

*The Washington Socialist*  
Articles from April 2013 Issue  
Archived October 2016  
Editor: Woody Woodruff

[Welcome to the April issue of the Washington Socialist](#)

Wednesday, April 3rd, 2013

### **April Fool! But who's being fooled? (Hint: It's not just today...)**

This newsletter is being sent out on April Fool's Day, a traditional time for those who operate more or less as truth-tellers to spin whoppers that are so whopping that they couldn't be mistaken for the truth. Or could they?

For example: It is easy – and for the moguls of consumer capitalism, quite profitable – for us to swallow the notion that paying large fees for monthly access to the “free” Internet is “just natural.”

Also: We are frequently persuaded by arguments that paying workers more, or providing them with paid sick leave, or allowing them to organize for better working conditions, will cut so deeply into the profit margins of large corporations that their inability to pay hefty quarterly dividends to shareholders will tank the economy.

These are those same large corporations that generally masquerade as, or hide behind the gauzy myth of, job-creating “small businesses.”

Likewise the constant refrain that what was once the world's most adept and advanced national producer of advanced technology is now unable to transform our energy regime to alternatives, but must instead keep on making smoke with the same old carbon extractives.

And did we mention that representative democracy, populated by politicians who depend almost entirely on corporate contributions to be re-elected, might not in fact always make decisions in the interest of the public, despite tearful protestations?

As socialists, we have a duty to change those features of our society, and to help working people understand that the vast crop of whoppers they are told every day about the benefits of corporate consumerism and the wisdom of the financial markets has created the terrain of misery we experience. But when corporate capitalism manages the gates of information and spins the load of lies that it has – April Fool's Day 24/7/365 – we will probably need to step it up. (*This introduction has been slightly update from the version emailed on April 1, 2013*)

---

**OUR OFFERINGS FOR APRIL** begin with a look behind the veil at what could be “NAFTA on steroids” – the Trans Pacific Partnership that is being developed in discussions with other national trade diplomats, but may in fact be the result of a confab over all our heads of the moguls of manufacturing, trade and financial markets. The result, Andy Feeney outlines, could be more exploitation of workers both here and overseas, even more loss of democratic control over how future trade relations are conducted, and a raging disregard for the effects on the environment and global climate of continued exploitation of resources. [Read complete article.](#)

**INEQUALITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS...** Joseph Stiglitz, economics Nobel laureate, has in his most recent book, *The Cost of Inequality*, described the long-term effects of the rising disparity between the 1% and the rest of us. The slow-ending Great Recession, we have heard, is costing an entire generation of young people their chance to create a full life. Stiglitz, as Dan Adkins recounts in his review, deals with that and more. [Read complete article.](#)

**MORE SPECIAL THAN USUAL** ... The upcoming special election in D.C. has some unusual features, Bill Mosley details in his analysis. Not only does it proffer an essentially open council seat and a small platoon of candidates – one of whom could take the post with far less than a majority – but it offers voters a chance to tell Congress to butt out of the District’s budget process. It’s a high-risk proposition that could stick. [Read complete article.](#)

**AFTER CAPITALISM, WHAT...?** Our monthly Socialist Salon spent its most recent evening chewing through David Schweickart’s 2002 book, *After Capitalism*. Schweickart’s proposal for workplace democracy and a contained capitalism harmonizes with some more recent analyses of worker coops in the US and elsewhere. His vision of a “successor system” to corporate capitalism got a varied reception, and the Washington Socialist is publishing some commentary from participants. DC Metro DSA co-chair Jose Gutierrez and Steering Committee member Andy Feeney were co-presenters of the book at the event and Ross Templeton has a different critique of the vision. [Read complete article.](#)

**DEPARTURE OF A GATEKEEPER** ... The FCC chairman, Julius Genachowski, has announced his long-expected departure from the job. Carolyn Byerly recounts his tenure as an unabashed fan of Big Telecomm and willingness to give away public resources – bandwidth on the spectrum – to the megacorporations that are coming to dominate the business that most of us tithe to for our Internet “privileges.” Who should replace him? Byerly has some ideas. [Read complete article.](#)

**STAY HOME, LOSE PAY** The Maryland Legislature is well-designed for the continuing comfort of business interests, and one of its most reliable mechanisms derailed a House of Delegates bill that would have afforded up to seven days of earned sick leave for 700,000 Maryland workers who now don’t have any. The Senate version is still on life support, Woody Woodruff reports, but it may be a matter of “wait till next year.” [Read complete article.](#)

[DC Special Election: A Scrum for the At-Large Seat; a Message for Congress](#)

Sunday, March 31st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2013**

*By Bill Mosley*

The April 23 special election to fill an at-large seat on the DC Council is the latest link in a chain of events precipitated by the last year's resignation of Council Chair Kwame Brown, following his pleading guilty to charges of bank fraud and campaign violations. Last November, then-At-Large Councilmember Phil Mendelson was elected council chair, replacing Brown. Continuing the game of musical chairs, Mendelson's old seat is now open, necessitating the upcoming balloting.

But before delving into the specifics of the at-large election, I'd like to call attention to another issue on the ballot: an amendment to the DC charter, placed on the ballot by the District Council, to free the DC budget from the congressional appropriations process. The entanglement of the District budget in federal appropriations, a byproduct of congressional control over DC legislation, has been a major obstacle to effective governance since the District gained limited home rule in 1974. Besides delaying the District's ability to put its budget into effect, Congress has exploited the process to add legislative "riders" on the DC budget that impose right-wing social policy over the objections of the local citizenry. In the recent past, these riders have banned the District from adopting domestic partnership laws, allowing the use of marijuana for medical purposes, and carrying out a needle-exchange program to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS. While all these restrictions were eventually lifted, the threat of Congressional meddling is ever-present: Two years ago Congress barred the District from paying for abortions for poor women, a restriction that still stands.

The legality of the District's unilaterally abolishing congressional budget oversight has been questioned by D.C. Attorney General Irvin Nathan and other legal experts. In addition, many statehood advocates have criticized the move as a distraction when the focus should be on full statehood, which would bring with it full budget and legislative autonomy. Nevertheless, the DC government should be looking at ways to force the issue of independence from Congress, and the Council deserves credit for its creativity and for seizing the initiative. Even if the measure is eventually overturned, it could force members of Congress to go on record against democracy and in favor of micromanaging the District's affairs. Statehood and full-democracy advocates should applaud this newfound willingness on the part of DC legislators to confront Congress directly.

. Now, for the Council race:

Elections in DC to fill vacant seats are one-round-only affairs, with no primary. Any registered voter, regardless of party affiliation, can get on the ballot by submitting the required 3,000 petition signatures. These elections can have crowded fields, and the April 23 ballot will feature seven candidates. Only a plurality of votes is needed to win.

Even though this election is to fill a vacant seat, there is an “incumbent” in the race. Due to an oddity of DC election law, whenever an at-large council seat becomes vacant, the political party of the former member selects an interim councilmember to occupy the office until a special election is held. In this case, the DC Democratic Committee selected its chairperson, Anita Bonds, as interim councilmember. (There is growing sentiment for eliminating the ability of parties to select interim councilmembers and to simply leave the office vacant until an election can be held). It should be noted that being an interim councilmember is not necessarily an electoral advantage – most recently, Sekou Biddle, appointed by the party as interim member when Kwame Brown moved up to council chair, lost his seat to Vincent Orange in the 2011 special election.

Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America has not endorsed a candidate in the race. However, there are significant differences between the candidates. The brief summaries below are my own personal observations, and offered as an informal guide for DSA members and other readers of the *Washington Socialist*. Comments and contrary views from readers are welcome and encouraged. Those wanting detailed descriptions of the candidates’ views should visit their websites.

**Anita Bonds** – As the anointed favorite of the DC Democratic State Committee, Bonds is the nominal front-runner and the “establishment” candidate. She has a long history of involvement in DC civic affairs, much of it Democratic Party-related, and as a senior government official in several mayoral administrations. DC statehood advocates, however, can’t forget that it was on her watch that the national Democratic Party dropped support for statehood from its 2012 platform, with seemingly little protest from her or other local Democratic leaders.

**Michael A. Brown** – Brown is attempting to return to the Council after his loss last year, following a campaign plagued by missing campaign funds and charges of ethical lapses. During his single term on the Council, Brown was perhaps the elected official most active in promoting the cause of DC statehood. He served as an Independent in the at-large seat reserved for non-Democrats, but for this race he has reclaimed his previous identity as a Democrat.

**Matthew Frumin** – Frumin, a Democrat, is a Ward 3 advisory neighborhood commissioner. Despite being a candidate without much of a citywide profile or record, he is running hard and was an early leader in the fundraising race. His campaign literature, other than mentioning the need for voting representation and DC statehood, runs the gamut of noncontroversial apple-pie issues: education, jobs, infrastructure, and helping seniors.

**Patrick Mara** – The sole Republican in the race, Mara previously challenged Councilmember Carol Schwartz for the 2008 GOP nomination for an at-large seat. He won the primary, but lost the general election to Michael A. Brown. In 2010, he was elected to the DC State Board of Education. He had hardly settled into that office when he was running for Council again, this time falling short in the April 2011 special election won by Vincent Orange. Despite his eagerness to leave the Board of Education behind, he bills himself as an “education reformer,” and in true Republican fashion advocates a freeze on taxes and lower regulatory burdens on business.

**Perry Redd** – Redd, a first-time candidate and member of the Statehood Green Party, has a platform stressing DC statehood, tax and budget fairness, and policies to create jobs for DC residents. Redd’s website speaks frankly about his past incarceration due to substance abuse and later, as an activist in Tennessee for workers’ rights and against police brutality, being indicted on gun and drug-trafficking charges (of which he was eventually cleared) which he believed were in retaliation for his activism.

**Elissa Silverman** – Silverman is a Democrat and journalist, formerly covering DC issues for the *Washington Post* and *Washington City Paper*. More recently, she was a leader of the unsuccessful campaign for a ballot initiative to eliminate corporate campaign contributions in local election. She promises to focus on “integrity, accountability and investment.”

**Paul Zukerberg** – Political newcomer and Democrat Zukerberg’s platform stresses one central issue: decriminalization of marijuana possession – a worthy issue, given how excessive penalties for this offense has saddled hundreds of young people in the District with criminal records for life, but is it enough to build a Council campaign around? His literature does also indicate that he is against crime, for improving schools and for “making DC a better place.”

A special election with a large field of candidates such as this one breaks the mold of the typical DC race, where the meaningful vote is the Democratic primary. A lesser-known candidate can sneak through to victory with less than a majority of the vote by standing out from the crowd or capturing the support of a small, well-targeted constituency. That was the path taken by a relatively unknown, openly gay Republican named David Catania when he upset interim councilmember and Democratic Party favorite Arrington Dixon in 1997. Sixteen years later, Catania (no longer a Republican) is still on the Council. There are undoubtedly a few candidates in this election dreaming of following Catania’s path into the Wilson Building.

[How Inequality Hurts Everyone: Review of “The Price of Inequality” by Joseph E. Stiglitz](#)

Sunday, March 31st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2013**

*By Daniel Adkins*

This splendid economics book is great because it tells you who is screwing you and how they are doing it. A major theme of the book is that our current increasing inequality is the result of political forces more than economic forces. All economies’ systems exist in the context of their government’s rules or lack of rules.

## **Alleged Markets as Scams**

Dr. Stiglitz demonstrates that much of the wealth in the US stems from wealth transfers instead of wealth creation. One example in the book is the role played by “economic rent,” defined as a payment to a factor of production in excess of that which is needed to keep it employed in its current use. Such rents can arise when monopolies charge inflated prices for goods after they have eliminated their competition or when banks too big to fail can take risks they could not sustain without a government to bail them out. Also an example of rent is that Obamacare does not allow the government to negotiate drug prices, thus giving drug companies excess profits by not having to compete. A law passed by Congress not allowing student loans to be canceled by bankruptcy removed banks from any risk that the student or educational institution might not be viable and placed all the risk on the student. This subverts the student and the market. Another example is the United States using defense spending to “stabilize” risky markets (i.e. keeping the price of oil down and stable), thus giving oil companies and fossil fuels a pass on market risks. The book maintains that rent-seeking impairs overall economic efficiency by using market manipulations to subsidize corporations by public funds. Economic rents are merely redistribution of wealth from the many to the few.

This book’s hypothesis is that markets are real but shaped (corrupted) by the political process. In a real market (one with competition) the laws of competition say the profits should decline due to competition, but with the improper government support they can be maintained. Current market imbalances partially resulted from technological changes that make it difficult for labor to migrate to new markets, but more important is that government has been managed to extend monopoly rents to favor some and disadvantage the many.

## **Democracy in Peril**

Inequality, then, has not risen from abstract market forces but has been shaped by political efforts. For the 1%, spending in elections is not a civic duty but an investment for which they expect a return. This tilting of the economy and the Great Recession has eroded the public trust and social cohesion. Inequality erodes social capital (trust), sowing the seeds of conflict. Trust is needed for people to believe in the political system. Americans have been proud that their economy was fair but this belief has been greatly challenged and no longer works. The wealthy try to disenfranchise the poor and disempower the rest by unlimited corporate donations and setting the social-political dialogue with economic theories (i.e. markets are self-correcting) that are proven false but repeated so often that many think them true. Also, the Constitution does not give corporations any inalienable rights but the Supreme Court is trying to. A great effort has been made to make unethical and undemocratic practices legal.

The 1% has rigged politics and political discussion to promote their interests. Their influences have subverted the US political system, and neither political party has shown any interest in reforming the system. Candidates are so dependent on campaign funds that they are easily manipulated. The revolving doors between politicians and lobbyists subvert our politics. Wall Street has cognitively captured the regulatory agencies by the revolving door between them and

by setting the ideological discussion. Elections and politics have become a game of redistricting and manipulation by advertising. The war on government is an ideology to make sure the public does not interfere with the 1%'s acquisition of wealth even when that acquisition covers almost all of the nation's profits and more.

Extreme concentration of income is not compatible with democracy and creates an entitled class born to wealth but expanding their wealth by market manipulation not invention. This group aims to privatize as much of the government as possible.

## **Paths Forward**

Stiglitz sees two routes toward reform. One is if the 99% come to realize that what is good for the 1% is not in their interest. If the 99% realize this, we have a political system that can be redefined to promote less-corrupted markets and politics, political space for unions and public interests, fact-based media, new types of economic organization like codetermination, and a viable democracy. Such a movement has not crystallized yet, but the Great Recession and economic stress are removing illusions at a fast rate.

The other possibility would be if the 1% see the error of their ways. Waiting around for this option does not seem useful, but the current strategy of the 1% is pushing the US into a being a less-developed country at a disadvantage in competing with developed and emerging countries.

The reasons why the 1% might change their minds are also reasons that the 99% must push for change. The US does not have a national competitor to make the 1% want an efficient and powerful economy, but the US decline is increasing. Already many of the US's advantages have dropped to the bottom rank among developed countries. Although the possibilities of a major war are not great, it should be remembered that we won WWII by overwhelmingly out-producing the Axis, and now that manufacturing base is disappearing. US upward mobility is now less than many developed countries because of US educational costs, our health services costing twice as much for ~~worst~~ worse results, and the focus on short-term profits blinding us to the needs of long-term challenges such as worldwide climate change. All of these changes are minimizing US influence which will decline naturally as the world develops. The question remains, do we want to continue to accelerate that decline and our demise?

One outstanding part of the book is the wealth of documentation and references. This may allow us to demystify the arguments of those who try to maintain the political and economic scam of the American people.

This book is a good statement of the current economic problems. But better treatments are found in Robert Reich's *Supercapitalism*; Paul Krugman's *The Conscience of a Liberal*; and Jeffery Sachs' *The Price of Civilization*. What those three sources offer which I find lacking in Stiglitz is a good comparison of American economic performance since from 1950 to at least 1973 and from 1980 to 2007. The earlier period shows the performance of the economy which was

governed by a “democratic” set of laws and regulations. The period since 1980 shows the performance of the economy under an increasingly plutocratic set of laws and regulations.

[Impressions and Responses: Socialist Salon on Schweickart's "After Capitalism"](#)

Sunday, March 31st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2013**

*Nearly 20 members of the local and interested parties met March 21 in our monthly “Socialist Salon” to discuss Schweickart’s book. Co-chair Jose Gutierrez and Steering Committee member Andy Feeney led the discussion, and their contributions — Gutierrez’ thematic summary and Feeney’s view as a self-described “fan” – are foregrounded here. Ross Templeton’s robust critique of the book anchored and represented a lively discussion and debate. A 2004 [review by Carl Davidson](#) called it “an excellent starting point and organizing principle” for radicals, and also provides a detailed breakdown.*

**Review of the economic model described in *After Capitalism*, by David Schweickart**

*By Jose Gutierrez*

What follows is what I hope is a simple description of David Schweickart’s proposal for a postcapitalist economy.

**Public Provision of Goods**

According to Schweickart, his proposal, which he calls “Economic Democracy,” would build on the foundation of Nordic social democracy so that certain vital services such as health care, education, child care and elder care would be economic rights to which all citizens would be entitled.

**Competitive market for goods and services**

Schweickart believes that markets are superior to central planning but that they should be confined to goods and services and not embrace labor or capital.

**Workplace democracy**

The labor market would be replaced with worker self-management. Enterprises would be organized as democratic communities.

**Social control of investment**



The surplus value created by workers would be channeled to a national investment fund. All enterprises would be charged a capital asset tax for this purpose. Public banks would draw from this investment fund and worker-managed enterprises would be created using these funds or would add employees to existing enterprises.

### **Full employment**

Under capitalism unemployment serves the function of keeping working people as a class in check. This would not be the case under Economic Democracy. Public banks would have a mandate to expand employment. Schweickart believes that in spite of this the government should have a role as employer of last resort to guarantee full employment.

### **Capitalism within socialism.**

There would continue to exist a sector composed of small private businesses. Schweickart believes that for the sake of innovation and economic dynamism it would be healthy for such a sector to exist, and the fact that this sector would have to compete with democratically run companies and with the government as employer of last resort would keep the antisocial tendencies of these companies in check.

### **Socialist protectionism**

A tariff would be created that would tax goods created with low wages or that were the result of environmentally unsound practices.

### **Leisure**

Schweickart draws on the work of Juliet Schor, professor of sociology at Boston College, who has studied trends in working time, leisure and women's issues. Schor wrote, among several other books, *The Overworked American*. He mentions her work on leisure and how many Americans are either overworked or don't have work. Shortening the workweek and sharing work are part of his vision of socialism. He argues that under "Economic Democracy" both government- and worker-managed firms should reduce the workweek for the sake of a more balanced life outside of work and for environmental reasons.

### **Democracy**

Worker-managed enterprises would be by definition an expansion of democracy. Through social control of investment, the polity at the national, state and local level would have a say over investment decisions, which would also be a democratic victory.

Most importantly, there would not be a large capitalist class that through campaign contributions, lobbyists and think tanks comes to dominate the political system. That class also could not engage in an investment strike that could bring down the government.

Schweickart also argues that his proposal would not be a panacea that would solve gender equality issues and environmental degradation, but he thinks it would lay a strong foundation to address both issues.

## **A Model for “Market Socialism” With Workers’ Control**

*By Andy Feeney*

As the host of this event and a fan of Schweickart’s book, I thought this was an excellent Salon. There was more debate and disagreement with Schweickart’s vision than I expected or hoped for, but I believe it’s essential for DSA members to undertake exactly this kind of debate in order to develop a persuasive vision that can make real democratic socialism possible in the United States – if not in my lifetime, then in that of younger DSA members.

“Utopian” visions of the socialist future and detailed plans for what a socialist society should look like have had a bad reputation in Marxist socialist circles since the 1840s, when Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* repudiated visionary socialism as a waste of time.. They instead looked to class struggle, rooted in the obvious conflicts between 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalists and the European proletariat, as the only “scientific” path to a revolutionary future.

The problem is, it was fairly easy for revolutionary (and not so revolutionary) socialists to agree on the struggle against capitalism and imperialism so long as no one was quite sure what “socialism” or “communism” would mean in practice. And for better or worse, this situation dramatically changed with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

Since the Bolshevik Revolution, millions of people around the world have identified “socialism” with what Lenin, Trotsky, and later Stalin and Stalin’s heirs wrought in Russia and Eastern Europe – a model of “socialism” that essentially collapsed in approximately 1990.

Millions of others have identified “socialism” with non-revolutionary European social democracy, as implemented by socialist parties (in name, anyway) in France, Germany, Scandinavia and to some extent the United Kingdom. But this “socialism” is essentially capitalism with a strong welfare state and a powerful union movement, and since the 1980s many “socialist” European parties have in fact implemented capitalist-style austerity programs to the dismay of their own supporters.

Countless other advocates of “socialism” since the 1960s have looked to African socialism, pan-Arab socialism etc. as models of how a non-capitalist future should be built, yet these non-western “socialist” models in many cases have failed as well.

One result is that by the early 1980s, a triumphant Margaret Thatcher in Britain could spearhead the reversal of British “socialism,” such as it was, and the dismantling of Labour Party reforms on the basis that free-market capitalism is inevitable, since (supposedly) “there is no alternative” – a position conservatives have sometimes abbreviated as TINA.

Echoing Thatcher and the TINA school of conservative capitalism, US philosopher Francis Fukuyama wrote in the late 1980s that “capitalist market democracy” was the *End of History* –

that in the crucible of world economic competition, capitalism had proven itself superior for all time to “socialism” in any guise, and that the global future thus must be capitalist.

As an older American radical from the 1970s, David Schweickart has been arguing for decades that TINA is simply wrong – that there is IS an alternative to capitalism. And in *After Capitalism*, Schweickart shows the outlines of an alternative system that he argues could be just as economically efficient as capitalism, but without capitalism’s obvious flaws.

Such flaws include chronically high unemployment, endemic job insecurities for millions of workers, uncontrolled flight of capital investment and capitalist factories from high-wage societies like the United States to low-wage societies like China, and not the least, the ecologically ruinous addiction to perpetual economic growth that characterizes capitalist economies more than any previous economies in history.

Schweickart characterizes capitalist economies as rested on three or four key principles, including a market exchange of goods and services, a private market for capital investment, and “wage labor” – a hierarchical organization of work in which relatively powerless workers (in Marx’s terms, “proletarians”), in exchange for monetary pay, must essentially accept the dictatorial power of capitalist bosses and capitalist owners in the workplace.

The failed “socialism” of the old Soviet Union, Schweickart argues, abandoned the market exchange of goods and services, adopting central economic planning instead. It also replaced private capital markets with government investment. But it retained wage labor and the hierarchical subordination of working people to managers – in this case, managers working for the State. In the process, it subjected working people to a form of “alienation” that Marx saw as a key feature of capitalism and its major flaw.

Schweickart in *After Capitalism* proposes instead to abandon Soviet-style central economic planning and retain a market exchange of goods and services. But his model – based in part on what Tito attempted to achieve in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s – would replace wage labor with worker control over the means of production.

Schweickart also would jettison both central government control of investment and a private capital market and replace them with public control over investment through regional or state-controlled public banks.

One striking feature of Schweickart’s vision of “Economic Democracy,” to my mind, is that he explicitly proposes to eliminate capitalist investors as a social class – at least on a lasting basis. Most functions now served by private investors would be taken over by worker-managed enterprises, elected factory managers and public banks in Economic Democracy as Schweickart outlines it.

Private entrepreneurs, even large ones, would be allowed to practice capitalism on a limited basis, but none could pass on their holdings to their heirs. Instead, all privately owned firms would be socialized upon the owner’s death, thus – in Schweickart’s mind – preventing the permanent existence of private capitalists as a class.

In my view, Schweickart's "market-socialism" with workers' control offers an economically plausible model of a non-capitalist future that might eventually allow socialist movements to regain the sense of hope and possibility that much of the left lost with the crimes and mistakes of Stalinism, the compromises of Euro social democracy, the failure of Gorbachev's *perestroika* and the disappointing performance of most forms of Third World socialism.

However, some participants at our Socialist Salon clearly disagree with the model, and I think some of their criticisms are instructive.

I hope our debate on Thursday [March 21] will help to engage all of us more in thinking seriously about a non-capitalist future, whether it takes the form of "market socialism" and "worker control" as Schweickart envisions them or not.

What's essential is not that democratic socialists sign up for any particular model of the future – Schweickart's or anybody else's. What's essential is that we come up with a cogent reply to the TINA argument posed by the conservatives – and also, unfortunately, by all too many liberals, both inside and outside of the Democratic Party. We need to prove to our own satisfaction – and that of a vast majority of Americans – that another world IS possible, if people have the vision and the courage to fight for it.

### **If this is Socialism then Spam is Meat**

*By Ross Templeton*

This was a good meeting – I enjoyed it! Lots of well-developed opinions expressed in a genial atmosphere that seemed welcoming to newer members. If anyone who is reading this hasn't made it to one of DSA's salons yet, I encourage them to do so. It will be worth their while.

Getting a chance to discuss ideas, socialist or otherwise, in a group setting is important. The group mind can be remarkably efficient at separating the wheat from the chaff. A key concept that one missed will be explained by someone else; a bias shared by one reader and the author will be uncovered by someone with a different background. Good ideas get improved upon; bad ideas show their internal contradictions.

David Schweickart's *After Capitalism* falls into the latter category. The book, and the model it espouses, suffers from two unfortunate tendencies: colonization by dominant-culture ideology, and narrowness of focus.

Schweickart seems enamored, as another salon-goer remarked to me, with the protestant work ethic. He bends over backward to include capitalists, which he calls "entrepreneurs," in his system. He envisions a system in which peoples' labor is still alienated from them by private capital. Why? All Schweickart can offer for justification are assertions of the superior initiative, ingenuity and drive of entrepreneurial capitalists. This is laughable. I don't recall needing entrepreneurs to set up the distribution of goods and services during Occupy. Schweickart's worldview is so colonized by capitalist mythology that he sees entrepreneurs as innovators, rather than as capitalists who exploit the need for innovation.

Schweickart has been in academia for decades. His book shows the biases of ivory-tower theorizing. He relies on economic models to demonstrate his system's functionality but misses some practical and moral flaws that can't be expressed in numbers.

Gender liberation is a good example. Schweickart is personally concerned with this issue, if we are to judge by comments in the book's preface. His model, however, ignores the economic disparity between men, women and trans people. In fact, it would likely continue to make it worse. Schweickart calls for the structurally unemployed to form a government-controlled, minimum-wage underclass. His examples for the tasks given to these workers, such as child and elder care, are industries overwhelmingly staffed by women. Women would find themselves disproportionately relegated to this new proletariat [\[Cc1\]](#). In addition, the disproportionate share of unpaid domestic labor performed by women would go on unabated.

Schweickart would claim that his model is gender-blind because it is an economic model, nothing more. This narrowness of focus is appropriate in a research paper, but unacceptable in a recipe for social and/or economic change. Gender and other culturally-constructed categories have a real economic impact on peoples' lives. Any economic system that ignores them unconsciously privileges the dominant class.

David Schweickart's idea of socialism is too adulterated to deserve the term. It is weighed down by the assumptions of the capitalist era and the baggage of patriarchy. Nevertheless, I'm glad we had a chance to discuss it. Any excuse to enjoy some fine Chinese food with friends is a good excuse to me.

See you at the next salon!

[Paid Sick Leave Meets a Legislative Roadblock](#)

Sunday, March 31st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2013**

UPDATED see below:

Like many legislatures, Maryland's Assembly is structured to make sure that dominant business interests have qualified veto power over populist enthusiasms.

The House of Delegates Economic Matters Committee and the Senate's Finance Committee are well-fashioned roadblocks and graveyards for progressive legislation.

Even successful legislation like this year's offshore wind enabling act took three sessions to fight its way through first the House ambush in Economic Matters and then, last year, Senate

Finance. In most cases, it is the dreaded required Fiscal Note – an economic impact statement – that often brings an unfavorable committee report.

This year, one of many casualties of this business-friendly impact statement was a modest attempt to bring paid sick leave to over 700,000 Maryland workers, mostly hourly wage-earners, who currently must choose between going to work sick or losing a day's pay. In many cases, the choice includes caring for a sick family member, particularly a child – or letting a sick child go to school or day care.

Economic Matters returned an unfavorable report on Del. Tom Olszewski's Earned Safe and Sick Leave bill (HB0735), which would have provided up to seven earned sick leave days per year for workers in private and public sectors not already covered by labor agreements.

The fiscal note that accompanied the bill may have doomed it before it received a hearing before the House committee Feb. 27. Olszewski, a Baltimore County Democrat, led off a panel of advocates who presented evidence that the improvement in working conditions that paid sick leave would bring – and has brought in other states – improved workplace efficiency and productivity and, emphatically, public health.

The fiscal note, however, focused narrowly on the unnumbered but “significant” costs to business and government that could result. No public benefits are on the radar in most fiscal notes. This structured business-biased ambush, plus hostile (and inaccurate) observations from Republican members, brought the bill's unfavorable report in mid-March and its withdrawal by prime sponsor Olszewski. Though Democrats had a substantial majority on Economic Matters, few sprang to the bill's defense. The standard mantra that even a good bill must fail in two sessions before passing on a third attempt appeared to be in force.

*UPDATE April 3 2013: Melissa Broome of the Job Opportunities Task Force added that the Business Regulations subcommittee of Economic Matters was the original source of the unfavorable report. A senior policy advocate for the Baltimore-based nonprofit, Broome said the withdrawal in part was because “it became clear we didn't have the votes for this year.”*

The Senate counterpart to HB0735, SB0698, is “still alive” in that body, said one of the co-sponsors, Sen. Victor Ramirez of Prince George's County, in late March. His email sounded resigned, however, to refiling it in the 2014 session. That bill, which as of March 31 had not been withdrawn, had a similarly rough time in a hearing on the same day in Senate Finance, causing harried sick leave proponents to shuttle back and forth across the crowded streets of Annapolis's little government sector. The documents indicate, though, that the Senate bill is different enough from HB0735 that it did not represent a true “cross-file.” If by some odd chance the full Senate should pass it, the House would be able to consider it on the floor, bypassing the Economic Matters roadblock. But the chances are slim.

The fiscal note system has done its work, making sure that the interests of business prevailed against the needs of working people – again — at least for this year.

— Woody Woodruff

## [What Will Obama's Free Trade Agenda Mean for US Labor and Progressives This Year?](#)

Sunday, March 31st, 2013

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2013**

*By Andy Feeney*

Predicting the course of U.S. politics is a risky business, and a good case can be made that we will know what President Obama intends to do about global free trade agreements when he actually does it.

But if Obama's recent State of the Union Address and coverage in the mainstream media are to be trusted, the Obama administration appears to be poised to betray the interests of the American labor movement, possibly by the end of this year, in a new free trade initiative recalling the enactment of NAFTA and establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) under Bill Clinton.

According to an article in the March/April issue of *The Washingtonian* by Clyde Prestowitz, former U.S. trade negotiator for Ronald Reagan, and a consultant on trade to the Clinton White House as well, the Obama White House hopes to finish up with negotiations over a proposed Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) by this coming October.

As currently envisioned, the 11-member TPP – which has been bitterly denounced by trade analysts at Public Citizen, and which has officials at the AFL-CIO worried about a new “race to the bottom” on wages and worker protections among participating nations – would embrace the United States, Canada, Mexico, Peru, Chile, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei.

According to Prestowitz's article, it is also possible that Japan and South Korea might join the pact once it is approved, as could other Pacific Rim nations who demonstrate compliance with its standards.

In a report last year, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch concluded that the TPP as then proposed would “extend the incentives for U.S. firms to offshore jobs to lower-wage countries.”

The report also found that the TPP would establish secretive tribunals for the resolution of trade disputes that would effectively give corporations in each participating country an expanded ability to challenge workplace safety, environmental and financial regulations enacted by other member nations.

In essence, Public Citizen has suggested, the pact would provide unelected panels of corporate trade representatives with a greater power to overturn democratically enacted laws as “unfair”

trade practices, and in this way would increase the power of global corporations as a group to dictate laws and regulatory policies to the people of the world.

TPP opponents are planning “days of action” against the TPP beginning on May 11, shortly before TPP supporters start their next round of negotiations, according to the Citizens Trade Campaign.

The CTC web site states that on May 11, “We can start [to} bring the anti-corporate globalization movement back to the streets ... Trans-national community resistance put a freeze on the WTO. It stopped the Free Trade Area of the Americas [and] it can stop the TPP.”

Suggested actions on or around May 11 include holding “community assemblies to discuss the problems with TPP” (and with free trade in general), and staging “creative actions or stunts that draw attention to the TPP talks in Peru.”

Activists should visit the website [TPPxBorder.org/](http://TPPxBorder.org/) for information about May 11th events already planned and to share information about those they are developing themselves.

Labor journalist Roger Bybee, in a critical article on Obama’s trade policies in *Dollars & Sense* last fall, portrayed the TPP and other trade policies supported by the Obama White House as potentially subordinating elected governments everywhere to an “emerging doctrine of global corporate supremacy, privileging maximum investor profits over protections for workers, consumers, and the environment.”

In a February 2013 statement recently by the AFL-CIO’s Executive Council, the AFL-CIO stopped short of saying that the TPP must be stopped. But the Executive Council Statement pointed out:

“Promoting economic growth with equity in the United States and worldwide requires an approach that couples expansion and enforcement of labor rights globally with necessary reforms in trade and economic policy. These reforms must break from current policies to address income inequality through demand-led growth, as part of a Global New Deal that raises incomes and standards of living for all.

The U.S. trade model, which began with NAFTA and continued with the Korea and Colombia agreements, undermines those goals by encouraging employers to pit one group of workers against another—both within and between countries.”

The Executive Committee continued: “The AFL-CIO believes there is a serious risk that the TPP ..will repeat the mistakes of the NAFTA trade model.” The AFL-CIO has proposed a number of progressive changes to the proposed treaty to address labor policies and the regulation of investment, as well as “environment, food safety and other public interest regulation.” But “...unless the TPP marks a break with the current trade model,” the Executive Committee warned, “workers will be unable to support it.”



Environmental groups warn that the TPP appeared geared to open up natural resources to exploitation, as well as workers. According to Greenpeace International, the TPP as proposed would promote continued corporate destruction of tropical rainforests.

In a March 15 statement, the Sierra Club recently reacted with special alarm to news that the new government of Japan has announced its intention to join the TPP.

Japan is hoping for a major increase in its imports of natural gas from North America, the Sierra Club noted, and it appears that the TPP “would allow for automatic exports of natural gas to countries in the bloc, overriding the Department of Energy’s ability to thoroughly review environmental and economic impacts of the exports.”

Consequently, the Sierra Club fears that adoption of the TPP with Japan as a member could significantly increase the dangers posed by natural gas “fracking” and decrease the U.S. government’s ability to regulate fracking’s adverse side effects.

Even Prestowitz, despite his championing of previous free trade deals by the Reagan and Clinton administrations, concludes that TPP is “lose-lose for the US, both geopolitically and economically.”

Given such negative reactions to the TPP by American constituencies – notably organized labor and environmentalists – that are important to the Democratic Party, why is the White House now taking such a positive approach to the TPP and other free trade pacts, such as those the US signed in 2011 with South Korea, Panama and Columbia?

In 2008, Roger Bybee notes, then-presidential candidate Obama was highly critical of the way previous free-trade deals had been negotiated and implemented.

“Decades of trade deals like NAFTA and China have been signed with plenty of protections for corporations and their profits,” Obama told auto workers in a Janesville, Wisc. campaign rally, “but none for our environment or our workers who’ve seen factories shut their doors and millions of jobs disappear.”

Despite this 2008 campaign rhetoric, Bybee charges, Obama is now championing the very kind of trade deal he once excoriated – resorting to “high-profile but hollow gestures” on trade.

Many left-wing critics of Obama may be tempted to agree with Bybee, seeing the TPP negotiations and other proposed Obama initiatives on trade as a simple selling out of the labor movement and the liberal environmental groups that contributed to Obama’s election and reelection.

Arguably, though, socialists – even those who hasten to join with labor and the more progressive green groups in opposing the TPP – would do well to understand the roots of the President’s apparent about-face, rather than simply being outraged by it.

According to Prestowitz and to reporter Howard Schneider, author of a March 9 *Washington Post* article on Obama's new drive for free trade, there are at least two main factors now driving the administration's approach to trade.

One, as Prestowitz reports, is geopolitical in nature. With the rising economic and military power of China, the Obama administration has made a "pivot to Asia" a foreign policy priority.

"Some Southeast Asian and East Asian countries have been looking for assurances that the U.S. will remain engaged in the region and provide a countervailing power" to China, Prestowitz writes.

The proposed TPP – which would include the United States and many of these Asian nations, but would not include China – is intended (along with an expanded US naval presence in the Western Pacific) to provide the smaller Asian nations with the reassurances they are seeking.

The other big factor behind Obama's push for the TPP and several other proposed free trade arrangements, according to Schneider, is economic. In part, new trade pacts are supposed to counteract "sluggish job growth" in the U.S. stemming from Obama's inability to promote a faster economic recovery in the face of GOP intransigence.

"Going through [the 2008 financial crisis] and recovery has pushed us all to focus on what it is we can do to create jobs and growth in every area of policy," Schneider quotes Obama's deputy national security advisor for international economics, Mike Froman, as saying.

Schneider also quotes Obama's trade representative, Ron Kirk, as saying that "in order to turn our economy around and make America a beacon for jobs, we could not win" by only focusing production on the 5% of the global population residing in the United States. Wider markets evidently are needed.

However, Schneider observes in the *Post* article, the TPP as envisioned today could well cost the United States additional jobs in basic manufacturing, while advancing U.S. economic interests in "innovation, technology and high-end services."

Schneider sees the pact as potentially increasing the ability of U.S. financial companies and consulting firms to penetrate foreign markets, while biotechnology firms obtain stronger patent protections and other high-tech US corporations enjoy more freedom "to source their software and place their computers where it makes the most economic sense."

Yet at the same time, critics inside and outside of the labor movement fear that the pact could cost significant numbers of jobs in basic American industries such as paper production and shoe manufacturing.

According to Prestowitz's *Washington Monthly* article, the TPP could cause the loss of 170,000 of the remaining US jobs in textile manufacturing, while ironically also undermining the Caribbean Basin Free Trade Agreement (CBFTA) and displacing some 1.2 million textile

workers in the islands – who like their US counterparts could lose out to fierce Vietnamese competition.

### **What We Can Do:**

The Citizens Trade Campaign, a diverse coalition of progressive interest groups formed in 1992 to oppose NAFTA, is urging individuals to write to Congress and the White House to oppose “fast track” treatment for the TPP this year. To sign up online, contact the CTC site at this web address: [http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1034/p/dia/action/public/?action\\_KEY=12495](http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1034/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=12495)

On March 4, CTC also coordinated the submission of [a letter to Congress](#) urging a cautious rather than a “fast-track” approach to the TPP and demanding that this and other trade pacts signed by the United States respect eight principles. These include (1) prioritization of human and labor rights; (2) respect for local development goals and the procurement policies that deliver on them; (3) no elevation of corporations to equal terms with governments; (4) protection of food sovereignty; (5) maintaining access to affordable medication; (6) safeguards against currency manipulation; (7) space for robust financial regulations and public services; and (8) improved consumer and environmental standards.

The CTC letter also outlines ways to increase public participation and Congressional oversight in trade policy-making through replacement of “outdated and extreme procedures like “Fast Track,” also known as the “Trade Promotion Authority.” This is a Nixon-era trade agreement approval procedure that enables proposed trade pacts to circumvent ordinary Congressional review, amendment and debate procedures.

Signers of the CTC letter included roughly 100 national organizations (including DSA and Jobs with Justice) and another 300 or so local and regional civil society organizations in the U.S, which together claim to represent more than 15 million members.

Organizations of note that signed the letter include the United Mine Workers, the United Auto Workers, the American Postal Workers Union, United Steel Workers, AFGE, Communications Workers of America, National Nurses United, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and a half-dozen additional international unions in the AFL-CIO; a range of environmental groups including the Sierra Club and the Rainforest Action Network; a half-dozen or more progressive religious denominations ranging from the Unitarian Universalists and United Church of Christ to Pax Christi and the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns; several US organizations expressing solidarity with Latin America, and such family farm advocacy groups as the National Farmers Union and National Family Farm Coalition.

Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch also is spearheading opposition to the TPP and is specifically urging all Americans to write to their US senators requesting copies of the draft text of the treaty – a key demand considering the extreme secrecy with which TPP negotiations have been shrouded.

For details, see [http://action.citizen.org/p/dia/action/public/?action\\_KEY=12152](http://action.citizen.org/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=12152). Global Trade Watch has a more general background page on TPP at <http://www.citizen.org/TPP>,

[With Genachowski's exit, a chance for FCC to serve public, not telecom giants?](#)

Sunday, March 31st, 2013

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2013**

*By Carolyn M. Byerly*

When Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Julius Genachowski announced his resignation from the Commission March 18, no one was surprised. Genachowski had openly discussed his intent to leave since fall 2012.

And, no one is happier to see him leave than those of us who believe that communication policies should be written to serve the public interest. Genachowski, a former venture capitalist, technology executive and personal friend of President Obama, was not in the public interest frame of mind in his three years as FCC head.

He never tried to hide his pro-business inclinations, which have even been reported widely by the mainstream media. A strong proponent of wireless technologies, Genachowski advocates reallocating a sizable portion of the broadcast airwaves (a public resource) for broadband and cell phone signals. That would shift substantial access to the airwaves away from “the people” and to private telecomm companies for their use in profit-generating services. The telecommunications industry is already the second highest revenue producing sector, right behind the pharmaceutical companies. Telecomm companies’ influence in politics is already hegemonic.

Most recently, Genachowski advocated relaxing cross-ownership regulations that keep one company from owning both newspapers and television stations in the same market. Right after he began to talk about this behind the scenes last fall, one major local newspaper reportedly began preparing to purchase a local TV station. Genachowski had let it be known that he planned to move the issue to a vote “early in 2013,” but to date that has not happened. He already had three votes (on the five-member FCC), he said, one of them his.

Concerned about the possibility of such a vote, civil rights groups held a closed-door meeting at the Urban League in December to discuss issues and strategy around the cross-ownership situation. A Howard University colleague and I attended and shared our own concerns about such further deregulation on the heels of a November 2012 FCC report showing that minority and female broadcast ownership had declined through mergers and acquisitions unleashed since the Telecomm Act of 1996. African Americans presently own only 1.7 percent of FM and 2.8 percent of AM stations, a medium that served as a major source of information and cohesion

through Civil Rights days and since. After that meeting many of us present, including myself and my colleagues in the Howard Media Group (HMG), submitted letters to the FCC asking for the cross-ownership ban to remain intact. To date, the issue remains on hold. (Note: See our HMG comment on this issue at [www.howardmediagroup.org](http://www.howardmediagroup.org) under “policies and resources.”)

Under Genachowski’s leadership, the FCC also refused to address the court-mandated requirement to consider remedies to declining broadcast ownership rates by women and minorities. The Third Circuit Court in Philadelphia had issued that *Prometheus II* ruling in July 2011, requiring the FCC to consider more than 40 remedies that had been submitted by civil rights groups like the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council. The FCC said that it had insufficient data from current research to show which remedies would be best, but to date the body has refused to commission those studies to obtain a baseline of data to aid its decision making.

Journalists covering the FCC have been speculating about possible successors in the months since November 2012 when the chairman began to talk of leaving. In March, my Howard Colleague Clint Wilson and I submitted our letter to President Obama for one of those individuals, Catherine Sandoval. Sandoval is a law professor at University of Santa Clara and a commissioner on the California Public Utilities Commission, an appointment of Gov. Jerry Brown. She has strong credentials: BA from Yale, MA from Oxford (the first Latina to win a Rhodes scholarship), JD from Stanford, five years as an FCC attorney. In her academic life, she conducts legal research on minority and media issues and she actively engages issues in media policy from a public interest perspective. The daughter of Mexican American parents who remains involved with her community, she would bring a wealth of understanding about what is needed to move telecommunications policy forward. See more at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine\\_Sandoval](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_Sandoval).

There are many ways to think about this moment of transition at the FCC. Among the things that I have been pondering these last few days is that at least the FCC is finally on the mainstream news agenda! Mostly that incredibly important body has flown under the radar of reporters, who have told me the FCC is “too complicated to report on.” The result of that has been a major lack of public awareness about how hugely powerful media companies are shaping legislation, services, and our daily communicative lives. Neither have many socialists shown an interest in communications policy. The significant exception to this has been Theresa Alt of the Ithaca DSA group, who began to cover federal telecom policy in her weekly public access TV show “DSA Presents” back in the 1990s. Members of the Ithaca DSA were also involved in challenging local public radio stations, which, among other things, refused to carry “Democracy Now!”

My personal hope is that our Metro-DC DSA group can turn a watchful eye toward the Commission and begin to inform ourselves of its work toward possible (at least occasional) involvement.