

The Washington Socialist
Articles from December 2012 Issue
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Editor: Woody Woodruff

[Washington Socialist December Issue: After the election, going global](#)

Wednesday, December 5th, 2012

[Our latest monthly email newsletter appeared in our subscribers' inboxes Dec. 3. If you are not a subscriber and would like to be, contact us at dsadcexchange@gmail.com — the Metro DC DSA editorial team]

We are going across the pond and into the weeds with this issue of the *Washington Socialist* – a break, we hope, from the tunnel vision that the election season seems to have forced on us. As socialists, we are accustomed to dealing with the US as it is, to aim to make it what it could be. But we know we don't have to fashion hypothetical models of what the US could be, when industrial societies around the world are practicing what we socialists are still preaching.

Health Care: The US election more or less affirmed the survival of our first national health system, flawed and compromised as it may be. The *Washington Socialist* for December takes a look at the health care models toward which progressives could push that start-up called Obamacare.

Jose Gutierrez outlines the **different forms of health care policy** and practice in Europe – and they are not all “single payer,” for sure. [Read complete article](#)

Woody Woodruff examines the **nonprofit health insurer alternative** to single-payer as practiced in Germany and elsewhere. [Read complete article](#)

In many nations of the EU, **worker representation** in company decision-making institutions is mandated by law. How are those representatives chosen? The interesting differences across borders are outlined by an article produced by the Institut Superieur du Travail in a major excerpt translated for *WS* by Metro DC DSA member Lucette Smoes. [Read complete article](#)

More specifically, **women's rights as workers in the EU**, while institutionally far elevated from their US status, are still contested terrain. Carolyn Byerly outlines the fights that have been, the state of play in the EU, and lessons for advancing women's rights in the US. [Read complete article](#)

Back home, the **Federal Communications Commission is slipping** toward a damaging relaxation of the rules that keep corporations from monopolizing mass communication outlets.

The cross-ownership of newspapers and broadcast media in the same market, long restrained, may become a piece of cake for buccaneers like Rupert Murdoch, Carolyn Byerly reports. Obama's FCC is too business-friendly, and progressives need to put on the brakes to preserve public interest in the publicly owned airwaves. [Read complete article.](#)

Big Bird was another survivor of the election. Dan Adkins examines several recent **public television historical series** that make, at least, brave attempts to explain the social justice aspects of broad-scale human history, the Dust Bowl and the Gilded Age. [Read complete article.](#)

And on the political front: national **DSA's National Political Committee has adopted a pungent and direct resolution on the so-called "fiscal cliff."** A summary excerpt: "Like other progressive groups, DSA rejects the notion that some 'unified' fiscal cliff must be addressed in the lame-duck session of Congress. It is in fact a 'fiscal obstacle course' that Congress should address without panic early in 2013, while heeding the election results." The statement calls for a progressive coalition to block the bipartisan attack on the interests of working families and push the better angels of the Democratic Party's nature to attack systemic inequality. [Read the full statement](#)

[In Europe, are Workers' Representatives Elected or Appointed?](#)

Monday, December 3rd, 2012

The Washington Socialist <>December 2012

Translated for the *Washington Socialist* by Lucette Smoes

Editor's introduction: In the industrial democracies of Europe, a variety of national laws requires some representation for workers in the affairs of the company where they are employed. This is often startling to US workers, whether unionized or not. Every successful experiment in workers-corporation relations, however, can teach us something about how to advance our socialist goal. The strength of unions varies greatly from country to country and there is an interesting difference between the laws governing labor relations in the US and in the European Union. This note concentrates on the laws defining the structures and roles of workers in the European workplace. It is a translation of an article by J.P. Roulleau and Michele Millor reprinted by permission of the "Institut Superieur du Travail"

>>Election by employees or nomination by the union? The implementation of employee representation in the enterprises shows a very large diversity from country to country in Europe. Each country responds differently and no trend is dominant.

What is the real source of legitimacy for a certain type of representation to be recognized in an enterprise? Is it the election by the wage-earners of an “enterprise committee” or the designation of a delegate by the union? Each country has its own response and no trend prevails. This is another difficulty of European social relations. Another problem underlies this question: what is the role of the representation — to contribute to the smooth functioning of the enterprise by helping to resolve difficulties that may occur, or to play the role of a critic, a challenger, and denounce the errors of management? Is the wage-earners’ representation recognized as a partner with true rights, or does it play the role of critical opposition?

Single or Double Channel

There are two situations in Europe:

* The single channel. The union is the only authorized representative of the wage-earners. This is the case of Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, and Sweden.

* The double channel with the coexistence within the enterprise of union representation and a form of representation elected by the wage-earners. It is the case in Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

However, in both cases, the situation is evolving.

On one hand, in the “single channel” countries, elected committees appear. This is the case in Great Britain, but only on a voluntary basis. By contrast, in Hungary, a law adopted in 1992 theoretically requires the establishment of such committees, but the practice, it appears, is slow to conform to law. In the Czech Republic, if there is no union in the enterprise, these committees may be formed. They have a right of information, consultation, and eventually negotiation. On the other hand, in the “double channel” countries, the role and functions given to the union in the enterprise can differ greatly, from simple tolerance in Germany to the exclusive recognition of the right to conclude agreements in France.

Finally, the ambiguity of the guidance — informational role, or consultation role? — risks further modifying the picture.

Closely Related Logic: Great Britain and Sweden

* Great Britain remains faithful to its liberal tradition [in the European, 19th-century sense]. The unions are the only representatives of the wage-earners’ interests. It is up to them, by their weight, to impose themselves upon the employer as interlocutors. Tony Blair’s government recently defined the procedures for the recognition of a union in an enterprise. The members of the union elect their representatives, the “shop stewards,” usually at the level of the workshop or of a department. Together the shop stewards may constitute a committee which has the right to negotiate once the union is recognized.

In other respects, in some enterprises, management has sometimes instituted committees which bring to mind our [French] enterprises committees. From one enterprise to another, their composition, their form, their role varies since they are, up to now, voluntary initiatives.

* Sweden, particularly due to its unionization, chose to recognize the exclusive representation of the wage-earners through their unions, under various forms: union representatives, delegates for security and working conditions. Since the law of January 1, 1977, complemented by legislation enacted April 1982, the employer, before any important decision, must consult the union representatives and negotiate with them the modalities of the project. Few enterprises have retained an enterprise council where questions of common interest are discussed. These steps conform to the decentralization of negotiations, previously realized at the branch level and from now on returning to the enterprise level, but always through the union channel.

The German System

* Germany's system is the opposite. It follows very precise rules, defined by various laws, updated in 1972 and 1976. These regulations are perfectly accepted and integrated by all parties involved: by the enterprise, the employees, and the unions.

The enterprise council (Betriebsrat) has a monopoly for the employees' representation. This council, where the directors are excluded, elects its own president amongst its members, and represents an essential gear of industrial democracy. It is part of the joint management. It is the partner recognized by management as the unique voice of the wage-earners. These councils should exist in all enterprises with more than five persons. Elected for four years, they are totally independent. They don't receive any imperative mandate from the employees or from the union. They cannot be dissolved; their elected members are permanent with a number dependent on the size of the enterprise.

Two complementary and specialized structures complete the council:

> "The delegation of young workers and apprentices" composed of young workers, elected by wage-earners younger than 24, to represent the interests of this age group within the enterprise council. One of these delegates may attend the regular meetings. All the "young delegates" attend when the council discusses a question that concerns them.

> "The economic council" for enterprises of more than 100 persons. It includes members that are not elected but nominated by the council. In contrast with the enterprise council, the employer may participate in these meetings.

There are also what is called "men of trust." Designated by the union, they have no representation role with the employer. They are in fact relays between union and wage-earners.

* The German system has inspired the system implemented in Hungary. However, the enterprise committee's rights introduced by the 1912 "Code du Travail" are much less important than those of the German Betriebsrat.

* Austria's system of representation is similar. The law of 1974 defines the functions of the enterprise council, with two distinct entities: a blue-collar council and a white-collar one. These two groups may elect a common council if two-thirds of the members want it.

Primacy of the Union

Unlike the example of Germany, integrated representation recognizes a certain primacy of the union structure.. In almost all these countries (Belgium, Luxemburg, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal), it is the unions that establish the lists of candidates for the enterprise councils. France created a two-round process. For the first round, only the recognized unions may establish and present lists. If these lists don't receive a quorum, the wage-earners may then form "free lists" for a second round. In spite of these hurdles, the non-union lists are now getting almost one third of the enterprise council positions. Italy, since 1993, has also established an original system of representation. It tries to reconcile both sources of legitimacy. Two third of the positions are elected by the wage-earners on union lists, and the last third is filled equally by the three unions.

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Original at www.istravail.com/article285.html.

[Popular — Sometimes People's —History on TV](#)

Monday, December 3rd, 2012

The Washington Socialist <> December 2012

By Dan Adkins

Three new series have arrived that are important and useful popular history. They are "Mankind: The Story of All of Us," "The Men Who Built America," and "Dustbowl." All told there are over 20 hours of public television programing.

Mankind: The Story of All of Us starts with the inventors of farming, trade, buildings and war technology. As a TV series it cannot be as deep as *Guns, Germs and Steel*, but as a quick overview it is not bad and gives more weight to China. An example of this is that over two

millennia ago the first emporia of China had a military that had mass-produced standardized cross bows. This was a technique used in the west 2,000 years later. It also estimates worker's situation by using more recent studies of the cadavers of Egyptian pyramid craftsmen to identify the rate building accidents by broken bones. Thus it tries to more evenly show social evolution and technology.

The Dust Bowl by Ken Burns is a beautiful and depressing story of ignorance and inflexibility in the face of environmental change. Part of the ignorance was poor understanding of the fragility of the grasslands and their history. Also shown are the migrations out of the western plains and the social and political repercussions. Part 2 shows the government's response to the tragedy and the various economic and environmental programs and teachings. With the global rise in temperature and the resulting decrease of water in some areas it will be a gamble if future dust bowls can be averted.

The Men Who Built America is a history of US industrialization in the late 1800s. The series revolves around Cornelius Vanderbilt (railroads), John D. Rockefeller (oil), Andrew Carnegie (steel), J P Morgan (electric industry), and Henry Ford (cars). Lionizing the Robber Barons and its focus on the 1% is a skewed focus at best and a bourgeois myth at worst but this history does place the period in the unregulated new markets of the late 1800s. These barons are not depicted as technical innovators but rather manipulators and organizers of unregulated new industries. It identifies the real horror of the resulting depressions and the oppression of the workers and their organizations. This series peaks with these competitors joining together to buy a president so as to keep their markets unregulated. History provides a surprise In Teddy Roosevelt, who moves progress along by battling monopolies. If only Obama had a little of Teddy in him we would not be at the mercy of Wall Street banks.

When the US was created, 90 percent of non-slave work was in farming. If there were market depressions at least most of the US then had access to food and housing. In the panics of the late 1800s, working families not only lost access to food but housing too. Production became more interdependent and connected but profits stayed private. Risks were taken by the Robber Barons but the only risks to food and shelter were experienced by the workers. We still have this system with the exception that Wall Street risks are taken by the public and there is a bit of a safety net.

[The nonprofit model for health care cost containment](#)

Monday, December 3rd, 2012

The Washington Socialist <>December 2012

By Woody Woodruff

Democratic socialists and other progressives can find ourselves in a real bind when it comes to the politics and practices of healthcare.

We find ourselves in the familiar, unpleasant posture of playing defense against calls for drastic cuts in social expenditures, including those for health care – Medicare, Medicaid and the numerous smaller federal and state-level programs that supplement the provision of care to low-income persons lacking employer-provided insurance.

And our first response is a Gompers-like “more” – a call for higher public expenditures to match the burgeoning cost of the current health care system, which has proved highly resistant to attempts to reduce those costs. Class-based political stances aside, this may not be the historical moment to be asking for “more.”

It’s clear that cost containment in US healthcare is a joke – that health systems in other first-world nations, whatever their conformation, deliver better care for far less cost. Much of the eventual success of the Affordable Care Act, AKA Obamacare, is pinned to projected cost savings. But how? Where are the pressure points progressives can focus on to reduce costs without cutting services? And on what points will the industry fight back most fiercely?

Those other industrial nations’ systems provide likely clues. Some are the progressives’ quest-grail: single-payer. Others (like the Netherlands) use private insurers, many (but not all) nonprofit. Germany’s is fueled by a progressive, income-based payroll tax but insured by about 200 private funds, all of which must be nonprofit to participate in the national system. Many consider Germany’s the most likely model for the US, and if the incentives and requirements for insurer participation in ACA could be incrementally adjusted in progressive directions, nonprofits could gradually replace the for-profit system that has made US health care the costliest.

In 2008, Bob Kuttner estimated that of the \$2.1 trillion spent annually on health care in the US, \$400-500 billion goes to satisfy profit margins and shareholders. That’s a fat target, probably getting fatter.

In 2011, Steve Hill outlined the attractions of the German system in the *Washington Monthly*.

“Contrary to stereotype,” Hill wrote, “not every country in Europe employs single-payer, or government-run, ‘socialized medicine.’ Unlike single-payer in Britain, Canada or Sweden, other nations like France and Germany have figured out a third way that not only appears to perform better than single-payer, but it also might be a better match for the American culture.” Like AHCA, they mandate individual participation, but “a key difference is that in France, Germany and elsewhere, the private insurance companies are *non-profits* instead of for-profits.” Unlike the “system” in the US (more like a free-fire zone) “you don’t have health care CEOs making tens of millions of dollars. Nor do you have stockholders demanding the highest return for their investment. Generally speaking, the profit motive has been wrung out of the system,” in Hill’s description. That would have amounted to one-fifth of US health care expenditures in 2008, again using Kuttner’s numbers.

Observing that some technically “nonprofit” health care systems in the US still rake in big bucks and pay outlandish CEO compensation, Hill points to the complementary policy that manages that factor in the European examples: “negotiated fees for service. In these ‘shared responsibility’ systems, fees for every health care service and product are negotiated between representatives of the health care professions, the government, patient-consumer representatives, and the private nonprofit insurance companies.”

This is where the national scale of ACA could provide the canvas for these kinds of enforced savings – savings that would give nonprofits a level playing field, if not an actual advantage.

Notice, however, that Hill has spilled the beans about the European health care systems: they are premised on “shared responsibility” – a social compact that is foreign to US culture except, perhaps, in time of war.

Uwe Reinhart, a Princeton economics professor focusing on health care, notes that the systems in France, Germany and the Netherlands are “goaded by tight regulation to work toward socially desired ends.” (We should note the in-process nature of this description.) And he, too, acknowledges that US culture contains the contradictory beliefs in a right to health care and a right to reject a mandate. That “immature, asocial mentality is rare in the rest of the world,” he says.

As Hill points out, if privileging the nonprofit sector is proposed as a solution in the US, “the for-profit health care corporations in the United States, and the politicians who do their bidding, will fight tooth and nail against the only types of reforms that have ever proven successful at reducing costs. But U.S. health care costs are so high, and so threatening to the nation’s future, that eventually the logic of reform will prevail.” It would be pretty to think so, but as we have seen in the past decade, that “immature, asocial mentality” is still deeply ingrained in the US public.

ACA contains some leanings toward reform that could make it more effective than it first appears (considering what seemed to be total capitulation to the big for-profit insurers). Obamacare is already pointing toward incentivization of nonprofits with its requirement for an 80% or better “medical loss ratio.” That’s the percentage that must be devoted directly to provision of medical services; as Kuttner puts it, “the percentage of the premium dollar actually paid out in health care benefits.” This could be the leverage that will incentivize and indirectly select nonprofits; it is hard to imagine a full-blown buccaneer capitalist health care insurance corporation that can confine its shareholder dividends, promotion, and CEO compensation to 20% of total premiums.

It’s likely that medical loss ratios will be a major front for industry lobbyists, who will try to cut those percentages back, leaving more room for profits – that is, rewarding shareholders, advertising agencies and top management.

And it’s becoming clear to even conservative economists that, whatever value markets have in the general realm of retail and service, they perversely reward inefficiency in the health care sphere. Kuttner’s 1999 account in the *New England Journal of Medicine* describes a boom in for-profit HMOs in the decade 1987-1997, in which the number covered by for-profits rose from 42

percent to 62 percent in a decade. The bonanza was followed by a bust of proliferation and consolidation that brought on the piratical practices of today's most notorious corporate HMOs, overpromising to gain market share followed by draconian cuts in benefits to stay competitive on Wall Street. Consumers and regulators, at this point, engaged in a joint backlash that showed they still had some power and curtailed many of the worst excesses. But the scene for today's chaotic health care marketplace was set.

In 2008, Kuttner updated the state of play in another *NEJM* article: "The extreme failure of the United States to contain medical costs results primarily from our unique, pervasive commercialization. The dominance of for-profit insurance and pharmaceutical companies, a new wave of investor-owned specialty hospitals, and profit-maximizing behavior even by nonprofit players raise costs and distort resource allocation."

Just a week ago at this writing, three economists in the *New York Times* noted that "Certainly, it is hard to be against competition. Economic theory is clear about its indispensable benefits. But not all health care markets are composed of rational, well-informed buyers and sellers engaged in commerce." The health exchanges in ACA that are designed to give individual insurance purchasers the tools for making good choices, they say, perversely degrade the efficiencies that large providers can offer by fragmenting the market.

So, "If health insurance exchanges divide up the market among many insurers, thereby diluting their power, reimbursement rates may actually increase, which could lead to higher premiums for consumers." Exchanges clearly need to offer good choices, but that doesn't necessarily require choices by the boatload – not if there are several large nonprofits with their scaled purchasing power to cut costs to the insured.

Bill Barclay, DSA member and economist, reminds us of other factors that make health care uniquely unresponsive to typical market "efficiencies." As the NYT article implies, none of us is an expert on purchasing health care, because (e.g.) we buy more TV sets in the course of our lives than we do bypass procedures. And improving our individual information base will be hard even with the help of health exchanges. Finally, health care has no saturation point for the individual; we always want to be healthier or less sick.

Taking the profit out of health care provision will not solve all the problems of cost in the system, but it's a point of leverage that is already implicit in the ACA structure. We socialists can argue in favor of nonprofit insurers and providers as low-hanging fruit in achieving the medical loss ratios required, and point to the example of Germany's system for proof that that approach works. The ACA, though riddled with compromises and concessions to the industry, is improvable if not necessarily perfectible.

This approach, of course, is exactly what corporate conservatives and their low-information stooges have perennially been watching out for—"creeping socialism," a suspected death-of-a-thousand-cuts for capitalism. Oddly, slow-walking public policy to the left is often dismissed on our side as too incremental. Socialism, we sometimes believe, has to arrive all at once... because the gradualist road to socialism often involves unpleasant disruption without the immediate, clear benefits that would sell the next step.

A slow socialist path to a nonprofit core in health care may be the exception – steps that will each demonstrate the value of the process and sell the doubtful on taking another one. Sometimes it needs to creep. Health care is such a singularity, so different from any other “market” structure, that we shouldn’t be surprised that the path to successful, truly *public* health care might be different too.

[The Politics of Media Conglomeration](#)

Monday, December 3rd, 2012

A clear and present call to socialist action

The *Washington Socialist* <>December 2012

By Carolyn M. Byerly

In a Nov. 26 article in *Truthout*, reporter Mike Ludwig asked whether the FCC will “give Rupert Murdoch the powerful gift of media consolidation.” The question is a deep and personal one for socialists, who are at the forefront of challenging the cancer of deregulation in the media industries. The media reform and justice movements challenging the corporate takeover of media emerged in 2003 with leadership from socialists like Bob McChesney, John Nichols and others, and it is those of socialist and feminist orientation who have continued to pound away at a seemingly un-giving wall of corporate power. I’ve been very involved in this movement, as I’ll explain later.

This commentary pulls together a quick summary of the politics of media deregulation and then presents a clear and urgent call to action related to a measure presently before the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Media conglomeration is about to get worse if the FCC has its way in what is widely believed to be a stealth plan to abandon the remaining cross-ownership rules that limit daily newspapers from owning radio stations in the same market. FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski, an Obama appointee who is pro-business and anti-public interest, distributed an internal draft of the policy among commissioners in mid-November to prepare for a December vote. *No public input is being sought before that vote.* If passed, Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation could begin to buy up radio stations in the same city where he already owns the daily newspapers.

Imagine a nation where Rupert Murdoch controls most of the means to communication. Socialists need to think beyond their own narrow reading tendencies here – consider the majority of the public who does not read *Mother Jones*, *Z Magazine*, *The Nation*, *In These Times*, *Dissent*, or listen to Democracy Now!

The background is this:

Under neoliberal national policies in the 1980s, US industries began to deregulate – a buzz word for conglomeration through mergers and acquisitions. I first saw this happening in the financial sector when my own locally-owned bank in Seattle was gobbled up by a big east coast financial institution. The same began happening in the media industries, as well, in the 1980s, something more relevant to freedom of expression. The thing for us to keep in mind is that neoliberalism has been the policy framework for both Republican and Democratic administrations since the 1980s under Reagan, with roots that go even farther back.

A consummate neoliberal, Democratic President Bill Clinton gave us both NAFTA and the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the second setting in motion a wave of mergers and acquisitions in the newspaper and telecom world. To be sure, media ownership had begun to loosen under Reagan, so that by the early 1990s, hardly a major city still had two competing newspapers; those that did typically had one controlled by the other under a Joint Operating Agreement. But the “T-‘96” as it came to be called, took away most of the prohibitions on the acquisition of smaller companies by the big corporations. Newspapers, book publishing companies, magazines, public relations firms, radio and television stations, cable, telephone companies, film companies and theaters soon were joined under ownership of a few huge parent companies.

In case the pattern here isn’t perfectly clear, the ownership patterns in media conglomeration happened through both horizontal and vertical integration. Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation has been a conglomerate that owned newspapers (horizontal integration), but now he’s branched out into other forms of telecommunication companies and is drooling over the possibility the FCC will lift bans so he can go after radio next. Disney, on the other hand, has always moved along a vertical integration strategy, owning everything from film studios to the theaters those films show in, as well as other distribution outlets like TV stations (ABC, Disney Network, Disney Channels Worldwide), product merchandising and theme parks. Both News Corp and Disney are among the top five global media conglomerates, controlling not just the circulation of ideas and images, but also controlling politics through the fortunes each reaps through its multiple revenue streams.

We need to conjure up a few old wise old sages who reminded us long ago that those who control the means of production also control the ideas that circulate (Marx & Engels) and that women’s ideas will never be heard so long as men own the newspapers (Susan B. Anthony).

The media conglomerates today have a race, gender, nationality and class profile, with controlling interests dominated by very, very wealthy white men who are based mainly in the United States. In his numerous books critiquing media conglomeration, Bob McChesney has observed that the nation has become both more conservative and more de-politicized under conglomerated media, which have weeded out all but vapid entertainment and pro-consumer content. Gone is investigative reporting, public affairs programming in broadcast, and a broader range of political discourse.

On Nov. 14, the Federal Communications Commission released its long-awaited report on broadcast ownership and it only confirmed the worst. The report shows that racial minorities presently own controlling interest in minuscule numbers of broadcast stations – 2.2 percent of

full-powered television stations, 6.2 percent of AM radio stations, and 3.5 percent of FM radio stations. Females own controlling interest in only 6.8 percent of television stations, 7.8 percent of AM stations, and 5.8 percent of FM stations. The situation with minority ownership, particularly black radio, is particularly dire – the medium that has historically given the African American community the means to articulate its experiences, perspectives and culture – appears to be shrinking out of existence. This loss of voice represents both a civil rights and women’s rights issue of deep and immediate concern to 12 percent of the nation’s population, those who comprise the African American community, and the 51 percent who are female. Women should also consider that the low numbers of stations we own are mostly under single ownership (i.e., women tend to own only one or two stations) in rural or other minor market areas. Who speaks for us?

The sorry state of women’s and minorities’ broadcast ownership has been challenged in the courts. The Third Circuit Court rulings in the *Prometheus vs. the FCC* (2003) and *Prometheus II vs. the FCC* (2011) required the FCC to address the structural problems preventing women and people of color from owning and maintaining ownership of broadcast stations. In fact, both rulings directed the FCC to consider the 47 proposals to improve women and minority ownership that the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council (which represents minority broadcasters) put before the commission in 2003. The FCC has continually delayed in doing so.

Why should socialists – and feminists – be concerned about broadcast when we have the Internet and all those left-wing and women’s publications? First, because the airwaves used in broadcasting are *owned by the public* and are supposed to operate in the public interest. At present, they do not. If we (the public!) don’t demand they return to serve us, they will continue to serve mammon. We should also keep in mind that even Amy Goodman’s and Juan Gonzales’ Democracy Now!, which originates on WBAI-FM, New York, is *broadcast*, even though it can also be streamed via Internet.

Second, most people in the U.S. today listen to broadcast radio, not satellite or Internet radio, and they watch network (i.e., broadcast) television, not cable. While broadcast TV networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox) are required to be carried by cable providers like Verizon, Comcast and Time Warner, millions of people who live in both urban and rural areas still get these networks through the traditional means – antennae. This is a class, race and gender issue since most of those who do not have cable are low-income men and women, and many are ethnic or racial minorities. Third, the ownership and control of broadcast stations is part and parcel of the larger issue of corporate media ownership, since all are presently dominated by those huge mega-corporations we mentioned earlier. There will never be a broader political spectrum of opinion available on the media unless ownership is diversified.

Stopping the cross ownership rules from being lifted is a step in the direction of a bigger struggle, but it’s a step that those of us on the Left must take.

Several of my colleagues at Howard University and I stepped into the ownership mess a few years ago by forming the Howard Media Group (www.howardmediagroup.org), with the commitment to give women and minorities a voice at the communications policy table. To date, we have submitted numerous comments during public proceedings, testified before the

Commissioners, met with Media Bureau staff numerous times, and conducted research associated with media ownership and diversification. We have had a modicum of response, not the least of which was the adoption of our recommendation about four years ago that the Media Bureau develop an online reporting system for all stations, both full powered and low powered, and should report the data from those reports to the public. Stations, which are required to report every two years, have done so in both 2009 and 2011. The Nov. 14 ownership report is the first output from this change in procedures, and can be found at <http://transition.fcc.gov/mb/>.

The FCC (www.fcc.gov) is a five-member body, with three commissioners representing the party in power (presently Demos) and two of them representing the minority party (the GOP). Commissioner Mignon Clyburn, an African American who has worked closely with the civil rights community, and Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel, who replaced that great champion of public interest, Michael Copps, last year when he retired, are presently the only two commissioners who can be counted on to speak up for the public interest. But public pressure has had some impact in the past and needs to be applied again now.

I urge everyone who reads this article and takes its messages to heart to write even a short note to the FCC and urge them not to lift the cross-ownership rules. Your letter should reference this proceeding – **MB Docket No. 09-182, 2010 Quadrennial Review** – and addressed to:

Chairman Julius Genachowski
Commissioner Robert McDowell
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel
Commissioner Ajit Pai
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, SW
Washington, DC, 20054

If you want to see a sample letter on the subject, you can check out the one that our Howard Media Group filed last week at <http://www.howardmediagroup.org/>. Click on the homepage item under latest news, “[Howard Media Group files letter with FCC.](#)”

[The Roads to Universal Health Care](#)

Monday, December 3rd, 2012

***The Washington Socialist* <> December 2012**

By Jose Gutierrez

The World Health Organization (WHO) produced a report in 2000 that tried to rank the health care systems of the world. In that report, the US system came in at 37th, between Costa Rica (36th) and Slovenia (38th).

Total expenditure doesn't seem to be the issue. In 2007 the US spent 16% of its GDP on health care, without covering everyone in the country. The number for France was 11%, for Germany it was 10.4%, for the UK 8.4%, for Japan it was 8.1% — and these countries cover their entire population or close to it.

According to author T.R. Reid's *The Healing of America: A Global Quest for Better, Cheaper, and Fairer Health*, the health care systems around the world can be divided among four major types:

The Beveridge model, or socialized medicine

After the Second World War, the Labour Party of the United Kingdom put into action the ideas of social reformer William Beveridge and created the National Health Service. Health care is provided by the government through tax payments like other public services such as education. Many, but not all, hospitals and clinics are owned by the government. These health-care systems tend to have lower costs because the government controls what the government can do and what they can charge.

A number of countries use this type of system, including the UK, which is the 18th-best system in the world according to the WHO report, and Spain, the 7th best. The Scandinavian social democracies and New Zealand also have this type of health care system. Cuba, number 39 according to the WHO, is another example. Ironically, capitalist Hong Kong has socialized medicine while the People's Republic of China does not.

Single-Payer model

Single-payer, or Medicare for all, has been the goal of much of the American left since the times of FDR. Truman proposed this type of health care in the 1940's and Ted Kennedy was an advocate for much of his political career.

Our neighbor to the north, Canada, has this type of system. In 1944, Tommy Douglas became the premier of the Canadian province of Saskatchewan and formed the first socialist government of a Canadian province. Douglas introduced single-payer health care to the province. Other provinces soon followed and eventually the federal government of Canada. According to the WHO it is the 30th best system in the world.

Single-payer uses private-sector providers but payment comes from a government-run insurance plan that every citizen pays into. Government negotiates lower prices, and as a result the same drugs in Canada are cheaper than in the US.

In the 1990's health experts from Taiwan looked at different health care systems and they decided that the single-payer was the one that suited their needs. It was used as the model for the health care system of the island.

Multi-Payer model

After the unification of Germany in 1871, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck feared the growing popularity of the German Social Democrats, the SPD. To win support from the working class, Bismarck began the creation of the first modern welfare state and the current German health care system.

In some superficial ways, the German system would seem similar to what many Americans already have through their jobs. The system is financed from deductions from employers and employees through payroll deductions. Unlike in the US, health insurance plans in Germany cover everybody and they don't make a profit. Tight regulation gives government much of the cost-control that single-payer models provide.

Germany's system was considered by WHO to be the 25th-best system, but France, which also has a multi-payer system, was considered to be the best in the world. Japan's was 10th.

Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland have been studied by American health care experts who were looking for an alternative to single-payer, and proposals by the Clinton administration, the Heritage Foundation (a conservative think tank) and others have been partly based on this model. The Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, itself owes some ideas to this model.

Out-Of-Pocket model

The richest countries, except for the United States, have universal health systems, but many of the countries of the global South have no health systems or systems with huge gaps. Hundreds of millions never see a doctor. The poor who can save enough can see a doctor; otherwise they go without medical care.

In the US we have elements of all four models. Our veterans have socialized medicine through the VA. Our seniors have Medicare, a single-payer system, like Canada. A diminishing number of those who are employed full-time have insurance through their job, like in Germany. For too many in our country, the access to the health care system is not that much better than in developing countries and worse than in some Latin American countries.

Some observations

One observation that should be made is that in Germany, the UK, Canada and other countries, the development of universal health care was a reaction to a rising socialist movement or one of the policies implemented by a socialist movement.

Secondly, even though the multi-payer models superficially are similar to the US system now and under Obamacare, most of the basic benefits are provided by non-profits.

Thirdly, all of these countries, including the ones that have multi-payer systems, have all-payer regulations. Government bargains with health care providers such as doctors, hospitals and pharmaceutical companies to set prices for medical goods and services. The prices agreed to are binding on all parties.

In the US, Medicare and Medicaid restrain costs, but there are no such restraints on the private sector. The state of Maryland has operated an all-payer system for hospitals since 1977 and has ~~since~~ seen costs rise more slowly than the national average.

Bob Kuttner outlines (see related article) the rampant commercialization of the US health care system, with medical expenditures leaking away into advertising and promotion, executive salaries and shareholder dividends. That for-profit activity, along with the lack of all-payer bargaining, help make US health care the world's least cost-effective. A shift to nonprofits as in France and Germany and broad negotiation of service and product costs can bring US health outlays, currently well above \$2 trillion annually, into line while covering nearly everyone.

[Women Workers' Rights in Europe:](#)

Monday, December 3rd, 2012

Glowing but Still Imperfect Models for the Rest of Us

***The Washington Socialist* <>December 2012**

By Carolyn M. Byerly

In the broader spectrum of workers' rights, where are women's? Do laws recognize women's rights to the same jobs that men hold, to the same pay that men get, and to accommodation for the biological realities associated with motherhood? Are women more equal as a result of laws?

These questions first came to me when I was doing research in Paris in the late 1980s. Across the street from my budget hotel on the Left Bank was a brick-front building that served as a public day care center. Both professional and working class parents and their pre-school children lined up each morning waiting for it to open, and each afternoon, parents came back to pick up their kids, who were always cheerful and sometimes carried pictures or something else they had made. It was an eye-opener as to how that European nation supported its working families.

More recently, I've had a chance to learn some of the answers to these bigger questions for nations in the European Union, in connection with a project I've been involved in as a contract researcher over these last months. The study is to learn how the EU's gender mainstreaming

mandates have been enacted (or not) by media companies. (More detail follows later in the discussion.)

Women's employment rights became part of the European legal framework in the 1950s as nations began to incorporate anti-discrimination statements into their labor legislation, one aspect of embracing social democracy. For example, Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome, which created the European Community (EC) – the forerunner of the European Union – required each member state to assure “men and women should receive equal pay for equal work.” Having an overarching political and legal structure from this time enabled women to begin working for broader applications of institutional change.

Activism is what enabled the following events to occur. From the 1960s, feminist mobilization successfully coalesced into a global movement in Europe (as elsewhere). By the 1970s women were pushing for more specific laws and policies that affected the workplace, both within their own nations and at the regional (Euro) level. Legal suits brought by women contributed to their labor rights by establishing case law, as with the 1975 ruling by the European Court of Justice in *Defrenne II*, forcing European states to introduce equal pay legislation. That same year, the EC defined “equal pay,” applying it both to elements of work and to forms of remuneration (including benefits). A series of subsequent directives adopted by the EC in the 1970s and ‘80s added gender equality to employee training, social security benefits, and pensions.

The Nordic nations were among the first and most progressive in Europe to address gender equality. Norway, for example, enacted a national law on gender equality in 1979, which extended into labor and other aspects of civil society. Laws enacted in both Sweden and Norway from that period also created the “ombudsman” to monitor gender equality and human rights and to process complaints of discrimination. Today, national legislation also provides the most generous maternity and paternity benefits in Europe and mandates subsidized municipal child care centers for children up to school age. In Norway, mothers are presently given 14 weeks of leave at full pay, and both parents can share additional leave at partial pay; nursing mothers are given up to an hour a day to breast-feed their children. Under Finnish law, parents may stay at home with children up to age 3 and there is a monetary allowance for childcare. Employers are encouraged to allow parents to work part time until children are 7 years old.

Like feminists in other western nations, European feminists worked together to create a structure for institutionalizing policies and practices. The creation of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) in 1987 by 17 organizations in 12 nations gained full legal standing under the EC in 1990, establishing offices and staff in Brussels (<http://www.womenlobby.org/spip.php?rubrique43&lang=en>). The EWL provided the structural mechanism for women to push quickly for workplace measures that became required for all EU member nations to incorporate into their laws. In 1992, for example, the Pregnant Workers' Directive was adopted, setting standards for maternity leave and pay, health and safety protections, paternity leave and pay, breastfeeding breaks, etc., across Europe.

That same year, the EU Council recommended that member states ask employers to support child care. Measures adopted in 1996 and 1997 expanded parental leave and part-time work requirements for employed parents. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights adopted in 1990

makes gender equality a fundamental responsibility of all nations entering into the EU, and as amended in 2002, extends women's employment rights to promotion, vocational training, working conditions, social security and the right to return to her same (or equivalent) job after maternity leave.

One of the most far-reaching pieces of legislation was that to establish a European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). Proposed by the Swedish Minister for Gender Equality in 1999, and followed by years of planning, the EIGE (<http://www.eige.europa.eu/>) was formally created in 2010, with headquarters first in Brussels, then in Vilnius, Lithuania. The EIGE has authority to "mainstream" gender equality across the institutions of the EU nations, and also to monitor its progress. In the media sector, which I study and have had the most involvement with as regards EU activities, this includes eliminating sexist stereotypes and including more information about women in both news and entertainment media. In its monitoring role, the EIGE is presently conducting a major 28-nation study to determine whether media companies possess policies on gender equality, hire and promote women at the same rate as men, etc. But media are only one aspect of the EIGE's concerns.

We might ask whether and how all these progressive policies have affected women's employment and status in the EU.

The *Global Gender Gap Index*, published annually by the World Economic Forum, shows that in 2012, the Nordic countries are leaders in gender equality in education, high healthy life expectancies, and employment. The report (http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf) says, "patterns vary across the Nordic countries, but, on the whole, these economies have made it possible for parents to combine work and family, resulting in high female employment participation rates, more shared participation in childcare, more equitable distribution of labor at home, better work-life balance for women and men and, in some cases, a boost to declining fertility rates" (p. 22). The overall gender gap ratings among 134 nations place Iceland 1st (for the fourth consecutive year), Finland 2nd, Norway 3rd, and Sweden 4th. Ireland is 5th and Denmark 7th. Most of the remaining EU nations all rank above 20th place, though a few fall remarkably low: Bulgaria 52nd, Poland 53rd, Italy 80th, Greece 82nd. Hungary 81st, and Malta 88th. Canada and the United States placed 21st and 22nd, respectively, with the U.S. ranking dropping 5 positions below 2011 (pp. 22-3).

While these are the overall rankings that take a range of elements in well-being into consideration, the report for working women is less rosy. Denmark drops to 31st in wage equality, Ireland to 12th, Finland drops to 15th, Norway to 21st, and Sweden to 49th. Canada and the United States placed 35th and 61st, respectively in the wage equality category. It bears noting that while neoliberalism has invaded Canadian society since the 1980s, much as it has the rest of the world, the nation has been able to hang onto most of its pro-social democracy policies. Within that political-economy, Canada's women's movement was able to institutionalize laws and policies on gender equality that have remained intact.

There are three big lessons to be taken by women in the United States from this brief comparison of women's labor and other rights in Europe and North America. The first is that women would be wise to be bolder in our political visions, thinking more like social democrats (or rather

democratic socialists, as we call ourselves in the US) to achieve a progressive legal framework for laws and policies governing labor and other rights. The second is to consider how to leverage more power, particularly in the workplace, by seeking leadership positions within labor unions. As I will explore in a future commentary, unions have not historically or presently always been the friend of working women, but there is potential for structural intervention by unions that can and should be serving women well. Third is to recognize that laws and policies alone will not stamp out the deeply imbedded (and unfortunately pretty universal) reality of male dominance. Beyond the legislatures and courts, this deeper malady has to be addressed in institutions where moral and attitudinal systems emerge: families, religions, schools, and the ever present cultural industries. I will also address this in future commentaries.

The International Labor Day Is Celebrated May 1

A Washington Socialist Report

On Tuesday, May 1st, a large contingent of DSAers participated in the largest May Day celebration the national capital has seen in years.

Around 15 DC-DSA members of all ages gathered at Meridian Hill Park (often known by the Left as Malcolm X Park) in the early evening. There was a real Maypole, and a pageant of people dressed up in costume recited speeches from long-gone May Days. There was also a performance of the *Internationale* by the Dc Labor Chorus.

The contingent of several hundred leftists marched east a few blocks to 14th Street and then south on 14th, ending at the White House.

All in all, it was a worthwhile revival of a once-proud tradition of celebrating May Day (the real Labor Day) on the left.