***The Washington Socialist***

**Articles from March 2016 Issue**

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**Editor: Woody Woodruff**

[Welcome to the March 2016 issue of The Washington Socialist](http://dsadc.org/welcome-to-the-march-2016-issue-of-the-washington-socialist/)

Wednesday, March 2nd, 2016

[](http://dsadc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/The_Washington_Socialist1346533384.jpg)

**Welcome to the March 2016 issue of the *Washington Socialist*, the free monthly email newsletter of the Metro DC local of Democratic Socialists of America.**

Black History Month was a day longer than usual, leap year etc., but there was more to it than that.

Perhaps it’s in part due to the election year, but Black History Month did not seem like a bell rung in an empty warehouse this year… huge levels of discussion on racism and its attributes had been going on for many months and Black History Month seemed… well, gee… normal. Just another month in a continuum of heightened conversation on those topics. When Black History Month is not special, does that mean something good is going on, or something not so good? Have to think about this.

**MARCH FOR BERNIE DRAWS LARGE CROWD**

DSAers were highly visible at a march for Bernie in DC Feb. 27.

[](http://dsadc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/bernie-march-feb-2016-crowd.jpg)[](http://dsadc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/bernie-march-feb-2016-dsa-four.jpg)

[](http://dsadc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/bernie-march-feb-2016-coleson-ming.jpg)[](http://dsadc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/bernie-march-feb-2016-mosley.jpg)

**NEWS: *DC LABOR MIXES CHANGE AND CONTINUITY***  
The long tenure of Jos Williams at the helm of the DC Central Labor Council is punctuated by his retirement this spring and a significant alteration of the way the Council operates. Jackie Jeter, the president of Amalgamated Transit Union in the metro area, is nominated as the president of the CLC and the Council just hired an executive director, Carlos Jimenez, who is a friend and ally from the Jobs with Justice field staff.  Two DSA members are nominated to the executive committee. The election will be held at the March 21 Council meeting.

**EVENTS**  
**Metro DC DSA Membership Meeting is Sunday, March 13** 2:30 p.m. at the Watha T. Daniel Shaw Library, 1630 7th St. NW right across the street from the Shaw/Howard Metrorail station on the Green/Yellow lines. The speaker is Zach Weinstein from Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), discussing the DC Fair Election Coalition, whose mission is “to pass meaningful campaign finance reform in D.C.”

**Metro DC DSA’s Socialist Salon is Thursday, March 17** 6:30 p.m. at Hunan Dynasty, 215 Pennsylvania Ave SE. A program on reproductive rights is in formation.  
***Get the latest updates on our activities at our*** [***Meetup page***](http://meetup.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=a44ac0084c&e=003de9ccab) ***anytime.***

**WORKSHOPS, ANALYSIS MARCH 12 AIM TO SOLIDIFY SANDERS MOMENTUM**  
The battle for the Democratic Party nomination, once considered a walkover for Hillary Clinton, has remarkably turned into a race too close to call: [the latest polls](http://meetup.us5.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=8a1725c80b&e=003de9ccab) show Sanders just about edging Clinton nationally, such has been his rise in recent months. We’ve never before come this close to electing a socialist president, and win or lose we must learn all we can from it.  
But could a President Sanders, as progressive as his program would be, possibly survive the inevitable right-wing onslaught not only from a Republican-controlled Congress but also from [within the ranks of his own party](http://meetup.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=8734900091&e=003de9ccab)? Or can we expect an internal rebellion among the Democrats, much like in [Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party in the UK](http://meetup.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=5839dc8f75&e=003de9ccab)?

And, perhaps more importantly, what happens to his political revolution if he fails to get elected?  *How can we organize ourselves to keep Bernie’s program alive, regardless of who’s sitting in the White House?*

**Together with People for Bernie, Metro DC DSA will be hosting a series of hands-on workshops on Saturday, March 12, focusing on how we can tackle these tricky questions after the election.**

Brooks Sunkett, Communications Workers of America Vice President for Public, Healthcare, and Education Workers, will make the opening address, while Harold Meyerson, *The American Prospect* editor-at-large and DSA Vice-Chair, will deliver a keynote speech looking into how our current political climate came to be.

We invite all of you to join us at the headquarters of Communication Workers of America (501 3rd St. NW, Washington, DC, 20001), close to Judiciary Square metro station. [The event will run from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m](http://meetup.us5.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=f8919e2fe2&e=003de9ccab)., and we’ll be discussing how to build a nationwide left-wing movement to confront the right, from the federal level right down to the neighborhood level, by supporting progressive legislation and bringing local progressives to power.

Stop by to learn how we and other activist groups can help Bernie Sanders turn his election manifesto into a real grassroots political revolution!  
— *Ming Chun Tang*

**The Future We Want: Radical Ideas for the New Century March 14**  
A Colloquy at Busboys and Poets (5th and K) Monday, March 14 at 6:30 p.m. featuring DSA member and *Nation* senior editor Sarah Leonard and DSA Vice-chair and *Jacobin* founder/editor Bhaskar Sunkara. The two are editors of the just-published *The Future We Want*, a collection of essays by young progressives drawing on what the editors describe as the country’s “rich tradition of socialist proposals.” Busboys and Poets 5th & K –1025 5th Street NW Washington, DC 20001

**COMING UP SOON**: National DSA has signed on as a co-sponsor of **Democracy Spring**, a complex action approximately April 2-16 that will include a march from Philadelphia to Washington D.C. beginning April 2 and actions in the capital April 11-16  that include mass civil disobedience with a potential for arrests.

Major themes include reversing the effect of big money in political democracy and voter suppression.

Organizers are invoking the Occupy movement and Selma as similarly seismic events to the one planned.

A ten-day march from Philadelphia to Washington begins April 2. The action demands that Congress pass the “perfectly viable reform bills now pending before it.” Failing Congressional action, Democracy Spring aims to “reclaim the People’s House in mass nonviolent sit-ins” planned to last five days, the call to action says.

The major focus will be on getting big money out of politics and restoration of Voting Rights Act elements that would reverse voter-suppression efforts impacting poor and minority voters, both high priorities for DSA.

**IN THIS ISSUE — MOSTLY CLOSE TO HOME**  
Socialist Feminism, a complex and evolving subject, was the substance of a discussion at the Socialist Salon in February, led by Carolyn Byerly. Rose Driscoll recounts Byerly’s talk and the subsequent discussion, with context and her analysis. [Read complete article](http://meetup.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=0d2c808be6&e=003de9ccab)

The turmoil and gridlock at the Supreme Court following the death of Justice Antonin Scalia has had several benefits, not least the stall-out of a dangerous right-wing attack on public unions. Kurt Stand reports on a talk by ATU organizer Chris Townsend on the state of unions and prospects for improvement if workers take up the fight for themselves. [Read complete article](http://meetup.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=d991fa1d12&e=003de9ccab)

The vulnerability of the District’s shaky Home Rule status to becoming a plaything for Congressional power trips is made even more so in a presidential election year. Will any of the potential candidates go to the wall for the rights of citizens in the Last Colony? Bill Mosley has a gloomy account – with one exception. [Read complete article](http://meetup.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=6f6a842620&e=003de9ccab)

One of the toughest local labor struggles features a public agency that privatizes that part of its service afforded to the most vulnerable citizens, putting its unionized employees behind the eight-ball from several different directions. Yes, we’re talking about MetroAccess. A recent meeting in Prince George’s mapped a fightback scenario joining riders and drivers, Woody Woodruff reports. [Read complete article](http://meetup.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=26e4643856&e=003de9ccab)

Five parcels of land near the Congress Heights Metrorail station are caught in a conflict between developer greed (and underhanded behavior) and the rights of low-income tenants. Whose side is the city – which has some control over the process — taking here? Andy Feeney describes the state of play, which may be susceptible to citizen pressure for a positive outcome. [Read complete article](http://meetup.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=1da7c6f5ed&e=003de9ccab)

Farther from home – in Annapolis, in fact – the fate of a statewide paid sick leave law is still shaky despite assurances from politicians that this is its year. Crucial hearings in the two committees that have killed the bill three years running are coming up the first week in March, Woody Woodruff reports, and advocates are raising the volume. [Read complete article](http://meetup.us5.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=776383781d&e=003de9ccab).

*BOOKS/ARTS/GOOD READS*  
The successes and final failure of communism in Bulgaria during and after World War II is the subject of a fine-grained history, *The Left Side of History*. Lynne Williamson reviews this personal, family-centered work. [Read complete article](http://meetup.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=6b307675c3&e=003de9ccab)

Kurt Stand reviews Lynn Nottage’s “Sweat,” a play presented at the Arena Theater detailing the tangled class, race and personal relations of characters who live through the death of a working-class town in the age of NAFTA. [Read complete article](http://meetup.us5.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=20ce0a5b5d&e=003de9ccab)

This month’s “Good Reads” is extra substantial, with curated reading suggestions from Kurt Stand and Andy Feeney as well as the basic recommended reading list for emerging socialists from members of DSA’s National Political Committee. Plus the usual grab bag. [Read complete article](http://meetup.us5.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=9a5b7e0502&e=003de9ccab)

Y**ou can read these and other past articles in the *Washington Socialist* on our website where they are archived,** [**dsadc.org**](http://meetup.us5.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=bee696bf6b36570e5c2c2e83c&id=307b4c94aa&e=003de9ccab)

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**Our readers are our best writers**. Join that group and submit an article about activism you are doing or someone else is doing; reviews of important books you have read; think-pieces contributing to the left’s perennial search for a better way to explain our crisis to its victims. ***You are part of this conversation. Submit contributions to The Washington Socialist at a number of levels — send us nominee for “Good Reads” (they should be available online so send links); send news and notices of activism; submit articles. Send to*** [woodlanham@gmail.com](mailto:woodlanham@gmail.com).

[Congress Heights Gentrification Fight: With Diverse Allies, Could Tenants Win This One?](http://dsadc.org/congress-heights-gentrification-fight-with-diverse-allies-could-tenants-win-this-one/)

Monday, February 29th, 2016

***The Washington Socialist <>* March 2016**

*By Andy Feeney*

For a generation, the rapid and ongoing redevelopment of the Washington area real estate market has unleashed forces for gentrification on a massive scale; and for a generation, advocates for the preservation of low-income housing, especially among low-income communities of color, have often been overwhelmed by well-funded and politically connected developers.

In one local battle centering around the Congress Heights Metro stop in Southeast D.C., however, a diverse and somewhat surprising coalition of gentrification opponents seems to be coming together in a fashion that could help a small community of low-income tenants hold onto their housing, while perhaps frustrating the development plans of an increasingly unpopular development partnership with apparent political ties to Mayor Muriel Bowser.

For several years now, D.C. developer Geoffrey Griffis of City Partners LLC, in coalition with   Bethesda-based property company Sanford Capital, has been planning to redevelop five properties near the Congress Heights Metro station into an upscale, multi-use project that would include a 285,000-square-foot office building, about 20,000 square feet of retail space and 208 apartment units. Before his death several years ago, former Mayor Marion Barry praised the proposed redevelopment as essential to the economic revitalization of this part of Southeast Washington, and an early *City Paper* article on the plan suggested that at first glance, its potential effects seemed to be positive.

In order to build the new 442,000-square-foot complex, though, City Partners and Sanford Capital are planning to demolish four existing rent-controlled apartment buildings housing low-income and mostly elderly tenants. Under DC’s Tenants Option to Purchase Act (TOPA), the tenants, upon official notice of the demolitions, would have a legal right to offer to purchase their units as an alternative to being evicted.

To prevent them from doing so, tenants and low-income housing advocates say, Sanford Capital has sought to push people into moving out, both by offering them financial assistance in relocating and by allowing the buildings to deteriorate to the point where the tenants face virtually unbearable conditions.

City inspectors and tenants have discovered furnaces and air conditioners that don’t work; leaking plumbing; infestations of mice, rats and bedbugs in some of the buildings; broken doors and broken locks that have enabled squatters and drug users to invade the buildings; falling ceilings in some units; peeling paint; and accumulations of sewage in some of the basements so that buildings are pervaded by disgusting odors.

Perhaps in response to these tactics, a majority of the 47 apartments in the four buildings are now vacant, but a stubborn 19 tenants remain and have formed an Alabama Ave./13th Street Tenants Coalition to fight Sanford Capital for their right to exercise their TOPA rights to purchase if and when the buildings are redeveloped.

Attorney Will Merrifield of the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless has represented the tenants in their fight; also taking up their cause is local community activist Eugene Puryear, whom Metro DC DSA endorsed in 2014 in his campaign as the Statehood Green Party nominee for an at-large seat on the D.C. Council. Through a new organization called Justice First, Puryear has organized protests at the homes of developer Geoff Griffis and at the home of one of the principals of Sanford Capital.

Also taking up the cause of the tenants are D.C. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson and D.C. Councilmember Anita Bonds, chair of the Council’s Committee on Housing and Community Development, who on Feb. 4 held a joint hearing of Bonds’ committee and the Committee of the Whole to hear testimony about conditions at the Congress Heights properties.

Also in February, D.C. Attorney General Karl Racine sued several individuals and entities associated with the properties in Superior Court, citing Sanford Capital’s repeated violations of city housing and health regulations at the property and requesting that the court appoint a receiver to take over the properties temporarily and correct the violations at Sanford’s expense.

Also voicing support for the tenants and demanding correction of the housing violations is Councilmember Elissa Silverman, who attended the Feb. 4 hearing along with Ward 8 Councilmember LaRuby May, who represents Congress Heights. Among other things, Councilmember May declared at the hearing that the D.C. Council would never permit white residents of the District to spend years enduring the same conditions that low-income black residents have had to experience at Congress Heights.

However, *Washington Post* reporter Abigail Hauslohner has reported that two close allies of Mayor Bowser who have been involved in a fifth property important to the proposed redevelopment project, Southeast businessman Phinis Jones and his business partner Monica Ray, have political ties to Councilmember May. In the view of some Congress Heights residents and some observers of the controversy, these ties make May’s true position on the redevelopment plan somewhat ambiguous.

The fifth property mentioned, at 3200 13th Street SE, is currently under the effective control of the D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), since its previous owner essentially defaulted on a $900,000 loan from the city and owes large sums in back taxes as well.

If DHCD chooses to forgive the unpaid loan and back taxes, the *Post* reports, the property will come under the control of an organization essentially controlled by Jones and Ray, the Congress Heights Community Training and Development Corporation. In that case, low-income housing advocates believe Jones and Ray would help the proposed upscale redevelopment go forward.

If DHCD chooses not to forgive the loan, however, it could take ownership of the property itself and then use its leverage to pressure Griffis and Sanford Capital into reshaping their proposed development to make it more amenable to the existing tenants. Mayor Bowser’s office presumably can have a great influence on which course DHCD will pursue.

However, Bowser’s campaign for mayor in 2014 received campaign donations of roughly $3,000 from Griffis and his family as well as $3,700 from Patrick Strauss, a principal of Sanford Capital, and his family. Critics of the mayor suggest that this may bias her in favor of the development, which in any case fits in with her larger plans for the redevelopment of Southeast D.C., including the old St. Elizabeth’s Hospital campus not far from Congress Heights.

The Post also notes that in 2015, the mayor appointed Griffis, who calls himself an old family friend, to a position on the National Capital Planning Commission. Whether Ms. Bowser is now likely to direct the DHCD to impose new conditions on the Congress Heights development therefore appears questionable.

Nevertheless, Will Merrifield of the Washington Clinic for the Homeless, in an interview with the *Washington Socialist*, said that one thing progressives in the region can do to help the embattled Congress Heights tenants is to contact Mayor Bowser’s office and urge her to have DHCD support their cause.

“A simple thing people could do is to call the mayor’s office and tell her to stand with the tenants of Congress Heights and partner with them once they get their TOPA notices, to create affordable housing on top of the Congress Heights Metro,” Merrifield said. “I don’t think it’s ever bad for the mayor to hear from the community and to know that people are concerned about this. I think all pressure is good pressure.”

In addition, Merrifield noted, the attorney general’s lawsuit against Sanford Capital and its associated entities requesting that its properties be put in receivership is another source of pressure on the developers. A third source of pressure is the campaign Puryear has been organizing through Justice First.

Yet a fourth source of pressure is a lawsuit that the tenants have filed against Sanford Capital in the city’s Office of Administrative Hearings asking for a rent rollback for tenants who’ve had to live in Sanford’s neglected buildings and endure the conditions there. On that lawsuit, Merrifield said, he is serving as co-counsel along with pro bono lawyers from Arnold & Porter, one of Washington’s more powerful corporate law firms.

What Merrifield suggests that the District Government should support, as an alternative to the virtual giveaways of valuable land to private developers who build expensive housing and upscale business developments on it, is a commitment to helping low-income tenants to own and control their own housing through housing cooperatives, with the city perhaps establishing an Office of Cooperatives to help people to create and operate such cooperatives well.

At the least, Merrifield said in the interview, “The city needs to make available land for true affordable housing development and make a commitment to developing such affordable housing, rather than just giving away land to giant redevelopment projects like the Wharf, which distort land values around them and in this way destabilize entire communities.” The District Government has plenty of money in its budget to house people, Merrifield added, and can easily find tens of millions of dollars to invest in sports stadiums. “To me, it’s just a matter of will.”

*Washington Socialist* readers who wish to contact Mayor Bowser can do so by calling her office at 202-727-2643. For a look at what the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless is saying and doing about Congress Heights, go to <http://www.legalclinic.org/broad-implications-for-dcs-affordable-housing-crisis-at-hearing-on-congress-heights/> .

Readers who want to oppose Sanford Capital’s management of the Congress Heights properties may also choose to join in a protest demonstration that Puryear of Justice First and tenants of the properties have scheduled at the Congress Heights buildings for Wednesday, March 9.

Puryear is calling for a “big turnout so the District, slumlords and developers know we mean business. We need everyone who believes the District shouldn’t help slumlords or displace low-income Black residents to come out.” According to an online press release from Justice First, attendees at the March 9 demonstration should gather at the Congress Heights Metro stop on the Green Line beginning at 7 p.m. For more details, check Justice First’s web site at <http://justicefirst.nationbuilder.com/support_congress_heights_residents> .

This article attempts to provide a simplified overview of some complicated political and economic issues surrounding redevelopment at Congress Heights. The *Washington Socialist* hopes to return to this topic in future issues as we continue to explore gentrification in the Metro DC area.

[DC HOME RULE: WHAT’S THE POSITION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES?](http://dsadc.org/dc-home-rule-whats-the-position-of-the-presidential-candidates/)

Monday, February 29th, 2016

***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2016**

*By Bill Mosley*

With all of the issues being juggled by this year’s crop of presidential candidates – terrorism, immigration, the economy, which device Hillary Clinton used to send emails – one seldom heard is what they will do to either give the District of Columbia more autonomy from federal rule or take some of what autonomy DC already has away.

It’s no wonder that DC’s status has been a non-issue on the campaign trail: Most Americans consider it to be of very little consequence except the 670,000 District residents who, unlike the citizens of the 50 states, are subject to congressional control over their laws and budgets and have no voting representation in Congress. This frequently has brought the District – with its overwhelmingly Democratic voter base and its majority-minority population – into the crosshairs of Republicans in Congress, who are all too eager to beat up on DC for enacting progressive legislation that the GOP opposes. Instances of congressional meddling in the District are legion, but the most egregious examples include the following:

* For nearly a decade, Congress prohibited DC from using its own funds to conduct a needle-exchange program to prevent HIV transmission, leading to rates of HIV and AIDS in the District that were the highest in the country. The lifting of the ban in 2007 led to a [dramatic drop in new HIV infections.](http://wamu.org/programs/metro_connection/15/09/25/dc_needle_exchange)
* In 1998, DC approved a voter initiative to allow marijuana to be used for medical purposes, but Congress forbade the District from even counting the vote for a year (it passed with overwhelming voter support) and then blocked DC from implementing medical marijuana for more than a decade.
* In 2011, to avoid a shutdown of the DC government, Congress – with the assent of President Obama – banned DC from using its own revenues to fund abortions for low-income women.

In a 1980 referendum, DC voters chose to make the District the 51st U.S. state, which would eliminate congressional interference in local matters once and for all. Now, 36 years later, not only has DC not achieved statehood; it has had to continually defend the limited home rule it achieved in 1974. In 1997, Congress even stripped the District government of virtually all its powers, and for several years DC was run by a congressionally appointed control board.

The failure to make DC statehood – and even defense of limited local democracy – a national issue has not been for lack of trying by DC officials, principally nonvoting House Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton as well as the District’s elected “shadow” senators and representatives (whose job is lobbying Congress for statehood) and citizen organizations such as the Stand Up! for Democracy in DC Coalition, DC Vote and Neighbors United for DC Statehood. Clearly, more work needs to be done to engage DC residents in the statehood movement, to say nothing of the rest of the country,

Nevertheless, all of the candidates have weighed in on DC’s status at various times, often when asked by local journalists or elected officials. Most of those who have served in either house of Congress have voting records on DC statehood or home-rule matters.

It will surprise no one that DC would fare much worse under any of the current crop of Republican candidates than with the Democrats. Statehood, especially, is a nonstarter for most Republicans, as this would mean one more certain vote for Democrats in the House and two in the Senate. From time to time, moderate Republicans have been open to measures short of statehood, such as a single vote for DC in the House of Representatives or more local control over the budget. But GOP support for even these limited reforms has been mostly missing lately.

Believe it or not, the one Republican candidate still in the race who has not completely shut the door on statehood is Donald Trump. In an interview last August on NBC’s *Meet the Press*, Trump responded to host Chuck Todd’s question about his views on DC statehood by first plugging his new hotel in the former Old Post Office building, and adding:

*I would like to do whatever is good for the District of Columbia because I love the people. You know, it’s funny. I’ve really gotten to know the people, the representatives, and the mayor, and everybody. They’re really special people. They’re great. And they have a great feeling. So I would say whatever’s best for them I’m for.*

That’s more of a non-answer than anything. But compare that to the rest of the surviving Republican field, [whose attitudes were compiled by DC Vote](https://www.dcvote.org/blog/where-do-current-presidential-candidates-stand-dc-equality):

* Ted Cruz – Of all the Republicans in the field, Cruz has been DC’s most active antagonist. During the current session of Congress, Cruz has introduced bills to repeal DC laws banning workplace discrimination and protecting the rights of LGBTQ students. He also introduced a measure to force the District to spend locally raised funds to provide vouchers for students to attend private schools.
* Marco Rubio – Rubio has no qualms about bashing the District to score points with his conservative supporters. Last year he introduced a bill that would have repealed virtually all of DC’s restrictions on guns.
* Ben Carson – After winning a straw poll of DC Republicans last summer, Carson said: “There are a lot of things that D.C. doesn’t have when it comes to infrastructure. For example, D.C. doesn’t have an agriculture infrastructure and that could be a real problem when it involves being a state. People who support D.C. statehood need to think long and hard about things like that. Perhaps it would be better if the District could have voting representation in Maryland or Virginia.” That reflects the views of many DC Republicans; the local party has supported voting representation in Congress but has never fully embraced statehood.
* John Kasich – While a member of the House, Kasich opposed statehood when it came up for a vote in 1993.

As for the Democrats, Hillary Clinton has been even more coy about her views on statehood than even Bill Clinton or Barack Obama, both of whom gave ringing rhetorical endorsements to statehood but declined to do anything more to bring it about. While a member of the Senate, she supported an unsuccessful bill to give the District a single vote in the House – a bill many local democracy advocates vehemently opposed, considering it a poor substitute for full statehood. When it comes to making a public statement about statehood she has been silent, although she expressed her support for statehood in a private conversation with Eleanor Holmes Norton, according to a [Norton press release](https://norton.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/norton-gets-clinton-s-personal-support-for-dc-statehood). If whispering soothing words in our delegate’s ear is as far as she is willing to go, we can guarantee that a Hillary Clinton administration is not going to drive statehood to victory.

This leaves Bernie Sanders. Of all the candidates he is the only one to have consistently, firmly backed statehood for decades – going back to 1993 when he voted for statehood as a member of the House representing Vermont. In 1993, during the House debate over the statehood bill, [Sanders made this statement on the House floor](http://www.c-span.org/video/?c4552649/bernie-sanders-dc-statehood):

*How could I in good conscience say that it is appropriate for Vermont to have two seats in the Senate, which is does, to have a Congressman who can vote on all the issues, which we do, to have a governor and a state legislature which deals with all of the problems facing our people, which we do, and then say that the people of the District of Columbia, with a population larger than Vermont and larger than some other states, should not be able to enjoy the same rights?*

Sanders’ views have not wavered since that time, reflected in his becoming a sponsor of the New Columbia Admissions Act, the statehood bill currently before Congress.

DC Democrats who regard achieving statehood as a top priority will have a clear choice in the June 14 primary. Those who are willing to put DC’s fate in the hands of the Democratic hierarchy might be content with Hillary Clinton as the nominee. For those who want our President to be a true champion of statehood, only Sanders fits the bill.

[Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association: A Respite Not a Victory](http://dsadc.org/friedrichs-v-california-teachers-association-a-respite-not-a-victory/)

Monday, February 29th, 2016

***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2016**

*By Kurt Stand*

Public sector unions – and the US labor movement as a whole — dodged a bullet when Supreme Court Justice Anthony Scalia died in the midst of hearing Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association, for there is little doubt that his vote would have been decisive in breaking a 4-4 tie in the case. A decision, had it been made, would have undercut the ability of public sector unions to collect fees for the workers whom they represent. But unionists should take little comfort from that, for it is only a bit of breathing space – the anti-labor offensive will not go away. Speaking at the February 14 DSA membership meeting, Chris Townsend, Director of Field Operations for the Amalgamated Transit Union (and formerly United Electrical Workers political director), argued that rather than hope for good court rulings, labor needs to aggressively organize its members and act with political independence on behalf of working class interests.

***The Legal Dispute***

Although the specific battle in Friedrichs is over, it is important to remember what it is about for the issues at stake will come up again and again. Rebecca Friedrichs, nine other school teachers and the Christian Educators Association claimed that the California Teachers Association violated their First Amendment rights by requiring non-union members to affirmatively opt out of paying the full agency fee for union representation. A description like that, of course, makes the matter seem arcane and too technical to have far-reaching meaning; moreover, it can seem like a legitimate request – after all, why should non-union members have to pay anything to a union? But behind the verbal games is a simple fact: Unions are legally required to represent all workers within a bargaining unit, whether or not they are members. If the California Teachers Association negotiates a pay raise, or an improved pension, or a smaller class size or an extra holiday, Friedrichs would accrue that benefit even though she never joined the union. And if she was unfairly transferred or assigned an extra time slot, or harassed by a principal, she could file a grievance through her shop steward. Moreover, if she felt that the union did not sufficiently fight for her at a hearing, she could sue the union for failing its obligation to provide fair representation – again, even though not a union member (and that is not a hypothetical, it happens – for some individuals hypocrisy will trump solidarity every time).

Such a restriction is unique to unions; government does not hold any other kind of organization – non-profits, churches, publicly traded businesses – to such a standard (one of many forms of unfair and disparate treatment to which federal law subjects organized labor, as Townsend pointed out). Moreover, the logic of Friedrichs had other implications, for behind it lies an effort to narrow the range of issues public employee unions can address almost to the point of vanishing. Federal workers, as we know in the DC metro area cannot bargain over wages, although they can advocate for members. But such advocacy can be considered “political,” as can virtually every measure any federal, state, even municipal public union advances; after all, every such measure impacts on the “public” or “taxpayers” – and so the effort to undermine union dues collection falls in line with the effort to undercut union bargaining rights, union political activity.

***In the Background***

Public employee unions are now under attack by corporate interests for the simple reason that they are the strongest section of the labor movement given the success of preceding decades’ attacks on private sector unions. The Friedrich’s case did not emerge because a few disgruntled teachers decided to go to court. Rather the lawsuit was developed, promoted, bought and paid for by the Center for Individual Rights, a right-wing think tank funded by the Koch Brothers, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Scaife Foundation and other funds dedicated to the destruction of social rights – thus the CIR has not only targeted unions, it has also fought against voting rights, affirmative action, protections for LGBTQ people, and remedies for violence against women. Townsend noted Jane Mayer’s **Dark Money** – a book about the Koch Brothers, their roots in the John Birch society, and their connection with other wealthy industrialists – as providing a glimpse of the forces arrayed against working people. He noted too, that the class dimension of the business struggle against organized labor – of which Friedrichs is only the most recent instance – can be seen in the role of General Electric, a company that has had a representative sit in every White House Administration, Democratic and Republican, since the 1920s.

One of the myths used to build opposition to unionism is by exaggerating labor’s strength, a myth used today in the assault on public employee organization. For they do not have anywhere near the power attributed to them – many states deny them bargaining rights altogether, some of the most egregious instances evident in Virginia. Townsend used that state to make a further point; most unions have become so timid and so bureaucratic they fail to resist such attacks – so unions supported Democrat Terry McAuliffe for Virginia governor without even asking him to consider changing anti-union state laws, laws initially proposed by labor-backed Democratic governor Doug Wilder. That failure to make demands on candidates is currently on display in this year’s presidential campaign, many unions have endorsed Hillary Clinton despite her past support for NAFTA and other free trade deals, despite her current refusal to support a $15 minimum wage. More to the point, Townsend stressed, those unions supporting Clinton, have not asked for anything in return. Access is what they want, but access by itself will do nothing to enable unions to organize or to gain the power right-wing opponent claim they have.

***Organizing Resistance***

Which returned him to his first point; it is an anomaly — and an aspect of the successful effort by property-owners to limit popular democracy with the writing of the Constitution –that Supreme Court justices have so much power. But such power can only be contested by an engaged labor movement that fights back, that continues to organize at workplaces to resist corporate power and to build workers’ collective strength. And that same approach, Townsend stressed ought to apply to presidential and congressional elections — which should not be fought over the pick of a judge, but rather ought to be seen as a means of electing people to office who will proactively legislate on behalf of working people. And this is where Bernie Sanders’ campaign is so important, for, he explained, Sanders has gone out of his way to support union struggles – a record not sufficiently known in its specifics, but a record important to remember. A Sanders presidency would not be about union presidents having access to the White House; it is about having a committed ally for workers mobilizing and organizing to assert their rights. Labor’s gains have only ever come through such action; they have never been gained by passive waiting.

***A Quote***

Townsend referred to lessons of the past contained in some of William Z. Foster’s writing. A syndicalist and later Communist trade union leader, he was a successful mass organizer in the meatpacking and steel industries and strategist in labor struggles through the early and mid-20th century. In a pamphlet written in 1925, when union strength was at a low point, Foster wrote the following lines that remain relevant today, when union strength is again at a low point:

“A glaring weakness of conservative trade unionists in attempting to organize the unorganized is their failure to take into consideration this fact, that the mass of workers have organized themselves in order to fight immediately for their demands. The conservatives stress the organizational side too much and the struggle side too little. … They proceed upon the basis that workers can be brought into the unions slowly, man by man, and then held there indefinitely until the great mass is organized, when sometime in the distant future, perhaps demands will be made on the employers for better conditions. Such a theory is of course absurd. …

“The future trade unions of the great unorganized industries will be born in the heat of struggle **… Organization campaigns … are preparations for strikes.** They are a struggle for position between the employers and workers in the big battle that is soon to come, the strike over establishment of better conditions. It is in this sense that such campaigns must be conceived and carried through”

**[American Trade Unionism: Selected Writings** *by William Z. Foster, pp 169-170, International Publishers 1947 (1970 edition).*]

[GOOD READS FOR SOCIALISTS – our March compendium](http://dsadc.org/good-reads-for-socialists-our-march-compendium/)

Monday, February 29th, 2016

***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2016**

**>>Socialist-Feminist Good Reads—Kurt Stand starts us off with a roundup of recent reads that bear on our February Salon on Socialist Feminism:**

*“A lifted world lifts women up,”*  
*The Socialist explained.*   
*“You cannot lift the world at all*  
*While half of it is kept so small,”*  
*The suffragist maintained.*  
*The world awoke, and tartly spoke:*  
*“Your work is all the same:*  
*Work together or work apart,*  
*Work, each of you, with all your heart—*  
*Just get into the game!”*

A poem written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a socialist and a feminist, in 1912 speaks directly to Carolyn Byerly’s talk at our Socialist Salon. The poem is included in an article by Peter Dreier, “Gloria Steinem Renews an Old Debate About Socialism and Feminism,” that was posted as a blog in *Dissent* <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/gloria-steinem-hillary-clinton-socialism-feminism-history>

Dreier puts Steinem’s criticism of young women supporting Bernie Sanders in an historical context, noting the narrowness that results when economic justice and the rights of women are perceived as separate. Speaking in more direct personal terms of the moment, Holly Wood explains in no uncertain terms why, as a millennial feminist, she has no problem with support Sanders and opposing Clinton (<http://www.villagevoice.com/news/feeling-the-yern-why-one-millennial-woman-would-rather-go-to-hell-than-vote-for-hillary-8253224>). So too, Kate Albright-Hanna discusses her evolution from having been a Clinton intern in 1995, someone who admired Hillary Clinton, into someone who strongly wanted Elizabeth Warren to run this year, and absent that alternative, unreservedly supports Bernie Sanders today. She writes:

“They say that I’m so blinded by my devotion to economic justice that I’m willing to miss this historic opportunity to lift up my sisters (well, just this one very special sister). To which I say: Patriarchal countries around the world have been passing the baton to the female relatives of male leaders for centuries. It’s always been one of the cracks in BroWorld — one that a few lucky women have been able to slip through. But I don’t want to just slip through a crack. I want to break BroWorld into a million pieces. That’s why this BernieLady is on board for the revolution.” (<https://medium.com/@katealbrighthanna/a-bernielady-in-a-broworld-b95d89a6952a#.lsguygpmc>).

Feminism and support for economic justice go hand in hand, something Barbara Ehrenreich, who played a key role in DSA’s commitment to socialist feminism at its founding in 1982, has always stressed. This comes through in an article which addresses the shortening life span of white working class men today, symptomatic of the economic injustice African-Americans, Latinos, women of color, face in even harsher terms. (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/barbara-ehrenreich/middle-class-life-expectancy_b_8687694.html>). Awareness of the ways race, class, gender impact upon one another – and how theories and politics of liberation need address that interaction is the ground upon which intersectionality emerged. Victor Wallis, an editor of the journal *Socialism & Democracy*, attempts an explanation of the term both historically and theoretically in Intersectionality’s Binding Agent:  <http://tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07393148.2015.1089032>

Without using the term, Beyonce’s “Formation,” performed at the Superbowl to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party, made linkages in struggles for justice, celebrating women’s leadership in the struggle for black lives as discussed by Malini Johar Schueller in Counterpunch . (<http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/02/16/lessons-from-beyonce/>). Linkages also made by Angela Davis who explained in an article connecting the struggles of the Black Panther Party in her youth to those of Black Lives Matter explained: “the feminist notion of intersectionality is one that should be incorporated into our work as well. I like to talk about the intersectionality of struggles, and how important it is to link the struggle against gender violence with the struggle against state violence, police crimes, and crimes against women’s bodies.” (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ebonycom/angela-davis-talks-black_b_9254196.html>). And, finally, she and her sister Fania Davis (who played a key role in the worldwide “Free Angela” campaign in 1970 when false FBI charges threatened the death penalty) gave a joint interview in *Yes Magazine* in which they emphasize that *“Self-care and healing and attention to the body and the spiritual dimension—all of this is now a part of radical social justice struggles.”*   (<http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/life-after-oil/the-radical-work-of-healing-fania-and-angela-davis-on-a-new-kind-of-civil-rights-activism-20160218>)

And thus we see in these articles – different articles, reflecting different emphasis and points of view — aspects of what was raised in the talk and subsequent discussion.   All fuel for further though and action – individual and collective.

**>>Andy Feeney delves into the (somewhat) startling speech on banks too big to fail by Neel Kashkari, former henchman of Tim Geithner and Ken Paulson…**   
**Bernie’s Right About Dismantling Big Banks – According to Bush’s 2008 Bank Bailout Czar**

In 2008, a former Goldman Sachs banker, Neel Kashkari, headed up George W. Bush’s emergency program to keep the U.S. financial system from collapsing in response to a fast-moving financial crisis. As Assistant Treasury Secretary with responsibility for the newly created Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), Kashkari oversaw the disbursal of hundreds of billions of dollars in payments to some of the nation’s largest financial institutions to keep them afloat during the crisis.

Kashkari, a Republican who made an unsuccessful run for Governor of California in 2014, is now President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. And in his new position, he declared in a Feb 16 speech to the Brookings Institution that some U.S. banks have become “too big to fail” and that because of this, they pose a continuing threat to the health of the economy.

Although the Dodd-Frank Act financial reforms of a few years ago have significantly strengthened the financial viability of such banks, Kashkari told the Brookings audience, there is still a risk that in some future financial downturn, they will again face possible collapse and require a bailout from the taxpayers.

For these and other reasons, Kashkari has said that Congress should move either to break up these giant institutions into smaller pieces which can be allowed to fail without significant threat to the economy, or convert them into highly regulated public utilities, with little ability to take on major risks, or systematically tax “leverage” – the use of borrowed money for speculation and investment purposes – throughout the financial system to reduce the risk of future crises.

Introducing Kashkari at the Brookings event was David Wessel, a long-time financial reporter and contributing editor to the *Wall Street Journal*, who is currently Director of the Hutchins Center on Fiscal and Monetary Policy at Brookings.

In a remark quoted in the *New York Times,* Wessel said in the panel discussion following the speech that he could imagine Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren voicing some of the ideas that Kashkari had expressed, but they weren’t what one normally expects from a “Goldman Sachs Republican.” Kashkari, the *Times* reported, replied that in his current position, he felt a duty to express his concerns about the banking system, and that if he didn’t, he wouldn’t be doing his job.

For a link to Kashkari’s speech, you can visit the Minneapolis Fed’s web site at <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/news-and-events/presidents-speeches/lessons-from-the-crisis-ending-too-big-to-fail> .

For the *Times* article on the speech, visit <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/17/business/dealbook/federal-reserves-kashkari-says-banks-still-too-big-to-fail.html?_r=0> .

For a Brookings video of the speech, click here: <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/brookings-now/posts/2016/02/kashkari-big-banks-still-risk-regulations-not-far-enough> .

**>>>>The Basics of Socialism: a list of introductory reads about DSA and socialism**

It’s a PDF, not the most helpful format, but here it is: <http://www.dsausa.org/introductory_reading_list>

**>>>>>>>>Other entries on this month’s Good Reads roster:**

Jeremy Gilbert has a very stimulating, if traditionally framed, argument in Red Pepper (Brit) on the need for a conscious pro-modernity strategy in advancing socialism. We get it by way of *Portside*. <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/the-case-for-radical-modernity/>

Our DSA comrade Mike Hirsch’s review of a new book by Danny Katch that Mike says walks the curious into socialist perspectives with humor and ease. <https://indypendent.org/2016/02/02/danny-katch%E2%80%99s-socialism-sense-humor> This book will be discussed at the next Socialist Book Group meeting April 3; check our Meetup page for details.

Gar Alperovitz’s latest magazine-scale summary of the collab-co-op developments around the nation – especially those with regional scope – that he and the Democracy Collaborative have been working on and celebrating. From *The Nation*: <http://www.thenation.com/article/socialism-in-america-is-closer-than-you-think/>

A nice extended discussion of capitalist development in terms of the development of precapitalist market formations – a fine walk-up to today’s alt-economy activism. It includes insights championed by the late scholar Ellen Meiksins Wood. It’s from the “Next System Project” associated with the Democracy Collaborative, via *Portside*. <http://thenextsystem.org/markets-in-the-next-system/?mc_cid=4a000b2755&mc_eid=12da9a7821>

Thomas Piketty’s Feb. 16 article in *The Guardian* (translated from a *Le Monde* appearance) about the effect and root of the Sanders campaign is just plain fun to read. <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/commentisfree/2016/feb/16/thomas-piketty-bernie-sanders-us-election-2016>

The red-baiting of Sanders and his campaign comes from all quarters. Here Doug Henwood takes on Paul Starr’s shots from the anterooms of the American Prospect.

http://lbo-news.com/2016/02/24/liberal-redbaiting/

Bill Fletcher Jr. posted this analysis by Peter Feld on his Facebook page – delves into the question of Sanders’s shying away from attacking Hillary Clinton’s foreign policy record and whether that has diminished his appeal. <http://mondoweiss.net/2016/02/did-dodging-foreign-policy-doom-bernie-sanders/>

Neel Kashkari, a Republican op who aided Treasury Sec. Hank Paulson in devising the partial solution to the 2008 financial crisis, has been named the chair of the Minneapolis branch of the Federal Reserve. Speaking as a Fed subchieftain but not, he says, for the rest of the Fed board, he argues that Dodd-Frank needs to be strengthened to prevent a recurrence, and that many banks remain too big to fail and therefore are eligible to be broken up (!) <https://minneapolisfed.org/news-and-events/presidents-speeches/lessons-from-the-crisis-ending-too-big-to-fail>

DSADC steering committee member Kurt Stand has had the first part of a two-part essay on the similarities and differences of the Left in the US and Germany published online by the Stansbury Forum… <http://stansburyforum.com/transformative-politics-german-leftus-left-same-challengesame-fight/>

And for something completely different, and pretty much non-socialist, here is an article from *Business Week* (gasp!). It is about code. You, know, what coders do. Your correspondent has it on good authority from some academic types that this is actually a good introduction.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2015-paul-ford-what-is-code/?cmpid=BBD022416>

[History of Socialist Feminism(s) Is Traced in February Salon](http://dsadc.org/history-of-socialist-feminisms-is-traced-in-february-salon/)

Monday, February 29th, 2016

***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2016**

*By Rose Driscoll*

Socialist feminism is a way of thinking that links the gender-based oppression women face with the oppression of a lower class under capitalism. Historically, the owners of the means of production could profit more from women’s labor because they were not legally obligated to pay women as much.

In a discussion led by Dr. Carolyn M. Byerly, nearly thirty members of Metro DC DSA analyzed the state and effect of socialist feminism. Byerly, a longtime DSA member, laid out a thorough history of the feminist movement in the western world and in America in particular, a narrative of manufacture of our own consent, both rewards and punishment.

The rising garment industry was well-organized and heavily comprised Eastern European immigrants who were familiar with socialism and with ownership that exploited and treated women poorly. Still, when they began to unionize, they lacked focus on women workers. Similarly, Gandhi’s movement for liberation in India did not include a reform of the treatment of women, evident in the sexual violence still rampant (though bitterly fought against) in modern India.

The “second wave” of feminism, led largely by liberal feminists, sought largely to gain for women the same opportunities offered to their male counterparts as well as protections against sexual violence, both domestically (i.e. domestic abuse and spousal rape) and at work and in the public sphere (i.e. sexual harassment). The second wave accomplished new rape laws, founded women’s shelters, and won rights to abortions and college education.

But liberal feminists operate under the assumption that equality can be achieved through individual choices and need not rely on a wider sphere in government, society, or through communal work. The leaders of the movement — Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan — had a blind spot around labor in general and family leave in particular. While some socialist feminists worked within the liberal feminist movement, founding communes and collectives, the mainstream actors remained fixated on individualistic feminism within a capitalist framework with an emphasis on personal choice.

At the DSA salon, this prompted a discussion of whether capitalism is inherently patriarchal — and indeed, whether any advanced society has been able to work beyond patriarchal frameworks. While more egalitarian societies than our own have adopted workable communal ownership or the means of production, none has established a matriarchy, let alone developed the industrialization and technology that we consider necessary based on our own rampant consumerism.

And in addition to consumerism, we in modern America place great value in our war machine. The DSA salon had a long discussion on whether the military-industrial complex is attributable solely to the patriarchy. While no doubt men have largely led the war machine, notable exceptions include Secretary of State and presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton. Likewise there is nothing to suggest that masculinity is inherently and unchangeably violent, despite the media’s best efforts to convince the public otherwise. Men can indeed overcome the societal expectations to stand on throats — whether physically or financially.

The oversight is what inspired many groups to splinter off and search for their own feminism. African American feminists, seeking to distance themselves from the liberal (and largely white) feminists, struck out into womanism. This new framework allowed them to consider the intersectionality of race, gender, and class oppression. Angela Davis, working from a Marxist analysis of slavery, led the Communist Party of the USA and worked closely with the Black Panthers to work for Civil Rights and — and to provide meals for neighborhood children before school.

The main difference between the feminism of Angela Davis or any socialist feminist, and that of Gloria Steinem or any liberal feminist, is in the analysis of the problem. Socialists, feminists or not, frame the problem first in the exclusive ownership of the means of production, whereas liberal feminists see the exclusivity of capitalism’s ruling class and the hierarchy it creates,  and deem it acceptable — as long as a woman *could be* one of those ruling capitalists, some day.

But not only is women’s liberation is a central plank in any reform of capitalism; women will never be fully liberated within a capitalist structure. Even today, capitalist oppression targets women specifically. Women are often viewed by capitalists as a means to make money rather than respected in terms of their own rights. The prevalence of gendered messaging in beauty, fashion, and diet industries often result in mental health issues and sexual abuse for women and girls. The recording artist Kesha attempted to release herself from a contract with music industry giant Sony after years of abuse and sexual assault at the hands of her producer, but her request was denied on the property-based premise that Sony had paid her contract and owned the rights to any music she might make, thereby forcing her to continue to work with her rapist. And more insidious is the outdated but clinging notion that women cannot both have children and work — men see a 6 percent pay raise if they have a child, [while a woman’s pay decreases 4 percent](http://nymag.com/thecut/2016/02/political-power-single-women-c-v-r.html) for every child she has.

How to improve the lives of female workers everywhere? Offer paid family leave and paid sick leave. Women are still relied on to provide the majority of work in the home, whether for care of the house or for a spouse, for children or for sick and elderly relatives. Support healthcare reforms that help women choose the size of their families and make the care for those families affordable. Raise the minimum wage — two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women, and that’s just in the US. Feminism is on the rise globally, through education becoming readily available online and increasingly in person. Feminists and socialists alike will need to continue fighting to ensure that quality education is available to women worldwide.

Domestically, feminist socialists will need to bring concerns at the intersection of feminism and the redistribution of wealth — paid family and sick leave and quality sexual health education to our lawmakers. We will need to offer support to women who are deemed less valuable than money — those working for minimum wage, those who are still expected to complete all the unpaid tasks of the homemaker, and those who are forced to endure sexual abuse in order to continue to make the money they need to survive. We will need to highlight these concerns in discussion with liberal feminists in order to bring awareness to the problems of capitalist ideologies.

*Metro DC DSA holds a Socialist Salon – generally, a meal and discussion – on the third Thursday of each month. For current updates, visit our* [*Meetup page*](http://www.meetup.com/DC-DSA/events/228866609/).

[Human Cost of Our De-industrial Revolution - A Review of Lynn Nottage’s “Sweat”](http://dsadc.org/human-cost-of-our-de-industrial-revolution-a-review-of-lynn-nottages-sweat/)

Monday, February 29th, 2016

***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2016**

*By Kurt Stand*

Who we are and what we can become cannot be separated from the circumstances of our lives, a truism that denies those glib assertions about lifting yourself by your bootstraps. Yet plant closures and lost strikes always leave in their wake suicides, marriage breakups, drug and alcohol abuse, spikes in petty crime and violence, all predictable consequences of loss. And not just material loss, but loss of a sense of purpose or control that comes with a demonstration of powerlessness. Anyone who has witnessed up close or experienced the devastation of lockouts, lengthy strikes, plant closings, long-term unemployment will know the devastating truths revealed in Lynn Nottage’s ***Sweat*** staged this season at the Arena Theatre.

The play focuses on the lives of three women workers (Tracey, Cynthia, Jessie) at a steel mill who survive through thick and thin, taking strength in the work they do, the mutual support they can give each other – mutual support that helps mitigate the harsh world of labor, of personal disappointments or family troubles, because of the community they form and share. But that mutuality, that sharing, that solidarity is made possible because a stable job and a strong union gives them a sense of security around which they can try and build a build a life. And so their friendships cannot survive the destruction of job, union strength or community.

Their stories – and that of the other characters in ***Sweat*** — are based on conversations Nottage had in Reading, Pennsylvania – once a thriving industrial center, today the poorest city in the United States; a multi-racial, multi-ethnic poverty. In her words: “Reading has been through an incredibly hard time. There was a level in some rooms of desperation, of profound sadness. In some rooms you could feel the nostalgia for what was and the longing for that to return. I think in some cases, there was genuine confusion: like, we signed with a contract with America, these were the things we were supposed to receive, and somehow we were lied to. So I think that people felt betrayed.”

Betrayed is another term for loss, a theme addressed by two of the most beautifully written monologues in the play. Jessie recalls a moment, just out of high school, when she and her then boyfriend thought that they would pursue the hippie dream, and travel through Asia (the 1960s an era when countries of the far and middle east felt like havens from materialism, rather than centers of “terrorism”) the names of the cities never visited repeated like an incantation. Instead, marriage, family, factory work took up her life; with the husband leaving her for a younger women only adding insult to injury in thought of the road not traveled. While in a reminiscence that is an attempt at an explanation of herself, Tracey tells of being taken around the city by her grandfather, a stone mason whose work was etched in buildings around the city, a piece of Tracy in each, at a time when craft and labor were visibly respected – a story told when the buildings themselves no longer stand. Both are white, and they speak precisely to what Nottage saw and heard, people in disbelief about the promise of our country, the social contract working people struggled for so painfully, being broken so thoroughly as if it had never existed at all.

For Cynthia, an African-American woman, those illusions did not exist; a racist society always means living on the edge. Still she had lived progress in the move from South to North, lived progress in steady employment, decent wages, union organization, that made possible a different kind of life with different kinds of possibilities. Her estranged husband, a once proud man who stood strong when challenged by management, became lost as the lockout at his plant took away his pride, his lack of work took away his self-respect, his drug habit takes away the pain of looking at what he doesn’t have. Recalling these brief instances from the play however, misrepresents a bit the depth of Nottage’s characterizations – each is three-dimensional, filled with depth and nuance. And thoughts of the past do not suggest a romantic nostalgia; life was always hard and filled with challenges, even a strong union didn’t make a life of factory work easy; physical pain from a life of labor is never distant for any of them. And the pleasure all take in drinking at the bar in which the play is set itself reflects a desperation even in moments of pleasure they do manage to create. But that recent past allowed a sense of place from which to resist – as an individual, as part of something larger – and to build; and the ability to resist and renew is precisely what winds up being taken away.

And the portrait of the complexity of each individual is why the play as a whole is so compelling, for it never takes the easy way out. Midway through, Cynthia is promoted into management, an advance especially meaningful to someone who had to face racism in every step on a journey to build a life that is more than drudgery, an advance that leads her to a conflict in loyalties, an advance that doesn’t protect her when the factory itself is closed. Yet it is a brief moment of progress that comes with a different kind of hurt, for the undercurrent of jealousy it creates with Tracey also brings to the surface traces of a racism in Tracey that otherwise wouldn’t have come to the fore – and yet doesn’t deny the fact of how real, how deep and meaningful their mutual friendship had been.

A friendship that had been passed on to their two sons, themselves factory workers (though Cynthia’s son once aimed toward college), embittered and lost to themselves and each other by strike-connected violence that leads them both to prison; the forces destroying the community robbing them of their future. A future never even open to Oscar, the Dominican who can only get work cleaning up at the bar, unseen as a person by black or white – unable to ever get work at the factory until the lockout lands him a temporary job as a scab.   Implied throughout is that the evils to be uprooted are not the choices made in desperation or anger, but rather the path of society that create such unpalatable choices. This is voiced by Stan, the bartender an almost constant presence in the play. A Vietnam veteran, a former factory worker until injury made him “unfit” – he speaks throughout as one who tries to create a sense of mutual understanding amongst warring friends, to give a sense of the past receding in memory, articulating what amounts to a progressive, class-conscious point of view. Not that the character as written would use such words himself, rather such a description comes from noting his ability to see the whole of what is happening rather than the part. Stan’s fate – devastating to see on stage – then becomes a metaphor of the working-class voice being taken from them.

Nottage’s other plays – all with strong African-American and African themes – touch on the politics of daily life in ways both tragic (***Ruined***; ***Intimate Apparel***) and comedic (***By the Way Meet Vera Stark***) that bring to life social realities by a focus on the mundane and the personal – exploring social conflict through the relationship of individuals. It carries on a tradition one can find in the works of Eugene O’Neil, Susan Glaspell, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller (Nottage recently edited and introduced a new anthology of his works), Lorraine Hansberry, Ntozake Shange, or August Wilson by developing a radical politics which is not explicitly such, which does not directly speak about “current events” or particular historical leaders. Rather a picture is painted of the whole through the interaction of one to another that is critical and challenging of conventional wisdom and comfortable certainties , following a path perhaps best seen in Sean O’Casey’s plays. So the politics are there in its indirection – just as the centerpiece of the play is the life of these three women, yet it begins with the two young men talking to their parole officer after release from prison, and ends with them back at the (now gentrified) bar in a return to the scene that brought them to jail.

The year of that beginning and end is 2008, a year of massive plant closings, and the rest of the play is set in 2000, the year of NAFTA; a purposeful connection made by Nottage, although neither NAFTA nor bank failures are ever mentioned in ***Sweat***. Ever in the background, they are the impersonal forces that impact on people for whom politics is usually assumed to be for other people. Purposeful too is its opening last year, its staging in DC at the Arena in the midst of the presidential elections, for Nottage recognizes that something must be done, the people need to pay attention and to act. ***Sweat*** certainly paints a grim picture, and there is little glimmer of hope for anyone at its close. But that does not make it a despairing work. We get a glimpse of who these people were, what they had been and built – and what was once built can be rebuilt.

Reading was once not only a center of union strength, it was one of the last industrial strongholds of the Socialist Party – the city elected and re-elected a socialist Mayor in the 1930s. Gone by the 1950s, it was still a solid Democratic, New Deal oriented, industrial town. Then came changes people didn’t understand, the loss of broader social solidarity that left unions isolated – and left unions with the illusion that they could survive in their isolation. The Reagan years destroyed that illusion and showed the corrosive impact of the loss of solidarity which rolled over our country in waves that always seem to hit people unaware. But those who created the destruction were aware, manufacturing towns and industrial unions were not undermined by some mysterious process, they were destroyed systemically by rapacious corporate owners in a system that defines value solely by increasing profits. And so pride in work for its own sake, dignity and community as values of greater import than the quick buck, worker organization to secure and protect such values – are threats to be tolerated by corporate powers when necessary, and crushed whenever possible

Increasing numbers of people are now aware of that broader reality. We see it all around us, not least in the public response to Sanders’s presidential campaign. It is to that search for understanding that ***Sweat*** – like many other recent works of theatre – speaks.   Speaking to inform or encourage action based on awareness and togetherness; the combination that enables hope to emerge.   An encouraging sign of such a combination was the large number of seats reserved by the Metro Labor Council at the Arena on January 27, expanding thereby the number of union members who could see and reflect upon the play.

Nottage puts this in notes that appeared in the Playbill describing what led her to write ***Sweat*** after reading an email she received from a close friend: “ ‘She said that she was completely broke; she was having a very difficult time making ends meet and had reached a level of desperation.’ Her friend wasn’t asking for a handout, but said she wanted her close friends to understand her circumstances. … ‘I’d known this woman extremely well, and I had no idea the depths of her despair. She lives two doors down from me, and it made me realize that probably most of us are living two to three doors away from someone who is either in poverty or on the verge of poverty, and that’s the nature of the culture we’re living in right now.’

“The Occupy Wall Street movement was just beginning. ‘We had no sense of what this was. All we knew was that there were these people in Zuccotti Park sitting there and saying, 99 percent of us are suffering while 1 percent are continuing to get richer and richer.’ The two walked in circles and chanted. Later, her friend said, ‘I actually feel a little better. Nothing has happened, but I feel better to know that at least there is a voice to what I’m feeling and I’m not by myself.’”

[Maryland’s Paid Sick Leave Bill — Hitting the Committee Wall Again?](http://dsadc.org/marylands-paid-sick-leave-bill-hitting-the-committee-wall-again/)

Monday, February 29th, 2016

***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2016**

*By Woody Woodruff*

Maryland’s progress in supporting struggling families has been significant in recent years – raising the minimum wage toward $15 and hour by stages, for instance.

But there are several pieces to supporting those struggles that remain to be put in place, and one of the biggest is on legislators’ plates – again – this week.

Paid sick leave, which is up for consideration for the fourth straight year, is a critical element in family stability and the chance for people to get traction and improve their lives. As before, it is in danger of committee burial, as Del. David Moon explicitly warned at the Progressive Neighbors forum in Silver Spring Feb. 28. Hearings before those critical House and Senate committees are coming up this week, March 1 and 3 (details below, including a way for Maryland residents to express support to legislators). DSA nationally and the Metro DC DSA local have supported the paid sick leave effort as a critical component of a broad move toward better public provision at every level of government, including in the District where some progress has been made.

Maryland Del. Luke Clippinger of Baltimore [recently capsulized the needs](http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/oped/bs-ed-sick-leave-20160218-story.html) in *The Sun*: “For the more than 700,000 Marylanders who are unable to earn paid sick days, abiding by a doctor’s orders to stay home and rest can mean forgoing groceries or rent. The choice is even more heart-wrenching for working parents who must decide between sending a sick child to school or day care, versus staying home and missing out on necessary income.”

Clippinger is lead sponsor of [HB0580](http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?pid=billpage&tab=subject3&id=hb0580&stab=01&ys=2016RS), which allows workers at many levels to earn paid sick days as they work.

Further, Clippinger notes, “Nationally, four in 10 private sector employees are unable to earn paid sick days, and the bottom quarter of earners suffer the most: 75 percent of them don’t get paid sick leave. Our most vulnerable workers in Maryland and beyond who are often already living paycheck to paycheck stand the greatest risk of losing their jobs simply because they fall ill.

“Not surprisingly, workers without access to paid sick days are more likely to go to work sick and more likely to delay needed medical care, leading to prolonged illness and costly emergency room visits. When food service workers go to work sick, they put Maryland’s public health at risk”

Progressive Maryland, a pro-worker grassroots group mainly active in Montgomery and Prince George’s counties, is part of the [Working Matters](https://mdpaidsickdays.wordpress.com/) coalition advocating for this effort, which stalled in critical committees for the past three years largely due to complaints from business interests that it will hurt the economy. As Clippinger detailed in his op-ed, “these concerns are not borne out by the facts. The experiences of cities and states around the country that have already implemented sick leave laws demonstrate that business climate has been healthy, costs have been minimal and job growth has been strong in municipalities with earned sick leave laws.”

The House bill is the subject of a hearing in the Economic Matters Committee at 1 p.m. Tuesday, March 1 and the Senate version is heard in the Senate Finance Committee at 1 p.m. Thursday, March 3. These are the two committees that have stalled this effort in past years, and Progressive Maryland along with other Working Matters coalition members [including broad sectors of the faith community](https://mdpaidsickdays.wordpress.com/2016/01/12/md-faith-leaders-issue-call-to-action-on-paid-sick-leave/) are urging that those who are able to attend those hearings in support of paid sick days do so. **Working Matters has circulated a** [contact template](https://actionnetwork.org/letters/action-alert-urge-lawmakers-to-vote-favorably-on-earned-sick-days?can_id=65a2487e5dd4cbb61591a2fe882293d3&source=email-action-alert-urge-lawmakers-to-vote-favorably-on-earned-sick-days&email_referrer=action-alert-urge-lawmakers-to-vote-favorably-on-earned-sick-days&email_subject=action-alert-urge-lawmakers-to-vote-favorably-on-earned-sick-days&link_id=3) **to allow constituents to alert committee members to the importance of these hearings and votes.**

Advocates, particularly working mothers, will lobby the legislators individually Tuesday morning before the House hearing.

**March 1**

**MomsRising Superhero Lobby Event for Earned Sick Leave**  
**9:30am**  
Anne Arundel Delegation Room  
House Office Building  
6 Bladen St. Annapolis, MD 21401  
[RSVP for superhero lobby event](http://click.actionnetwork.org/mpss/c/2AA/ni0YAA/t.1uy/1oE21WioTbyDbwlEkpmycg/h4/WQ-2BlIwq7W2eCmkkcwbDiBbbPwUfyzAVeutdE2lG-2FrPdl5-2FC96Hpa90XY-2BJBdybaZ3g288LvMNrFqoT9oSieRUnAle8xxaBQ6Jeyf6hTXAPFd9I32yur-2BFu5ikK7x4fmuyrPj2-2BSaz4sTIk54qlv8ZY895EMM0WzBFTAyRGmJ8evFeAWD2SDXUuqV0pkHYgLNDuqhejoU-2F-2BolnDCAO49Oq9HaRh5mIRiVlrIdLQ7q6cTnYLkV2-2FzcfXpUZL96djzRjCYrv-2FhI8RtjKDsjDD9wEuvkEeO94iPTPR0KoLIQu4-2Bknu2-2F16bUsexnRkch8IjbUKFKRajPov77-2BhEUGNPTJB1ya0DtSwpSrEEVx3hgajQ-3D)

**House Economic Matters Committee Hearing   
1pm**House Office Building  
6 Bladen St. Annapolis, MD 21401

**March 3**

**Senate Finance Committee Hearing  
1pm**Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen St. Annapolis, MD 21401

[METROACCESS RIDERS, WORKERS JOIN TO SEEK REFORM, FIGHT PRIVATIZATION EFFECTS](http://dsadc.org/metroaccess-riders-workers-join-to-seek-reform-fight-privatization-effects/)

Monday, February 29th, 2016

***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2016**

*By Woody Woodruff*

Disability advocate Heidi Case drew applause from a packed room on Feb. 20 when she asserted that “Riders and workers are natural allies.” Case was among the speakers at a gathering of more than 100 transit workers, riders, activists, and elected officials who gathered at the Paint Branch Unitarian Universalist church in Adelphi, MD, to clamor for better conditions on Metro Access Vans.

Drivers also demanded their present poverty-level wages of $13.48 an hour be increased to $15, and for sick leave to be included in their next contract. Presently, they must use vacation days for sick leave, and after several “sick days off,” they are dismissed.

Metro Access is the service that provides transportation for persons with disabilities on an appointment basis in the greater DC area. The meeting was called by Amalgamated Transit Union local 1764, the union representing Metro Access employees and negotiating with WMATA for a new contract.

Riders and workers alike are struggling under what they claim are unfair conditions in the recently privatized system. The parent agency, the Washington Metro Area Transit Authority (WMATA), has has outsourced this critical service for disabled persons throughout the metro-wide service area.. One speaker said the van she drove was owned by a company in France.

Advocates for riders also seek stronger action by the Metro board to remedy bad equipment and regulatory constraints. One man spoke from his wheel chair about Access vans arriving to pick him up but having lifts that didn’t work or that couldn’t accommodate the weight of him and his wheelchair. A woman said she rode in a van one day whose door wouldn’t close.

[](http://dsadc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/MARCH-pix-of-metroaccess-event.jpg)

*Photo: Carolyn Byerly*

Prince George’s Executive Rushern Baker was in attendance but arrived late, catching heat from activists who said that lateness or absenteeism can cost them their jobs.

Baker, whose family life is widely known to be affected by his wife’s Alzheimer’s disease, described how waiting for caregivers sometimes disrupts his schedule and causes him to be delayed. The tough audience palpably softened as he spoke.

But Baker was not off the hook as county exec – he had been challenged before he came through the door by Kimberly Lynch, a paratransit driver who said somberly that drivers were trying to serve their disabled customers within a broken system, beset by private companies that skimp on support and cheat the paratransit users.

In 2013 Metro [announced award of five contracts](http://www.wmata.com/about_metro/news/PressReleaseDetail.cfm?ReleaseID=5447) totaling $86 million a year for five years for MetroAccess, including three transit operators who would get $68 million to transport disabled persons. The three transit operators – Veolia (now operating as TransDev), Diamond and First Transit – continue to provide what is widely considered substandard service. Metro touted the arrangement as promoting accountability but MetroAccess driver Lynch argued that “safety, professionalism and respect” are out of reach as drivers “do the best we can within a broken system” and that WMATA officials “treat us like disposable people” and “are more interested in passing the buck than in providing solutions.”

Case, who is accessibility and safety coordinator of the Metro Rider’s Union, said of the drivers and dispatchers, “they’re just as stuck in the system as the rest of us.”

Numerous disabled clients of MetroAccess testified about their dissatisfaction with the service and with the treatment of the drivers, who they said were abused by the rules imposed by the private companies. Valencia Moody, an officer of a Prince George’s chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, said WMATA board members needed to be reminded that their job is “service to us, not service to you.”

And driver Eric Williams said that even though Baker represented only one of the numerous jurisdictions that funded Metro, he had the power of the purse and of appointments to the WMATA board and should be held accountable for using them. The disjointed power structure of WMATA, he said, was “no excuse for inaction” and the driver/rider coalition had to pressure the other jurisdictions as well.

The goals for the event were read from the podium and executive Baker was catechized on them, asked to affirm he would push the Maryland members of the WMATA board to establish a $15 minimum wage and paid sick leave for the drivers, who must give up vacation time if they are sick or caring for sick children. He was pushed, as well, to support paid sick leave legislation in Prince George’s County (where it had already failed with no visible support from Baker) and at the state level (where a bill is pending – see related story).

And he was urged to push for improvements in MetroAccess specifically –

* Ending a requirement for fare collection outside the vehicle regardless of weather or other hazards
* Ensuring that all van lifts work with actual weight on them, rather than empty-lift testing
* Improving the inadequate Call Center geotracking system, which falls well short of GPS capability
* Review the scheduling software, which often sets wasteful routes and unnecessary travel duration for disabled customers
* Improved sensitivity training on disability that includes input from disabled customers.

Baker’s answers were generally “yes” to the demands though he qualified his “yes” with needs for study and review in some instances. ATU field organizer David Heller, asked which of the demands would require most follow-up and watchdogging in Baker’s case, grinned “All of them.”

*Carolyn Byerly contributed to this article.*

[“PLEASE TELL OUR STORY SIMPLY TO THOSE WE WILL NOT SEE…”](http://dsadc.org/please-tell-our-story-simply-to-those-we-will-not-see/)

Monday, February 29th, 2016

***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2016**

*By Lynne Williamson*

Review of *The Left Side of History: World War II and the Unfulfilled Promise of Communism in Eastern Europe*, by Kristen Ghodsee

Kristen Ghodsee interweaves the personal actions and fates of the Lagadinovs, a Bulgarian communist partisan family, and Major Frank Thompson, a young British officer sent to provide support to the partisans in the efforts against fascism in Bulgaria. This interweaving serves as the structure for the history of the promise and the failure of communism in World War II and after in Bulgaria.

The word “Left” in the title resonates in two ways. First, “Left,” of course, stands for the political designation for the communism of the Bulgarian partisans and their young, doomed British supporter, Frank Thompson. But the word “Left” also reinforces the ultimate “left behind, left out, abandoned” historical outcome of the efforts of Thompson and the Lagadinovs, when the positive hopes for a better future through communism are horribly eclipsed by the post-war brutalities of Stalin. This sense of promise lost and the sacrifices of people forgotten is reinforced throughout the book by the author’s elegiac tone and by brief, pertinent quotes from Thompson’s war poetry as well as intimate dialogue with survivors of pre-and-post World War II Bulgaria. As Ghodsee says, “I wanted to recognize the nuances of what communism meant to ordinary people, how it motivated or paralyzed them, how it fueled hope or spread despair. There is the official history of communism and there is the intimate history of communism—the latter composed of individual men and women making individual decisions in a confused and sometimes chaotic world.”  
Frank Thompson died before the triumphant surviving Bulgarian communist partisans descended from the mountains and into the villages and towns as war heroes when the Red Army crossed into Bulgaria in September 1944. Elena Lagadinov, who had at age 11 had smuggled messages and supplies to her communist partisan brothers because “communism meant dolls and books for all children,” was among the survivors. In fact, she survived the partisan period, the Stalinist aftermath and the subsequent era after 1989 called not what the West calls the democratic revolution, but simply “The Changes.” Elena’s intensely moving conversations with the author and those of some of her friends about their hopes during the communist period, particularly the women’s efforts to make life better for women and families, make up a critical part of the left out, left behind, abandoned history that Ghodsee captures for us. The author clearly knows that given the current blackwashed word “communism,” equating to “Stalinism,” she risks being labeled as “an apologist for totalitarianism” as she documents the progress of women in Bulgaria between 1944 and 1989 through their stories.

For example, Elena Lagadinov describes for the author how during the communist period she developed a comprehensive plan to give women paid maternity leave and to build more kindergartens, a plan that she gave to party officials in a three-hour presentation in an effort to socialize housework in order to incorporate women into society. Elena explains about the idea of justice that motivated her: “It was about building a society that would work for the many rather than enriching the few. And now after “The Changes,” Elena says, “…you see what we have? So many people are without medicine. So many children are on the street; they are not going to school. Prostitutes make more money than doctors and judges. The young people leave to the West and never come back. People are poorer now than they were before the war, while the rich live in mansions with swimming pools in Boyana and Dragalevtsi.” Elena’s friend Anelia says, “Communism was like Cassandra…It told the truth. But it couldn’t change the future because no one believed it.”

The author ends the book by poignantly reinforcing the sense of historical change and loss as she describes her trip to all that is left of the once-proud monument to Frank Thompson and the partisans who fought to defeat fascism in World War II and to bring the hopes of communism to Bulgaria. The monument site is described as “deserted and falling into ruin” with the marble tombstone cracked and crooked. Frank Thompson’s name is listed with other partisans along with the inscription *“PLEASE TELL OUR STORY SIMPLY TO THOSE WE WILL NOT SEE, TELL THOSE WHO SHALL REPLACE US— WE FOUGHT COURAGEOUSLY.”* This broken-down, abandoned monument is contrasted with the bright, new monument erected in 1999 celebrating the 10-year anniversary of the collapse of Bulgarian communism. Ghodsee leaves the reader with a deepened understanding of the dilemma that led her to write the book: “If all acts of heroism are ultimately weighed and judged by subsequent generations of historians … with their own political agendas, why be brave? Why take a stand? How can you ever be sure that you are fighting for the right thing?” In this sense, the book serves as Ghodsee’s stand.