

***The Washington Socialist***  
**Articles from April 2016 Issue**  
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**Editor: Woody Woodruff**

[Farewell to women in Maryland's congressional races](#)

Saturday, April 30th, 2016

***The Washington Socialist* <> May 2016**

*By Carolyn M. Byerly*

Election night in Maryland was a downer to those who had supported progressive women candidates in their primary campaigns.

In her concession speech to Chris Van Hollen on April 26, US Senate candidate [Donna Edwards](#) noted that Maryland voters had chosen an all-male, nearly all-white slate of Democratic candidates to stand election for Congress in November. She lamented particularly that black women were denied a voice, saying:

“What I want to know from my Democratic Party is, when will the voices of people of color, when will the voices of women, when will the voices of labor, when will the voices of black women, when will our voices be effective, legitimate equal leaders in a big-tent party?”

Edwards, who had emphasized her gender and African American race during her campaign, raised her own voice to say, “My friends, this is the 21st-century question for the Democratic Party, and it is time for the Democratic Party to call the question.”

Another progressive candidate, [Joseline Peña-Melnyk](#), from College Park, lost her bid to replace Edward in the 4<sup>th</sup> District for House of Representatives, placing third behind Anthony Brown and Glenn Ivey. Peña-Melnyk, who is Afro-Dominican, is a three-term Maryland delegate and a champion of labor, women’s rights, and criminal justice reform. She served as a prosecutor, defense attorney, and College Park council woman before running for the Assembly seat – a seat she can fortunately keep now. Two years ago, she led the formation of the Latino Caucus in the Maryland Assembly.

Peña-Melnyk’s challengers, both African American, had better name recognition and funding than she did. Probably more important, they are both well ensconced in the powerful Maryland Democratic Party machine. Brown, from Baltimore, was Lt. Governor under former Governor Martin O’Malley, and Ivey was States Attorney in Prince George’s County until recently.

Maryland has elected only eight women — five Democrats and three Republicans — to Congress since 1941, including retiring US Senator Barbara Mikulski, who was elected in 1986. Donna Edwards was elected to the House in 2008, and she has been a vocal advocate for women, low-income and minority constituents, and labor. During the Occupy encampment in

Lafayette Park, Edwards was reported as being the only member of Congress to meet with Occupy folks and hear their concerns.

Van Hollen, a moderate Democrat who is a Party favorite, will more than likely win Mikulski's Senate seat in November, and Anthony Brown will more than likely win Donna Edwards' US House seat. Brown ran a lackluster and losing campaign against Maryland Republican Governor Larry Hogan three years ago. Lost will be two exceptional women of color to the US Senate and House.

[Good Reads for Socialists](#) May 2016

Saturday, April 30th, 2016

## GOOD READS FOR SOCIALISTS

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> May 2016**

One of the longer authors' lists around... a cross-section of left thinkers co-signs a letter on the next steps. Saskia Sassen, Bill Fletcher Jr., Gar Alperovitz, Noam Chomsky and Barbara Epstein are just a few. From *Znet* via *Portside*.

<http://portside.org/2016-04-09/possible-ideas-going-forward>

National vice-chair Joe Schwartz's latest, from *Jacobin*: "Socialism isn't the negation of liberalism. It's the realization of liberal values made impossible by capitalism."

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/04/jonathan-chait-nymag-marxism-democratic-socialists/>

Our DC comrade David Schwartzman, who has spoken to our membership meetings on the topic of climate change and capitalism, has a tight piece about the good news/bad news scenario of renewables (wind and solar) becoming aspects of industrial big capital. It's from CNS Web – "an online community of red-green activists"

<http://www.cnsjournal.org/green-capitalism-builds-big-solar-should-we-throw-the-baby-out-with-the-bathwater/>

Recycling is viewed as part of a virtuous circle, lowering resource use and providing social bonds and values. In a global capitalist environment, though, it's tough for recycling to escape the trappings of exploitation and profiteering. This article appeared more or less simultaneously in *Mother Jones*, *The Oregonian* newspaper and in several industry publications including *FairWarning: News of Safety, Health and Corporate Conduct*, to which we link here:

<http://www.fairwarning.org/2016/04/recycling/>

Here's a well-stated reprise of what many people have developed/worked through about the kind of mental condition that is the natural outcome of today's late capitalism – the social disease of

imposed individualism leading to self-blame. It's from the *Medium* website and was spotted because of a Facebook post from our Gotham comrade Rosa Squillacote.

[https://medium.com/@joe\\_brewer/the-mental-disease-of-late-stage-capitalism-4a7bb2a1411c#.a2a7ghe1a](https://medium.com/@joe_brewer/the-mental-disease-of-late-stage-capitalism-4a7bb2a1411c#.a2a7ghe1a)

Your compiler is not a regular reader of the Daily Kos blog nor of its eponymous blogger, so others may not find this build-the-party-from-inside perspective as interesting. It's on the occasion of the Acela primary outcomes. The point about focusing down-ballot seems worth a look. <http://m.dailykos.com/stories/1520509>

A nice, comprehensive *Guardian* piece about neoliberalism (touting a new book on the same subject) by Georges Monbiot. Solid historical approach though the emphasis on personalities behind the theory kind of masks the fact that capitalism's dynamic is the driver of neoliberalism and keeps the zombie walking. [http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot?CMP=fb\\_gu](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot?CMP=fb_gu)

A piece from *TruthOut* on a third-party scenario building from the Sanders campaign. Metro DC member Carolyn Byerly, professor of communications at Howard University, notes an interesting aspect well into the discussion: how to create an alternative communication structure that bypasses the cost of mainstream media. <http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/35644-how-sanders-could-lay-the-foundation-for-a-third-us-political-party>

Our comrade Cecilio Morales like this one from *Quartz* – kind of exo-politics, as he implies, but explaining and understanding are not always the same... <http://qz.com/656159/the-scientific-way-to-train-white-people-to-stop-being-racist/>

Astra Taylor, author of *The People's Platform*, has a discussion of the comparative narrowness of “activism” and the kinds of engagements that surround and extend it. Posted from *The Baffler* by XDIR Maria Svart in late April. <http://thebaffler.com/salvos/against-activism>

*Jacobin* fave enviro author Alyssa Battistoni on demanding a “Red environmentalism” future. We say correctly that we can't envision life in actual socialism; it's on the other side of here and now. But we can imagine our future surroundings stripped of financialism and proprietarianism, and that's a good start. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/04/earth-day-climate-change-environment-socialism-resources/>

The origins and nuances of Black Lives Matter as traced by Jelani Cobb in *The New Yorker*: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/14/where-is-black-lives-matter-headed>

Science fiction as fact. Marcia Angell parses the (all too lethal) intersectionality of human practices from poor population management to poor carbon management in *American Prospect*. <http://prospect.org/article/our-beleaguered-planet-0>

The post-Sanders development of the US left will not come from the campaign, one Occupy veteran tells Kate Aronoff, but from movements. The author, in *Rolling Stone*, concludes “If a small-s socialism really is rising in America, it will look different than any form we've yet seen

around the world.” <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/whats-the-future-of-bernie-sanders-political-revolution-20160425>

## MARYLAND LEGISLATORS DON'T FAIL TO DISAPPOINT: "BUSINESS-FRIENDLY" IS NOT JUST A SLOGAN

Saturday, April 30th, 2016

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> May 2016**

*By Woody Woodruff*

The Maryland General Assembly's 2016 session offered the usual combination of high (sometimes manufactured) drama and proof of a business-dominated legislature whose sessions entertain, and then reject or disembowel, proposals meant to help redress the balance in favor of working people, consumers and the poor. Corporate capital, even at this level, calls the tune.

Several big disappointments put a damper on some significant progressive victories as the Assembly wrapped its 2016 work at midnight Monday, April 11. A [last-minute hostage situation](#) left two critically important bills hanging and unpassed – a sweeping tax package that would have harnessed the state and federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to broaden support for working people, and a requirement for employers to provide earned sick leave for up to 700,000 now-vulnerable Marylanders, many low-income. Both had been top priorities of progressive organizations during the session. Their joint demise on the last day of the session meant that the two most potentially far-reaching improvements in the lives of low-income workers were put off for at least another year.

The Senate leadership's push to add tax breaks for the wealthy to the EITC package led it to keep the earned sick leave bill, which had been passed by the House, trapped in a Senate committee, and both failed at midnight in the endgame. As Progressive Maryland organizer [Justin Vest wrote](#), “lawmakers certainly didn't disappoint at disappointing Maryland's most vulnerable residents.”

“The session started out strong,” Vest continued, “with the Democratic majority overriding six of Governor Hogan's vetoes from the 2015 session including one that returned the right to vote to 40,000 formerly incarcerated people, making them eligible to vote in the April 26th primary. But despite positive messages from both chambers, politics as usual got in the way of what stood to be a historic session.”

Progressives [could enjoy modest victories](#) on a big criminal justice package that will cut jail populations and ease sentencing constraints for nonviolent offenses, as well as a police

accountability package that will let civilians be a part of police misconduct trials, where previously abusive officers were only judged by other department members.

The police accountability bill went down to the wire with constant pressure from police to weaken the role of civilians in a reformed process. “We were wrestling to protect pieces of the police bill up until around 10 p.m.” the final night, said Larry Stafford, Progressive Maryland’s executive director.

Several big environmental bills passed with wide support, raising the bar for [the state’s shift to renewable energy resources](#) and the jobs and economic development that would – or should – accompany that shift. And the legislature sent the governor a protection for some of the hardest and most threatened workers around – literally, the “worker bees” – against [lethal neonicotinoid toxins](#) in agricultural and consumer lawn and garden products, associated with colony collapse.

Few bills made it through the process without tough fights to prevent weakening by advocates for the business sector, mostly but hardly all from the Republican side. The tax breaks for the wealthy that appeared to have sunk both the EITC package and the paid sick leave bill were supported by the Senate’s Democratic leadership and touted as [making the state more “business friendly.”](#) a mantra also of GOP Gov. Larry Hogan. For the Assembly’s leadership, business-friendly has meant business-captured when push comes to shove.

The lawmakers were therefore enthusiastic about another tax break, nearly \$40 million for defense megacorp Northrop Grumman to soothe the company’s hints about leaving the state. Even Republicans cringed about “corporate welfare” and Del. Jimmy Tarlau (D-47) said he couldn’t find any job creation in the bill (according to a tweet from the *Sun*’s Pamela Wood)... but it passed with near-unanimity.

“Advocates have been fighting as part of the [Working Matters coalition](#) for four years to win paid sick days for the 700,000 uncovered Maryland workers,” Vest wrote in his [session wrap](#). “Fearful of a veto by a first-year governor, some members of the General Assembly thought it best to punt on the issue until now. The bill passed the House with a solid majority for the first time ever. The bill was poised to come out of the Senate committee, but the last-minute vote was canceled when it became clear that [a tax package loaded up with goodies](#) for corporations and the very wealthy was falling apart.

“That same tax package did include one important component for progressives – expansions to the state [Earned Income Tax Credit](#). The changes would have allowed younger workers ages 18 to 24 to benefit from the credit along with workers without dependents. The EITC is already one of the most effective anti-poverty policies in existence, enjoying broad bipartisan support including President Barack Obama and Speaker Paul Ryan. Approximately 240,000 Maryland workers would have benefited from the expansion by seeing the average tax credit increase from \$74 to \$375. That money would have gone directly back into the local economy, but a policy benefitting workers without also providing handouts to the wealthy wasn’t seen as a priority by those in power.

“ ... the legislature did come together to pass a [comprehensive criminal justice reform package](#) that increases funding for rehabilitation programs while reducing overly punitive policies such as mandatory minimum sentencing. Another bill championed by the Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability brought [significant changes to policing](#) in the state. We came together with activists, victims of police violence, and even law enforcement personnel to demand common sense changes that put people first and eliminate special rights for officers. Among the changes are provisions making it easier for victims and witnesses of abuse to file complaints, including anonymously, creates an independent training and standards commission that will modernize recruitment and set best practices with an emphasis on community policing, increases transparency into department operations, and requires departments to track the number of officer-involved incidents and take preventive action,” Vest recounted.

Despite some qualified victories, Vest concluded, “this session also serves as a reminder that politics – at least for those playing the game – isn’t necessarily about doing what’s right for those in need.”

Other bills with red flags for injustice or special interest entered the lists this year, and some made it through.

A bill that would have given corporations and wealthy individuals tax breaks for providing [scholarship money for private schools](#) finally failed, probably due to embarrassment, but the Assembly for the first time set aside money directly for private schools, a priority of the right getting a foot in the door against public education.

Hogan’s budget, unlike last year’s, fully funded education aid to the school districts around the state – apparently he learned his lesson after a significant furor last year, when the outraged legislators passed a bill (probably of dubious legal standing) that would force him to provide full funding this year. His budget originally shorted Baltimore – still restive from the Freddie Gray upheaval – but a supplemental provided the city some relief in reconstruction from the effects of the uprising, as well as in other areas. The city still will not forgive his de facto cancellation of a rail project, the Red Line, seen as crucial to righting the city’s geographical inequality.

Baltimore, heavily dependent on higher education as an economic engine, also stands to [potentially lose](#) as a result of the merger of two university campuses – the College Park flagship home of the University of Maryland and the university’s system’s Baltimore campus. The legislature jumped to pass the merger bill despite suggestions that a longer look would be prudent.

The carnage reminds us of the Assembly truism that it takes three or more years to get a good bill through the legislature but only one year to get a bad bill through. Bills to reform campaign finance routinely fail each year, never coming to the governor’s desk, and it’s no accident that the legislators’ near-invulnerability to challenge at the ballot box is rooted in their creation of “slates” to pool campaign funds and fend off those challenges. Efforts to rally the legislature against the Citizens United decision and “corporate personhood” also foundered despite [apparent lip service from the leadership](#).

You wonder if part of the reason Larry Hogan is so confoundingly popular among Marylanders (two out of three register Democratic) is that he has gotten in some respects a free pass. The Assembly is so careful not to lose on a veto override episode (needing a supermajority) that they don't send legislation his way that they might not be able to uphold, if vetoed. [Like paid sick leave](#) or the EITC bill. Like [automatic voter registration at age 18](#). [The Center Maryland blogger Josh Kurtz](#) observes that Hogan is "a governor who is fluent in social media, skilled at masking his conservative priorities in bromides, and relentless in driving his messaging."

The leadership apparently doesn't want to give the impression of weakness that might be signaled by a failure to override. So they don't risk the confrontation. It's likely, too, that there are Democratic delegates or senators in risky districts who need to avoid voting on some of these bills. Well, next year is even closer to 2018 and they will have less time to tuck such votes into the memory hole. Meanwhile, good bills get the back of the hand for another year. Will next year be easier?

The leadership's power trip keeps these highly valuable bills, and the issues and failures of public will that they involve, basically out of the discourse at all. Because they don't want to lose. There are worse things, one would think, than "losing" to a governor whose right-wing allegiances are being hidden from the public – with the help of the Assembly leadership. How are people in general going to see what the genial Larry Hogan is fronting for – the pro-business, anti-worker forces that maintain affluent Maryland's many inequalities in everyday life – if the Democrats in the Assembly dodge that confrontation whenever it looks as though they might lose?

If Hogan showed his true colors by vetoing good bills like paid sick leave, police reform, and the many other good bills we have mentioned, people might begin to see through the good-guy façade to his being joined at the hip with the business community and the wealthy. Surely the Democrats – who are all too cozy with those same forces as well – could use to sharpen the contrast.

*Woody Woodruff, a production editor for the [Washington Socialist](#), also moderates the blog for [Progressive Maryland](#), from which some of this material is shamelessly repurposed. Submissions received at [woodlanham@gmail.com](mailto:woodlanham@gmail.com)*

[The Small Joys of Getting Out the Vote for Bernie](#)

Saturday, April 30th, 2016

***The Washington Socialist <> May 2016***

***By Andy Feeney***



I was standing on the corner where Maryland Highway 28 crosses Maryland 182 and waiting for a ride when the first crows turned up. I had spent six hours on foot trying to contact possible Bernie voters in a nearby Aspen Hill neighborhood characterized by biggish houses, large and widely separated building lots, very long driveways and a bewildering labyrinth of winding side streets and small cul de sacs, and I had had enough walking for the day. It had been a beautiful area to canvass, admittedly, with tall and stately trees and flowering azaleas and dogwoods and on one hilly street two deer gazed at me calmly from someone's front yard as I trudged past looking for an address. But now I wanted to go home.

For more than half an hour I had been standing on the highway divider along Maryland 182, Layhill Road, wearing my bright red "DSA for Bernie" shirt in hopes my ride from the office would see me easily. There's not that much to do or see at the intersection of 28 and 182, although the countryside is pretty enough, and I was growing a little bored when the crows caught my attention.

First there were three or four of them, up ahead and to my right, and they were circling slowly in an updraft, high above an open field, as though looking for something edible. Then in a few minutes they were joined by several other crows, so that there were now six or eight of the birds crossing over Norbeck Road, Maryland 28, toward the big golf course to south and east of the intersection. Then still other crows joined them, so that nine birds were now gliding high in the air above the golf course. Then they crossed to the west over Layhill Road and were circling directly in back of me.

In curiosity, I turned to watch, thinking, "I wonder if they've spotted something dead to eat. " And then, for a second, I wondered if possibly they might be waiting to peck at me. I hadn't moved much in half an hour, and as I stood on the median strip I might have looked from the air like roadkill. I also was wearing a green khaki cap of a kind often sported by hunters and fishermen, which may have reminded this convocation of crows — highly social animals, with long memories that researchers have documented — of some nasty human who once killed one of their friends. Crows apparently don't forget these things.

Taking off my fisherman's cap, therefore, and trying not to think of Hitchcock's horror movie *The Birds*, I waved in air in the crows' direction, then walked a few steps down the median strip and back. In a minute or two, all the crows silently drifted back across Layhill and disappeared behind some trees. I felt a little odd about this.

My bright red Bernie shirt attracted more than the crows that afternoon, though. As I stood there on the median strip, an affluent-looking older white man driving a Lexus and sporting a bushy mustache that made him resemble the rich banker pictured on the Monopoly cards pulled up beside me and rolled down his window. "I'm for Bernie," he said proudly. "I've contributed to his campaign — twice." He smiled and held up two fingers. "Even though" — his voiced dropped meaningfully and trailed off.

"Yeah, in Maryland he's facing an uphill battle," I said. "But supporting him means you're sending *them* a message." The guy with the mustache nodded, rolled up his window, and made the light.



A few minutes later I heard a beep behind me and a white man in his 40s driving a pickup truck, a man whose cargo and paint job suggested he was a landscaper, leaned out his window and yelled “Feel the Bern!” He gave me a big grin and a thumbs up sign, which I returned. “Right on!” I yelled, and he too disappeared.

A bit later still – my ride was having difficulty getting away from the local canvass office – a white woman in her early forties, who was acting almost furtively, as if she were doing something naughty, rolled down her car window and declared from a lane over in the intersection, “I’m voting for Bernie in the Tuesday primary!” Then she rolled off, looking quite pleased with herself but a little guilty about transgressing some personal psychological boundary.

For me, it’s the pleasure of small moments like these that have made canvassing for Bernie this season a lot more enjoyable than I expected it to be when I signed up for it. We all know — from DSA Activist emails, from endless appeals by Maria Svart, and from high school civics classes, too — that as Americans in a supposedly democratic society, we “should” do the nuts and bolts work of engaging in local political activism. As socialists and/or progressives, we know we “should” sign up to leaflet outside the polls on election day, hand out literature to potential voters, take part in worthy petition drives, reach out to minority and low-income communities, join union picket lines, host progressive house parties and so forth.

As leftists, a militant minority of us probably share the view of the English poet William Wordsworth, who in a famous ode described “Duty” as “Stern Daughter of the Voice of God.” Others on the wider left may agree with Nietzsche about local activism representing the “will to power” in action, whether for good or ill. But what’s often forgotten, as we uneasily ponder the immense personal sacrifices that committed socialists must supposedly make for the class struggle, is that some grassroots political work — including getting out the vote – can be fun.

I don’t want to be guilty of stupid exaggeration about how much fun I had getting out the Bernie vote in Aspen Hills on April 23. It’s a relatively high-income area, and I saw several yard signs for conservative Democratic candidates in the big front yards, and there some moments in the day that I found discouraging. I talked to one allegedly Democratic voter with a giant American flag in his yard and a hatred of the Environmental Protection Agency, for example, who thinks Hillary is a crook, Bernie is crazy and Trump makes a lot of sense. He indicated that he hates Obama, too, and while he did allow me to sit on his front porch and rest my feet after several hours walking, his ideas of what a “sensible” Democratic Party should be nearly made me despair.

But I really did enjoy seeing the deer and talking to the pro-Bernie drivers at the intersection, and in retrospect I appreciate my odd experience with the crows, now that it has ended well. And there were other, more substantial pleasures to be had from Aspen Hills canvassing as well. One favorite moment was when I knocked at a door shortly after talking to the conservative Democrat with the flag and the attitude and it was answered by a middle-aged man who said, “My wife, my son and I all will be voting for Bernie on Tuesday. Thanks for the work you’re doing.”

Another good moment was when a woman in her fifties answered the door and said her husband I was hoping to talk to wasn't home and that she couldn't support Bernie in the primary, because she was a registered Republican. She couldn't say if he was a registered Democrat or not. But she thanked me for the Bernie door hanger and hoped I could stay dry, and it was raining at that time in the morning. "Speaking of staying dry, could I use your bathroom?" I asked. Sure, she replied, but please give her a moment so she could be sure it was clean. As I was leaving the house a few minutes later, she said one good thing Bernie had done was improve the quality of debate on the Democratic side.

"I won't say anything about the quality of the Republican debate," she added a bit tartly. We commiserated for a few minutes over the prospect of a Trump or a Cruz presidency, and after we each wished the other well I walked on.

At another Aspen Hills house, in mid-afternoon, the door was answered by a short, stocky man in his forties whose biceps looked as swollen as a weightlifter's. He had blue tattoos along his arms and shoulders beneath an Under Armor tank top. "You must be here for Ricky," he grinned as he eyed my Bernie shirt. "You're definitely not here for me."

"Yeah, I am here for Ricky," I said. He yelled for his son to come to the door and the son and I had an enthusiastic conversation about Bernie, so enthusiastic I marked him down as a possible Bernie volunteer. "Do you have a phone number where we can reach you?" I asked the son. He said he might as well give me the landline number for the house.

"If I answer the phone, I'll probably tell you he isn't home," his father joked. The three of us smiled at each other and I congratulated them for having a family where they could tolerate political differences, and we actually exchanged a few words about runaway technology under capitalism before I left.

At another Aspen Hills house there was the rich odor of exotic cooking inside when I knocked on the door at noon. A very nice Ethiopian immigrant woman in her twenties who answered said she was definitely committed to Hillary, but she said it with a smile; we both agreed that Trump needed to be kept out of the Oval Office.

At another house there was an electric car parked in the garage sporting a bumper stick that said, "This is what the end of gasoline looks like." The man inside and his wife both seemed to be Hillary supporters, but it was their teenaged son who was on my list, and all three listened with interest to my spiel for Bernie. Eventually the son, a high school senior taking an honors AP course in history, said he really didn't have enough information to cast an informed vote yet and needed to do some serious online research in the few days remaining before the primary to make his choice. It was exactly what I would have wanted a son of mine to say under the circumstances, although I was sad to lose a possible vote for Bernie. I congratulated him and his parents for being honest and intellectually serious before taking my leave.

I'm only one of several local DSA members I know personally who have done serious canvassing and get out the vote work for the Sanders campaign over the past half year. I can't speak for the experience of the others, who've include most the old guard activists on the

Steering Committee as well as four highly dedicated younger members and David Duhalde, who now works for the national office. Several of the younger members have genuinely worked as organizers for DSA's Bernie work, scheduling regular canvassing events in the District, organizing a march for Bernie attended by local college students, assisting in the organizing of debate watch parties and the like. But I've confined my work to individual volunteering, mostly in the form of leafleting and door-to-door GOTV efforts. For me, human interactions like those I've outlined above make leafleting and GOTV work especially rewarding.

The weekend before three of us in the Metro DC chapter joined the National Nurses Union in getting out the vote for Bernie in Montgomery County, which is the event that involved me with door-to-door canvassing in Aspen Hill, our local co-chair Carolyn Byerly organized at least half a dozen DSA members in handing out DSA literature for the Bern in the Maryland suburbs. On that weekend I and a new DSA supporter distributed flyers and fact sheets for Bernie near the Silver Spring metro station, and it was a very different ambiance from that I discovered in Aspen Hills.

In Silver Spring it was mostly a matter of handing literature to people on the street, or in a few cases to local street vendors. There wasn't nearly as much walking and the work went faster, partly because a big fraction of those we encountered were already enthusiastic about Bernie. That was gratifying. However, my favorite moment of the day came when I approached a small group of black and Hispanic teenaged guys hanging out at Veterans Plaza near the Silver Spring Civic Center. When I handed them some DSA flyers on Bernie, including national DSA's new fact sheet on Bernie's record on racial justice issues, they were enthusiastic.

"Hey, man, could I have some of these to hand out?" one of them asked. "I think I could use them to meet some girls." Another of the group asked to help me and the other DSA volunteer in distributing our other flyers to people at the Plaza, and did very well at it. Closer to the Civic Center, where early voting for the primary was occurring that day, I talked to a campaign worker for a local progressive Democratic candidate for Congress who was extremely interested in DSA's history, current membership and structure, and said she might be very interested in attending local DSA meetings once her work for the candidate is concluded for the year. Also staffing a table outside the Civic Center that Saturday was the head of the Montgomery County Democratic Party, who said he was delighted to see us working for Bernie, since Bernie's candidacy has sparked such involvement by younger voters in Democratic politics.

I got a different kind of enjoyment still from doing individual volunteering for the official Bernie campaign in Virginia in the last few days leading up to the Virginia primary. The two high points of my GOTV volunteering in Arlington were probably some extremely polite and civil exchanges I had with Trump supporters in one middle-class neighborhood, on the one hand, and on the other hand walking into a popular Italian restaurant nearby and having the cashier and the guys behind the sandwich counter both make favorable remarks about Bernie's candidacy and my tee shirt advertising it.

The next two days, while doing individual volunteering for the GOTV effort in Alexandria, I found myself visiting lower-income apartment complexes a few miles from King Street. When I knocked at the door of one second-floor apartment, the old woman who answered spoke more

Chinese than English and was having a hard time remembering things, including the new phone number of her son, who was the Democratic voter I was supposed to canvass. Nevertheless she invited me in and had me sit on her sofa while she rummaged in her effects for her phonebook, and when she finally called him he assured her, and me, that he was a strong Bernie fan and would be voting in the primary.

In another apartment complex in the same neighborhood, a young Latino man was repairing a motorcycle on the landing outside of his mother's apartment and waved me through an open door when I asked to speak to her. His mother, too, seemed to speak very little English, but her daughter translated for her and after a somewhat lengthy conversation she decided that yes, she would vote for Bernie in the primary, as all the other candidates running were only representing the rich. At still another address in Alexandria the young white man who was on my list to canvass said of course he was for Bernie, but he actually believed in a more radical socialist vision. We then had a longish exchange about Marxism, capitalism and socialism before I'd gotten enough of a break from constant walking to want to move on.

I've read a good deal of radical literature over the course of my life, although never in a disciplined way, yet there is something about encountering real people through political work for Bernie this election season that I find enormously exciting. Somehow, it represents a step far beyond what I've picked up in the way of pure socialist theory. There's a buzz to be had, a high you can experience from talking to people in this way, and I can easily see why some activists find it addictive. I'm hoping it makes me a better socialist over time. For now, though, I'm sure it's making me a happier one.

### [The Team that Dare Not Speak Its Name](#)

Saturday, April 30th, 2016

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> May 2016**

*By Bill Mosley*

Review of *Redskins: Insult and Brand*. By C. Richard King. University of Nebraska Press, 2016. 256 pp.

When the Cleveland Indians last month announced that they would [mimize the use of their Chief Wahoo logo](#) – the idiotically grinning Native American stereotype that disgraced the players' caps and sleeves – the campaign to eliminate Native names, logos and imagery from sports took a baby step forward – sort of. The Indians removed the Wahoo image from caps, replacing it with a block C, but the face still smirks from the players' sleeves, and the team will continue to sell Wahoo paraphernalia. By trying to be only a little bit racist, the club satisfied no

one. But the move did show that the growing movement to eliminate Native stereotyping in sports is being heard, if not always heeded.

The fact that the Cleveland club was doing a little something put the spotlight back on the sports team engaging in the most egregious and offensive appropriation of Native symbols and verbiage – Washington, D.C.’s professional football team, whose name is the slur in the title of C. Richard King’s timely and valuable new book. King examines the battle over the club’s name and the campaign to eliminate names and imagery insulting to Natives from sports in general. While the dictionary-defined slur that is at the heart of the controversy appears in the book’s title, in the text itself King substitutes an asterisk for the “e” in most uses so as not to repeat the insult.

King, a professor of comparative ethnic studies at Washington State University, makes clear from the beginning which side he is on. “*Redskin* is a problem,” he writes. “It is an outdated reference to an American Indian. It is best regarded as a racial slur on par with other denigrating terms.”

King examines the Washington team’s name, and Native names and imagery in sports in general, through a lens of the white privilege that has made it acceptable to degrade and stereotype minorities for fun and profit – that is, until the minorities fight back. While African Americans and Latinos have had a large measure of success at removing demeaning stereotypes of themselves from popular culture and advertising (gone are “Sambo’s” and the “Frito Bandito”), Native Americans, due to their smaller population and isolation, have had a tougher battle. But, as King amply notes, they are making progress.

King explores the history of the Washington team’s name, and finds the official backstory fails to hold water. Owner Daniel Snyder claims that the team, formerly located in Boston and nicknamed the Braves, was renamed in 1932 by its new coach William “Lone Star” Dietz who was said to be of Lakota heritage. Therefore, said Snyder, the name “was, and continues to be, a badge of honor.” But King explodes that myth, finding that Dietz was in fact of German heritage and claimed Native ancestry likely due to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century “nationalist zeal for authentic Indianness and the popularity of playing Indian.” Dietz, in fact, tried to evade the draft during World War I by calling himself a “non-citizen Indian,” a claim that was deemed fraudulent by the FBI and led to his spending a month in jail.

The real story behind the name seems more straightforward. The change in the team’s nickname coincided with its move from Braves Field to Fenway Park, and seems to have been largely what we today would call a “branding” decision, both to call attention to the new venue and distinguish the team from the baseball franchise also called the Boston Braves. The new name, which traveled to Washington with the team’s relocation in 1937, was similar to the old one but just different enough, and owner George Preston Marshall had no compunction against adopting a name that stereotyped and demeaned Natives. Marshall’s team, King notes, was the last in the NFL to sign African American players, and not until 1962 when it was pressured to do so by the federal government.

The origin of the word “Redskin” itself is even murkier, with various sources linking it to war paint once used by some tribes, and others to the bloody scalps of Natives collected when

colonial governments put a price on their heads. But there is no question that as Western settlement advanced and Natives were driven from their land, the word increasingly became recognized as a slur.

The popularity of Native team names, logos and imagery, King effectively shows, is bound up in white America's contradictory and changing views of the country's original inhabitants. While in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Natives were often viewed as little better than pests that, along with the bison, needed to be exterminated or at least removed to where whites would not have to encounter them, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century – when most remaining natives lived on remote reservations – it became safe to view them through the lens of nostalgia. “It was,” King writes, “a paradoxical love of imagined Indians and a loathing of actual, embodied Indians that continues to this day.” Native names and imagery made a transition from denoting savagery to hearkening back to a time of simplicity and bravery, to the “noble warrior.” The traditions of disparate nations – feathered headdresses, tomahawks, teepees, totem poles – were lumped together to create a single, generic “Indian,” more a fictional character and a childhood game than a real, breathing human being. And, of course, a sports mascot.

One of King's more valuable insights is how Native team names and mascots stem from the white man's desire to dominate and appropriate Native culture. “Native Americans,” King writes, “are not unlike trophies, remnants from a kill, longingly kept reminders of past glory, and continuing signs of the prowess and superiority through which Euro-Americans channel the strength and energy of those they . . . have vanquished.”

For decades, Native Americans – and their non-native allies – have fought back against the hurtful stereotyping of their images and traditions. As early as 1972, Native advocates pressured the Washington team on its derogatory nickname. More recently, lawsuits have challenged the team's ability to trademark merchandise bearing a “disparaging name;” the U.S. Trademark and Patent Office ruled against the team, which is appealing the decision. Native organizations such as Change the Mascot and Not Your Mascots have kept up the heat on the Washington team while convincing many college and high school teams to change their names; while most of these teams did not have a nickname as offensive as the Washington club, their uses of Native symbols and stereotypes remained offensive and insulting. A November 2014 demonstration in Minneapolis, where Washington was playing the Vikings, took the demand for a name change directly to the team. Non-natives also are joining the cause of changing the Washington team's name; many prominent sports journalists, including ESPN's Mike Wise and NBC's Bob Costas, have been outspoken on the issue. And in Washington, a grassroots organization, [Rebrand Washington Football \(RWF\)](#), has been conducting a petition and informational campaign to change the name; King includes quotes from RWF co-founders Ian Washburn and Josh Silver in his book. (Full disclosure: the writer of this article is a member of RWF).

The book marshals a wealth of evidence showing why the Washington team's name in particular, and most Native names and mascots generally, should be changed. Unfortunately, King too often resorts to academic jargon to get his point across, and the book can be dense at times. King also could have benefitted from tighter editing: He repeats information and ideas throughout the book, such as the team's origin in Boston, the heritage of “Lone Star” Dietz, and the team's use

of the offensive “Little Indian” image. He also restates the notion of real vs. imagined Indians in a number of different places and different ways.

King offers only hints to two questions on readers’ minds: Why does Snyder cling so tenaciously to the name in the face of protests and criticism, and what will it take to bring about change? King cites Snyder’s childhood as a fan of the team and his fondness for everything connected to it, but the real answer is more likely the man’s stubbornness and willful refusal to be told by outsiders what to do. Now that he has dug himself in on the name, dislodging him will be doubly difficult. Nevertheless, King suggests a number of possible wedges that might separate him from the name, such as his desire for a new stadium in DC coupled with the District government’s stated unwillingness to let him bring the name with him. An unfavorable final outcome to the trademark case could be an impetus, as well as growing recognition among fans that the team’s name and symbols are stigmatized by racism. If nothing else, someday Snyder will no longer own the team and the new owner or owners will be able to look at the issue with fresh eyes. But advocates hope it won’t take that long, and continued pressure and public education are the sometimes slow but necessary steps toward forcing the team to change. King’s book provides valuable ammunition that might help bring about that change sooner rather than later.

[This Pie is Not in the Sky: How Idealism Moves Reality](#)

Saturday, April 30th, 2016

**Progressives don’t know their cultural history, while the Right Wing has capitalized the power of idealism**

***The Washington Socialist <> May 2016***

*By Jessie Mannisto*

We’re hearing the phrase “pie in the sky” tossed around a lot these days. Center-left readers of respectable news sources—the type that have compared Bernie’s proposed policies to [unicorns](#) and [puppies with lottery tickets tied to their tails](#)—often note that as tasty as that pie sounds, there is an election coming up and they’re on a diet.

It’s ironic to compare a socialist crusader’s proposals to some sort of celestial pastry, as it was the radical labor leader and songwriter [Joe Hill](#), a [Wobbly](#), who [coined](#) the phrase “pie in the sky.” Hill (who later became a martyr when he was executed for a crime of which he was likely innocent, but I digress) wrote a song called “[The Preacher and the Slave](#)” to the tune of a hymn associated with the Salvation Army, “In the Sweet Bye and Bye.” [Utah Phillips](#) will [sing it for you](#):



Or if you'd prefer to stick with text, here's the first verse and chorus:

*Long-haired preachers come out every night,  
Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right;  
But when asked how 'bout something to eat  
They will answer with voices so sweet:*

CHORUS:

*You will eat, bye and bye,  
In that glorious land above the sky (Way up high!)  
Work and pray, live on hay,  
You'll get pie in the sky when you die. (That's a lie!)*

When Hill sang of pie in the sky, he was attacking what he believed was an imaginary reward intended to tranquilize the otherwise volatile masses. The Salvation Army's decision to worry more about souls than about hunger here on Earth infuriated him. "Pie in the sky" is an insult directed at that sort of nebulous promise that one day things will finally be great if you just fall in line and believe what the powerful are telling you.

That's definitely *not* a criticism that fits Bernie Sanders.

Most other wealthy nations have baked the very pies Bernie's proposing. Things like universal health care, paid sick leave, and publicly funded college can and do work. The task now at hand is convincing policymakers, current and future, that we can smell the pie and would very much like a slice.

*And there's the rub!* say too many who otherwise support these policies. *We could never convince our leaders that they should support such radical plans!* If you don't actually support these progressive goals yourself, that's one thing; I'm not talking to you here, and I don't consider liberal opinion disseminators like Nicholas Kristof and his ilk progressive allies after articles like the one [I criticized](#) last month. (Perhaps these folks have themselves used these goals as their own sky pie to herd the masses along and are now alarmed that we're actually serious about them. I dunno, I don't hang out in their circles.) But many people who I know actually support these policies nevertheless are convinced we live in a country of ever-ascendant right-wingers and see no room or reason even to try.

This is not only wrong (see, for instance [a February poll by Vox](#) suggesting broad support for Bernie's proposals); it's also dangerous defeatism. And parsing the success of those very right wingers who scare us so much shows us why.



The “Overton Window”

A central concept underlying the growth of the plutocratic deregulating antidemocratic movement is the [Overton Window](#). This bit of political theory comes from the [Mackinac Center for Public Policy](#), which SourceWatch describes as a right-wing pressure group established by activists seeking to promote free market, pro-business policies. What they called the Overton Window, after one of the think tank’s vice presidents, refers to the small section of the overall range of all conceivable policies, from one extreme to the other, that are deemed acceptable by mainstream voters and that, therefore, a politician can support and still survive the next election. The image shown here above gives you an example of what this means. If you shift the position or size of the window, represented in teal in the graphic, you change what is politically possible.

This is what the Right has been doing over the past few decades. With funding from the Koch Brothers and Michigan plutocrats, the Mackinac Center has normalized and pushed ideas that would have been seen as crazy not so long ago.

And look at what the Right’s version of idealism has achieved. Not so long ago, the goal of making Michigan—*Michigan!* We named a freeway after [Walter Reuther!](#)—a Right-to-Work-For-Less state would have been considered among the most egregious of celestial pastries. The Emergency Manager law that brought us the suspension of democracy that led to the poisoning of Flint represent another realization of the Right’s wildest dreams. I’m sure you can think of plenty of other noxious right-wing pies, but I’ll stop before I depress everyone. The point is, Republicans haven’t sat there and said, gee, we’d like to do this, but people aren’t on our side. They went out there and shifted the window of discourse.

I’d wager that the Right’s willingness to champion their goals has even helped mobilize their voters, giving them a reason to get excited and come out to vote in midterm elections. The Democratic Party, meanwhile, has hunkered down and trembled under the banner of “no, we

can't," trying to position itself as a defender of a status quo in which many voters, including plenty of moderates, see cracks.

Bernie Sanders's campaign has already been a tremendous success, because he's opened the Overton Window on the left. Progressive economic goals are now back inside of it. But this won't go any further without a fight, and I'm not talking about the one with the Right. I'm talking about the alumni of the [Democratic Leadership Council](#) and their elite allies — the ones who closed the left side of the Overton Window in the 1990s — who are telling us that economically progressive goals are forever out of reach. No, we can't.



Radical labor leader Joe Hill, who coined the phrase "pie in the sky"

More than anyone in national politics today, Bernie stands for the same ordinary working Americans for whom Joe Hill wrote his songs. Bernie understands that there needs to be a real fight to make the system work for all of us. Our detractors who fancy themselves pragmatists tell us that, y'know, Bernie's not going to be able to implement all these changes. (I wonder if they think a Republican Congress is going to go along with Hillary Clinton, but I digress.)

We know that. But we also know that each vote for Bernie opens the Overton Window a little further. If you are for social safety nets, if you want to push for an economy whose benefits are accessible to all, if you think banks that are too big to fail are too big to exist, if you're impatient waiting for cautious politicians to recognize the rights of oppressed minorities, if you are embarrassed that our country is the only major industrialized country that doesn't mandate paid family leave or sick time, et cetera, then voting for Bernie is at present is one great way to show that.

It can't be the only way. We need a movement, much like the one described recently in [an excellent article](#) in the Huffington Post. And hey, if you're a progressive for Hillary, we still would love to welcome you on board; I know you have your reasons to support her in 2016, and that's cool. Just don't believe anyone who tries to tell you what can and cannot be. And if they bring up celestial pastry, perhaps they'd be interested in the story of a Wobbly named Joe Hill.

*This pie is real. It can be done, no matter what the comfortable elites at *The New York Times* want you to believe. They're the ones who are really promising pie in the sky, in the original sense of the term.*

Sing with me now!

*Pay your loans, bye and bye,  
With that glorious job in the sky. (Way up high!)  
Work and pay, live on hay,  
You'll get health care in the sky when you die. (That's a lie!)*

*Jessie Mannisto blogs at: [counternarration.wordpress.com](http://counternarration.wordpress.com) – where this article first appeared.*

[US Labor Against War Keys March Socialist Salon Discussion](#)

Saturday, April 30th, 2016

***The Washington Socialist <> May 2016***

*By Kurt Stand*

## **Background**

There was a time, in the not too distant past, when wars – in all their horror and misery – had beginnings and endings, when official rhetoric would proclaim that the particular war being fought would be the last war. There was even a brief period – between the US withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973 and our invasion of Grenada in 1983 – when the military's hand was stayed in circumstances which would now elicit drones or ground troops or mercenaries. Such days are long gone, our country now engaged in what amounts to endless war, bringing death and destruction around the world without even a pretense that these will ever cease. The change didn't just happen, the militarization of our economy and culture are part and parcel of the corporate neo-liberal assault on democracy and workers rights.

There was also a time, in the not too distant past, when the dominant leadership of US unions cheered wars as a source of jobs, as a way to “prove” a patriotism often called into question by business interests. And such support had adherents amongst rank-and-file unionists at a time when US capitalism appeared to offer opportunities not known elsewhere. Although there was always more working-class and union opposition to war than official mythology would have us believe, it is also undeniable that those resisting the siren call of the battlefield have generally been a minority – especially before the body bags start piling up. Yet this is no longer the case, the AFL-CIO in its majority has spoken out against war, and in so doing has expressed

sentiments of rank-and-file members. This too, didn't just happen, it came about as a result of conscious work by union activists who sought to democratize the labor movement and widen its vision to better combat the destructiveness of unbridled corporate power at home and around the world.

Although not a central part of either campaign, Clinton's hawkishness has made clear that her support for the invasion of Iraq was no accident, has made clear her readiness to continue to assert US military power abroad no matter the cost in human life or social well-being. Sanders, by contrast, in his opposition to the Iraq war, his willingness to speak of Palestinians as human beings who have suffered injustices, his inclusion of climate change and corporate free trade pacts as foreign policy issues, has sharpened the distinctions between the two of them. The political revolution Sanders has spoken of, is connected to the question implied above — are we a country of war or a country of peace?

## **Talks**

These themes were in the background of DSA's March 21 Socialist Salon which featured two USLAW – US Labor Against War – co-conveners: Brooks Sunkett, Senior Vice President for Public Workers, Health and Education for CWA – and Bob Muhlenkamp, former Executive Vice President and Director of Organizing for SEIU-1199, and Director of Organizing for the Teamsters during its brief period under reform leadership. USLAW is a union organization, financed by affiliated locals across the country that recognize the connection between the labor's domestic issues and the struggles for peace and justice workers are engaged in around the world. USLAW'S National Assembly held in Washington DC the weekend of March 19-20 provided a forum to analyze the global issues confronting working people today and a place to strategize on how to forge stronger connections between social and economic justice initiatives with the peace movement.

Sunkett began the Salon reminding participants that working people are the first to suffer in war, recalling his own experience as a soldier in Vietnam while still a teenager. That experience – what he and his fellow GIs endured, the suffering they witnessed being inflicted on the Vietnamese people – scarred him but also gave him an understanding of the world which he subsequently brought to his work as a union activist and leader. He explained that what he observed and felt during that war was in his mind when he introduced a resolution developed by USLAW at the 2005 AFL-CIO Convention condemning the US war against Iraq. The resolution – passed without opposition – marked the first time a US labor federation condemned an on-going war. The broad backing for the resolution was built upon the heritage of unionists who opposed the war in Vietnam, then, a decade later, opposed US intervention in Central America and US support for South African apartheid. USLAW was able to come to the Convention having already garnered support from state and municipal labor federations, as well as from union locals and regional organizations for the resolution Sunkett introduced. It was the prior work of organizing that created the basis for this historic anti-war measure.

But not that alone. Sunkett noted that USLAW also organized tours of US unionists to Iraq and of Iraqi unionists to the US – tours which brought out the common interests of working people in both countries, making solidarity more concrete by giving it a human face. Mutual opposition to

the war machine was also due to the shared public consequence for war not only brings death and destruction, it also distorts the economy by taking investments out of socially useful production and undermines social spending because massive arms expenditures takes money away from public needs. This led Sunkett to speak of an initiative CWA developed and outlined in a brochure: *Building a Movement for Economic Justice and Democracy*. The Communications Workers of America demonstrates in those pages the linkage between the growth of inequality in society to the successful decades-long corporate assault on organized labor. That linkage, in turn, provides the basis for an appeal to progressive and civic organizations from all walks of life and communities to work together to repair our broken political democracy. It is a logic consistent with the platform put forward by Bernie Sanders, and consistent with that CWA endorsed Sanders for president – an endorsement was based upon the democratic participation of union members, in a process Sunkett explained. Running as a thread in his remarks was the need to overturn the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision to equate corporate money with free speech. This, Sunkett stressed, is not simply needed to limit the direct power of big money in elections, it is needed to end the distorting power of the 1% in all phases of our society – including that of the arms industry and military establishment.

Muhlenkamp took up that theme when describing his work helping organize the massive 1982 Nuclear Freeze march in New York at the height of war tensions fueled by Ronald Reagan's nuclear weapons build-up. At the time Muhlenkamp was an officer of I199, a groundbreaking hospital workers union that had made an enormous difference in the lives of its members. Leon Davis, the founder and then president of the union said, however, that all the gains working people had made through hard fought struggle could be wiped out in an instance if work broke out. It was a reminder that unionists had to break out of their own silos, their own narrow focus on only what lies immediately before them, for labor rights can't exist without peace.

Bringing this sensibility back to the present, he then recounted his trip last month to Vietnam and Cambodia, countries that are still living with the destruction caused by the rain of bombs our government dropped on them during that long war. Yet despite the environmental and human loss, the people of those countries are looking forward toward building a future, a reminder that we should do so as well. Yet, Muhlenkamp added, there is one figure for whom forgiveness should impossible, and that is Henry Kissinger – the architect of war policies during the Nixon Administration who unleashed a blood bath Christmas 1972 simply to demonstrate US power at a time when the US government was already preparing to withdraw from the conflict.

The significance of that for today is that Hilary Clinton has referred to Kissinger as a man whom she respects and from whom she has learned. And what those lessons amount to can be gleaned from a *New York Times* article ("How Hillary Clinton Became a Hawk" <http://nyti.ms/1WH99LV>) that speaks to her intimate associations with military contractors and arms manufacturers — wielding the kind of influence she pretends does not exist with her Wall Street financial backers. A symmetry between military power, corporate power and anti-unionism Muhlenkamp noted, was on full display in Iraq – for the first action taken by the US occupation authorities after Baghdad was conquered was to ban public sector unions. Oil fields and most industry had been nationalized in Iraq, so this action was effectively a US ban on the country's unions.

Such connections, in turn, led Muhlenkamp to speak of the importance of the political alternative the Sanders campaign has opened, an alternative which, importantly, has allowed socialism to re-enter our country's political discourse. That said, and notwithstanding the clear difference between Sanders and Clinton on issues of war and peace, Bernie's campaign has focused on domestic issues. Muhlenkamp suggested that this is a reflection of a change in society which was also discussed at the just-concluded USLAW assembly.

Young people – the millennials – have grown up in a time of on-going war, with the consequence that war has become virtually normalized as an inevitable part of our modern world. Moreover, the stagnating economy combined with growing poverty has meant that a career in the military is one of the few avenues open to young people who want to break free from the limitations that surround them. So whereas ROTC – the Reserve Officers' Training Corp – was kicked off one college campus after another in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they have made a huge comeback not only at universities but even high schools. USLAW recognized that this is a reality which the anti-war movement has to take into account. So it is passing the reins to a new generation, one less marked by the Vietnam War, but instead is attuned to today's realities.

## **Discussion and Reflections**

Realities that have found expression in the Sanders' campaign, the support he has received amongst young people itself providing a bridge from struggles of the past to today while expressing an energy, a hopefulness and an openness that will be needed if the opportunity now before us is ceased. Much of the discussion after the presentations focused on Sanders, not only his candidacy but those running for Senate and House seats, those running for local offices.

The Maryland primaries held but a few days later were a reminder of how much more need be done – for not only did Sanders lose in the state, but so too did many of those running on an anti-corporate platform akin to his. And although there were some bright spots, such as Jamie Raskin's victory, there were more defeats, including those of Joseline Pena-Melnyk and Donna Edwards by establishment Democrat candidates, that were especially painful. Edwards loss in particular was a loss that spoke to systemic opposition to independence, that racial and gender representation is only allowed to tokens beholden to those above rather than their constituencies. All of which were predictable and all of which touched on questions raised at the Salon – most pointedly that posed back to participants by Sunkett asking what each would do if Clinton not Sanders is the eventual nominee of the Democratic Party.

The answers varied from person to person, yet the agreement expressed lay in the need to continue to organize, to continue to address the issues behind the broad support for Sanders. This was on display during the Awakening Democracy/Rally for Democracy actions the week before, simultaneous with USLAW's Assembly. Alongside direct action civil disobedience with arrests of over 1,000 there was congressional lobbying; alongside workshops to encourage civic engagement and knowledge there was a public rally at the Capital Building. The twinned themes of all were the need to end the corrupting role of money in politics and the need to defend and expand voting rights. The expression for the need for such



change was the need for environmental protection, an end to anti-LGBT laws, for immigrant rights, an end to gun violence, support for peace not war.

And, just as at our Salon, the voice of labor was heard – especially in the presence of members of the Amalgamated Transit Union embroiled locally in conflicts with our Metro system; and in the presence of leaders and members of CWA now in the midst of a 39,000 member strike. Sunkett spoke of the strike, the issues workers were facing and called on everyone to join the picket lines and give financial assistance to those who walked off the job rather than give in to the concessionary demands of business. People at the meeting opened their pockets to contribute – demonstrating in action that the movements for peace and for social and economic justice are all different aspects of the same demand for a genuine democracy – aka — socialism.

[We Deserve Better- Say No to Walmart Expansion](#)

Saturday, April 30th, 2016

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*By Kurt Stand*

## **Perspective**

Bernie Sanders likely will not get the nomination, nor win the presidency. But that doesn't mean that his campaign was in vain. Rather the work done serves as a reminder that organizing to improve conditions of life in our own communities when joined to a vision of social solidarity can sustain struggles over the long haul – and can sometimes even surprise us with a victory. What follows is a description of just such efforts undertaken to stop Walmart expansion in Prince George's County.

## **The Problem**

Good neighbors are trustworthy, good neighbors take care of their own houses or apartments and lend a hand to those around them when help is needed. By any such definition, Walmart has been a bad neighbor to communities across the country. One doesn't have far to go to discover instances of such; an example can be found in Prince George's County's Duvall Village. Walmart announced in 2013 its intention to put a 24-hour store in a small community. Residents, concerned about safety, environmental damage, and a further hit to property values in an area that still hasn't recovered from the 2008 financial crisis, organized opposition. Walmart countered with the alleged economic benefits of the store. But that myth was countered when neighborhood activists cited statistics revealing that Walmart destroys three jobs for every two it creates (by causing layoffs or store closings in existing businesses unable to

compete), and underpays its workforce (half of its employees earn less than \$25,000 per year). The weight of such evidence, backed by public meetings, public hearings and a signature campaign, contributed to a decision by the Prince George's County Council – exercising its land use capacity authority while wearing its District County hat – to vote unanimously in 2015 to deny Walmart's application. That decision should have ended matters but Walmart lived up to its reputation of not caring about the opinions of communities; it appealed the Council's decision, showing a complete lack of respect for the residents of Duvall Village. The Court hearing was held on April 22, residents waiting to see if the victory they thought they won is protected or if they will have to resume their organizing.

Meanwhile, a new battle is looming. Walmart's treatment of its own property and the property surrounding its Capital Plaza store over the past decade has demonstrated the lack of respect to the entire Prince George's County community that Duvall Village residents feared. And that record of bad behavior is the reason for local opposition to Walmart's proposed expansion at the Capital Plaza site it has occupied for nearly a decade.

Walmart elicits such opposition because it operates on a business model opposed to any accountability to customers, to employees, to communities. Thus it has no compunction to break promises made, as recently witnessed in DC where Walmart announced it was not opening two stores in distressed Southeast communities that had been promised as part of an agreement that allowed the company to open stores in three more lucrative neighborhoods. A handshake had sealed the deal – the District government's mistake was banking on Walmart's integrity. At the same time, Walmart announced it was closing hundreds of stores across the country. Business conditions change, consolidation and closing of existing outlets, plants, offices, can happen to any company. But what makes this especially problematic when Walmart is involved is the gap between the jobs and development promised when they go into a community and what they deliver. Their cost-cutting methods of operation drive other businesses out of an area—so when they do shutter their doors they often leave a community worse off than when they entered.

Such an outcome flows from an unsustainable business model that pushes costs on those it serves. The low-wage, often part-time jobs Walmart does provide allow its employees little in the way of benefits or possible savings. When a wealthy company acts irresponsibly, taxpayers must bear the burden – as when people with jobs still need subsidized health care, rent assistance, food stamps. After all, one must live even when not earning a living wage. Moreover, that low-wage model undermines the ability of other retailers that want to treat their employees with more justice from doing so, because they can't compete against those low costs. Walmart's refusal to pay its fair share extends beyond its mistreatment of employees to all other areas of business. Unlike responsible companies, it pays for neither security nor groundskeeping – not caring whether these are provided by the local communities, by volunteers, or not at all; just so long as it doesn't come out of their bottom line.

## **Forum Talks: Looking Back**

Concerns such as those above lay behind many of the remarks made at Progressive Cheverly's February 4 Forum: *The Proposed Super Walmart at Capital Plaza — is it good for the local community?* Addressing a full house of residents concerned about the possibility of having a "Super Walmart" as a neighbor were Cheverly Mayor Mike Callahan; Progressive Maryland Staff Representative Jennifer Dwyer from Duvall Village; Madeline Golde and Clareen Heikal, Progressive Cheverly representatives in the Community Standards Coalition; and Malcolm Augustine, community leader and Progressive Cheverly member. They described Walmart's failure to adequately address past concerns or keep promises once made, and explained the reasons that more space for Walmart will not lead to the economic development area communities want and need. And they concluded with suggestions of actions people can take to ensure that citizen concerns are heard.

Past is prologue was the theme of Heikal and Golde's remarks as they described the background to current concerns over Walmart's plans. Prior to the Capital Plaza Walmart being built in 2007, the property in Landover Hills had been empty for 11 years. Although there was a great deal of interest within the community for retail stores opening at the site, the kind of development Walmart provides did not appear to offer a solution to the lack of local shopping and lack of jobs. Progressive Cheverly helped found the Community Standards Coalition in 2005, with the initial goal to keep Walmart from coming into the area. Once their presence in our area became inevitable, the Coalition established criteria the company needed to meet in order to become a good corporate neighbor – criteria which Walmart has, for the most part, fallen short of. Since putting in the expansion request, they have made some improvements; after 8 years of not being responsive to community concerns these latest actions are likely only being made to weaken opposition to store expansion.

The Community Standards Coalition – comprised of the Town of Bladensburg, Town of Cheverly, City of College Park, Town of Colmar Manor, Town of Edmonston, City of Glenarden, Greater Landover Knolls Civic Association, City of Hyattsville, Hyattsville Organization for Positive Environment, Landover Area Revitalization, City of Mount Rainier, City of New Carrollton, Port Towns Community Development Corporation, Progressive Cheverly, Radiant Valley Civic Association, Town of Riverdale Park – agreed upon nine goals when first formed. The nine demands are:

- Prohibition on sale of guns and ammunition.
- Prohibition on alcohol sales.
- Provide parking lot security to protect customers and employees.
- No 24-hour store; hours should be comparable to other retailers in area.
- Work with community leaders in adjoining neighborhoods to address congestion and security issues.
- Design a building with attractive façade and landscaping.
- Establish an energy-efficient and environmentally innovative site.
- Recruit workers from the area and engage in workforce development.
- Engage in ongoing dialog with elected municipal and civic association leaders in the area concerning these issues during the duration of the store's operation.

In addition, the community insisted that Walmart not open up a grocery store at the Capitol Plaza store. Beyond that, the aim was for Walmart to be an anchor store that would lead to the development of the rest of the site; this did not happen. If Walmart gets its way and expands, its larger store and parking lot together will take up a disproportionate share of Capital Plaza's 39 acre lot, thereby inhibiting any other use of the mall. They also typically include a full-service grocery store, which would hurt sales at other local businesses. Walmart has agreed to meet with community representatives, has agreed that the store will not be open 24 hours (a major concern for nearby neighbors), but to ensure that those promises are kept and result in lasting changes means continuing to organize. And so those nine goals remain as goals the Coalition wants Walmart to meet in full.

### **Forum Talks: Organizing for a Different Change**

After hearing about past conflicts with Walmart, speakers addressed how to work for a better outcome in the present. Dwyer – who led the fight against Walmart in Duvall village — explained that her involvement began after being notified that Walmart wanted to open a store that would be virtually at her front door – a proposal made without any prior consultation or discussion with those who would have to live with the consequences. She took the initiative, talked to her neighbors, and soon discovered that her opposition was shared. Organizing from neighbor to neighbor, doing their own research and so gaining usable knowledge that could be shared, the voice against Walmart's plans grew from one individual to hundreds, leading to the victory – and current court case – described above.

The experience is relevant to the issues faced at Capital Plaza. The Planning Board is pro-development, pro-Walmart, and is unlikely to give equal weight to community concerns relative to corporate interests. Therefore opponents need to create a body of evidence at the hearing, even if the Planning Board will go along with Walmart's proposal. Although the whole process is constructed as a narrow legal procedure, ultimately it is a political process – and much will rest on the ability of concerned communities to make their feelings known and create a body of evidence at the Planning Board (even if it is ignored) and use that to mobilize and create political pressure on Prince George's County Council.

Dwyer was followed by Callahan who reiterated the Town of Cheverly's long-standing support for the Community Standards – and that those nine standards remain the basis of Cheverly's opposition to a Super Walmart at the site. Cheverly's mayor is working with the mayors of Landover Hills (where Capital Plaza is located) and Bladensburg to make development of the entire mall a condition of support for Walmart expansion. Those communities had initially been supportive of Walmart opening up a store, and now feel let down because it is such an eyesore and because it hasn't led to increased local employment opportunities or the shopping expansion promised and anticipated. In meetings with local elected officials and the Coalition, the property owner had claimed Walmart would attract other businesses, but that hasn't happened – though perhaps that is because he has been unwilling to offer the incentives that mall owners typically provide (outside maintenance, financial incentives, work on exterior facades, and the like). If true, it reflects the adoption of a business model similar to that of Walmart – pushing costs onto others that are usually borne by a proprietor.

This need for real, sustainable development is key, Callahan stressed. What is at issue isn't opposing Walmart per se; rather it is to promote an alternative model of mixed use development, with walkable areas, and several anchors. Such a project is what adjacent and nearby communities want and need.

To allow for the possibility of such an alternative we need to make our voice heard now, as Augustine stressed in his concluding remarks. Explaining the importance of engagement, he recalled Walmart's underhanded methods of getting its original application for the store approved in 2007. That approval was strongly influenced by a then recent transplant to Cheverly, Phillip Hoffman, who was elected to the town council and was a strong proponent of the economic benefits which would follow if Walmart opened a store in our area. About six months after the application was approved he relocated back to Bentonville, Arkansas where his wife worked as a Walmart Executive Vice President. This is an example of a culture of corporate duplicity and manipulative behavior, of "win" at all costs in pursuit of quick dollars symptomatic of the entire process. Neither trust nor honesty are part of Walmart's method of expansion. Only action now can prevent such behavior from being again rewarded, a sentiment that was repeatedly affirmed in the subsequent discussion.

### **What is to be Done**

There are numerous steps that local residents can take in order to resist this expansion. All can speak up and speak out – not as experts (though we have expertise on our side) but as citizens with rights. A broad mobilization is expected for the public Planning Board Hearing which will be held on May 5.

For more information on this fight and on forms of action Marylanders can take please read a fuller version of this article posted on the Progressive Maryland Blog: *Cheverly Residents, Neighbors, Say "No," to Walmart expansion as May 5 Hearing Nears* by Kurt Stand, April 16, 2016. See: [http://www.progressivemaryland.org/cheverly\\_residents\\_neighbors\\_say\\_no\\_to\\_walmart\\_expansion\\_as\\_may\\_5\\_hearing\\_nears](http://www.progressivemaryland.org/cheverly_residents_neighbors_say_no_to_walmart_expansion_as_may_5_hearing_nears)

And for more information on the Duvall Village fight see *Another Prince George's Neighborhood Fights a Super Walmart* by Jennifer Dwyer, April 22, 2016 – also posted on the Progressive Maryland Blog: [http://www.progressivemaryland.org/another\\_prince\\_george\\_s\\_neighborhood\\_fights\\_a\\_super\\_walmart](http://www.progressivemaryland.org/another_prince_george_s_neighborhood_fights_a_super_walmart)