

*The Washington Socialist*  
Articles from December 2013 Issue  
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[The December Washington Socialist: Our Inequality Issues High on Public's Agenda](#)

Tuesday, December 3rd, 2013



**Welcome to the December 2013 issue of the *Washington Socialist***  
*(Meeting dates and a notice*  
*at the foot of this column...)*

Having just endured what has come to be called Black Friday (and is morphing into Bleak Thanksgiving), we note with mixed feelings that some of our core concerns as socialists have risen to high levels of public attention – because the news is so bad. Our issues – joblessness and underemployment, a low-wage corporate regime, public revulsion at the moribund federal minimum wage and its visible consequences, and health implications of the lack of paid sick leave in local jurisdictions – are out front, for now. Whether they will stay in the public eye is at least to some extent dependent on the readers of this newsletter. The public's awareness of these issues has been driven by courageous workers at the bottom of the wage scale – at Walmart, at fast-food outlets and other bottom feeders that combine low wages with sub-fulltime hours to extract the cheapest of labor – who have pushed back against their conditions. Social media and some mainstream media coverage have raised the salience of these efforts. And local and state governments here and around the country are [taking action](#) to raise minimum wages in the pathetic absence of any Congressional willingness to raise the federal minimum of \$7.25 an hour.

In suburban Maryland and the District, a regional effort is nearing fruition.

Montgomery and Prince George's counties have passed minimum wage bills that will raise the minimum in stages to \$11.50 per hour by 2017. The D.C. Council is scheduled to vote on a companion measure Tuesday, Dec. 3. That's after our press time, but we'll update it on the website. Lead sponsors Marc Elrich on the Montgomery Council and Prince George's council chairwoman Andrea Harrison may both have to fend off veto threats from their respective county executives, but both bills were supported by veto-proof majorities at the time of their passage.

According to the weekly *Gazette*, "Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) has said he plans to make a minimum wage increase a priority and Maryland is expected take up a bill in the 2014 session to raise the statewide minimum wage to \$10.10." Local sponsors for the bill are not clear yet; last year Del. Aisha Braveboy of Prince Georges' 25<sup>th</sup> District was a co-sponsor of the version that failed but this year she has declared a run for state Attorney General.

Progressive Maryland, a union-allied group, published [results](#) Nov. 12 of a poll showing 83% of Marylanders polled favored raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour. The federal \$7.25 wage currently applies in the Free State.

Maryland's legislature will also see a return of a [paid sick leave measure](#) that failed in the last session. It would allow the state's 700,000 workers not now covered by sick leave policy to earn paid sick days. A campaign for paid sick leave in the District is also being pursued by the alt-labor Restaurant Opportunity Council. For many low-wage workers an unpaid day off for illness or a child's illness risks missing rent or utility payments – not to mention being fired.

Many other states and local governments [have recently passed, or are considering](#), measures to raise jurisdictional minimum wages well above the federal minimum. Black Friday saw many actions in support of Walmart and other low-wage workers as they pushed for higher wages and protested management attempts to punish or fire workers who participated in organizing activities – a charge that the National Labor

Relations Board [has preliminarily upheld](#) against Walmart.

Progressive activists should not pass up the chance, even in the holiday season, to support and engage with these and other efforts. [Jobs with Justice](#), an organization with which DCDSA works closely, has frequent updates on them. Opportunity is knocking.

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As we often remind you, this is the monthly email newsletter of the Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America, a local of Democratic Socialists of America, the nation's largest socialist organization.

DSA's membership meeting this month is a Holiday Party on Saturday, December 14<sup>th</sup> at 12:00 PM at [Rosemary's Thyme](#) 1801 18<sup>th</sup> St. NW at S Street in D.C. There will be no free food... order up on your own. Nor will there be an agenda. But there will be freely flowing conversation. Bring interested friends. You can RSVP on our [meetup site](#).

**Socialist Scope** – Readers of *The Washington Socialist* are of course encouraged to forward their email copies to friends who might be interested – and you don't have to be a DSA member to receive the newsletter every month. You and anyone else can, of course, read all these articles directly on the [dsadc.org](#) website, and individual article addresses can be cut-and-pasted into a friend's email if you see a specific article with appeal. The Metro DC DSA local welcomes the interested or the just plain curious to our website, our [Meetup site](#) (for the latest events notifications) and our [Facebook page](#).

We invite readers to contribute shorter material for “**Socialist Takeaways.**”

Here's one: a notice soliciting possible participation and action in Montgomery from member David Steigler:

“Let's test the theory that 50 united people can make a difference in public policy! I wish to found a new local Ralph Nader style citizens' advocacy group in Montgomery County with the purpose of keeping Congress accountable to the American people,

instead of to huge corporations, the military-industrial complex, and the wealthy as it now does. We would attempt to influence Congress by petitions, phone calls, and personal visits. I wish to advocate on a wide spectrum of progressive issues, including limiting government surveillance, civil liberties, civil rights, LGBT rights, sex trafficking, anti-war, more funding for social services like Medicare, Food Stamps (SNAP) and Social Security, prison reform, end the death penalty, anti-drug war, homelessness, and humane treatment of animals in factory farms, and limiting the influence of undemocratic institutions in public policy. Other issues may be included later. Please agree on most of these issues before joining. The purpose of the group is to take action, and not debate the issues endlessly. I will try to reach close to consensus on the issues, and responsibilities will be shared.

“Please respond to me at [cause@gmx.com](mailto:cause@gmx.com), or call me at [301-461-6174](tel:301-461-6174) after 10 am, or at the Democratic Socialist meetup site.”

**Be a participant.**

[Building trust, defending rights](#)

Sunday, December 1st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> December 2013**

*By Kurt Stand*

Congressional action and inaction last year – part of a right-wing/corporate assault on democratic rights – victimized millions via the sequester and the government shutdown, through budget cuts that hurt the neediest and tax breaks that help the wealthiest. And among those most hurt by such action/inaction have been immigrants, millions of whom are forced to live in a shadow world because Congress has refused to pass just and comprehensive immigration reform legislation, as well as because of federal and local enforcement of unjust laws that deem categories of people living in the country as “illegals.” These laws are and should be seen as unjust like those segregation laws that defined African Americans as being second-class citizens.

Difficulty in making progress nationally has therefore pushed the struggle to the states – and there progress has been made in Maryland. . Last year, state legislators passed the Dream Act, enabling children of immigrants – many who have spent virtually their whole life in the U.S. – to attend college. This important measure opened up opportunities, the chance for a

future, for many whose hopes up til then had been denied. Nonetheless that step alone didn't fully legalize their status or the status of their family members; the danger of being subject to unfair and unjust treatment under the law, including the danger of deportation, remains. Thus the battle for immigrant rights in the state has taken a new direction. Prince George's County State Senator Victor Ramirez (D-47<sup>th</sup>) – with support from Casa de Maryland, SEIU, and the ACLU – is proposing the “Maryland Trust Act,” legislation that would prohibit local police from holding immigrants for transfer to federal immigration unless they have been charged or convicted of felonies.

This legislation is designed to establish community trust in law enforcement, trust impossible when something as simple as a traffic ticket can lead to someone's deportation, splitting families, taking livelihoods, creating fear. Such a measure is an assertion of state authority designed to *protect* civil liberties, and stands in direct opposition to state measures of voter suppression and civil rights abuses directed at African Americans in states like Alabama, North Carolina and Texas – states also at the forefront of targeting and harassing immigrants. Absent such laws, local police can be used by right-wing forces to disrupt community organizing, and can be and have been used by business interests to try and undermine union organizing drives. The past two decades have seen numerous instances of collusion between local police and immigration police to arrest and deport workers who are raising their voices in packinghouse and other industries.

Ramirez's bill is modeled on a similar measure signed into law last month in California and is based on research and policy proposals developed by the ACLU and presented in the report “Restoring Trust: How Immigration Detainers in Maryland Undermine Public Safety Through Unnecessary Enforcement.” According to a “Maryland Juice” post, key findings in the ACLU report include:

- Most individuals held on an immigration detainer in Maryland are charged only with traffic violations or minor misdemeanor offenses.
- The overwhelming majority of people targeted by immigration detainers in Maryland are Latino.
- Immigration detainers undermine public safety and community trust in local law enforcement by entangling local authorities in federal immigration enforcement.
- Immigration detainers are purely voluntary requests that impose costs on local jurisdictions, and those costs are not reimbursed by the federal government.
- Several states, counties, and cities across the United States have taken steps to stop detaining individuals based solely on immigration detainer requests.

If the bill is passed it will be a step toward equalization of rights between communities. Another such initiative is taking place now in the on-going labor/community legislative drive to increase the minimum wage in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties in Maryland and in Washington DC, in order to create a regional minimum wage of \$11.50 per hour, indexed to inflation. The idea behind pushing the same bill in all three jurisdictions is to create a common front so that lower wages in one area are not used to push down wages in other areas. And indexing the gains to inflation means that today's progress won't be lost each time the local cost of living rises. Absent that, a full-time worker with two children has a standard of living at or

below the poverty level, making any path out of that poverty far more difficult.

Initiatives such as these won't substitute for needed federal action, but they are important stepping stones toward that end. Victory, however, will not come easily — as seen in Washington DC where Walmart used its economic power to blackmail the city and force a rollback of proposed wage increases that had been easily passed by the City Council. And, as comments on Ramirez' legislation indicates, his bill will be fought by demagogic appeals to fear and hatred, by the effort to blame our country's economic distress on those without rights so that those with power are held unaccountable. Yet the progress made in Maryland last year is a sign that these victories can be won — and each such victory can provide a basis to further social and economic equality and thereby fight back against corporate power's attempts to render democratic rights meaningless.

Sources:

Immigration Bill:

“Maryland bill would limit local immigration policing,” AP, *Frederick News Post*,  
(<http://www.fredericknewspost.com/content/tncms/live/2>),  
November 19, 2013

**“ACLU Report Details How Immigration Detainers in Maryland Undermine Public Safety Through Unnecessary Enforcement,”** ACLU Press Release, Juice #6, 11/22/13, *Maryland Juice: Advance Justice Through Information* (David Moon)  
(<http://www.marylandjuice.com/2013/11/juice-kagan-vs-simmons-for-d17-senate.html#sthash.NvT2A7bU.dpuf>)

Minimum Wage Bill:

“ACT NOW: One Vote Needed to Pass Montgomery County Minimum Wage, Progressive Neighbors MD, Press Release, 11/23/13 ([pn4change@gmail.com](mailto:pn4change@gmail.com))

Resolution # 11 “Minimum Wage, Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO, 10/26/13  
(<http://md.aflcio.org/mddcstatefed/index.cfm?action=cat&categoryID=23a00fdb-ef0b-4eba-9e4f-3355d6d977b2>)

[Good Reads: Best articles for December](#)

Saturday, November 30th, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <>December 2013**

*Some of the best articles (linkable, that is) we (and you) have run across since the last issue:*

Fran Piven and Fred Block review the interplay of inequality and the Clinton-legacy welfare programs (plus some that are even older) in an article from DISSENT. They couch it as a letter to Hillary Clinton...

<http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/letter-to-hillary-clinton-lets-talk-about-poverty>

Recently discussion took place among some local members about the value of the Working Families Party, which is strongest in New York state and those other areas where fusion voting (candidates listed on more than one ballot line) is legal. Here, via *Jacobin*, is some further grist for the mill:

<http://jacobinmag.com/2013/11/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-working-families-party/>

Here's a slightly wonkish econ piece by a Bush economic advisor outlining some good elements of the Dodd-Frank law and some places to enhance it. It's especially interesting on changes brought by Dodd-Frank that could improve the fairness of the future unthinkable – the next “too big to fail” bailout.

<http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/29/reducing-the-impact-of-too-big-to-fail/?hp>

The NYT and WaPo had same-day articles on the impetus behind local and regional minimum-wage increase attempts.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/29/business/on-registers-other-side-little-money-to-spend.html?hp>

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/push-for-minimum-wage-hike-led-by-localities-democrats/2013/11/28/5b2c7dc4-5795-11e3-8304-caf30787c0a9\\_story.html?hpid=z1](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/push-for-minimum-wage-hike-led-by-localities-democrats/2013/11/28/5b2c7dc4-5795-11e3-8304-caf30787c0a9_story.html?hpid=z1)

And here's one from AlterNet, more polemical, by Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers:

<http://www.alternet.org/economy/corporate-elites-are-witnessing-growing-wave-resistance-walmartization-our-economy?akid=11202.312991.TsqJQw&rd=1&src=newsletter930687&t=9>

**Send us your nominees for “Good Reads” – to [woodlanham@gmail.com](mailto:woodlanham@gmail.com)**

How the TARP Program for Banks Was Sold & How It Really Worked — Under Bush & Obama

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

*By Andy Feeney*

Book review of *Bailout: An Inside Account of How Washington Abandoned Main Street While Rescuing Wall Street*, by Neil Barofsky, former Special Inspector General in Charge of Oversight of TARP. (New York: Free Press, 2012)

In October 2008, Neil Barofsky was an aggressive young prosecutor working for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Manhattan on mortgage-related financial fraud. A lifelong Democrat, he was surprised when his Republican boss persuaded the Bush administration to hire him as Special Inspector General for the newly created Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP), which then-Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson had hastily cobbled together to avert the overall collapse of a tottering U.S. financial system.

In *Bailout*, his memoir of attempting to provide anti-fraud oversight for TARP, Barofsky provides the reader with a lively anecdotal account of how TARP evolved and functioned, first under the outgoing Bush White House and then under Obama's team.

In telling the tale, Barofsky provides informative vignettes of – among many others— Neel Kashkari, the 35-year-old former Goldman Sachs vice president chosen to administer the new bailout program by Bush Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson, and Herb Allison, a courtly 65-year-old financial industry veteran who was tapped by Obama's new Treasury chief Tim Geithner to run TARP after Kashkari's departure. Fascinating glimpses of other well-known Washington personalities also are scattered through the book, giving us insights into political players like Barney Frank, Elizabeth Warren, conservative Republican senator Charles Grassley, Alabama's Sen. Richard Shelby, and many others.

Beyond the trove of collected personality profiles that Barofsky furnishes in this memoir, however, is one big and uncomfortable truth: in Barofsky's estimation, TARP never worked well – or to be more accurate, it worked for some of the big banks, but it never delivered what its proponents and administrators had promised it would also deliver: relief for millions of heavily indebted homeowners whose mortgages were at risk of foreclosure in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

Instead, Barofsky writes, first the Bush Treasury Department and then the Obama team devised scheme after scheme to employ hundreds of billions of dollars in taxpayer funds to bail out the biggest US banks that had helped to create runaway speculation in mortgage-backed securities, and that profited heavily from the trend until it exploded. Both administrations also resisted Barofsky's proposals for anti-fraud controls on the TARP outlays, thus making it extremely difficult for him to do his job.

In response to his proposals, Barofsky reports of one tense meeting with the Bush team for TARP, "Kashkari suggested that requiring banks to report on their use of funds could actually



destroy ... TARP and perhaps, as a result, the entire banking system. He accused us of being politically motivated or just plain stupid.”

Despite Barofsky’s hopes, Obama’s new Treasury team, featuring Geithner and Allison, failed to bring much improvement over Kashkari and the Republicans. Under Democratic as well as under Republican auspices, the bailout program continued to shovel huge sums of money in the direction of the bankers, with minimal if any oversight from the Special Inspector General’s office.

When Geithner’s Treasury Department, which by now was attempting to relabel the TARP program as the Financial Stability Plan, unveiled a huge new scheme for helping endangered mortgage holders as well as the financial industry – a plan that Geithner called the Public Private Investment Program (PPIP) — Barofsky and his staff were stunned by the potential financial holes and loopholes in it.

“The fraud risks jumped out at us,” he writes. “Although it was going to be funded overwhelmingly with taxpayer dollars, PPIP had been designed by Wall Street, for Wall Street. We only later learned, in connection with one of our audits, that at the same time that Treasury had been keeping us in the dark, it had been working on the design of the program with ... two of the giant investment houses that would later manage funds under the program and stand to profit from it the most.”

Yet – at least according to Barofsky’s account – Geithner and other Treasury Department officials stoutly resisted his attempts as Special IG to prevent serious abuse of the program. As Barofsky fought back against his Treasury Department superiors by using his power as an auditor to issue a series of well-publicized reports outlining potential problems with the ongoing bailout efforts, he found himself being attacked in the *Wall Street Journal* by anonymous Treasury officials who accused him of trying to scare bankers away from the financial rescue package. Late in his career as Special Inspector General for TARP, he was attacked by name by a White House press official, an Obama appointee, for allegedly undermining the program.

Why was there such bipartisan pushback against efforts to provide financial oversight of TARP and its successor programs? Why did those administering the programs repeatedly sacrifice the interests of homeowners facing foreclosure while focusing obsessively on helping the banks, as Barofsky reports they did?

*Bailout* offers an intriguing series of insights as to what may have motivated the Republicans and Democrats who administered TARP. To start with, Barofsky strongly suggests, the pressures of electoral politics in an off-year Congressional election year probably explained some of the hits that the TARP Special Inspector General’s office took from the Obama team in 2010.

The added fact – much lamented by the political left at the time — that both the Bush administration and the Obama White House filled high-ranking economic policy positions in Washington with financial veterans of the same professional circles on Wall Street that had helped to create the near-financial collapse of 2008 in the first place was, in Barofsky’s view, another key factor.

Such Treasury appointees as Paulson, Kashkari, Geithner and Allison all had the same or similar backgrounds as the banking officials they were overseeing, and Barofsky thinks they simply could not imagine that their old colleagues – who had previously driven the global financial system to the brink of the abyss – might somehow lack the integrity or the genius to save it.

But one far more basic and highly disquieting fact about TARP as Barofsky portrays it is that the program was sold under false pretenses from the start. Hank Paulson, after previously denying that there was anything seriously wrong with the US financial sector, rolled out a proposed \$700 billion TARP program in the fall of 2008 in hopes of preventing a total failure of the banks.

Paulson promoted his original scheme as a way to relieve endangered homeowners as well as banks by using TARP's unprecedented budget to buy up "toxic" mortgages and remove them from the bankers' books, Barofsky notes. Some progressive Congressional Democrats reluctantly supported the plan for that reason. But by the time Congress finally approved the program, Paulson had already decided his original scheme would be too slow to provide the relief needed, and he therefore carved a \$250 billion sub-program out of the original \$700 plan to provide immediate infusions of cash to several of the biggest banks, without doing anything about their toxic mortgages.

When Congress howled in protest, Paulson insisted that the banks getting the money were healthy, and that the new funds would help spur them into lending money and restarting economic growth. But Paulson himself later admitted to him, according to Barofsky, that at least two of the banks getting the CPP money were believed ready to collapse, and as it turned out, the banks getting relief were still too uncertain about the economy's health to lend out the funds they'd been given. Instead, they sat on them, for the sake of their own security, and the benefits to the economy were limited.

CPP and in a larger sense TARP, in short, were designed by Paulson to inject huge amounts of government money into the financial sector to prevent immediate economic Armageddon, and the assurances given to Congress and the public about relief for homeowners were just window dressing for this fact. This suggests that Kashkari may have been completely sincere in saying that Barofsky's proposed anti-fraud safeguards for the bailout fund might have wrecked the entire financial sector. Treasury officials wanted to rescue the banks, period, without drawing anyone's attention to their perilously fragile condition, Barofsky concludes; and naturally, they hated the idea of the Special Inspector General's office drawing public attention to this.

Geithner apparently didn't confide in Barofsky as Paulson allegedly did. But judging from *Bailout's* narrative of the Geithner years, the Obama Treasury Department seems to have been motivated by the same fear of total collapse that apparently motivated Paulson and Kashkari.

The root problem, Barofsky argues late in this book, is that the US financial sector in 2008 really was dominated by a few giant banks and other financial institutions that were so entwined with one another and with other parts of the financial industry that they had become "too big to fail," and both Bush Republicans and Obama Democrats deemed it urgently important to throw money at them to prevent that potential disaster – but without being candid with the voters or underwater homeowners that this was the government's aim.

Since 2008 and the passage of the Dodd-Frank financial reform bill, as Barofsky and many other commentators have noted, the largest banks have gotten even larger and more central to the financial sector than they were at the time of the last financial collapse. What's more, the health of our capitalist U.S. economy depends in large part on private investors' – whether wealthy individuals or large institutions— having the confidence (what Keynes once termed the “animal spirits”) to risk large sums on making new investments in production, distribution and exchange.

Having a financially fragile banking system – and what's worse, having smart and aggressive regulatory officials from the government, like Barofsky in his tenure – publicly commenting on the system's weakness is potentially fatal to investor confidence, as Barofsky comes close to admitting in this memoir.

What this suggests to many socialists, anyway, is that until we devise a somewhat different economic system with somewhat different arrangements for insuring investment and re-investment in the real economy, we can probably count on bailouts of this ilk being repeated, and Treasury officials lying to the public as this occurs.

### [Making It Possible NOT to Become an Immigrant](#)

Sunday, December 1st, 2013

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

*By Bill Mosley*

Review of *The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration* by David Bacon. Beacon Press, Boston, 2013.

The debate over U.S. immigration policy has largely become a question over what to do about immigrants already in the United States. Smooth their path to citizenship? Give them green cards and enroll them in guest-worker programs? Throw them out? Send them to prison?

To assume that large numbers of people from abroad will always clamor to enter the United States, legally or not, unfortunately casts the debate in terms favorable to the anti-immigrant right. Charismatic xenophobes such as Fox TV commentator Lou Dobbs and Maricopa County, Ariz., Sheriff Joe Arpaio eagerly raise the specter of foreign hordes at the gates – or inside the gates – aiming to steal our jobs and corrupt our culture while refusing to learn English. Even liberals and the left tend to focus on legalization and a path to citizenship, rather on the more fundamental question – why do so many people from Mexico and other countries come to the United States in the first place?

Labor journalist and former union organizer David Bacon provides a necessary corrective to the notion of the inevitability of large-scale immigration with his new book *The Right to Stay*

*Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration.* The book could be viewed as Part II of Bacon's dissection of U.S. immigration policy, following 2008's *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants*.

In his latest book, Bacon supplements his own reportage and analysis with narratives by migrants themselves, describing in their own words their experiences in the United States – why they left Mexico, their exploitation and mistreatment by their employers, and their attempts to fight back. Bacon relayed some of these stories in a talk last October at Democratic Socialists of America's national convention in Oakland, Calif.

In both of his books, Bacon shows why so many Mexicans and persons of other nationalities are desperately trying to enter the United States – not from the lure of living in “the land of the free,” but because globalization and U.S. corporate priorities are driving them here. And while Bacon largely examines migration of Mexicans, his analysis also could apply to many of the countries and regions that are the source of large numbers of migrants, especially Central America and Asia. Yet his focus on Mexico allows him to more sharply illustrate the impact of globalization on the country that is by far the source of the greatest number of migrants – both documented and not – to the United States.

In both books, Bacon skillfully connects the dots between neoliberal trade policy and the desperation that drives people from Mexico to the United States. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which took effect in 1994, broke down trade barriers between the United States, Canada and Mexico. This allowed cheap, industrially produced U.S. agricultural products – notably corn – to flood the Mexican market, causing prices to plummet below the level that would allow Mexican farmers to make a profit. This drove countless Mexican farmers off the land to seek work elsewhere. Many migrated within Mexico, but many others crossed the border to the United States where certain kinds of jobs were plentiful – seasonal agricultural jobs or work in meat-processing factories lured many of them. Although many of these jobs were difficult and dangerous, and almost all of them paid below a living wage for a U.S. worker, the difference between the cost of living in the United States and Mexico made it possible for Mexican migrant workers to subsist while sending part of their pay back to their families south of the border. This suited the Mexican government, because the remittances – in excess of \$20 billion annually — were a valuable source of income, and encouraged successive Mexican governments to collaborate with U.S. neoliberal trade policy.

U.S. corporations welcomed the migrants because they were willing to work cheap – especially undocumented immigrants, who were trying to stay under the radar of U.S. immigration authorities and therefore tended to be reluctant to fight back against unjust treatment. And there has been plenty of that: Bacon documents rampant abuses faced by migrant workers, such as wage theft, barely habitable housing, exposure to toxic pesticides, sexual assaults on female workers and much more.

Bacon makes sense of the seeming contradiction of U.S. corporations eagerly exploiting desperate migrant workers while the U.S. government, in the form of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), hunts them down for deportation or even imprisonment. In fact, the companies and ICE work hand in glove: When migrant workers become too assertive in

protesting brutal conditions or, especially, when they become so bold as to try to organize a union, the employer tips off ICE, which then rushes in with arrests and deportation orders – a practice that has accelerated during the Obama administration. The company then hires a new batch of undocumented workers and starts afresh.

Even under such oppressive conditions, a surprisingly large number of migrants have attempted to speak up or fight back. In Los Angeles, Mexican migrant workers became leaders of International Longshore and Warehouse Union and United Electrical Workers locals. Sometimes workers fired for lack of documents take to the streets, as did large numbers of San Francisco janitors in 2010, although their protests failed to win them back their jobs. Bacon also illustrates the growth of solidarity between unions on both sides of the border with the growing recognition that U.S. and Mexican workers face a common struggle.

Some employers, mostly bigger companies that hire large numbers of non-citizens, would prefer an expanded guest-worker program rather than rely on undocumented workers – in other words, a return to the *bracero* program that brought large numbers of Mexican workers to the United States from the 1940s to the 1960s. These workers, initially imported to compensate for worker shortages during World War II, came to be used regularly by companies to replace striking workers and break unions. The *bracero* program also was characterized by abusive treatment of the workers, and was not so different from today's program that provides a limited number of temporary visas for foreign workers who are recruited by specific companies. These companies seek a more "managed" form of immigration, one that provides them with a low-cost, docile workforce without the threat of ICE raids. Smaller employers, however, tend to prefer undocumented workers, who will work cheaper and be even less likely to speak up against unfair treatment.

Employers are supposedly subject to sanctions for knowingly hiring undocumented immigrants. But, as Bacon shows, companies are hardly ever penalized for the practice. ICE will frequently notify a company that many of their employees have Social Security numbers that do not match their names, a sign that the numbers may be fictitious or "borrowed" from real cardholders and therefore being used by undocumented immigrants. However, this only encourages the company to fire the suspect workers, and there are seldom further repercussions for the employer – but for the employee, the result is unemployment and possibly worse.

Bacon argues that the immigration debate must emphasize reducing the need for people to leave their communities in the first place. Organizations such as the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations have led strikes and other protests, largely in the poorer regions of southern Mexico, demanding alleviation of the conditions that drive people out of their communities in order to survive.

“Without addressing the sources of the displacement that pushes people into the guest worker stream, recommendations for better management assume an inherent desire on the part of workers to come to the United States,” Bacon writes.

A major step in halting forced migration, Bacon asserts, would be to renegotiate NAFTA and other trade agreements that are the cause of displacement. Progressives should support

policies that strengthen local economies in Mexico, making them more self-sufficient and less subject to the vicissitudes of the global economy.

Canceling or reducing Mexico's foreign debt would go a long way to making unnecessary the remittances by Mexican workers in the United States. Remittances account for 2 percent of Mexico's GDP, but these are largely swallowed by the country's debt payments, which are 3 percent of GDP. Without the debt, the payments could be used for local development projects that in time would make the remittances unnecessary.

Another part of the solution must be better treatment of all migrants in the United States. One way to make guest-worker programs less oppressive, Bacon argues, would be to allow holders of work permits to seek employment anywhere they wish, rather than have their right to be in the United States tied to employment with a specific company. The current system is a form of indentured servitude in which the company can threaten employees not only with firing but almost-certain deportation if they become too assertive.

A welcome challenge to the criminalization of migrants was the AFL-CIO's reversal of its stance on immigration. Once concerned about migrants as competitors for their members' jobs, in 1999 the federation "called for the repeal of employee sanctions, legalization of the undocumented, and enforcing labor rights for all workers," Bacon writes. In addition, last year President Obama told ICE to stop deporting young people who were brought to the United States as children if they were attending or had graduated from school or served in the military – although he was unsuccessful in persuading Congress from passing the Dream Act, meaning that their ability to remain here is subject to the whim of whomever occupies the White House.

Migrant activists and their allies amplified their demands by participating in the 2011 Occupy protests and by protesting the attacks the same year against Wisconsin public-sector workers. In communities such as Seattle, San Diego and Oakland, Calif., the Occupy movement's tactics were inspired by the Mexican tradition of the *planton*, an encampment in a public square designed to focus public attention on a particular demand or injustice. In Wisconsin, Bacon writes, the message of migrants and U.S. citizens alike was: "We all work, we all contribute to our communities and we all have the right to a job, a union and a decent life."

Yet a sensible, just solution to the immigration crisis is contrary to corporate interests and those of their cronies in both the U.S. and Mexican governments. It will take a vocal, sophisticated movement on both sides of the border to force the "right to stay home" onto the agenda of policymakers. That movement is growing in Mexico, and it needs more allies north of the border. Yet David Bacon has done his part in providing that movement with facts, ideas and stories that will help it succeed.

[Palgrave Handbook of Women in Journalism examines gender in the neoliberal newsroom](#)

Sunday, December 1st, 2013

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

By Carolyn M. Byerly

First, the back story.

It's a fact that more and more of the world's people are getting their news online these days, but the traditional news media – increasingly called the “legacy media” – remain the main employers of both print and electronic journalists. Add to this another fact: Those media still actively discriminate against their women employees the world over.

But how bad is it, and how does it differ from nation to nation?

In 2008, I was asked by the International Women's Media Foundation to oversee a global study of women's employment in the traditional news companies to answer these questions. The project would take over my academic life for several years, culminate in more statistical data than anyone would ever use, and produce two publications – a technical report and an academic text. This was not done singlehandedly – I had a small budget that was used to secure and pay a team of 160 researchers in 59 nations (whom I would also supervise – that was fun). The project would encompass interviews with executives at 522 companies (newspapers, TV & radio stations). The media we surveyed published or broadcast in nearly 40 different languages; however, completed questionnaires were submitted to me in English, Spanish and French. After months of data entry and fussing with numbers (hooray for statisticians), I wrote (and IWMF published) the 400-page technical report in 2011 (See *Global Report on the Status of Women in News Media*, downloadable free at [www.iwmf.org](http://www.iwmf.org)).

What the study found will be summarized shortly.

But now the current story:

In late October, the second publication, *The Palgrave International Handbook of Women and Journalism*, came into print. It included 29 of the original 59 nations, with most chapters written by the original researchers for those nations. (See details on the book at <http://www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?pid=634271>)

Did I mention looking for a publisher? It turns out that book publishing has gone through the same conglomeration process as other media (all over the world), and few academic publishers in the social sciences want to publish real research (which now goes almost exclusively to journals). Publishers have shifted to textbooks, mostly, which are more lucrative. The UK-based Palgrave Macmillan Company is one of few that still recognizes the value of original work and its editors were excited about the project from the outset.

What distinguishes the *Palgrave Handbook* from its predecessor *Global Report* is that the findings for each of the 29 nations are discussed in greater detail, within a context of history, politics, media-government relations, culture and women's status. I authored four chapters, including one on feminist political economy of news that makes an effort at situating women in the neoliberalized (is that a word?) news industry. The book is arguably the biggest effort to date to determine where women fit into the newsmaking apparatus of companies across the world. While not comprehensive (we did not even set out to gather data on all companies), it is representative – and revealing.

When aggregated, the data from those original 59 nations show women beginning to do quite well within the profession at the reporting ranks, and, in some nations, even in the lower rungs of newsroom management. But in nearly ALL nations, there is a clear glass ceiling, with men dominating in top management and governance roles of traditional media companies. Women are also marginalized in technical jobs, e.g., camera work and production.

There are some surprises. Women journalists seem to fare best in the former communist nations of Eastern Europe, where the goal was to educate women for the workforce. Women are near parity with men and in some nations (e.g., Russia) even surpass them in number. Why? Journalism became feminized during the Soviet-era news industry, which was both heavily oriented to state propaganda and also low paid. After the Berlin Wall came down, and those nations moved toward democracy, women were already in place in those newsrooms and have retained their jobs. Authors of these nations, however, are quick to point out that sexism still abounds in the news and other employment sectors and across the broader society.

Women journalists also fare well in the Nordic nations, where the Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish authors noted “gender equality is a public consensus” and laws for several decades provide the framework for women's advancement professionally. It also helps that these nations have extremely generous maternity and paternity benefits, as well as community based public daycare centers.

By contrast, in Japan, men outnumber women 7:1 in news companies. In Bangladesh, India and Jordan, the ratio is 5:1, and in Lebanon, 2:1. Here in the USA, women are inching toward parity with men in reporting roles and even in middle management (e.g., senior editors), but not so in the higher roles of decision making. The glass-ceiling is firmly in place even in this nation which has experienced a more vigorous era of feminism than many others.

Leftists are likely to dismiss traditional news media as sources of the truth; however, there is no way to dismiss those them as workplaces. Newsrooms have greatly (also gravely) been affected by major structural shifts these last two decades, the most obvious two being digital convergence and a rapid process of conglomeration. Often overlooked are the gendered dimensions of these events, and so it is significant that the majority of the authors in the *Palgrave Handbook* talked about media conglomeration and its impact on women journalists in their countries (both developed and developing). Some examples are layoffs, the switch from full to part-time (or freelance) positions, and a level of emotional tension on the job produced by uncertainty. Women feel these pinches disproportionately within this occupation, as they do in others, and it falls to leftist feminist researchers to examine these lest they be ignored.



## [Virginia Elections 2013: Dems slip by amid GOP civil war](#)

Sunday, December 1st, 2013

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

*By Daniel C. Adkins*

The 2013 Virginia elections were unique in that it was the Democrats against the Tea Party. The Democrats seem to have won the state-wide offices although the Attorney General race is headed for a recount. The Tea Party's war on women's health aided the Democrats, as women voted in larger numbers for Democrats. The government shut-down also aided the Democrats by pissing off federal workers, their contractors, and the workers and businesses that support them.

The race was won partly because a civil war is starting in the Republican Party. There was much criticism of the Republicans' having a convention to choose their statewide slate. This tactic favors the extremists. Some business-oriented Republicans stopped funding their party and supported the Democrats. In other parts of the US, business-oriented Republicans are supporting candidates in primaries for the first time in order to minimize the Tea Party effect and get electable candidates. Demographic changes aid the Democrats and Asian-Virginians made appearances in several races.

However, the multi-cultural environment of Northern Virginia and cities has not spread to southern Virginia. Given the Republican gerrymandering and the slowness of demographic change, we should not count the Tea Party out anytime soon.

Sometimes we question the time spent on elections. However, protecting the poor, workers, the environment, and stopping the war on women are important goals. Also there is an opportunity to organize our neighborhoods, condos, and apartments. A useful tactic we can do today is to get our apartment building or condos to post our polling places on our apartment websites. With the natural turnover of residents, it helps to get our allies to vote to the maximum extent. Also, in aiding elections we have a chance to meet politically committed people. Now is a time that many Democrats are wondering about what role their party has played in raising inequality in the US. This is still a great time for a discussion.

For specific results see Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia\\_elections,\\_2013](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_elections,_2013)