

The Washington Socialist
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Editor: Woody Woodruff

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

Thursday, April 2nd, 2015



Welcome to the April edition of the *Washington Socialist*, the monthly email newsletter of the Metro DC local of Democratic Socialists of America.

Conventionally, this is April Fools Day, historically “all fools’ day,” which has a rich history as one of the weapons of the powerless. In late medieval and early modern times surprising currents of rebellion were sustained by the yearly or seasonal festivals in which the authority structure, including property rights, was systematically subverted under a tradition rooted in the officially tolerated festivals that saw “the world turned upside down” and the oppressed classes crowned as lords of misrule. Mikhael Bakhtin found these rowdy upheavals in Rabelais and his contemporaries and Eric Hobsbawm, discussing how to write “History from Below,” argued that early festival-based episodes of rebellion could be found emerging in official, often judicial records to counter the authoritarian narrative provided by the literate elites. The sanction of tradition for festival-based class upheavals was key to what has been called the “weapons of the weak,” disruptive behavior somewhat sheltered or permitted by primitive, actually pre-Christian tradition that punctured whatever hegemonic hold the aristocracy had on everyday life – at least during the course of the festival.

By the sixteenth century, a more formal critique of property and conventional behavior rooted in part in the Reformation emerged (in Western societies), one that didn’t need the cover of festival tradition. The famous or (today) not so famous “Pope of Marxism” Karl Kautsky examined, for instance, the rebel impulse in [the Anabaptist uprising led by Tomas Munzer](#) in the sixteenth century. The most religious among that group renounced property in total and held all things in common; others more practically were as anti-propertarian as needed; they “have all things so far in common that they allow no one among them to suffer want,” as Kautsky quotes another scholar. In a [Jacobin article](#) late last year, the contributor Loren Balhorn noted “Kautsky’s attempt to reconstruct human history as a history of class struggles, in order to imbue his readers with a sense of historical tradition, revolutionary continuity, and moral obligation to the socialist future.” The notion of continuity with the past rather than one in which industrial capitalism changes everything may have been Kautsky’s way of dealing with the collapse of worker internationalism during the Great War, contrary to classical Marxist dogma if not the more

nuanced Marx himself. But Kautsky's purposive interpretation of the role of property and its conceptual abolition weaves an important thread from history, through Marxism, and into today's notions of the roots of inequality.

Though the best-known festival of social topsy-turvy was in the Saturnalia winter holiday, Twelfth Night tradition, it was no accident that many of the festivals allowing for inversion of social relations took place in the warmer months and we can take today's April Fool's Day as the beginning of the protesting season, a potential renewal of the spirit of Occupy that inverts property relations. The tradition of April Fool's Day as one for pranks played on others is a pale imitation of the more robust (if temporary) uprising against property and authority in the human past. As [Steve Fraser's new book](#) appears to ask: When will we stop giving consent and start demanding it? Is this the prank we are playing on ourselves?

EVENTS

Metro DC DSA's **membership meeting** Saturday, April 11 will focus on the upcoming steering committee elections; those who are interested in joining the local's executive committee should attend. The local's coalition work on the Fight for Fifteen minimum wage campaign will also be discussed, and solidarity support for postal union workers. The meeting is at 2:30 p.m. at the Watha T. Deniel/Shaw library, WTD meeting room, 1630 7th St NW, Washington, DC. A steering committee meeting precedes the general meeting, at 1 p.m. The Shaw/Howard U. metrorail stop on the Yellow/Green line is just across the street from the library.

The **Socialist Salon** is in a different location this month for good reason... see the article below by Carolyn Byerly, DSA member and chair of the Department of Communication, Culture and Media Studies at Howard University. A film about the immensely influential theorist, teacher and *New Left Review* co-founder Stuart Hall will be presented at Howard Thursday, April 16, 7-9 p.m. in Room 118 of the [C.B. Powell Building](#) there, Bryant Street between 4th and 6th Streets NW. Consider taking the 70 Metrobus from Georgia Ave/Petworth or Gallery Place Metrorail stations.

Metro DC DSA is co-sponsoring [Demystifying Syria – The Real Story Behind ISIS](#), an April 11 forum in Rockville along with lead sponsor Peace Action Montgomery. The bitter and largely misunderstood situation on the ground in Iraq and Syria is outlined by some of the most well-informed analysts in the U.S. Speakers are Phyllis Bennis of IPS, Raed Jarrar, policy analyst for American Friends Service Committee, and Prof. Younes Benab of Strayer University. Questions, discussion and action plans to oppose the violence are included. It's Saturday, April 11, 7:00 p.m. at Unitarian Universalist Church of Rockville, [100 Welsh Park Dr., Rockville](#). This was originally scheduled for February but unusually bad weather conditions caused its postponement.

NOTE: National DSA is in the early stages of updating its national strategy documents. Access to the draft is [here](#). The national DSA website also has aggregated [numerous strategy proposals](#) on specific issues over the last several years. Locals, including this one, will be participating in the shaping of this updated strategy for socialism and social change.

Keep up with events, including any changes, on our [Meetup page](#).

IN THIS ISSUE

[Stuart Hall](#), a founder of the New Left Review and critical-cultural theorist who died in 2014, is the subject of a much-praised biographical film that will be shown at the Metro DC DSA Socialist Salon April 16 (details above). *Carolyn Byerly*, who will host the event, explains why Hall's work continues to have explanatory power for socialists today and tomorrow.

At our March Salon, Chris Riddiough drew on her long personal experience with the feminist movement to explain "[Second Wave](#)" feminism. *Lisa Foley Stand* reports on Riddiough's talk and the response.

As the FCC ruling on [Net Neutrality](#) approached, Metro DC DSA members heard from Matt Wood, of the progressive activist organization Free Press, about the tough battles to follow the ruling. *Woody Woodruff* reports on what is at stake.

The struggle to wind down the appalling US [incarceration state](#) has huge follow-up requirements to integrate ex-offenders successfully into their communities and to end the school-to-prison cycle. *Kurt Stand* reports from a recent local panel outlining the tasks.

Two [DC Council](#) seats are up in a special election, and money (along with its acolytes) appears to be fully in charge. *Bill Mosley* analyzes a usual-suspects scenario.

The [Maryland General Assembly](#) is drawing to a mid-April close as Democratic legislators continue to struggle with a Republican governor; several dispatches and alerts.

[Books](#) by Astra Taylor and Andrew Keen are concerned with the Internet's effects on employment, inquiry and the culture (including the embattled creators of culture). *Woody Woodruff* reviews two of the many books that view capitalism's role in cyberspace with considerable alarm.

[Good Reads for Socialists](#) – recent articles that you may have missed, with links.

You can read these and other past articles in the *Washington Socialist* on our website where they are archived, dsadc.org

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.

[A Fresh Look at the Second Wave](#)

Tuesday, March 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2015**

By Lisa Foley Stand

“Jane’s not here. But we can have her get in touch with you.” The caller is a woman with an unwanted pregnancy. Jane is the solution of her choosing – a safe but unlawful abortion performed by a skilled but anonymous woman of the Jane Collective, a project of the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union in the 1960s.

Jane is not here now either. Abortion was legalized to a degree by the Supreme Court’s 1973 interpretation of the Fourth Amendment. Since then, however, countless new anti-choice laws have been passed and upheld. For many women in 2015, abortion is no more available than it was in the 1960s. Women still need Jane.

What Jane represents in a broad sense and how to get in touch with her today – these are key questions for socialist feminism, and matters explored in a recent salon with Chris Riddiough. The March 19 program, “Second Wave Feminism: A History and Evaluation,” was co-sponsored by DC-DSA and DC NOW (National Organization for Women) and drew an audience of 20-30 people.

Riddiough is a former leader of the CWLU (which disbanded in 1977), as well as an honorary DSA vice chair and past chair of the DSA Feminist Commission. Her talk touched on aspects of the women’s liberation movement that can now be seen as distinct in the larger frame of the women’s rights agenda of the ’60s and ’70s.

One aspect, Riddiough noted, was the tendency to “understand the movement for women’s liberation as part of the larger movement for peace and justice.” Because many women’s liberation leaders had experience in civil rights and anti-war efforts of the day, they viewed the “struggle for women’s rights as not isolated from other struggles,” and believed that gender theory and strategy had to bridge the intersections with concerns of race and class.

Along with attention to theory came discovery of a historical perspective, as women collectively pursued and shared knowledge of past women’s movements (in times predating Women’s Studies in academic settings). As a guide to their work, members referred to the “Juliet Mitchell Chart,” adapted from the writings of British socialist feminist Juliet Mitchell.

The chart identified four roles occupied by women in society in which they are oppressed: production, reproduction, sexuality, and socializers of children. It was helpful to refer to these roles and the particular experience of oppression in them when defining areas of struggle.

Yet, while CWLU members did debate theory and were dedicated to a collective process of setting strategy, they were not about finding and following a “correct line,” Riddiough said. In practice, the CWLU was committed to engaging women in activist programs that “met them where they were,” which led to collective work on a range of issues and priorities defined by members themselves— health care, lesbian rights, access to public space for women’s athletics, self-defense, as examples. Some of this work led to gains recognized today in Title IX in education, establishment of lesbian and gay rights, and increasingly strong LGBT presences in politics and culture.

On the other hand, as Riddiough acknowledged with nods of assent from listeners, results fell far short of some aims, and in other areas women have lost ground after short-term gains. Anti-feminist backlash seems particularly strong against efforts on many fronts to stop rape, sexual assault, and violence against women. Reproductive freedom, as noted, has been under constant attack. The degree of women’s autonomy over their own bodies – individually or collectively – is still the most basic measure of women’s freedom. For that, much struggle lies ahead, perhaps most of all in two of Juliet Mitchell’s four domains — production and reproduction.

So, again, how do we get in touch with Jane?

In Riddiough’s closing remarks, she offers a few suggestions. Though the CWLU ultimately disbanded as the Reagan era began to overpower the era of a new left in the ‘60s and ‘70s, the organization left a solid legacy. So, “first, we need to know our history. When I talk to women who were active in the ‘60s and ‘70s, I hear over and over, ‘We knew nothing about the struggles that came before us.’ In school, for instance, history books had a sentence or two – if that – about the women’s suffrage movement, for instance.” The lack of knowledge and sense of continuity with past movements “led us to reinvent the idea of feminism. Young feminists today don’t have to do that if they learn the lessons of the past.”

Her second suggestion, almost an urging, is about what it means to be strategic. “The political right with its War on Women has been really good at this.” Keep a long view, accept that some victories will not be lasting, and use theoretical and strategic tools for action. “Internet petition drives, hashtags that disappear in a few days, will not be enough to counter the right wing war.”

Finally, Riddiough affirmed the importance of strong organizations capable of supporting effective leaders, noting the seemingly weak structures of the short-lived Occupy movement. This point always resonates in a roomful of socialists and socialist feminists, often pulled away from an organizational center even as they have impact in other compatible movements.

There was Jane. But there was also the Jane Collective.

For more information about the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union, visit the CWLU Herstory [website](#).

[DC DSA member meeting hears of next struggles in Net Neutrality](#)

Tuesday, March 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2015**

By Woody Woodruff

The Feb. 26 date for the FCC decision on Net Neutrality was looming close as Metro DC DSA heard [Free Press](#)'s Matt Wood on the subject at the membership meeting Feb. 15. Wood's theme was clear: the amount of corporate money engaged in this contest of titans means the FCC decision (which looked favorable to consumers and the concept of net neutrality at that point) would just be the first skirmish in a long contest.

The [FCC's 3-2, party line vote](#) to reclassify internet providers as common carriers under Title II of the FCC's own enabling legislation was a solid win for consumers and creators using the Net – which after all is based historically on a publicly funded US government “Arpanet” created by military and civilian researchers. And, as Wood stated, classification of internet providers as common carriers would return the state of play to that in place before George W. Bush's FCC chair, Michael Powell, decided against that status for the then-burgeoning Net business. The major telcom players had pushed for that non-decision. Powell is now the well-paid head of the cable and telecommunications lobby, NCTA.

The big players – Comcast and Time Warner, Verizon and AT&T – had been lobbying to keep their FCC classification as information services, not as common carriers/utilities, because reclassification as utilities would give the federal regulators far more control over their services, treatment of consumers and producers, and pricing.

As Wood warned at the DSA meeting several weeks prior to the ruling, it won't end there. Corporate profits for those big players depend on maintaining control – over prices and offerings, and over lawmakers whom they now will enlist to push back against the FCC. Marsha Blackburn, a rising member of the House GOP leadership, [has filed a bill](#) that would overturn the FCC ruling. She and the bill's co-sponsors have hauled in several hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the major corporate players. And attorneys for the same corporate players have [already filed two suits](#) to overturn the FCC ruling as well.

Even though the astonishing outpouring of public comment on net neutrality pushed both FCC chair Charles Wheeler and even President Obama to endorse a stronger stance, Free Press and other anti-corporate Net activists face a formidable struggle to shore up the FCC ruling now that it's in force, Wood recounted.

And the overall regulatory environment is still conditioned by the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which is generally an industry-friendly, deregulatory statute, as DSA member Carolyn Byerly, a professor of communications at Howard University, pointed out. That gives conservative appeals courts like the DC Circuit room to pick away at the FCC's stance.

The FCC majority grasped that corporate control was endangering the freedom and accessibility of the Internet, a game-changing technology. The strong stance that they took was not, unfortunately, the end of the story. It must be written by activists ready to fight corporations as they try to buy back what democracy took from their hands.

[DC Politics Roundup: Progressives Continue to Eye DC Special Council Elections](#)

Tuesday, March 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2015**

By Bill Mosley

With the special elections to fill two DC Council vacancies less than a month away, progressive DC voters are still trying to make sense of the cattle call of candidates in both of the contested wards – with 14 running in Ward 4 and 16 in Ward 8 – while many of the left-of-center organizations that routinely endorse candidates have yet to make their picks.

While the herd of hopefuls is scurrying to make an impression on DC voters in what is likely to be a low-turnout election, they also are eager to pick up endorsements that may sway undecided voters and bring a last-minute surge of money and volunteer energy into their campaigns.

In the election for the Ward 4 Council seat, which Muriel Bowser vacated when she became mayor, Bowser's hand-picked successor Brandon Todd — her former campaign and Council aide — is sucking up much of the oxygen and money, and it will take courage for any organization that depends on friends in DC government to oppose him. Things are a little more fluid in Ward 8, the stronghold of the late Councilmember and former Mayor Marion Barry. Here Bowser is also playing kingmaker by endorsing former Barry aide LaRuby May, who has a large lead in fundraising. However, a few other candidates have enough of a name or record to possibly make a push, such as longtime DC voting-rights advocate Eugene D. Kinlow, former DC Shadow Representative Nate Bennett Fleming, and Marion C. Barry, the late councilmember's son.

(For more information on some of the leading candidates in each ward, see [this article in last month's *Washington Socialist*](#)).

One of the most-watched endorsements is that of the Metropolitan Washington AFL-CIO's Council on Political Education (COPE), which is evaluating the candidates in preparation for endorsing but as of press time for the *Socialist* had not yet announced its picks. DC for Democracy, a multi-issue progressive group, has announced it will make its endorsements on April 8. The Gertrude Stein Democratic Club, the influential LGBT group, is also studying the candidates in preparation for endorsement.

One notable group that has already made endorsements is the local chapter of the Sierra Club, giving its nods to Todd and Kinlow. The club's [website](#) indicates the endorsement of Todd, in particular, was based less on his skimpy environmental record than on his responses to a questionnaire and his meetings with club leaders, while Kinlow was recognized for his role in local environmental-justice activism.

Metro-DC DSA has no plans to make endorsements in the races.

The real question is: How many voters will care whom these organizations endorse? The answer is: probably very few, but in a close race with a large field of candidates, a key endorsement or two could make the swing enough votes to influence the outcome. This could be the case in the more competitive Ward 8 election; in Ward 4 the question is whether anyone can stop the Bowser/Todd juggernaut.

DC Government Takes More Confrontational Stance Toward Congress

Mayor Bowser can be credited with the DC government's at least somewhat more assertive posture in confronting congressional attacks on home rule. Her determination to move ahead with implementing the voter-approved initiative to legalize marijuana, in the face of threats from Republican members and even a provision in the DC budget challenging legalization, is evidence of this new attitude.

More recently, she said she would not pursue the litigation initiated by former Mayor Vince Gray to overturn a referendum that unilaterally declared the District free from the congressional budget process. Gray and his attorney general Irving Nathan took the legalistic argument that notwithstanding DC's desire to stop Capitol Hill from meddling in its local affairs, the Constitution gives Congress legislative authority over the District. But for DC voters as well as Bowser and members of DC Council who supported the referendum, that was beside the point: DC, especially in the face of a more hostile Congress, will get nowhere politely requesting its rights; it must demand them. The District's goal is to become a state, and Bowser and allied members of the Council deserve a hand for trying to make DC act like one.

However, the attacks from the Republican Congress keep coming. The latest assault is from arch-conservative Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, who introduced a bill to overturn two progressive measures enacted by the local government – one that would ban employers from discriminating against workers for using birth control or seeking an abortion, and the other to require educational institutions affiliated with religions, such as Georgetown University and Catholic University, to comply with the city's law banning anti-gay discrimination. While such a stand-alone bill stands little chance of passage – this Congress is hardly capable of agreeing on what

day of the week it is – Cruz’s posturing is more proof that DC will never be free of congressional interference until it achieves its goal of statehood.

[Economic \(and cultural\) consequences of the Internet](#)

Tuesday, March 31st, 2015

By Woody Woodruff

Review: *The People’s Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age* by Astra Taylor. Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt 2014.

***The Internet is Not the Answer* by Andrew Keen. Atlantic Monthly Press 2015**

Astra Taylor’s examination of the cultural consequences of an Internet under increasing capitalist control sits in the midst of a flock of books that have taken on the varying parts of this puzzle.

Some lament the effects on today’s minds of low-friction information availability (often comparing it unfavorably with the pre-digital learning process, which we should remember privileged an elite of the learned who could afford access to education and books. “Is the Internet making us stupid?” asked writer Nicholas Carr – as if the milieu created by class-privileged access to knowledge has turned out so wonderfully for the masses. Others argue that the convergence of creation and consumption on the Internet is breaking down the old relationship between creator and public or consumer – and they cheer it. Taylor does not.

Andrew Keen, like Taylor, instead looks with dismay at the rising inequality and job destruction that is resulting from many of the internet-related businesses rising on the ruins (more or less) of the industrial era. His concern is tonally different than hers – she is worried about the easy expropriation of intellectual property and the degradation of cultural life that has paralleled the supposed glories of an “information wants to be free” ethos. Keen, whose contempt (and envy) for the new, young overlords of Net business is unbounded, builds a case around numerous narratives of the degradation of communal life and employment in company towns like Rochester, N.Y. (Eastman Kodak, now defunct, leaving a hollowed-out and impoverished home base) and San Francisco, being gentrified and hollowed out from nearby by the new feudal barons of Silicon Valley.

Taylor, a journalist and documentary filmmaker, focuses on the conformations of the net and its associated businesses that are squeezing creative people – artists, musicians, journalists and authors of both fact and fiction – out of the cash nexus. As this is happening, corporate interests take a larger and larger share of the monetization of the net while the public for these cultural goods gets more and more “free” content while paying heavily in other ways.

Advertising is the true coin of net commerce, driving significant business to Amazon and other entrepreneurs. Taylor calls advertising a \$700 billion invisible “private tax” levied on the public, the internet user, and sealing further the fate of creative people who are increasingly asked to create for free in order to participate in cyber-distribution. The rivers of Europe that in the late middle ages were littered with gangs operating as tollkeepers at every defensible bend in their course have their counterpart in today’s heavily trammled Internet.

As vast and unmanageable as the Internet appears to the non-coder, it is “vulnerable to capture by the private interests we depend on for access,” Taylor observes, not too originally. But she weaves a significant and different narrative about the loss of power and control by the public as corporate forces inject the fluid of commerce into every bend in the Internet’s “pipes.”

Many people, including some on the progressive and radical left, continue to see the Internet as a vehicle for revolutionary change because of its wide, low-cost potential for outreach. Taylor has a glummer view: the Internet has already largely been captured by capitalist forces and will be hard to pry from their clutches.

Keen, who is frank about his own failure to get traction as an early dot.com entrepreneur in the transition of music from CD to online, agrees and highlights the contradiction: “...while Paul Baran, Vint Cerf and Tim Berners-Lee consciously designed the Internet to be without a center, that distributed architecture hasn’t been extended to the all-important realms of money or power. Here, the future is actually as *bordered* as the past.” (italics in original) He later quotes journalist/historian John Naughton: “In Darwinian terms these new corporate giants are just the latest stage in the evolution of the public corporation.” Their goals— maximized profits, benefits to shareholders and CEOs, and rejection of unions, taxes and regulation – parallel those of the robber barons of the Gilded Age, Naughton continues, and they differ mainly in “hiring far fewer people.”

Tim Wu (author of *The Master Switch*) could have been summarizing the views of both in his NYT review of Taylor’s book: “Instead of serving as the great equalizer, the web has created an abhorrent cultural feudalism. The creative masses connect, create and labor, while Google, Facebook and Amazon collect the cash.”*

Wu goes on to say “virality is the promise that keeps the proletariat toiling in the cultural factories, instead of revolting and asking for something better.”

Wu, in 2010’s *Master Switch*, expertly showed how natural monopolies like telegraph, telephone, radio and television services overplay their hands under capitalist management and become fodder for regulation or even nationalization. He shares Taylor’s concerns about a similar phenomenon wrecking the Internet before it can be wrenched to the proper use of the broad public. The struggle over “net neutrality” (a term credited to Wu as originator) has brought [flashes of pushback](#) from the wide public that uses, and sometimes creates, on this forty-year-old but continually “new” phenomenon. But capitalism, as always, starts better organized and the struggle is continual catch-up.

Radicals in this game have to struggle just to avoid disorientation. A phenomenon disruptive of capitalism as it exists has to be the love-object of any self-respecting revolutionary, right? But the ethic of the Internet skews that notion. Taylor quotes the knotty formulation of Internet apostle Clay Shirky. His “Shirky Principle” – “institutions will try to preserve the problem to which they are the solution” – exemplifies for Taylor the ambivalent attitude that apostles of the disruptive qualities of online opportunity take toward the traditional one-way means of communication like broadcasting, TV and print news. Shirky, a popular media scholar, is one such, applauding the removal of the traditional gatekeepers from the mesh, or field (as Bourdieu would have it) of communication. *Here Comes Everybody*, Shirky titled his seminal book. Nevertheless, acknowledge Shirky and his compatriots, the material provided online is essentially what used to be available through the old media varieties – video, radio, news, entertainment, music. All that has changed is who is making money from it. The sociologist Bourdieu said that the “field” of communicative action was characterized by unequal power relations, and that in fact the powerful elements in the field employ communicative action to enforce their status. It’s productive to explore, as Taylor and Keen do, what has really changed and what remains.

Keen probably has an even better array than Taylor of examples showing that the power relations of this communication “field” are disrupted by the Internet but the result is an even more concentrated set of power relations – Internet entrepreneurs who dominate the field while employing almost nobody – and a proletariat of the Net that produces and consumes, but for whom the meter always runs the wrong way, pumping money in the direction of the narrowing group of powerful entrepreneurs.

Taylor’s caution, similarly, is that the old gatekeepers of content (publishers, broadcast outlets) have been replaced by new gatekeepers of the new mesh, the once-free World Wide Web. They are the Internet Service Providers who must be paid for access to the Web at all, as well as the lords of content and access like Google and Yahoo. Social media enablers like Facebook and Twitter occupy a slightly different sphere but are equally capitalist aggregators of eyeballs and access points – and money.

Keen especially focuses on the background oligarchy of the ISPs: the U.S. government “handed over the running of the Internet backbone to commercial Internet service providers.” It was, Keen quoting here the words of venture capitalist John Doerr, “ ‘the largest legal creation of wealth in the history of the planet.’ ”

Taylor’s approach, says Michael Harris in a WaPo review of Keen’s book, pushes to a “more unabashedly Marxist conclusion.”** Certainly she touches many a lefty base: C. Wright Mills’s extension of the concept of “alienated labor” to the middle management sphere in the ‘60s, adding “If we want to see the fruits of technological advances widely shared, it will require conscious effort and political struggle.”

Taylor notes John Lennon’s scornful view of the “clever and classless and free” self-image of folk in the US who are unable to grasp their own imprisonment in a deliberately covert class system. She suggests that makes it easy for them to embrace the notion that “information wants to be free.” Equally erosive of class consciousness is the well-cultivated Tea-Partyish resentment

against cultural elites and expert authority, which emphatically is not “striking a blow against the real powers.” Such feckless misdirection of thinking is not limited to the Right.

Tackling the actual inequities and power differentials of capitalist society, she recognizes, is difficult for ordinary folk whose time is consumed by various dimensions of survival.

“Motivation and resources, time and power – these are not assets that are evenly distributed,” Taylor asserts. And, we socialists would add, this is no accident, but a singular advantage of capitalism, to fill up the overscheduled daily lives of workers and consumers with coerced activities suffused with anxiety or outright fear of losing even a precarious foothold. Popular democratic activism is well tied down by these constraints. In the brave new world of the Internet, Taylor says, “material and social conditions have not given way to will and imagination,” contrary to the world-has-changed evangelism of Shirky and others.

Taylor’s concern includes the hollowing out of the creative process, with its consumers increasingly expecting free creative content, the new moguls of the Internet collecting a hidden tax from those consumers and the creators of cultural goods left with little or nothing to show for their labors.

This is a sad truth that was true before the Internet and will probably be true in the next iteration of human communication, whatever that looks like. The Net may have exacerbated this trend but it hardly initiated it.

Worse, she argues, the pressure on creators has caused a race to the middle, with fewer and fewer genuinely radical, evocative voices and blander and blander, politically harmless content. For the capitalist overlords of culture, it is a reduction of risk.

For her fellow creators, Taylor calls for a shift “from free culture to fair culture” with established fair trade principles and a wider culture in which that fairness is encouraged. In contrast, “a communication system left to the free market will not produce the independent, democratic culture we need. ... while the Internet could have offered an alternative to the sphere of commodity exchange, private and often monopolistic markets now dominate.”

Taylor suggest some market-socialist solutions that could help dislodge capital’s foot from the neck of Internet and its users – industrial policy, state investment in the electronic infrastructure and research, with “public option” alternatives for Internet access. In fact, the FCC recently took steps to block industry-backed state laws prohibiting municipal wi-fi systems – a small shred of progress. Another Taylor proposal, a staple of European social democracies, is vastly increased spending on public broadcasting pegged to a sales tax on our electronic toys – and for commercial stations and networks to “pay a market rate for spectrum licenses” and a national sales tax on online sales, now levied only by some states and easily dodged by big corporations and their in-house tax lawyers.

The cash cow provided by the Internet to big corporations, after all, was originally derived from government R&D and public efforts like DARPA, where the Net was engendered – the free lunch for the corporations, she says, should stop and they should pay for what they are enjoying.

Taylor, like Keen, falls into a difficult ravine, suggesting that valuable cultural goods are produced by a relatively small group of cultural creators who should be compensated therefore. Both push back against the democratic yawp of Shirky and others, who celebrate the access of ordinary folks to the tools of cultural creation and grassroots political discourse. In doing so they undervalue a real benefit of the Net, suggesting instead that the common sort has been narcotized by social-media brain candy, the “cultural dupes” of old-school, mass-society media theorists.

Social media are in fact a fascinating amalgam of brain candy and real sociopolitical stimulation, and offer as low-friction an opportunity for expression by all as history has provided so far. Keen and some of his cohorts – Nicholas Carr and others – feel the Internet has devalued knowledge by lowering the difficulty of gaining it. This seems a bit of sour grapes.

One can see why Harris suggested in his review that Taylor had a more nuanced revolutionary perspective, even “Marxist,” compared to Keen. Keen’s sources are more other journalism and less thoughtful analysis, and the tonal difference between Keen’s sometimes-shrill denunciations of Internet billionaires and Taylor’s focus on their consequences is distinct. Both are in fact “Marxist” in the general sense that they recognize structural tendencies in capitalism itself that exacerbate inequality in information and its increasingly important commodification, while actively working against its remediation.

Both writers provide plenty of illustrative examples of those structural tendencies as they play out in the terrain of e-commerce.

Keen’s narrative and examples are more rococo and gossipy than Taylor’s (Keen cheerfully refers to Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg as “autistic”) and in many ways a more fun read. His encounters with some of the princes (ain’t no princesses) of Silicon Valley and its posh outposts in San Francisco make them seem nearly clownish in their degree of detachment from the society they count as customers.

Taylor’s focus on the way Internet discourse defaults toward the mediocre under financial pressures is a more useful, because less common, critique. These are two of a number of books that, taken together, keep us current on the remarkable impact of new technology on our lives and jobs, as well as the persistent truths about the behavior of powerful corporations in capitalist society.

*”Content and its Discontents,” July 18 2014

**Michael Harris, *The Washington Post*, Jan. 2, 2015

Tuesday, March 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2015**

Brentin Mock, Justice correspondent for the politico-enviro site *Grist*, explores the relationship of climate change and gentrification (in all its forms) in a thoughtful and novel way. *Grist* has been running a series on gentrification; links are with this one: <http://grist.org/living/climate-change-is-the-ultimate-gentrifier/>

Tom Edsall, in *the New York Times*, details the seismic shift among some prominent, formerly neolib economists – Larry Summers at the forefront – in the direction of interventionist and regulatory action to increase jobs and job demand.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/04/opinion/establishment-populism-rising.html?ref=opinion&r=0>

Naomi Klein's work, including the book *This Changes Everything*, has coalesced a lot of climate-change discussions into a capital-T Thread that is encompassing quite a lot of the ongoing work of activist thinkers. Jodi Dean, in her blog I Cite, responds that "This Changes Some Things" and argues that Klein backs away from the clear revolutionary imperative that climate change conditions imply. As often happens, this was placed center stage by a Doug Henwood Facebook post. http://jdeanicate.typepad.com/i_cite/2015/03/this-changes-some-things.html

All of us being artists in our own lives if not more, we hear from Toni Morrison in the *Nation's* 150th-anniversary issue about the duty to resist that is imposed on all artists in dark times. "Forcing a nation to use force is easy when the citizenry is rife with discontent, experiencing feelings of a powerlessness that can be easily soothed by violence."

http://www.thenation.com/article/198465/no-place-self-pity-no-room-fear?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=socialflow#

Two books on the new dot-com boom detail the way e-commerce has sharpened inequality and unemployment in the robotics age. How about the people who work for the dot-coms? An article in *In These Times* focuses on coders, among the new oppressed. This was first posted by *Portside*.

http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/17773/coders_are_becoming_the_industrial_workers_of_the_21st_century_will_they_o

Tom Edsall, again (his long analyses in the *NYT* are becoming must-reads) – this time about measures of poverty and judging the relative success or failure of antipoverty policy since Lyndon Johnson...

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/25/opinion/how-poor-are-the-poor.html?ref=opinion>

There's not much new in this recent update on the Trans Pacific Partnership trade boondoggle, some of the secrets of which have been outed by WikiLeaks. But Jim Hightower has a way of putting things that can help refresh your own arguments against Fast Track authority...

<http://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/jim-hightower-obamas-terrible-trade-pact-scam-must-be-stopped>

[Locked Out and then Locked Up: Ending the Injustice of our Justice System](#)

Tuesday, March 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2015**

By Kurt Stand

“I have been locked by the lawless.
Handcuffed by the haters.
Gagged by the greedy.

And, if i know anything at all,
It's that a wall is just a wall
And nothing more at all.
It can be broken down.

I believe in living
I believe in birth
I believe in the sweat of love
And in the fire of truth.

And i believe that a lost ship,
Steered by tired, seasick sailors,
Can still be guided home
To port.”

Assata Shakur

The majority of people imprisoned by our criminal justice system are in the 18-24 year age range when arrested; the likelihood of being charged with committing a crime dropping significantly with each passing year thereafter. Yet time spent in jail or prison reduces an individual's life chances in every respect, thus those caught in a prosecutorial web when young are penalized for a length of time far outlasting a prison sentence. This reality was the theme of a panel discussion sponsored by the Reentry Network for Returning Citizens at the Thurgood Marshall Center in Northwest DC on Wednesday, February 25. The purpose of the meeting, wrote Executive Director Courtney Stewart, was to “continue the conversation to end the school to prison pipeline, end mass incarceration, recommend and create more alternatives to prison and diversion programs. The law says that a boy becomes a man at age 18, well many of us know that is not necessarily true in the case of our youth. So why are so many ending up in the criminal justice system with little chance of ever getting their life back together?”

Each of the panelists — Tracy Valazquez, Council for Court Excellence; Malik Burnett, Drug Policy Alliance; Marcy Mistrett, Campaign for Youth Justice; Reginald Williamson, Public Defender Service; Walter Johnson, Collaborative Solutions for Communities; and community activist Tony Lewis — spoke about the concrete programs or outreach efforts they are engaged in, yet they all also stressed that incremental changes, important as they are, need to be followed by more basic changes. The point was repeatedly made by panelists and by attendees commenting from the floor that taking youth away from the young through incarceration exemplifies the inhumanity of a system which victimizes people already victimized by poverty. Individuals with the fewest life chances in our highly inegalitarian society are those most likely to wind up in prison when they should be receiving an education or embarking on a career. In other words, those “locked out” become those “locked up.”

Although recent years have shown some small improvement with the overall rate of incarceration (in DC and across the country) dropping, the absolute number of those in jail or prison is still growing. Nationally and locally some sentence reduction measures (such as marijuana decriminalization/legalization) have been enacted, some programs to ease the process of re-entry have been funded; however, while welcome these have failed to turn the problem around because counter-trends continue to marginalize and criminalize parts of the population. Gentrification is a prime example and has had a particularly harmful effect in our region where rising cost of housing is reinforcing pre-existing patterns of exclusion based on race and class – thereby making it especially difficult for young people to get a foothold in the economy even when they are employed. And the racial disproportion when it comes to arrest and sentencing is especially striking amongst young men; blacks between the ages of 18-19 are more than 9 times likely to be imprisoned than whites. According to the Bureau of Justice, almost 3% of black men were imprisoned on December 31, 2013, as were about 1% of Hispanic and 0.5% of white men (even that last number is itself far higher than what most other countries would tolerate). Meanwhile the percentage of women in prison rises from year to year – also especially impacting youth. Overall approximately 250,000 teenagers under the age of 18 are annually prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system.

The combination of repressive laws and racism is thus having a devastating impact on our society, on our democracy. The challenge is multi-fold – as meeting participants noted, the problems relate not only to excessive sentencing and unnecessary imprisonment, but also lack of funding for schools, housing, mental health services; a lack of jobs for youth, and a lack of jobs for people returning home after time in prison. Numerous initiatives are underway locally to address aspects of these problems – from the passage of ban the box legislation in DC (preventing employers from asking about criminal backgrounds on job applications), to the creation of job training and placement programs. Invaluable in and of themselves, these are preventing the existing problems from getting worse, and make the difference between building a life and struggling simply to survive for those whom they reach. But by themselves they do not go far enough – a more systemic solution is needed, rooted in a critique of the structures that create and sustain a society that locks out and locks up so many.

Such critiques and solutions are posed by articles written by political prisoners, prisoner rights activists, radical scholars – including Angela Davis, Sekou Odinga, Laura Whitehorn, Kevin “Rashid” Johnson — in the quarterly journal, *Socialism and Democracy*. Having as its theme

“The Roots of Mass Incarceration in the US: Locking up Black Dissidents and Punishing the Poor,” the issue was edited by Mumia Abu-Jamal and Johanna Fernandez. They pose the underlying problem in their introduction: “While mass incarceration addressed the problem of redundant labor in urban centers and functioned as a tool of social control, it served ideological purposes as well. During this period [1980s-90s], crime became the new code word for black people, Latinos, and increasingly, for immigrants. These groups became the perfect scapegoats in the context of growing class stratification in US society. In response to the broader national economic crisis, US capital shored up its profits through a draconian project that cut wages, eliminated health benefits, and busted unions. The hysteria around crime on which mass incarceration was erected served as an important ideological tool, a kind of a palliative for disgruntled white workers and the middle class during this long period of economic austerity. ... The unrelenting criminalization of African Americans and of poor Latino communities over the last 35 years – the idea that these undeserving “Others” were taking advantage of the system and digging Americans deeper into a financial hole – was integral to the politics of neo-liberalism, deployed by Democrats and Republicans alike ...” (p.9)

The challenge is to take the truth of that reality and connect it with the necessary work of individuals and organizations working for economic and social justice in other spheres of life as well as with those directly focused on reforming all aspects of the criminal justice system. An example of what this might look like was provided by Vijay Prashad in a ***Socialism and Democracy*** article that points to a different model of economic growth than the models pushed by liberals and even some progressives unable to see outside of the neo-liberal box. Writing about Newark, New Jersey, the road he suggests ought to be taken should be viewed as directly relevant to what we need to advocate in our communities, especially now with Mayor Muriel Bowser determining the course of action her administration will follow in Washington, DC and with political changes underway in suburban Maryland and Northern Virginia.

Prashad notes that, “[municipal government could use] laws of eminent domain to seize whatever abandoned property is in the city limits; use funds from the city budget, from the stimulus bill and elsewhere to hire people from the neighborhoods to refurbish these buildings into community centers, daycare centers, local schools, indoor farmers’ markets and petty workshops; turn the empty lots into gardens to grow edible crops and flowers, which can be sold. Put the unions and community organizations into the mix ... using their organizational capacity and experience as well as their budgets to reconstruct their urban landscape. Dramatic use of people’s energies would help break the apathy and helplessness that leads to criminality, drug use, and poor nutrition.”

This speaks to precisely the kinds of initiatives and projects the attendees at the Reentry Network for Returning Citizens forum were engaged with or looking to develop. Key is to find policies and practices that reach more than isolated individuals, but rather speak to and organize all who are impacted by corporate/political practices that undermine communities and lead people to blame themselves – or each other — for their particular plight. That too means breaking with the pious sounding notion that anyone can achieve anything and focus on changing structures that can enable people to turn wishes onto realities. Prashad’s conclusion expresses that truth: “there is no point preaching hope alone, for hope can sour if it does not come with either the concrete capacity of a popular movement or a concrete recognition of possible public policies. As the

writer Lemony Snicket put it, ‘A story about people inside impressive buildings ignoring or even taunting people outside shouting at them turns out to be a story with an unhappy ending.’ It is necessary to consider better endings, which are themselves new beginnings – considerations of the needs of the people who have no wish to live lives of desperation and incarceration.” Better endings that may help steer us all to port.

All quotes from *Socialism and Democracy*, Vol. 28, Number 3, November 2014

Assata Shakur’s poem quoted by Joseph Ramsay, “Revolutionary Relatability: *Assata: An Autobiography* as a Site of Radical Teaching and Learning.” (pp 124-125)

Mumia Abu-Jamal and Johanna Fernandez, “Locking Up Black Dissidents and Punishing the Poor: The Roots of Mass Incarceration in the US,” (p 9)

Vijay Prashad, “Towards a Happy Ending,” (pp. 33-34)

Other Sources:

Cardozo Law Review

Liz Ryan, Youth in the Adult Criminal Justice System, Vol. 35:1167, 2012

Office of Human Rights: District of Columbia

Criminal Background Screenings and Employment – Fact Sheet for Job Applicants, December 17 2014

Re-Entry Network for Returning Citizens Fact Sheets:

- a) African American Males in Criminal Justice
- b) African American Males in Education
- c) African American Males in Finance
- d) African American Males and the Family

Vera Center on Sentencing and Corrections:

“Incarceration’s Front Door: The Misuse of Jails in America,” Report Summary, February 2015

[Maryland Notes: Assembly Getting Down To It](#)

Tuesday, March 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2015**

As mid-April's *sine die* finish for the Maryland General Assembly approaches, significant pressure points are emerging in the legislative session and other high-hopes projects are fading. A very Democratic Assembly is fighting the state's statutorily strong executive power now wielded by a Republican governor.

A labor activist working for the state AFL-CIO agenda reports "The budget is our main priority. Hogan is trying to get rid of the pay increase for state workers, [and we're also fighting] his cuts to education, and using the transportation trust fund to balance the budget. [We are supporting] the Red Line in Baltimore and the Purple Line in MC/PGC. Paid sick leave of course [see below], and fighting the charter school legislation. Hogan wants to privatize schools like most Republicans, so he is trying to eliminate some of the rules so private companies can make a profit off of our children's education."

Melissa Broome of [Working Matters](#) urges activists to put their voices behind the [Maryland Healthy Working Families Act](#), the paid sick leave bill mentioned above, which has not been called for a vote (as of March 26). "More than 700,000 people in our state are working every day without access to paid sick days. Please take a quick moment to contact members of the [Senate Finance](#) and [House Economic Matters](#) Committees and ask them to vote in favor of this important legislation."

Much of the dispute about the proposed big electric power merger, [Exelon's takeover of Pepco](#), is relevant to the major environmental effort in the Maryland legislature this session, as a bill accelerating the required share of alternative energy production in the state's power grid advances with wide support but the usual business-friendly roadblocks. The "Renewable Portfolio Standards" bill would increase the percentage of wind, solar and other renewables required by 2020 to 25 percent and by 2025 to 40 percent. The reset stems from the relative ease with which the state is on a path to make the goals in the current renewable portfolio standards. Exelon's demonstrated unfriendliness to renewables, especially wind and residential solar (with the "net metering" that allows rooftop solar) and the megacompany's need to sell juice from its aging fleet of nuclear plants is not a good match with Maryland's goal, old or new. Activists are working to convince the Public Service Commissions in both [Maryland](#) and the [District](#) to turn down the merger.

— Woody Woodruff

[Stuart Hall and the Rise of the New Left in Britain: Film and Discussion at Howard University on April 16](#)

Tuesday, March 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> April 2015**

By Carolyn M. Byerly

When filmmaker John Akomfrah decided to make a documentary about the legendary British intellectual and activist Stuart Hall a few years ago, it was because he saw Hall as the living embodiment of Britain's New Left movement of the 1960s and 70s. Hall died in 2014 of kidney failure at age 82, but he worked with Akomfrah to complete that film, *The Stuart Hall Project*, in his last days. The result is a brilliant production composed of footage from the BBC and other productions, still photographs, and new interviews with Hall and others who were part of the political and academic dynamics of those raucous years.

The Stuart Hall Project, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2013, will be shown and discussed at DSA's monthly Salon, 7-9 p.m., Thursday, April 16, in Room 118 of the C.B. Powell Building, at Howard University. The event is hosted by the Department of Communication, Culture and Media Studies at Howard. Carolyn Byerly, a member of DSA, chairs that department and has arranged to host the monthly Salon featuring Hall's work. She will be joined in leading a discussion after the film by Howard faculty and students. [ALERT: The film will begin promptly at 7:05 p.m., so please arrive on time.]

Stuart Hall, born in Jamaica, was of mixed racial heritage and middle class. When he was awarded a Rhodes scholarship to study at Oxford in 1952 to pursue a doctorate in English literature, he expected to be received as an intellectual equal among his peers. Instead, he ran head on into institutionalized racial and class attitudes cultivated by centuries of British colonialism. Hall had arrived in Britain with anti-imperialist views, but the ensuing years would radicalize and move him Left.

The dark skinned people of the Caribbean Islands were pouring into Britain in the '50s to rebuild the war-torn nation, and while Hall was part of this so-called "Windrush Generation" (named after the steamship that gave them passage), in that he, too, was of the Caribbean region, he was not of the laboring class. Still, Hall felt alienated from most of his university classmates who had joined the bebop era and other trivial pastimes and he began to take greater interest in his own people.

Hall found himself drawn to the West Indian workers who were marginalized into segregated, poor areas of London and other cities and were beginning to develop campaigns to demand their civil rights. He also found friendships among a few other disaffected students – an array of White British, Trinidadian, Jamaican, Syrian, and Sudanese – who were interested in expanding their radical consciousness. Hall remembered that he and his Leftist friends debated "with a

fierce intensity” to move beyond the narrow binaries of the Cold War, i.e., Soviet-style communism and Western capitalism. The year 1956 became the year of “conjunctures” when certain events indicative of the two faces of the Cold War collided to suggest a new direction for Hall and his friends. The first was the Soviet suppression of the popular Hungarian Revolution with tanks and troops; the second, the British and French invasion of and efforts to regain the Suez Canal Zone.

In seeking a third political space, Hall and his friends aimed to meld political analysis to activism. Hall, who was more affiliated with what he called “an independent socialist tradition” than “communist humanism,” would abandon his dissertation on Henry James at Oxford and assume editorship of what became the *New Left Review*. Hall was drawn to Gramsci’s inclinations to “displace Marxism,” and to confront Marx’s opacities and omissions, as well as to champion Gramsci’s notion of the “organic intellectual,” i.e., the person whose wisdom is grounded in the daily lived experience.

In London, Hall supported himself with part time public school teaching and university lecturing, while he poured his energy into his new political and intellectual endeavors. All of the journal’s writers were also engaging in organizing campaigns around a range of issues including racial discrimination, disarmament, and anti-imperialism, among others. Hall traveled around Britain, sleeping on friends’ sofas and making friends among others who had already planted the seeds for a Leftist era – Raymond Williams, Edward and Dorothy Thompson, Richard Hoggart, Doris Lessing and others. Hall met Catherine Barrett, a feminist historian, in a nuclear disarmament campaign, in 1963, and they married a year later. Hall experienced racism at a particularly personal level in his new inter-racial relationship.

The DSA Salon will highlight Hall’s centrality and contributions to the formation of the New Left in Britain in these years, including his institutionalization of Leftist analyses during his years as the director of the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, 1972-79. Hall became known as the “father of British Cultural Studies,” but in fact, he was so much more than that. Hall also left his mark on the Open University, from 1979-1997, a television-based distance learning program, and later as chair of the International Centre of Visual Arts (Iniva) and other organizations.