches provide a legacy we should remember and uphold, for the conditions which they then fought are with us again. A statement issued by the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly in 1884 shows that connection with advice still worth heeding:

"[We call upon workers to demonstrate] to capitalists, bankers and their hirelings the power you possess when thoroughly understand how to think and legislate for yourselves. While you drudge and toil away your lives for a bare existence, these idlers and non-producers live in luxury and debauchery, squandering with a lavish hand that which belongs to you – that which your labor produces. ...

"They have tried to deny us the right to organize – a right guaranteed by the constitution of this government. Therefore we call on you to show that we defy them; that you will organize; that you have organized; that the day of deliverance is approaching. To do this we ask you to join in our ranks celebrating the day.

"The Trades and Labor Assembly proclaims to be labor's annual holiday the first Monday of September. Leave your benches, leave your shops."

Quotes:

Poem is from:

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Labor Day quotes are from:

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[Local DSA Cecily McMillan Solidarity Event: Police Repression and the Legacy of Occupy](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Kurt Stand

On July 19, nearly two-dozen people attended a Metro DC DSA event in solidarity for Cecily McMillan, a DSA member in New York City. Sentenced to 90 days, she had just been released from prison (though now facing 5 years probation on the felony conviction) for allegedly “assaulting” a policeman at the six-month anniversary of Occupy Wall Street. Her arrest more than a year ago occurred in an incident that the police clearly initiated. That fact, along with the refusal of the judge to allow the jury to hear evidence vital to her defense – in particular records that the officer in question had been charged with excessive use of force in other incidents — and the insistence of the prosecutor to press harsh charges exemplify the continuing hostility of the New York establishment to the legacy of the Occupy movement.

The two speakers were Lucy Parks and Chris Hicks. Parks is a New York City activist and a leading member of Justice for Cecily Committee and Hicks, a national staff member of Jobs with

Justice, but speaking from his experience with DC & NYC Occupy. Each emphasized McMillan's informal, but real leadership role in Occupy (significant in a movement that rejected the notion of leadership) and, especially, her emphasis on the importance of formulating demands as the basis of organizing. These were particularly important in a movement in which many questioned the validity of leadership per se, questioned the legitimacy of formulating demands.

Taken together, the talks gave a sense of Occupy's development, the political debates within it, and the continuing engagement in different social justice arenas by many of those who had taken part in it. And they served as a reminder that the challenge to politics as usual, the challenge to the systemic abuse of power by those in power, was the reason the movement was suppressed.

Hicks focused on the context in which McMillan's arrest was made possible. He described the level of police harassment throughout the Occupation of Zuccotti Plaza and of activists thereafter. Extensive police surveillance of key activists may have led to her being a specific target. Moreover, the permitted excessive use of force against Occupy protestors created the context that gives police the "right" to treat dissent as criminal. Parks talked about the role of solidarity in keeping the public's eye on McMillan and thereby preventing her sentence from being longer than it likely would otherwise have been. The Justice for Cecily Committee led the effort, with [solidarity support from DSA](#) members and many others, to keep her case in the public eye. She also spoke of Cecily's experience at the Rikers Island prison, the awful conditions many of the women prisoners with whom she served time must cope with, and of how these are an outgrowth of policing patterns that target African Americans and Latinos.

The line dividing society was evident in another aspect of the case. The charges against McMillan were brought by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance, Jr. Vance is a scion of a family long a part of the dominant political circles in the US, and an ardent defender of the "1%," of the Wall Street executives with whom he is personally close and politically defends. Thus his prosecutorial zeal does not extend up the ladder; Vance brought no charges against any banker for the practices that brought the country to the brink of financial ruin and led to massive loss of homes, of jobs.

Following their presentation, local DSA member (and former Young Democratic Socialists leader) David Duhalde, who helped recruit McMillan to DSA, moderated questions and answers. The discussion, continued at a local restaurant when the meeting ended, touched on Cecily's personal situation, the nature and on-going work of Occupy Wall Street, and our broken criminal justice system.

As we go to press, the systemic injustice of our justice system, the impunity with which police forces are able to act, is on display with all its tragic consequences in Ferguson, Missouri. Giving proof to the argument developed by Michelle Alexander in her **The New Jim Crow**, we see the connection between racism, economic injustice, and the militarization of police forces with its impact on the civil liberties for us all. The suppression of civil liberties in instances of political protest and the suppression of civil liberties in communities of color are inter-related and need to be confronted as a shared injustice.

These events emphasize the relevance of the statement McMillan issued upon her release that highlighted the realities women prisoners face and the need for continued solidarity with their struggle for justice. The full text is available at: (<https://portside.org/2014-07-04/cecily-mcmillan-released-rikers-island-uses-platform-challenge-systemic-injustices>), below is her opening and closing paragraphs:

Fifty-nine days ago, the City and State of New York labeled me a criminal. Millionaires and billionaires who had a vested interest in silencing a peaceful protest about the growing inequalities in America worked the justice system, manipulated the evidence presented and suddenly I became dangerous and distinguished from law-abiding citizens. On May 5th the jury delivered its verdict, the judge deemed me undesirable, and officers drove me across that bridge and barred me within. On the outside, I spent my time fighting for freedom and rights, On the inside I discovered a world where words like freedom and rights don't even exist in the first place. I walked in with one movement, and return to you a representative of another. That bridge right there, that divides the city from Rikers Island does not only divide two worlds, today I hope to bring them closer together.

...

Working with my sisters to organize for change in the confines of jail has strengthened my belief in participatory democracy and collective action. I am inspired by the resilient community I have encountered in a system that is stacked against us. The only difference between people we call "law-abiding" citizens and the women I served time with is the unequal access to resources. Crossing the bridge I am compelled to reach back and recognize the two worlds as undivided. The court sent me here to frighten me and others into silencing our dissent, but I am proud to walk out saying that the 99% is, in fact, stronger than ever. We will continue to fight until we gain all the rights we deserve as citizens of this earth."

[Passenger Pigeon Centenary – Warning from an Empty Sky](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Bill Boteler

September 1, 2014 is the 100th anniversary of the extinction of the passenger pigeon. This bird's population numbered 3 to 5 billion individuals before European settlement of North America and was still numbering in the billions in the 1860s. Then, in less than 50 years, it was completely extinct. How is this possible?

Passenger pigeons were unlike any other birds in our natural history. They may have constituted one quarter of the bird population of our country. This single species would gather in huge flocks to feed and breed. They lived off the beechnuts of our eastern forests and travelled in huge flocks that would darken the skies.

The passenger pigeon was the second most important wild food bird in North America, after the turkey – and this was true for both the Native Americans and the European settlers. They were an important source of food for poor people and slaves. Their bodies were full of fat that could be used as a form of butter. These qualities and their seemingly endless abundance would be their downfall.

The rise of commercial hunting combined with deforestation are the underlying drivers of the passenger pigeon's extinction. The railroads made it possible to kill and ship large numbers of pigeons to more distant markets. Companies formed to hire professional hunters who followed the flocks. They were easily killed in large numbers by a single shotgun blast.

All kinds of killing methods were devised. Elaborate nets were set up to trap the birds, trees were set afire, birds were immobilized with fumes of burning sulfur. The birds were pickled and salted and shipped to market in large numbers. One professional hunter is credited with killing 3 million birds in the course of his career.

The pigeons were attacked in their breeding grounds, which disrupted their breeding behavior and probably contributed to fewer births. As their numbers plummeted, it became more difficult for the remaining individuals to meet and mate. They had formerly mated in very large groups. By the mid- 1890s they had become very scarce across their range.

The last individual, a female nicknamed Martha, died in the Cincinnati Zoo on September 1, 1914. Her body was frozen and shipped to the Smithsonian where she was stuffed and mounted and is still kept. You can see a stuffed passenger pigeon, though not Martha, in the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History as a part of a display of the birds that used to inhabit the District of Columbia.

What can be learned from the rapid extermination of this bird that might prevent a repetition of this sort of destruction? For one thing, the commercial harvest of any wildlife is difficult to sustain. As long as pigeons were hunted for subsistence by Native Americans and settlers, there was not a massive depletion of the resource. But mass consumption in the market could not be sustained.

What killed the pigeons off was a drive to kill as many as possible to ship to distant markets for sale. The extinction cannot be separated from these factors and from the rise of railroads.

Parallels in today's world are sharks being killed for the shark fin soup trade and elephants for the ivory trade.

Globally, one in seven species of birds is threatened with extinction. The main threat to their existence is habitat destruction and alteration. It is predicted that unbridled climate change could

raise the percentage to half of all bird species. This would [include common species that are not currently threatened](#).

The bottom line is that passenger pigeons were killed off by exactly the same forces that are emptying the oceans of fish. The profit motive comes into intense conflict with people trying to conserve a resource – especially where there is not an effective governmental body that can regulate or stop these clear depredations. Change also needs support in the community through organizing and educating.

What can you do to protect and enjoy birds in your community?

1. Try joining groups such as the [National Audubon Society](#) and [Birdlife International](#).
2. Protect bird habitat in your community and your yard
3. You can plant bushes and trees in your yard that provide food and shelter to birds.

<http://www.nwf.org/HowtoHelp/>

[GardenforWildlife/](#)

[GardeningTips/](#)

[HowtoAttractBirdstoYourGarden.aspx](#)

4. Learn more about passenger pigeons and other birds at Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology. It's a great place for people who want to learn about birds. Maybe you'll become an ornithologist. <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid=1478>

5. Keep your cats inside if you can. Cats are a major threat to wild birds.

<http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/index.html>

6. Read *A Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon's Flight to Extinction* by Joel Greenberg.

<http://www.amazon.com/FeatheredRiverAcrossSkyExtinction/>

[dp/1620405342](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

A review by *Carolyn M. Byerly*

Donna Leon's mystery novels are an imaginative escape for Leftists who seek a little relief from day-to-day political challenges. Leon, who was born and raised in Montclair, NJ, has lived in Venice for three decades (<http://www.donnaleon.net/>). She writes about the city, environs and culture she has embraced from a decidedly feminist, Leftist sensibility, infusing her police commissioner Guido Brunetti novels with the rich sensory detail of Venetian waterways, architecture, history, smells, language, and most tantalizing, mouth-watering cuisine, while also spinning great, engaging stories.

In two dozen Brunetti novels beginning with her first, *Death at La Fenice*, in 1992, Leon's murder plots are typically dramatic and ensconced in political and sexual intrigue. In *La Fenice*, a German conductor named Wellauer is found poisoned in his dressing room at the famous opera house during intermission. The suspects are many: Is it Flavia the soprano who appears to be having a relationship with a British woman? Or the baritone, the tenor, or Wellauer's young unhappy wife? And, does Wellauer's wartime Nazi past connections have anything to do with his poisoning by cyanide?

In *Dressed for Death* (1994), a man dressed as a woman is found bludgeoned to death in a field near a slaughter house where prostitutes work. But was the victim really involved in the sex trades, or was his grisly murder motivated by his work in financial matters that threatened to expose others' wrongdoing? And how is Giancarlo Santomauro, a prominent defense lawyer who happens to be in the apartment of a male prostitute Brunetti goes to interview, implicated in the crime?

In *Uniform Justice* (2003), a cadet attending one of Venice's elite military academies is found hanged in the showers. Leon's disdain for all things military is never hidden but rather shapes the tone and development of this story. In one scene, Brunetti, who investigates the crime, encounters three intoxicated cadets in uniform walking with arms linked through a narrow Venetian street. As they walk toward him with the intent to displace him, he gives a swift kick to the ankle of one cadet, sending him careening onto the pavement in agony.

Leon speaks clearly through her characters, who some readers note are "fascinating and believable." Her hero central figure Brunetti, the vice commissario of Venice police, is a complicated guy who has been compared to the French writer Simenon's Inspector Maigret. Like Maigret, Brunetti is "a serious, honest anti-hero . . . sober yet deep, subtle yet elegant." His investigations are intelligent and plodding, never rushed, and they are replete with his internal thoughts that ponder the meanings of life, crime, and human relations. One reviewer notes that in Brunetti Leon has created "the quintessential police detective. . . a surprisingly neat man: tie carefully knotted, hair shorter than was the fashion; even his ears lay close to his head,

as if reluctant to call attention to themselves. His clothing marked him as Italian. The cadence of his speech announced that he was Venetian. His eyes were all policeman.”

Another reviewer mentions the scenes that Leon creates between Brunetti and his “pompous, faintly stupid boss, who doesn’t even know when he’s being insulted by Brunetti.” These exchanges between the dim boss and his brighter underling pepper the novels and provide a space for both levity and challenges to upper class pretenses.

Leon’s novels examine gender and class relations at a number of levels, but never brashly, in fact, mostly in the context of Brunetti’s home and family life. His wife Paola, daughter of an Italian count, was raised in and among the aristocracy but chose to pursue an academic life in English literature. The family – Guido, Paola and two teenagers – are supported by the modest incomes of a professor and a policeman. They live in an apartment with a terrace that looks out over the city, where many of Guido and Paola’s political conversations take place. Paola cooks fabulous (elaborately described) meals served in courses. They pour wine liberally with both lunch and dinner.

After hours, Paola and Guido talk more philosophically about his cases, her teaching and research, the affairs of their city, over a glass of grappa. This is a mature, egalitarian relationship with no taboos on subject matter or calling each other’s views into question. In *Willful Behavior* (2002) Paola asks Guido why he bothers to read the *Gazzettino*, one of several newspapers he follows daily. In one of its stories, the paper had just referred to a woman who had been kidnapped some years before as “*confessing* to having been the victim of some sort of sexual attack.” Why would a woman *confess* to being victimized, she demanded, and added then, “I don’t know why you bother to read it!”

Leon never shies away from the political realities of Italian life, whether corruption in government, the peculiar power dynamics of academic departments, or a class system still based on feudal structures that include a titled aristocracy. One reviewer observed that she also is “a great hater: hates the Mafia, the Vatican, the American military (in no particular order) – along with neo-Stalinist architecture, the kid sex trade, and a long list more.” She also routinely belittles U.S. culture, particularly as exhibited by American tourists who throng to the city in summertime.

Leon launched her Brunetti mysteries after a career as a lecturer in English literature for the University of Maryland’s international programs that took her to posts in Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Iran and China, before she settled in Venice. Her novels bear the signs of her academic training in their attention to cultural and historical detail, political dynamics, and feminist and critical analyses. She is a skillful writer, and her tightly edited stories are nonetheless notable for their rich descriptions of the ambience of Venetian life and places.

European audiences, particularly Germany and the UK British, popularized Leon’s work before she developed an American following. Recognition for her work novels includes the CWA Macallan Silver Dagger for Fiction for *A Sea of Troubles* and *Willful Behavior*, the first of which draws readers into the world of fishing on Pellestrina Island, just off the coast of Venice. *Sea of Troubles* stands out as one of Leon’s best examinations of a marginal social class, the men and

women reliant on a dwindling supply of fish and shellfish for their living and their contentious relations among themselves and with those on mainland Italy. She also subtly sets forth the limitations of rigid gender roles institutionalized by the nature of the hard physical work of men and the entrenched customs of women who them. In this rather isolated subculture, there is little way out.

Fiction allows writers to advance political analyses through the device of storytelling, the creation of complex characters, and dialogue that engages ideas and problems in more customary cotillion settings than non-fiction writing can accomplish. Donna Leon's mysteries open the are ways for those who want more than just an entertaining whodunit page turner. Readers will also get that, but with more to poke and arouse consciousness.

[Report on Socialist Organizing Weekend/Young Leaders Retreat](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Jose Gutierrez

Several under-40 year-old Metro DSA members participated in a national retreat located in Bolivar, Pa. The event served as both the Young Democratic Socialists' (DSA's youth section) summer conference and activist training for DSA members under 40. One of the event's main purposes was for YDS and younger DSA members to interact and learn from each other. Our contingent was composed of seasoned DSA & YDS conference attendees as well as those who had never registered for a national gathering.

DSA chapters represented included members from Atlanta, Detroit, DC, New York City, Philly, Providence, Sacramento, and Utah. YDS chapters included New York, Ohio, Texas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Pennsylvania and California. Attendance seemed equally split between YDS campus activists and DSA local members.

Many of us arrived Thursday night. We took part in several workshops and sessions Friday thru Sunday. We shared information about the state of our chapters and the situation that we faced in our corner of the country.

Caucuses met during lunch and included: writers, LGBTQ, women, people of color, ableism/disability, and education. The identity based caucuses want to develop members in their identity areas because they want YDS and DSA to have a more diverse membership and leadership.

The weekend was also the YDS annual internal, and the primarily campus organization voted on two key agenda items: to shrink the coordinating committee (their volunteer leadership body) and their Activist Agenda (the national priorities). Members decided to shrink the coordinating committee from twelve to six seats, with 50% quotas from women and people of color. The student activists also voted to maintain work fighting student debt as their main focus in the coming year.

I was impressed by the diversity of the participants that took part: ethnic, class, gender, and sexual orientation. This diversity was better than previous DSA conferences that I've attended. Also learning from comrades on what has worked for them and what does not was very useful. I hope that all of the participants will be able to continue the conversation that we started in Bolivar, Pa. and I look forward to the next time we get together.

[Review: Creative Path to a Future of Work](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Daniel Adkins

>>*Creativity Inc.*, by Ed Catmull (Random House, \$28)

The new book, *Creativity, Inc.*, suggests an increasingly dynamic culture in the more creative sectors of U.S. industry. The guidelines for the “creative industry” are in sharp contrast to how most U.S. industry and government currently work. Yet the future holds broad competition with a mercantile China and others, when all our work will require creativity and sustainability. How we treat each other and work will be changing to meet future needs. Whether we meet the challenge by a part of the U.S., or by all of us will be important.

An old work model from 1900s is called “Taylorism” or scientific management (sic) which is still alive in Amazon. This theory aimed at controlling the physical work of labor by using time and motion studies to script the flow of work. Combined with the assembly line, it influenced work for much of the last century. Taylorist theory moved the mental aspects of physical labor to be decided by industrial engineers and management. Some of its excesses were mitigated by labor unionization. Today Amazon uses Taylorism and computers to drive some employees so severely in un-air-conditioned warehouses that ambulances are needed to preserve the un-unionized worker's lives. It seems Jeff Bezos' libertarian individualism works for CEO's wealth but not so much for workers survivability.

In the 1950s another movement was increasingly apparent and sometimes it was called the quality movement or the Deming System of Profound Knowledge. This system was the development of W. Edwards Deming's life's work and was an effort to systematize the mental

labor of work and management. Instead of programming labor like a computer, Deming wanted to enroll labor's mental capacities by giving them skills to evaluate the work process and provide aid. Management was also engaged to think in terms of systems of work and design as well of the psychology of workers and management. Deming's teaching in Japan resulted Japan's leapfrogging the quality of American cars and other products.

The Deming principles go far beyond the focus on short-term profits and managers' belief that they have sole responsibility to control an organization. Deming's System of Profound Knowledge includes an appreciation of the system of production and market, a knowledge of variation of quality including statistical sampling, a theory of knowledge including its limits, and a knowledge of psychology and human nature. This focus presupposes an organizations learning to cooperate within and between themselves, driving out fear to enable honest communication, allowing pride of workmanship, instituting education and self-improvement, and believing that organizational transformation is everybody's job. He also championed the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle. Deming demanded a profoundly cooperative, educational, and motivated system with a long-term view in order to create a highly competitive organization.

Below are some of Deming's principles:

1. Create a constant purpose toward improvement.
2. Continuously improve your systems and processes.
3. Use training on the job.
4. Implement leadership (Be a coach instead of a policeman).
5. Eliminate fear.
6. Break down barriers between departments.
7. Remove barriers to pride of workmanship.
8. Implement education and self-improvement.
9. Make "transformation" everyone's job.

Creativity, Inc. is the history of the growth of computer graphics and Pixar, which is one of the U.S. entertainment industry's crown jewels. Pixar is the culmination of over 40 years of computer animation development mixed with world-class storytelling. The author, Ed E. Catmull, helped lead the computer graphic revolution that allowed Pixar to excel. The author expanded his technical skills into the management of creative people including artists of stories and animation. The story of Pixar is the story of inventing the enabling hardware, software, culture, processes, and story lines.

Some of Pixar's principles are listed below and the reader will see that they parallel Deming's theories. These are the most relevant to development and creative tasks but can enable excellence in much work.

- When hiring people, give more weight to their growth potential than their current skill level.
- If there are people in your organization not free to suggest ideas, you lose.

- “Engaging the collective brainpower of the people you work with is an active, ongoing process. As a manager, you must coax ideas out of your staff and constantly push them to contribute.”
- “If there is fear in an organization, there is a reason for it – our job is to find what’s causing it, understand it, and try to root it out.”
- “If there is more truth in the hallways than at meeting, you have a problem.”
- “Sharing problems is an act of inclusion that makes employees feel invested in the enterprise.”
- “Many managers feel that if they are not notified about problems before others . . then that is a sign of disrespect. Get over it.” [This can happen when managers are more focused on competing with each other, than solving agency problems.]
- “Change and uncertainty are part of life. Our job is not to resist them but to build the capacity to recover when the unexpected events occur.”
- “Failure isn’t a necessary evil. . . It is a necessary consequence of doing something new.”
- “The people ultimately responsible for implementing a plan must be empowered to make decisions when things go wrong, even before getting approval.”
- “Everybody should be able to talk to anybody.” [management competition and pride can block this]
- “An organization, as a whole, is more conservative and resistant to change than the individuals who comprise it. . . . it takes substantial energy to move a group, even when all are on board.”

The trick of these statements is to think of them as a prompt toward deeper inquiry.

Working in the federal government gave me a view to the limits of bureaucratic work. When staff and managers compete with each other, often knowledge of the work process, potential options, creativity, and efficiency are lost.

The question of work styles or cultures may become more intense in coming years when China becomes a more developed country. China is a mercantilist country lead by an elite that is focused on maximizing the country’s economic wealth and dominance. The U.S. is different in that it tries to maximize its elites’ wealth, but not the country’s wealth (i.e. its people’s potential). A mercantilist country is more focused on maximizing its national abilities and potential, and should outperform leadership like the U. S. elites that are more focused on extracting wealth from its people than on developing them. This contradiction will make for increasing political fractures in the U. S. A support for U. S. competitiveness is an effective government that supports all our pursuit of happiness, growth, and development. Social democratic programs that support free education and health care, sustainable growth, and worker involvement in design and leadership will more completely grow and use all of our mental and physical powers. This is the promise of a Star Trek society that will work together for our and all the world’s growth and development.

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Kurt Stand

Introduction

The article below was written in early July; unfortunately it is just as relevant now at the end of August. And the analysis below is relevant to the unconditional support the US is giving Israel during the on-going fighting in Gaza. Political conflicts require political solutions; the attempt to impose military solutions inevitable fails (as is evident once again in the current crisis in Iraq). The police shooting in Ferguson, Missouri provides an example of a domestic equivalent, as does the response to the subsequent protests. Militarization – whether of our own police forces or our foreign policy – only serves to strengthen social injustice, only serves to strengthen reaction.

Choices and Alternatives

Denounced and threatened for the on-going crisis in Ukraine, Russia is routinely held as responsible for the violence and turmoil in the area by the White House, State Department, leading members of Congress and virtually the entire mainstream media. By contrast, the US, the European Union, and NATO are all presented as disinterested parties motivated primarily by humanitarian concerns, responding to a situation rather than being active forces in creating the problems now to be addressed. Debates within government and press are limited to the ways and means of intervening. The underlying assessment of events and of our government's moral superiority, our right to intervene if we so choose, are unquestioned.

Behind that pose lies an imperial arrogance in which no legitimate interests are acknowledged other than those of the dominant powers – therefore Ukrainians on all sides of the political spectrum and from the various communities that comprise the country are denied agency as though puppets without opinions of their own. Goals sought by people on either side of conflict are ignored except as soundbites and photo-ops depicting supposed virtuous democrats who just want to “join the West” and share in the good life we allegedly all enjoy.

Some, no doubt, may even believe that; nonetheless the political range of Ukrainians is far wider and more complex – as are the goals driving US policy. Diversity of opinion and underlying analysis, however, are absent from coverage of the crisis – and absent from our political discourse. Stephen Cohen notes in *The Nation*:

As atrocities and humanitarian disaster grow in Ukraine, both Obama and Kerry have all but vanished as statesmen. Except for periodic banalities asserting the virtuous intentions of Washington and Kiev and alleging Putin's responsibility for the violence, they have left specific responses to lesser US officials. Not surprisingly, all have told the same Manichean story, from the White House to Foggy Bottom. ... Still more shameful, no American official at any level

appears to have issued a meaningful statement of sympathy for civilian victims of the Kiev government, not even those in Odessa. Instead, the administration has been unswervingly indifferent. When asked if her superiors had “any concerns” about the casualties of Kiev’s military campaign, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki has repeatedly answered “no.” Indeed, at the UN Security Council on May 2, US Ambassador Samantha Power, referring explicitly to the “counterterrorism initiative” and suspending her revered “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine, gave Kiev’s leaders a US license to kill. ... (Since then, the administration has blocked Moscow’s appeal for a UN humanitarian corridor between southeastern Ukraine and Russia).

Echoed by the press and television, this outlook bespeaks a double standard that allows the current wave of violence directed at ethnic Russians and Russian-language speakers in Ukraine to be ignored; one can only imagine the headlines were the equivalent violence launched by forces our foreign policy apparatus deemed unfriendly. It is a uniformity of opinion that replaces historical understanding with self-serving anecdotes rooted in “good guy” “bad guy” storytelling. The construction of an “evil” opponent, of an “other” to be feared — in this instance, Russian President Putin — functions to depoliticize discussion, and inhibit debate. Consequently, the ability of the broader society to intervene in foreign policy debate and to construct a alternative perspective is contained, all such questions handled by self-serving “experts.” This serves, too, to sever foreign policy from domestic policy, a particularly false divide in this era of globalization.

By contrast, what is needed is an alternative approach that connects humanitarian concerns to a challenge unequal to the injustices rooted in corporate/military power — as suggested in a resolution adopted by the European Left Party (ELP) entitled “No More War, No More Fascism:”

We call on all parties to the conflict to stop armed operations and to avoid further escalation of the situation. We are against repression by the military forces and armed militias. The conflict has to be solved by negotiations and political democratic means, as e.g. referenda.

We consider as the main factors in the Ukraine crisis the imperial attitude towards the country, as shown by all major powers involved: the deliberately provocative and bellicose moves by USA, NATO and EU as well as the aggressive steps taken by Russia. This leads to a dangerous situation at our doorsteps, with reminiscence to the Cold War and even to the WWI outbreak in 1914.

We are against undemocratic repression of communist party, left wing, and other democratic political forces. We demand the release of all political prisoners and people taken hostage.

We demand an impartial international investigation of the Maidan shooting [hundreds were killed in government/protestor violence when street demonstrations turned into a coup], Odessa massacre [explained below], and of all other war crimes committed during the conflict. We condemn the presence of fascist forces like Svoboda and Pravi Sektor in the government and state apparatus, and the presence of far-right forces in the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Lugansk.

We are strongly against the austerity measures imposed on Ukraine by the EU [European Union] and IMF [International Monetary Fund], and we support the right of Ukrainian people to control the resources of their own country and their rights for social protection. We are against the presence of any foreign forces on the soil of Ukraine.

Looking Within

The last paragraph is key, for igniting the conflict last year was the then Ukrainian government's rejection of the austerity program that would have followed incorporation into the European Union (as working people in southern and eastern Europe have already discovered) – an austerity program that labor and the left in the US oppose domestically and should also oppose abroad. For the “liberal” human rights the US is promoting in Ukraine are for the rights of banks and corporations to stand over and above the rights of working people. The logic of Citizens United, turning corporations into people and endowing them with greater rights than living, breathing beings, does not stop at our border. Bill Blum noted the extent to which the US had been working on behalf of those political/economic goals long before the Ukrainian crisis broke out in violence.

The National Endowment for Democracy, an agency created by the Reagan administration in 1983 to promote political action and psychological warfare against states not in love with US foreign policy, is Washington's foremost non-military tool for effecting regime change. The NED website lists 65 projects that it has supported financially in recent years in Ukraine. The descriptions NED gives to the projects don't reveal the fact that generally their programs impart the basic philosophy that working people and other citizens are best served under a system of free enterprise, class cooperation, collective bargaining, minimal government intervention in the economy, and opposition to socialism in any shape or form. A free-market economy is equated with democracy, reform, and growth; and the merits of foreign investment in their economy are emphasized.

Developing a critical perspective on US policy toward the Ukraine and Russia is part and parcel of challenging the assumption that our society, our political and economic system, our government's foreign policy, is in essence a positive good relative to the rest of the world (an assumption maintained even by many who critique aspects of the system). The justifications used to support our aggressive, interventionist overseas actions – especially when pictured as actions conducted for “humanitarian” reasons – reinforce a narrow nationalism which limits questioning of the fundamental nature of our system. And, by identifying the “free market,” the capitalist system, as an objective good, it reinforces the logic that socialism is illegitimate (and, far short of that, that social programs – such as health care – are somehow limitations on freedom). The needed criticism of authoritarian and unjust actions by the Russian government loses its force when our system is used as a yardstick against which others are measured.

After all, the US “right” to act as the world's policeman and to intervene directly or indirectly in other nation's affairs loses much of its force if we are guilty of the same (or worse) transactions. No overseas action of Russia (or China, or any of our putative opponents abroad) is

comparable to the deaths and destruction the US has directly inflicted on countries far from our border – be it Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq or numerous “lesser” engagements. And criticism of political repression in Russia or by the previous government of the Ukraine is hypocritical so long as we allow the kind of domestic repression that denied “freedom of assembly” to Occupy Wall Street encampments. Solidarity with embattled trade unionists in countries our foreign policy targets has little meaning if not connected to the substantive, defacto limitation on US unions’ rights to strike, organize, bargain, engage in political action. So too the denunciation of Russian “oligarchs” (and of those Ukrainian “oligarchs” we opposed and helped depose) is used to conjure up an image of evil that avoids acknowledging that our own 1% is richer and politically more powerful. That poverty, inequality and injustice so easily condemned abroad exists in our own country – though too often ignored by those for who from their seats of power sit in judgment over others.

Looking Abroad

This is the framework in which to try and understand developments in Ukraine. It is too easy to engage in competing horror stories in countries far away in which most who are taking sides one way or the other know little of the history and culture of those of whom they speak, who fail to know the literature or language of people readily cast into pre-determined images. While an “us against them” viewpoint is easy to state, it inevitably fails to explain anything at all. Certainly, on both sides of the conflict in the Ukraine there are activists and groups involved who see themselves as promoting democracy, see themselves as victims of repression. And certainly on all sides of the conflict in the Ukraine, foreign governments are working to advance their own national interests.

But the forces backed by the US and EU are those committed to that neo-liberal agenda also embodied in attempts to expand free trade pacts and weaken social safety nets. It is the austerity agenda the European Left scored, that also finds the US aligned with ultra-nationalists looking for an ethnically pure state, finds us aligned with fascist organizations (just as in some parts of the world it has us aligned with militant Islamists we oppose in other places). For those right-wing forces support a new model of social integration to accompany giving a free hand to the blind market – a model of exclusion enforced by violence.

The attempt to solve Ukraine’s economic and social challenges via integration into western capitalism creates social dislocation – a dislocation which some see as only resolvable by a policy of exclusion. This has been the path of Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Spain, and other countries and has led to attacks on Roma, immigrants from central Africa or from the Arab world, even to a revival of anti-Semitism. And the search by western eyes for that “other” to be condemned has turned toward Russian-language speakers in the Ukraine, to Russia itself. The fact that structural adjustment policies promote globalization and cultural freedom while making societies more unequal and less democratic opens up political space to right-wingers who use the language of freedom to suppress any sign of equality – a process analogous in some ways to the Tea Party, anti-immigrant supporters and others of similar views here at home.

In Ukraine, however, this has resulted in horrific violence, and has been utilized by actual fascists who, though relatively small in number, are disproportionately influential. Along with

the racist attacks designed to divide Ukraine, undermining its character and further narrowing its politics have come attacks on Ukraine's unions, and on the left (including, but not limited to the Communist Party). All this is acceptable to our media and politicians as is the repression imposed by the Saudi kingdom over its people and neighbors – because it reinforces that free-market capitalist order that is considered the only acceptable form of society. The depths of that acceptance allows the unquestioned moral relativism within the US (aided and abetted by McCarthyism's legacy) that does not condemn as “undemocratic” the destruction of Ukraine's Communist Party offices, assaults on its members, bans on its public activities.

But that does not mean that authoritarian groups cannot be found on either side of the divide, that on both sides are groups seeking an expansive democracy. What it does underscore is that reaction moves in when demands for freedom and social rights, for a more liberal society are divorced from demands for social justice, equality and peace. In practical terms it reinforces the need to support calls for negotiations rather than further militarization of the conflict, for only through a political process can a just solution be found.

A Bit of History

We are too quick to forget the past, exemplified by the ease with which arguments used to justify war in Iraq or Vietnam are recycled today. Yet there is a direct connection between the growth of US global domination and the diminution of the rights of working people. The United Electrical Workers (UE) issued a statement to combat that forgetfulness by placing the Ukrainian conflict in the context of our past. The union begins with a review of developments since early this year:

On February 22, the elected president of Ukraine was overthrown in a coup which was supported by the Obama administration. Since then, the country has been torn apart and violence has escalated. On May 2 in the southern city of Odessa, supporters of the new unelected Kiev government, including members of the violent extremist Right Sector party, surrounded peaceful, unarmed anti-government protestors who had taken refuge in the city's main union hall. The right-wing crowd then set the union hall on fire, and 46 people died by being burned alive or jumping to their deaths trying to escape.

We are troubled by this horrific atrocity, and by the fact that mass murder was committed by burning a union hall. We are concerned about the conflict in Ukraine, by the massing of Russian troops near Ukraine's eastern border and U.S. and NATO troops and planes in neighboring Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which signal the return of the Cold War and the threat of a much hotter war.

The statement then goes on to explain the reasons why UE's particular past has made it aware as a union of the importance of opposing this drift as a labor issue relevant to all working people:

A defining period in the history of UE was our union's courageous opposition to the Cold War. At the end of World War II there was great hope among union members and other Americans for a continuation of FDR's New Deal, with progressive social and economic policies including national healthcare, expanded Social Security, and progress against racial discrimination in

employment. What we got instead was the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act and the Cold War. Military spending, including the nuclear arms race, continued to trump all other priorities. Local conflicts all over the world were treated as global showdowns between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. In the name of “fighting communism,” the U.S. sided with the French and British colonial empires against independence movements, and backed many brutal dictators against their own people. The 40-year-long Cold War included some very hot wars – notably Korea and Vietnam. The CIA organized coups that overthrew democratic governments that dared to disagree with the U.S. government or corporations. On the domestic front, the Cold War was a massive attack on civil liberties and an effort to wipe out organizations, including UE, that refused to enlist in the Cold War.

Cold War arguments and ideology are resurfacing in one account after the other of the Ukraine and Russia, despite the Cold War having long been over. But the US tendency to global expansion and the deleterious effect of that expansion remains as it was. And the connection between that past and the present weakness of US labor and the slow erosion of democratic rights here at home should give pause to those who so uncritically want to jump on the bandwagon of calls for sanctions, for any action that further inflames conflict.

Action

Working for peace is active, not passive; it is a form of engagement, not a withdrawal from conflicts around the world. Opposing US foreign policy means acting in solidarity with all working people, with all who suffer from repression and oppression, irrespective of which side they are on. Only via advocacy for an engaged alternative overseas policy will it be possible to challenge both the domestic and overseas corporate/militarist agenda, to build support for an alternative domestic and foreign policy.

The perspective offered by the European Left Party noted above provides one framework in which to conceive this. UE concludes its statement with a similar call:

We reaffirm UE’s historic position. We favor peace and friendly, equitable economic relations between nations. We favor negotiations rather than military confrontation to resolve disputes, including this one. We believe the countries that defeated Nazism in World War II, including the U.S. and Russia, should work together against any resurgence of racism, anti-Semitism and fascism in Europe.

In this, we can build on the recent experience of war in Iraq, which was justified by horror stories about Saddam Hussein – and which broad sections, one can say the majority, of US society came to oppose not because of sympathy for Hussein, not out of a misguided belief that he represented a positive social model, but because change cannot be imposed from without, because the purpose of the war was rooted in a corporate imperative toward expansion unrelated to the degree of human rights permitted or repressed in the government being targeted. US Labor Against War was the key organization which successfully mobilized union opposition to the invasion. Its statement on Ukraine reflects a similar perspective:

There is plenty of blame to go around and all parties share some responsibility for the crisis. It defies simple solutions. We here in the U.S. may not have any opportunity to influence other parties to the conflict, but we do have both the opportunity and responsibility to influence our own government.

U.S. Labor Against the War opposes any and all resort to military force or the threat of military force by the U.S. or any other party in response to developments in Ukraine. USLAW calls on the U.S. government to abide by the U.N. charter that bans war and the use of force, and to rely on diplomatic processes in dealing with all affected parties to resolve differences peacefully.

USLAW opposes expressions of or appeals to racism, anti-Semitism, jingoism or xenophobia and acts of violence motivated by them, whether committed in the U.S. or by Russians, Crimeans, Ukrainians, or any others.

The U.S. must not contribute to the crisis by introducing more arms or escalating hostile rhetoric. Most certainly launching war games and expanding the “missile defense” program represent a dangerous escalation, and lend themselves to potentially tragic miscalculation.

USLAW encourages our affiliates and all union members to better understand the situation in Ukraine, and events leading up to the current crisis. We caution against relying on the corporate media for an accurate and unbiased perspective.

It remains important to understand and debate the nature of events, even where sources of information are limited. Debate that is not about picking sides, but rather is rooted in trying to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons social conflict turns violent, of the challenges others face in navigating challenges of race and nationality, of cultural freedom and democratic rights, of sexual equality and an end to violence in everyday life within the framework of the need to ensure social justice and universal social standards that enable all who live within given borders to enjoy a secure life.

But such debate and discussion ought not to lose sight that, however the conflict in Ukraine (or the next such situation) is understood, the primary goal of those seeking justice here in the US is to work to influence working people, the political climate and government action in the direction of support for peace and negotiations. Together with that we should strive to build a diverse set of links abroad to develop an ever-more informed global solidarity, seeing within that the basis for strengthening an agenda here and abroad that promotes labor and human rights, that builds support for a socialist alternative to capitalist politics of war and oppression anywhere.

Quotes:

ELP Statement on Ukraine Conflict: “No More War, No More Fascism!” July 2, 2014 (<http://www.european-left.org/positions/ukraine-no-more-war-no-more-fascism>).

The Silence of American Hawks About Kiev's Atrocities by Stephen F. Cohen, *The Nation*, June 30, 2014.

Anti-Empire Report by Bill Blum, # 126, March 7, 2014 (<http://williamblum.org/aer/read/126>)

UE Statement, signed by Bruce Klipple, General President, Andrew Dinkelaker, General Secretary-Treasurer, Bob Kingsley, Director of Organization

US Labor Against the War Statement On Ukraine, April 2, 2014
(<http://www.uslaboragainstawar.org/pages/LaborResolutions>)

[The Community Route to Sustainability](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Daniel C. Adkins

Many progressives are faced with solar-averse utilities like Dominion Virginia Power that limit our ability to move to a sustainable future. When we try to regulate some utilities on the state or national level we are met with the utility buying state and national representatives. Direct appeals at the utility level may fail because we often find that utility leadership is in sync with short-term business interests and groups like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). ALEC supplies prototype bills benefiting the fossil fuel industry's short-term interests. In some areas it may take a long time to get moving on sustainability on the state and national levels.

Other paths to a sustainable future are available to us. Besides outfitting our own homes, we must consider actions on the community level where we may have more influence. Cities and suburbs in the mid-Atlantic states are generally more Democratic and more amenable to the needs of sustainability.

An example of community action is the award given by the Urban Libraries Council to Arlington County Library (Va.) for encouraging clean transportation, clean energy buildings, and community gardens. Another possibility might be to mobilize to outfit our local governments with renewable systems like photovoltaic panels. This action could expand the community's knowledge of solar technologies, and inspire and educate our younger citizens. Solar technologies are competitive or near competitive to fossil fuel technology. They aid important community values of public health, energy self-reliance in emergencies, and sustainability. In many states these arguments are better understood in urban and suburban areas even though they

are just important in rural areas. It is just that the Tea Party members' opposition to all government blinds them to market limits (near-term bias) and community cooperation.

Once we have a nucleus of solar momentum and knowledge it may be possible to spread solar technology throughout the school system and municipal buildings and create a broader coalition to confront large utilities. Cities or coalitions of cities may be better able to negotiate better deals with a state utility. Over a decade or so it might be possible for those championing community renewables to challenge an intransigent utility with a city-based utility. In the longer term we might envision an Appalachian Power Administration District with renewable jobs replacing coal jobs for those in Appalachia and energy for all.

Sustainability in one city is no more a solution than sustainability in one state or country, but it is a start. For sustainability to succeed our focus must eventually find solutions for the whole world. However unless we get cooperation from political parties and business, the self-interest of the few will jeopardize the sustainability and survival of us all. The short-term focus of some business interests will have to mature into a longer-term vision tempered with the cooperation of all of us.

[Transportation for People, Not for Profit](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Bill Mosley

Politicians often speak of transportation as one of the rare policy fields that lie above partisanship. "There are no Democratic roads; there are no Republican roads" has worked its way into the speeches of several recent secretaries of transportation in administrations of both parties. One might suppose that transportation, unlike such ideology-laden fields as health care or immigration, involves issues most people can agree upon.

We all want safe cars and planes, pothole-free streets, and bridges that lead somewhere and don't fall down. Yet the notion that transportation is nonpartisan, that solutions are the province of technology or engineering rather than policy or ideology, has been propagated largely by special interests who don't want the public asking too many questions. Corporate interests, in particular, have driven transportation policy for the past century or more, with an eye more to their own profit than to whether these policies help move people and goods.

Congress and the Obama administration are currently weighing an overhaul of federal surface transportation (highway and transit) programs, an exercise that takes place every few years. In

February, the Obama administration proposed a \$302 billion, four-year transportation bill. However, members of Congress have their own ideas about transportation, and the debate over a multi-year authorization will continue into next year, and possibly beyond, while Congress enacts short-term authorizations to keep the concrete flowing.

While these periodic reauthorization debates often degenerate into political posturing, they can result in policy changes that determine whether federal transportation programs can serve communities, commuters and travelers better, or whether they will become vehicles, so to speak, for helping the rich become richer while sacrificing genuine mobility, the environment and energy conservation. Therefore, it behooves socialists and other progressives to become engaged in the emerging debate over transportation policy.

Public transit in the form of trolleys emerged in the late 19th century – first horse-drawn and then electric – helping city-dwellers cope with the urban expansion of that period. This continued to be the predominant mode of public transportation until after the First World War, when the car came roaring into the picture.

Even after Model T Fords became a common sight on US streets, trolleys still were an efficient and popular way for people to move around cities. But for a growing corporate sector invested in selling more cars – composed of automakers, oil and rubber companies and the like – trolleys were the enemy. During the 1930s, General Motors, Firestone Tires, Standard Oil and Mack Trucks formed a holding company which bought, and then dismantled, trolley systems around the country. By 1955 nearly 90 percent of the pre-war trolley systems were no more.

Even in the face of the disappearing trolley, public transportation – in the form of newly minted buses (whose sales benefited GM and its fellow anti-trolley conspirators) remained popular in urban areas during the 1930s and after, especially given that fewer people could afford cars during the Great Depression.

However, in 1956 everything began to change when Congress enacted legislation launching the construction of the Interstate and Defense Highway System. The Interstates were sold to Congress and the public first as bulwarks of national defense, and secondarily as a means for people to quickly move from city to city and around the country. But as they grew, they also altered the face of the city itself and the way people moved around metropolitan areas.

The extension of the Interstates into exurban land made it feasible for more people to live outside the city limits even if they worked in the city. Trolleys and commuter trains already had created “streetcar suburbs” – in the Washington area, these included the close-in neighborhoods of Mount Pleasant and Brookland as well as farther-out Anacostia and Chevy Chase – but the Interstates made possible an exponential increase in suburban living. However, it took more than the building of highways to make that happen.

Developers, seeing profit to be made in the newly accessible suburbs, quickly began gobbling up farm and forest to be converted into tract-house communities. Their ally was the Federal

Housing Administration, which provided federally subsidized mortgages for suburban homeowners but seldom to urban dwellers. This contributed to “white flight,” robbing cities of a large portion of their tax base and making it more difficult for them to fund schools, social services and, of course, transportation.

Business interests successfully lobbied for the expansion of the highway system in order to open new land for commercial exploitation. Developers have been at the forefront of the pro-highway lobby, buying exurban land and campaigning for highways to run through their property, increasing its value and making development there more profitable. Publicly, corporate interests argue for new highways as a means to relieve congestion and shorten commuting times. However, while the new highways were very effective at generating profits for developers, homebuilders, retail chains and other corporate interests, they frequently failed to reduce congestion, and often increased it.

The development of highways in the DC region provides a case study in this developer-driven highway development. The Capital Beltway, completed in 1964, was sold to the public as a way for through traffic on the East Coast to avoid having to pick its way through downtown Washington. Once the highway was completed, however, it became the Washington area’s “main street,” with housing developments, shopping centers and office developments clustering around its 44 interchanges. Before the coming of the Beltway, Tysons Corner was a sleepy crossroads; today it is a major “edge city,” [with 46 million square feet of retail and office space](#). The Beltway not only attracted development but congestion and delay as well, with a recent study finding it to be [third-most congested freeway in the United States](#).

Developer John “Til” Hazel, the creator of Tysons Corner and driver of much of Northern Virginia’s sprawl, is a prime exemplar of profit-driven highway construction. Hazel’s business plan involves buying up cheap suburban land, lobbying for roads to be built through the land, purportedly for the purpose of reducing congestion. Once the roads arrive, the value of his land multiplies, and he pockets big bucks by building housing, malls and offices along the new highway – which are accessible only by cars, leading to more congestion.

Likewise, the new National Harbor complex in Prince George’s County, at the Maryland end of the new Woodrow Wilson Bridge, would have been unthinkable without the favor of government-funded transportation infrastructure. For years, local business interests led efforts to replace the deteriorating, early 1960s-era bridge. They argued that a new, larger bridge would relieve a bottleneck in the Interstate system, improve the flow of traffic around the Washington region and enhance safety. Once the new bridge was completed in 2009, making it easier to cross the river, the new edge city rose quickly, [with 300 acres of shops, condo, offices and a gargantuan Gaylord’s Hotel](#) — and a casino on the way.

The result of this developer-driven transportation has been metropolitan sprawl radiating in all directions from central cities, convenient to highways but usually with limited access, if any, to transit. True mobility has been sacrificed to corporate profit, with most growth taking place in

car-dependent outer suburbs at the expense of the denser, transit-accessible central cities and closer-in suburbs.

Highways also cut into and across cities to provide suburbanites quick access to urban employment centers, with little thought given to the city residents whose homes lay in the way or to once-vital neighborhoods torn apart when bisected by highways – “white men’s highways through black men’s bedrooms” was the bitter but apt description. A classic example is New York’s Cross-Bronx Expressway that drove once-thriving working-class Bronx neighborhoods into decline and blight. During the 1960s, Washington-area activists succeeded in blocking plans for highways that would have done the same to DC neighborhoods.

Developers pitched the new suburban communities to urban dwellers as a way to escape from the crowded city and its problems to greener pastures, and millions responded. Yet postwar suburbanization brought with it a host of problems:

- The growth of suburbs drained the cities of their middle classes and their tax dollars, leaving behind an urban population that was increasingly poor and minority. Detroit’s recent bankruptcy is a legacy of this trend, but nearly all large cities experienced some measure of abandonment and decline during this period.
- Residents of the low-density suburbs were almost entirely dependent on cars for mobility, leading to explosions in car ownership and miles driven. This in turn drove up the consumption of oil, seemingly limitless in supply until the energy crisis of the 1970s brought home the reality that petroleum is a finite resource. The continuing appetite for oil and insecurity about its supply led directly to such environmental disasters as the 1991 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska and 2010 Gulf of Mexico BP spill, as well as both recent US wars in the Middle East.
- Cars are one of the largest sources of carbon dioxide, the principal contributor to climate change, and other toxic pollutants. Runoff from roads, bridges and parking lots pollute drinking water. And uncontrolled, sprawling development leads to the destruction of green space – [more than 6,000 acres per day, according to the U.S. Forest Service](#), equivalent to paving over an area equivalent to DC every week – which not only prevents the land from being used for recreation or wildlife habitat, but also contributes to climate change.

For at least three decades now, it has been clear that a transportation system based on motor vehicles is environmentally unsustainable and not necessarily the best way to move people and goods. And there has been change, however halting or gradual. More cities have increased the reach of their public transportation systems – as have suburbs, despite their residents often being harder to reach. The idea of “smart growth” – designing our communities to be walkable and convenient to transit, with shopping, services and jobs close to housing rather than segregated in malls and office parks – has gained adherents and, occasionally, has been put into practice (with jurisdictions such as Portland, Ore., and the state of Maryland adopting the principle as policy). Til Hazel’s own Tysons Corner, the archetype of an auto-dependent suburban edge city, is undergoing what local officials hope will be its conversion to a walkable, transit-friendly (with three newly opened Metrorail stations), more “urban” suburb.

The 1991 federal surface transportation authorization – the Intermodal Transportation Surface Transportation Equity Act (ISTEA) – represented a departure from previous legislation that emphasized building more highways. [ISTEA gave metropolitan areas unprecedented flexibility to decide whether highways or mass transit best met their transportation needs.](#) Unfortunately, subsequent authorizations have failed to build on ISTEA’s model. [The \\$286.4 billion, four-year transportation bill passed by Congress in 2005 degenerated into a contest to see which members could grab the most pork for their states and districts – Alaska’s infamous “Bridge to Nowhere” was tucked into the massive bill \(and, fortunately, later killed\).](#) The most recent bill, the two-year, [\\$105 billion measure passed in 2012,](#) curbed some of the pork but continued to favor highways at the expense of transit, bicycling and pedestrians.

Federal officials have recognized that the Highway Trust Fund, derived from gas taxes and used to provide federal funding for highway and transit projects, is running out of cash. President Obama proposes to fill this gap through “pro-growth business tax reform” that would provide an additional \$150 for transportation projects, while Congress recently injected enough cash into the fund to keep it running until May.

Yet a more fundamental question would be: Are we spending transportation money on the right projects? The very reason the trust fund is running dry is that, for the first time since the auto age began, Americans are beginning to drive less – [vehicle miles traveled in the United States are down 2 percent from 2007,](#) according to the Federal Highway Administration– partly because of the higher cost of gasoline, and partly because many people, tired of charmless suburbs and lengthy commutes by car, have moved to central cities or close-in suburbs where transit, walking and bicycling provide alternatives to driving. However, [highways still receive four times as much federal support as transit.](#) At a time when the Interstate Highway System has been deemed to be “complete,” and when the need to address environmental degradation has become critical, we need to question the continued push for highway-building – a practice that is more about profit than mobility.

So change will come. Will it be the change we want? Here are some elements of reform that would make serving the public and minimizing environmental impact – *not* corporate profit — the highest priorities of transportation policy:

>> Make transportation environmentally sustainable – Reducing transportation’s impact on the environment is critical to attacking global warming and other environmental problems. Transportation funds must be shifted away from highways — except for upkeep and maintenance — and toward public transit, bicycle lanes and improved pedestrian access. Public transit systems should phase out the use of polluting fossil fuels in favor of vehicles using electric power generated by non-polluting sources such as solar and wind power.

>> Bring people and transportation together – Public transit works best when serving relatively dense, compact areas. Transit hubs should be targeted toward already built-up residential and commercial areas in central cities and inner suburbs. Areas that are already well-served by transit should be targeted for new housing and retail. Local communities should look to convert isolated, auto-dependent developments into more transit-friendly locations, as Tysons Corner is trying to do.

>> **Target transit to low-income communities** – People with lower incomes are the most dependent on transit, but often the least well-served by it, while local governments sometimes give undue priority to gentrifying communities when planning new transit options. Alternatives to driving should be available to all, but a higher priority should be placed on serving the least-advantaged. Targeting rail and bus hubs to lower-income communities will help connect their residents to employment opportunities, as well as to health care and other services not available in their neighborhoods.

>> **Keep public transit fares low** – Make transit affordable for low-income people and more attractive than driving. Farebox revenue should be supplemented with dedicated sources of funding established by the locality or region being served.

>> **Include affordable housing in transit planning** – There is a tendency for improved transit to cause neighborhoods to gentrify, increasing housing costs and driving lower-income residents out. Local governments should ensure that a substantial percentage of housing in these areas is set aside for lower-income residents.

>> **Make drivers pay the full cost of driving** – When gasoline prices increase, so do complaints from drivers. Yet if one factors in such costs as driving's impact on the environment, the cost of traffic accidents, and the law-enforcement/public works infrastructure needed to make road and highway transportation possible – not to mention the cost of our oil-driven Mideast wars – it's clear that the price at the pump, including taxes, constitutes only a fraction of the true social cost of driving. The federal gasoline tax, currently 18.4 cents a gallon, has not been increased since 1993. A combination of higher gasoline taxes, tolls and auto registration fees, with the proceeds targeted toward transit, bicycling facilities and pedestrian programs, can help correct this imbalance. In addition, emerging technology will allow local governments to record how many miles cars travel and enact fees on this basis, perhaps in lieu of gas taxes. Recognizing that many lower-income people drive and have little or no access to transit – due to their isolation or the unwillingness of their localities to provide adequate transit services to their communities – tax breaks or other allowances should be made to minimize the impact of higher auto fees on poor workers who must drive. However, the thrust of public policy must be to provide better transit to low-income communities, rather than create additional incentives to drive.

>> **No more “white men's highways in black men's bedrooms”** – Low-income and minority communities must organize to ensure that they no longer suffer the undesirable impacts of transportation development – especially highways, but also bus garages, rail yards and other facilities incompatible with residential neighborhoods.

>> **Reverse the trend toward privatization of public transit** – Communities are increasingly transferring transit services from public agencies to private corporations, arguing that the private sector can provide better service at lower cost. But experience has shown that privatization often costs the public more, while often failing to improve service quality and usually resulting in less public accountability – while enriching the owners of well-connected businesses that win the contracts. For example, a private firm won a contract to run Phoenix's bus system after putting the city's mayor and his girlfriend on the company's payroll; it subsequently demanded millions in extra payments on top of its contract and was fined for poor performance. Here in DC, plans

are afoot to transfer some Metrobus routes to a private operator, an effort being challenged by the local bus drivers' union and its allies.

>> **Beware of false solutions** – Measures such as better fuel economy, vehicles that run on fuels other than gasoline (such as electricity, ethanol or hydrogen), and the expanded presence of hybrid-fuel vehicles have been touted as ways to both minimize the environmental impact of the car and to conserve oil. However, all of these solutions presume continued dependence on cars and could [encourage people to drive](#). Any environmental benefits from somewhat more eco-friendly cars must be weighed against their continued contribution to sprawl and the pressure for more roads and parking that they generate. In addition, to the extent that cars use gasoline, no matter how much more efficiently, they are still helping to exhaust the finite supply of oil. In the absence of planning for a future free of fossil fuels, conservation only postpones the inevitable.

For too long, progressives have sat on the sidelines as corporate interests have dictated the terms of America's transportation policy in the service of their own profit. The ability of the transportation system to move people and goods has often been an afterthought. Lower-income communities, where the need is greatest, have gotten the least benefit from transportation policy while suffering the greatest social and environmental costs. It is time for the people to reclaim transportation from the profit makers and to transform it into a path to mobility and opportunity.

[Why the US Doesn't Have a Labor Party and Australia does](#)

Monday, September 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2014**

By Jose Gutierrez

>> Robin Archer: *Why Is There No Labor Party in the United States?* (Princeton University Press 2010)

In 1906, Werner Sombart wrote *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* This book was the first of many that tried to explain why there is no mass socialist party in the United States. It emphasized the relative affluence of American workers in relation to their European counterparts.

In *Why Is There No Labor Party in the United States?* Robin Archer abandons comparisons with Europe or Canada. Archer makes a strong argument for adopting Australia as the “most similar case” to the US for the purpose of analyzing the variation from a comparable base.

Archer uses the labor politics of the 1890s in both countries to illustrate the similarities and the differences between the two societies. He examines and assesses those categories that are traditionally cited as explaining the divergence of the US from other advanced capitalist

societies. He concludes that for the most part these factors were equally applicable to the conditions prevailing in Australia during the 1890s at the very time when Australian unions decided to establish a labor party.

In stark contrast, American union leaders decided against such action despite experiencing the same conditions of industrial defeat and depression that had prompted their antipodean counterparts to opt for a party-based political strategy.

Much of the author's case rests on the argument that the labor movements in both countries were facing very similar challenges and opportunities in the 1890's. After that decade, conditions started diverging in a very pronounced way. However, in the 1890's it seemed that both countries might develop a labor party.

Archer contests received common wisdom regarding why there is no labor or socialist party in the United States. It is often argued that the relative prosperity of the American working class reduced the perceived need for a working class party in the US. Archer points out that the Australian working class was as prosperous relative to the European working class.

Another argument is that American working class voters could vote and were not marginalized like they were in Europe but, again, that was also true in Australia. The electoral system of the US with its trademark first-past-the-post elections and single-member districts is cited as one of the explanations for the lack of a working class party. Meanwhile Australia, along with the UK, New Zealand and Canada, had the same voting systems, and yet labor parties developed in all of those countries. Moreover, European countries where socialism grew in strength also had first-past-the-post elections and single-member districts. Proportional systems developed later.

Archer argues that racism was not one of the main stumbling blocks to the creation of a labor party in the 1890's. Racial hostility towards non-white workers was rampant in both Australia and the United States but in Australia it actually facilitated the creation of a labor party.

Australia actually had more workers who were foreign-born than the United States. Racial hostility towards southern and eastern European immigrants would be a major factor in both countries after the 1890's, but it wasn't an important factor in that decade, partly because immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were a small percentage of both countries' labor force at that time.

Archer argues that the level of state repression that the labor movement faced was one of the factors that was different in the United States. It was in fact higher than in Australia and several Western European countries.

Religious tensions were less important in Australia, but very significant in the US. The Australian working class was more secular and religion was not as divisive as it was in the United States. There was a real fear among American labor activists that a labor party would be wrecked by religious divisions but that trade-union organizing would not be as divisive.

In both countries, three American authors were at the height of their influence in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Edward Bellamy, author of *Looking Backward*; Henry George, writer of *Progress and Poverty* and Laurence Gronlund's *Co-operative Commonwealth* were well known among labor activists. They were more popular than the works of Marx or other European thinkers.

Another factor that was different in the United States was that German socialism had a greater impact. Marxism was a more important influence in the US than in Australia. Labor activists who were influenced by Marxism came to different conclusions. Some thought that creating a working-class party was paramount but others believed that trade union work needed to come first. Both sides would use Marx to defend their position. This sectarianism was absent in Australia. Some activists also feared that this ideological division would doom an American labor party.

It's interesting that in debunking certain arguments for exceptionalism Archer argues for a different version of exceptionalism. Nevertheless, Archer's innovative approach, together with the clarity of his arguments, should lead to questioning about the common wisdom in regard to why there is no labor party in the United States.