

The Washington Socialist
Articles from December 2015 Issue
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[Metro DC DSA's December 2015 Newsletter: National DSA convention in the rear-view mirror and next steps for 2016](#)

Wednesday, December 2nd, 2015



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

Our nine-member delegation returned in mid-November from the biannual national DSA convention and our recollections and responses are part of this newsletter, with more to come. But first, what's to come this month.

DSADC's DECEMBER – First up is the **DSA Book Group**, meeting Dec. 6 at the Kogod Courtyard, National Portrait Gallery at 8th and F Streets (Gallery exit of the Gallery Place metrorail station). The group meets at 3 p.m. to discuss Kristen Ghodsee's book, *The Left Side of History*. [More information](#) on our meetup page.

Our [general membership meeting](#) is Sunday, Dec. 13, 2 to 3:30 p.m. in room A-9 at Martin Luther King Jr. main library, 901 G St. NW, also Gallery Place metrorail station Gallery exit.

Watch this space (after it turns up on the website) for the latest news on our **Socialist Salon**, which would be the third Thursday, Dec. 17 – unless it is moved to accommodate holiday schedules.

As the year wanes, a [DSA Happy Hour](#) is scheduled Wednesday, Dec. 30 at 6:30 p.m. for Luna Grille, 1301 Connecticut Ave. NW

The Convention: There's a fine overall report from Atlanta's Barbara Joye in the [Democratic Left blogspace](#) on the events in Bolivar, Pa.

The strategy document, as described in our last issue, was democratically demolished and resurrected over the course of nearly two years. Its passage at the convention – under the parliamentarian's gavel of our former DC comrade Tim Sears, now of Seattle – was by acclamation. The drafting committee's final product following the sense of the convention is likely to be on the National DSA website shortly. More from our delegation...

IN THIS ISSUE:

The DC delegation's experiences and impressions of the convention include:

“Living Our Strategy:” Merrill Miller's observations about the democratic and human qualities of the convention and its people. [Read complete article](#)

Andy Feeney's observations weave the physical setting of the Antiochian Village retreat center and the business of the convention. [Read complete article](#)

One of the many substantive workshops at the convention, an evolutionary history of socialist feminism, was co-led by Carolyn Byerly of DC and Peg Strobel of Chicago. Woody Woodruff reports. [Read complete article](#)

UNCONVENTIONAL STUFF:

The attacks in Paris have brought foreign relations and security back to the headlines. Bill Mosley discusses the neoliberal world's reaction, our perspective and its evolution. [Read complete article](#) Varieties of co-ops and worker-managed enterprises are part of our emerging perspective on the "solidarity economy." Dan Adkins discusses unionized government co-ops, a longtime model that has possibilities for our future. [Read complete article](#)

BOOKS AND ARTS– REVIEWS

A documentary film on the struggles of a Honduran community to create its own health care system under the rule of a US-sanctioned right-wing coup "government" was shown in DC recently. Kurt Stand was there and tells both of the film and the participants who spoke. [Read complete article](#) Michael Moore's new movie, "Where to Invade Next?," gets an early look from Dan Adkins. [Read complete article](#)

Andrew Cockburn's scathing new book, *Kill Chain*, about high-tech warfare, is reviewed by David Richardson. [Read complete article](#)

GOOD READS – as always, a selection of web-accessible articles on the left that you may have missed. [Read complete article.](#)

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

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

["Where to Invade Next"—review of a Michael Moore film](#)

Tuesday, December 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> December 2015**

By Daniel Adkins

Michael Moore's film "Where to Invade Next" is a tongue-in-cheek look at nearly twelve other countries and their practices. Many of us would like to steal these ideas for the US. The almost

two-hour film gets a look at one dimension of life per country which is then compared to the US experience. Ironically some of their ideas came from the US but are not executed as well.

Italy was one country viewed and its attention to worker morale and vacations is remarkable. Italian workers have eight weeks of vacation time when all time-offs and holidays are counted. They seem to have equivalent productivity as the U.S. An Italian CEO talks in a way that would be considered socialist by some in the U.S. The difference in political culture slaps you in the face!

Finland often scores as having the best education system in the world and has a national law banning private schools. That is something to think about given the American experience with private schools and inequality. Also they have only twenty minutes of homework in high school. What is not covered is that Nokia's leaders could not grasp the importance of the iPhone until it smashed them. Great education does not always ensure vision by leaders.

One German experience covered is how they relate to their dark history. Plaques are placed on sidewalks marking where Jews were taken from their homes to death camps. Local artists are able to place signs noting events of Nazi history. Moore suggests how Americans might use this technique to point out slave markets, Indian massacres, and other parts of our history not always covered in textbooks.

A major critique of the film is that it would work better as a TV mini-series where you could get a deeper look at the countries' governance and culture.

"Where to Invade Next" may be coming out in the next month. It should be on the film list of democratic socialists and maybe encourage us to hear more of other countries' achievements so that we can steal them for ourselves. There is starting to be more discussion in DSA about how democratic socialism is defined and used in foreign countries. This film is a small taste but to be truly helpful we will have to delve deeper into how these countries function.

A film by Michael Moore — 110 minutes

[AFTER PARIS- THE RIGHT ROAD TO COMBATING TERRORISM](#)

Tuesday, December 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> December 2015**

By Bill Mosley

Last month's horrific terrorist attacks in Paris brought forth a swift barrage of responses, actual and proposed, from politicians in the West. France immediately took revenge on the Islamic State (known as ISIS), of which the perpetrators were presumed to be members, by bombing the Syrian city of Raqqa, the group's base of operations. Other European leaders urged the elimination of free movement within the European Union, which was one of the hallmarks of Europe's integration. Coming only months after the Charlie Hebdo massacre, it is understandable that the French in particular, and Europeans in general, were eager to do something, anything, in response.

But there seemed to be more rhetoric from American leaders than European, with U.S. politicians rushing to outdo each other on who could appear the most fearless in ensuring that a similar attack would not happen here. Republican candidates for president, not surprisingly, thumped their chests most vigorously, tying the attack to the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis, based on suspicions that some of the attackers might have attached themselves to the stream of migrants. [Religious intolerance](#) raised its ugly head, as front-runner Donald Trump called for the shuttering of mosques and, with ominous overtones of Germany in the 1930s, creating a registry of American Muslims; while Jeb Bush and Ted Cruz, trying to break out of the middle of the pack, called for allowing only Christian refugees to enter the United States. Ben Carson likened some Muslims to "rabid dogs." A stream of governors, almost all of them Republican, vowed that they would not let refugees into their states, notwithstanding that governors have no control over people moving into and out of states once they have entered the country. Lindsay Graham, the leading hawk among GOP candidates (if not a leader in any other sense), wants to see U.S. combat boots on the ground in the Middle East, the sooner the better.

Calmer heads have proposed less offensive solutions, but these voices have unfortunately been largely drowned out in the ongoing hysteria. All of the Democratic candidates for president participating in the debate the day after the attacks emphasized that any U.S. response must be in collaboration with countries in the Middle East. Bernie Sanders, for one, in his [Nov. 19 address at Georgetown University](#), said that "the fight against ISIS is a struggle for the soul of Islam, and countering violent extremism and destroying ISIS must be done primarily by Muslim nations – with the strong support of their global partners."

Sanders' caution is borne of experience. If one examines objectively the recent history of U.S. involvement in the Middle East, a pattern emerges: The more the United States intervenes, the worse things get. The 1990-91 Gulf War, while resulting in driving Iraqi troops from Kuwait, inflamed and radicalized many people in the region over U.S. troops remaining in Saudi Arabia, Islam's "holy land," after the fighting was over. This was one of the grievances cited by Osama bin Laden that motivated his organization al-Qaeda to carry out the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. Then came the disastrous 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq over false accusations that Iraq was behind the 2001 attacks and that it was manufacturing "weapons of mass destruction." The war tore Iraq apart and created the political vacuum that allowed ISIS to take root. And there is the long-standing resentment by Arab countries over unwavering U.S. support for Israel, no matter how much that country oppresses Palestinians under its occupation. For the United States, the goals of Mideast policy have been to protect Israel and keep the region's supply of oil flowing, not necessarily in that order. If that means stepping on the necks of most of the people of region, so be it.

The overreach of the West in the Middle East is a long-simmering source of resentment in Muslim lands and fuel for the growth of extremism in the region, a phenomenon that formed a backdrop of the *Cairo Trilogy* of Nobel Prize-winning Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz. This saga of a fictional Egyptian family, spanning the period between the two world wars, depicted the tensions in Egyptian society as Western values and mores encroached on the Muslim practices that had persisted for centuries. Some embraced the liberating effects of the new ways, while others, fearing a loss of control over their own society, joined Islamic organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. “Should we give up our religion in order to please foreigners?” asks a character who has embraced strict Islam as a response to creeping Western influences. Politicians who opine on how their Middle East policies would end our headaches in the region would do well to read Mahfouz before forming their half-baked opinions.

This loss of control, this encroachment of Western ways that threaten to erase tradition, has contributed to the backlash and rise of Islamic radicalism as a defense mechanism. The United States is correctly perceived as the main engine of Westernization in the Middle East. Rhetoric such as that coming from Trump, Bush and Cruz only confirms Muslim fears that the United States intends to Christianize the Islamic lands, as does the [proposal of Ohio Gov. John Kasich](#) – another GOP presidential hopeful – for a new federal agency to spread “Judeo-Christian values.” ISIS has gotten the message, and its [claim of responsibility](#) for the Paris attacks cited France as a “crusader nation” for its past air strikes against ISIS forces. But a more realistic fear is that the United States and its Western allies intend to incorporate the Mideast more firmly into the global capitalist web, converting a region more accustomed to small, family-owned business into yet another source of low-wage labor and cheap natural resources.

To be sure, there are many features of Western society that most of us would like to see spread more widely in the Middle East and other Muslim lands, including freedom of religious practice, greater democracy and – perhaps most of all – gender equality in a region where, in many places, women are virtually slaves of their husbands or fathers. Many Middle Easterners, however, see these values as inseparable from rapacious capitalism, Christianity, and looting of their wealth. When viewed this way, one can see the attraction of preserving the old ways by any means necessary.

Those who see this as a battle between peaceful, tolerant Christianity and violent, intolerant Islam have a short view of history. We are only a few centuries removed from the Crusades, the Inquisition, the religious bloodletting of the Thirty Years War and the expulsion of Jews from England and Spain; and less than a century removed from pogroms and the Holocaust – the latter of which was made possible by centuries of Christian intolerance. The ideals of freedom of thought and freedom of worship in Europe came about only after centuries of struggle and sectarian violence. The predominantly Christian countries were the colonizers, their armies accompanied by missionaries who converted natives at gunpoint. Western colonization included domination over Muslim lands, which precipitated an earlier wave of Muslim immigration to Europe – France being one of the principal destinations. The marginalization and poverty experienced these European Muslim communities have experienced have made them a breeding ground for extremist organizations.

Why does it seem (“seem” is the operative word) that there are no Christian terrorists? The answer: Christianity has been joined at the hip to the world’s most powerful armies. It is the beleaguered Muslims that feel the need to fight back. I am reminded of a story (possibly apocryphal) of Mohandas Gandhi being asked what he thought about Western civilization, to which he was said to respond, “I think it would be a good idea.”

The answer is, then, not the big boot of U.S. intervention in the region, but the exercise of soft power. Support the moderate Muslim nations that show Islam need not mean repression and dictatorship; there are too few of them but Turkey is the best example (although it is battling its own domestic Islamists). Offer friendship and assistance, not guns and bombs. And part of this assistance is not shunning the region’s refugees, but rather doing our share to offer refuge. Lead by example, not by invasion. It is the longer, harder road, but the only path to the destination of true peace.

[Convention Impressions](#)

Tuesday, December 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> December 2015**

By Andy Feeney

The best moment at this year’s DSA national convention, for me, came on the last day. The auditorium where the plenary was meeting was chilly, and I ducked out for a few minutes to get an extra sweater. When I returned to the table seating most of the Metro DC delegation, four of our younger members were engaged in vigorous exchanges with Jose and Ingrid about local organizing possibilities for the ‘We Need Bernie’ campaign. I had nothing at all to contribute, partly because I was late but mostly because the younger members, Jose and Ingrid were doing all the political work. It was a great moment.

Looking around the auditorium, I also noticed younger members from many other chapters in lively discussions about DSA’s future. Baby Boomers my age and older still made up a majority in the room, but not an overwhelming one. And I reflected that whatever achievements and failures DSA has seen since I got involved six years ago, we’ve begun to recruit a new generation of democratic socialists to succeed those who either knew Michael Harrington personally, or could have. The thought gives me hope for socialism’s future is this traditionally anti-socialist culture. Kudos to Jessie, Merrill, Sammy and Ken from Metro DC (and to Jonathan from our new Baltimore chapter) for the energy and intelligence with which they’re picking up the torch for change.

Another fine moment came during Saturday night’s customary fundraising event, which in past conventions has impressed me as a fairly grim affair in which DSA leadership tries to guilt-trip the delegates into giving more to DSA than we really want to. This year the sum donated

exceeded the leadership's target, which was very impressive. Some delegates made extremely generous pledges totaling in the hundreds of dollars; and a few made generous sustainer pledges totaling even more. But what I liked best was that Joe Schwartz, DSA's long-time political guru, dropped his customary university professor's stance and did leftwing stand-up comedy at the fundraiser to make the giving more bearable. Joe can be an implacable opponent in internal DSA political debates, but on this night he was both relaxed and funny, and I think even some of his customary political adversaries enjoyed it. Solidarity Forever! And may one-liners make us strong!

I also enjoyed the workshop on Socialist Feminism: Theory and Practice that Carolyn Byerly from our steering committee led with Peg Strobel from Chicago; it gave me a sense of what I think socialist feminists and others mean when they speak of creating a "safe space" for people who may be nervous about fitting into somebody else's agenda. I felt surprisingly safe listening to Carolyn and Peg discuss feminism, and I hope I've learned something about group process, as well as the history of the feminist movement. Also useful was a workshop on techniques for strengthening local chapters led by David Green of Detroit and Hope Adair from Atlanta.

Finally, I found it politically and personally rewarding – as well as cheap – to share a 5-man bedroom with four of my DC and Baltimore comrades. We talked late into the night and I really enjoyed the experience, despite one comrade's amazing Richter-scale snore. Even with the snore, I would happily do it again.

[CONVENTION WORKSHOP ON FEMINISM YIELDS PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVEMENT, ISSUES OF PRACTICE](#)

Tuesday, December 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> December 2015**

By Woody Woodruff

A "theory and practice" workshop on feminism in our work and in our locals at DSA's 2015 convention illuminated bright spots and persisting gendered practices in both spheres.

Led by Carolyn Byerly of the Metro DC local and Peg Strobel of the Chicago/Oak Park local, the session began with the historical development of feminist theory and practice on the left.

Strobel, an historian, outlined the varied narrative history of the "woman question" on the left, with Engels giving it more attention than Marx and examining matrilineal societies such as the Iroquois Confederation. Early socialist focus on those who sold their labor to capitalists – nearly all male – couldn't encompass the unpaid labor of women at home. Later (turn of the 19th-20th centuries) socialists diverted into the function and role of marriage, which Emma Goldman accurately identified as "an economic arrangement, an insurance pact" that routinely subordinated women. Ancillary debates about sexuality beyond the binary fused with theory that

projected mature (future) socialism as a context for deregulated love, both in parallel development, as epitomized in the work of the Russian feminist Alexandra Kollontai.

Byerly, a feminist communication scholar, recounted the growth of feminism in and out of the stream of left political development. Women, she noted, were involved in early trade union support and left parties, including the Socialist Party, and were supporters in the suffrage struggle (but there were internal fights about how suffrage and class politics intersected, or didn't). In the world war and interwar periods feminism appeared more often as lifestyle debates in the industrial West but sexual equality was advanced as law in some Communist societies. In the theory resurgence of the 1960s the class question resumed, with race added – white bourgeois women seemed privileged to do all the speaking for women, leaning the discussion toward liberal feminism and away from the radical variety. Left organizations like DSA have helped integrate class and race questions back into the discussion but feminism is an unfinished and dynamic theory.

In a group activity, participants developed a view of how successfully feminist perspectives and practices were playing out in their locals. Problems of what some were experiencing in their locals included:

- Gendered assumptions about the division of labor — some still saw women doing chapter maintenance and even post-meeting cleanup with tacit male acceptance;
- Specific constraints (especially family) that limited women's time for activism; locals are not always sure or able to accommodate women;
- Internal discussions are still often dominated by men and women have to struggle for an equitable role in leadership and direction despite bylaw guidelines.

But some progress was seen by some in:

- A strong role for women in the fast-growing Austin local, many recruited from union activists;
- Female leadership in other locals such as DC and Detroit;
- Conscious, local-wide participation in important women's issue areas such as reproductive rights, violence against women and affordable housing;
- Success in recruiting women through nontraditional (for DSA) outreach – the Sanders campaign, book discussion groups.

Thanks to Carolyn Byerly for her excellent notes on the session.

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As a frontline part of the Solidarity Economy, food co-ops are going into food deserts that the chain groceries are avoiding to preserve their Wall Street standing. This account from the Cooperative Development Institute shows how food co-ops are part of a concerted effort to “regain local and democratic control over key community resources” and is distinguished by the rich array of links to further information and detailed examples. <http://www.cdi.coop/food-coops-food-deserts-low-income-communities/>

Another conceptual part of the solidarity economy is the assertion of decent shelter as a human and social right, buttressed by a rebuilding of the nation’s public housing stock on many pathways. In a dispatch shared by *Dissent* and *Jacobin*, Karen Narefsky contextualizes the history of public housing (including its post-Nixon decline into support for public housing as a Section 8 profit center for capital) and proposes models for a revitalization of the “public” in housing. She notes that when public housing is scaled up sufficiently, “The prevalence of public housing imposes de facto rent controls on private landlords, who cannot raise rents far beyond what the government charges if they want to attract tenants.” This piece complements Andy Feeney’s account in this issue of our November Salon discussion on gentrification in our region. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/11/public-housing-social-welfare-crisis-affordable-gentrification/>

Responses to the DSA convention in addition to what you see among our contributions in this issue...

Here’s Atlanta’s Barbara Joye, from the *Democratic Left* blog:
http://www.dsausa.org/dsa_convention_new_strategy_for_a_new_era_dl?recruiter_id=2

The Bernie File... several quick responses to Sen. Sanders’s talk at Georgetown

Here is Harold Meyerson’s observation in the *American Prospect*... like all good things, it was crossposted in *Portside*... <http://prospect.org/article/bernie-defines-socialism>

Here is Bhaskar Sunkara’s interview with Dylan Mathews in *Vox* on the Sanders speech.
<http://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2015/11/20/9767096/bernie-sanders-socialism-jacobin>

Here is a roll-up package from *Portside*, again, with a statement from Seattle’s socialist city council member Kshama Sawant plus three short takes from *Jacobin* contributors and editors:
<http://portside.org/2015-11-21/four-takes-bernie-sanders-democratic-socialism-speech>

Where does the responsibility for corporate misdeeds start and stop? A searching piece in *The Guardian* uses the trial, now concluding, of Massey Energy boss Don Blankenship for his role in the Big Branch mine disaster that killed 29 miners to explore how hard it can be to bring individuals to book for these tragedies and massive frauds. <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/us-money-blog/2015/nov/22/west-virginia-mine-explosion-trial-massey-energy-jailing-ceo>

One of the most puzzling phenomena in the US is the tendency of red states – net importers of federal tax revenue, users of public provision – to vote against Democrats and their favoring of public provision. This fine piece of reporting helps us understand that, and points out some mobilization needs that aren't being met.

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/22/opinion/sunday/who-turned-my-blue-state-red.html?ref=opinion&_r=0

Juan Cole, in *The Nation* (also reposted in *Portside*) argues forcefully that the “Islamic State” is a criminal enterprise, not in any sense a “state,” and Francois Hollande made a rhetorical blunder in declaring France’s “war” against a non-state. “The Paris terrorists bear much more resemblance to biker-gang members and unbalanced mass shooters than they do to the special-forces operatives of a proper state.” http://www.thenation.com/article/isis_wants_a_clash/

Sam Pizzigati’s blog, “Too Much,” anatomizes the world of inequality in all its ways every month. The December issue has a particularly fascinating interview with Martine Durand, the chief economist/statistician for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The OECD, you’ll remember, was a pioneer in developing quality-of-life measures for societies/nation-states that pinpoint what GDP and other measures miss. Read it at <http://toomuchonline.org/tmmonthly.html>

Andy Feeney recommends this post from the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism. Harry Targ’s “Politics of Chaos” is the kickoff for pre-convention discussion in our kindred left organization. <http://www.ccds-discussion.org/?p=5150>

[Government-linked Co-ops- a Once and Future Model](#)

Tuesday, December 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> December 2015**

By Daniel Adkins

DSA’s vision of the future includes worker-run coops, but there are other non-profits we need to know about that are economically important. These are not all worker-run but some are unionized and have been around a while.

Utility cooperatives are tasked with delivering electricity, water, or telecommunications to their members. Many of these cooperatives were created during the New Deal and are in Republican-dominated states. Profits are either reinvested or distributed to members based on the member’s investment in the coop. Each member has an equal say as every other member. Most of these cooperatives are in rural America. Many cooperatives strive to provide the best service at the

lowest cost, but rural infrastructure is more costly than the more compact urban areas. These cooperatives receive a preference from federal Power Administrations.

In addition to the Tennessee Valley Administration, there are four Department of Energy Power Administrations. These power administrations cover most of the U.S. except for the Northeast. Most of these were created in the 1930s and provide low-cost electricity for public agencies, including states, cities, towns, electric cooperatives, and Native American tribes. These administrations originally were based on hydroelectric power but now include nuclear and coal plants. Power left over after supplying public needs are sold on the open market. These administrations aid load balancing from intermittent renewable generation. They also play a role in flood control and regional environmental management.

One reason for these organizations was to eliminate rural poverty and develop the countryside. The coops and the power administrations brought electric lighting to much of America. Given the sad state of Appalachia, there is the need for an Appalachian power administration today that could be based on renewables.

The power administrations played a significant part in the World War II victory by providing the electricity for the production of aluminum for aircraft. They also served the Manhattan Project.

Under President Clinton federal unions partnered with their agencies. If a democratic socialist does become president in the near future, the possibilities of agency/union partnering need to be considered and used. Worker coops are great, but creating a more cooperative hierarchical structure need to be on our to-do list too. There are tools for getting more cooperation in hierarchical organizations. A 360-degree evaluation of staff and managers can provide critiques to remedy a kiss-up, kick-down authoritarian culture. The quality movement provides ways to improve processes and get staff involved in how organizations work. These and many other policies can humanize hierarchical organizations and make them more productive.

[Health, Medicine and Social Change: A Review of the film Revolutionary Medicine: the Story of the first Garifuna Hospital](#)

Tuesday, December 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> December 2015**

By Kurt Stand

Health care must speak to each individual's physiological needs – but so too it must address individuals' psychological needs, and must recognize the social, economic and cultural conditions within which people live and work. Those connections are made explicit in

Revolutionary Medicine: the story of the first Garifuna Hospital, a 45-minute film that documents the creation of a free community-run hospital in Garifuna – one of the poorest communities in Honduras (itself, one of the poorest countries in Latin America) – a community without roads, electricity, or social services of any kind. Descended from survivors of a shipwrecked British slave vessel in the early 17th century, the Garifuna people have long battled racism, poverty and underdevelopment. Prior to the building of the hospital, the nearest doctor or medical facility was more than 12 hours distant, a reality that meant that illness was often simply a death sentence – a truth reflected in the grim detail of an average life span of 52. About 75 people attended the showing at the AFL-CIO headquarters in an event sponsored by the Federation, the Metro DC Labor Council and the National Nurses Union. The NNU has developed a solidarity relationship with medical practitioners in Honduras and sees in its work the kind of bottom-up health care that will be possible in the US only if and when we adopt a single-payer health system – a point made both by NNU Political Director Ken Zinn and by medical anthropologist and American University Associate Professor Adrienne Pine, who introduced the film. What that means in practice was described in greater detail after the screening by Dr. Luther Castillo – a Garifuna doctor who founded the hospital.

Produced and directed by independent documentarian Beth Gaglia, based in Washington DC, and Canadian film maker Jesse Freeston, based in Montreal, the movie tells the story of the building of a hospital – run on solar power from necessity owing to the absence of electrical power – in Ciriboya, Colon on Honduras' Caribbean Coast. The hospital does not stand alone — it is part of a holistic health system built by members of the community it serves; thus all services, consultations, and medications are provided free of charge, a necessity if people who live in grinding poverty are otherwise to be served. The community has not only built the hospital, but defended it as well against threats by the right-wing government that has dominated the country since the 2009 US-backed coup that ousted Honduran' democratically-elected president Manuel Zelaya after he began to implement a modest program of social reform. Free health care for the poorest is a threat to a medical system that has taken privatization to the extreme as patients must now pay for everything – from doctors' surgical gloves to the needles used when getting a vaccination. And the grass-roots community organization inherent in the building and running of the hospital is itself a form of organization that stands in the way of threatened displacement by a right-wing government that seeks to remove the Garifuna from their land and turn the area into a tourist playground for the well-heeled from abroad.

Watching the film, listening to interviews with Castillo and the other men and women working at the hospital, one question kept recurring – just how did people from such isolated areas even get the chance to become doctors? The answer is given by Castillo in the documentary (and explained by him in greater depth during his talk at the AFL-CIO after the showing): Cuba's medical school – which provides training for poor students from the poorest countries in the world (and from impoverished areas in the US) – asking only that those so trained go back to serve the communities from whence they came. Castillo was such a student as are virtually all of Garifuna's doctors and nurses. It is in Cuba too that a sense of the interconnection between personal health and social health is made. Castillo explained the matter by talking about how almost all the women they treat complain of back pain. The individual diagnosis might be medication followed by rest – but poor women who work and raise children can't rest. And simply prescribing more medicine has only limited value, all the more so as an inadequate diet

means that medication can easily lead to gastritis or other stomach problems. Instead there is a need to go to the source of the problem, the 40-60 pounds of firewood women carry every day for that is the only source of power they have for their homes. Thus, alongside medication, alongside, rest, alongside better food, what is needed is development that will serve, not exploit or displace, the community. Again and again, the film shows such connections being made.

The film includes a mass march led by 214 drums – a march that was also a dance – following a 27-hour journey by foot and bus to the national capital, Tegucigalpa, to protest social exclusion. The marchers then returned home (the same 27-hour trip in reverse), energized by the experience, energized by acting and not simply being victimized. Such demonstrations, just as the work of the hospital, do not happen easily or spontaneously, but it can happen when people see the connection of social change on the quality of their lives and future – social action, that is, returning back to individual needs and hopes. The connecting link is solidarity, for as Castillo said during that protest, “We believe in the accelerating march toward a new country, with a new constitution that reflects the rainbow of different faces in this country, the indigenous, the blacks, the workers, the farmers, the unionists, the professionals, that they are all recognized.”

For more information about the film or information as to how to order it go to:

<http://revolutionarymedicine.org/>

[Living Our Strategy, Not Just Speaking It: Thoughts on the DSA 2015 Convention](#)

Tuesday, December 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> December 2015**

By M. Miller

Oftentimes, our enthusiasm as activists leads us to tackling large issues without any firm connection to our larger goals. This rashness is often rooted in noble aims—we are empathetic to the suffering of people around us, we are indignant at the injustices of inequality, and we genuinely desire to implement progressive social change. We see a problem, so we rush in to try to solve it. Unfortunately, without larger goals in mind, this type of activism often fails to generate systematic change in the long-term. It may solve individual issues here and there and it may do a lot of good for many people, but the structural inequalities all too often remain. What we need, as activists, is a long-term strategy.

For this reason, I was particularly pleased that Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) passed an overarching strategy document at its 2015 convention. The document affirms the good work

that DSA chapters are doing all over the country to rectify inequality and present positive, socialist alternatives to our current capitalist system. But it also defines the long-term goals of the organization as a whole in such a way that it allows activists to focus their work on issues that will have the most effective and long-lasting gains both for the organization itself and for the democratic socialist aim of creating a more equitable society. The strategy document emphasizes long-term goals for the organization, such as reaching out to people of color, women and other marginalized communities, that will grow democratic socialism as a national movement while also allowing chapters to focus on local problems in their own communities. The document also contained a sense of urgency, particularly surrounding the dire need for climate justice in a globe that has been ravaged by capitalism, which will hopefully spur chapters to increase their local activism and raise the profile of democratic socialism. If our movement is to have any traction, we cannot simply react to problems as they arise, but we must also proactively seek out opportunities to build coalitions with other groups and advance our vision of a democratically controlled economic sector. The strategy document acts as a roadmap for DSA nationally, locally and even individually to take these proactive steps.

What struck me most at the convention, other than the breadth of the strategy document itself, was the way in which it was adopted. Unlike many other organizations with which I have been involved, DSA implemented its strategy in a democratic manner that aligned with the organization's principles. Instead of the document being formulated by a national staff and board and then foisted upon the individual members, the document was a product of collaboration and planning at both the national and local levels. Individual members were given ample opportunity to weigh in on the strategy document and suggest amendments to it. Considerable time at the convention was dedicated to discussing the document so that every delegate present thoroughly understood the strategy and could vote for its passage with confidence. Instead of claiming to be for the grassroots while functioning under a top-down administration, the DSA convention operated as a microcosm of the informed, fair and democratic society that it hopes to bring about.

This attitude was present in the passage of the strategy document, but it also permeated the entire proceedings of the convention. At other conferences and national gatherings that I have attended, hosted by other organizations, I have often found the national staff, board and other organizational leaders to be distant from the ordinary members of the movement. Other conventions that I have attended have brought in lauded speakers and activists who all too often end up behaving like drama queens and divas, demanding special attention and deference, even as they give lofty speeches about democratic principles. I experienced none of this snobbery or superiority at the DSA convention. The national staff was helpful and always attentive, despite the tireless work that they were all doing to ensure that the plenaries and workshops ran smoothly. All of the DSA leaders whom I met were friendly and open, and they treated me as though I was just as important to the organization as they were. Rather than promoting themselves or stroking their own egos, people seemed genuinely excited to connect with other democratic socialists, trade tips on building local chapters, and share stories about how they had become involved in Left politics. The atmosphere of the convention was welcoming, and watching the commitment of everyone to living out their democratic values of fairness and equality in both their individual interactions with people and their larger activism was truly empowering.

Given this environment of solidarity, I am confident that the DSA strategy document will not just be words on paper but an implemented guide that is acted upon by local chapters and activists. A strategy is only useful if it leads to action, and DSA's strategy document will only be as useful as the organization's individual members make it. We cannot merely speak about our strategy. We must also live it. Fortunately, I expect that DSA's members are more than up to that challenge.

[The US Military's Crippling Obsession with High-Tech Death](#)

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Kill Chain: The Rise of the High-Tech Assassins

A book by Andrew Cockburn (Verso, 2015)

Review by *David H. Richardson*

In 1999, then-presidential candidate George Bush said in a speech at The Citadel “When direct threats to America are discovered, I know that the best defense can be a strong and swift offense—including the use of Special Operations Forces ... we must be prepared to strike across the world with pinpoint accuracy—with long-range aircraft and perhaps with unmanned systems.” (p. 250) Thirteen years later, President Obama, in his defense vision, declared that “as we reduce the overall defense budget, we will protect, and in some cases increase, our investments in special operations forces, in new technologies like ISR and unmanned systems ...” (p. 250) Since 2001, the American taxpayer has shelled out trillions, not billions, in military adventures, only to see the terrorists expand from a few bases maintained in Afghanistan at the sufferance of the Taliban, to a territory the size of Utah with outposts in a half-dozen other countries. While suffering setbacks, their trajectory was and continues to be on the rise, while American influence in the Middle East has been and is on the decline.

Kill Chain: The Rise of the High-Tech Assassins by Andrew Cockburn, an editor of *Harper's* magazine and a younger brother of the late Alexander Cockburn, is the story of this failure.^[1] Given the dollar amounts expended, let alone the loss of life, the result can only be characterized as catastrophic. While a catastrophe of this magnitude can only be described as a team effort on the part of the US military, the US Air Force, with its drone operations, its core belief in strategic bombing, and its faith in computer automated systems, is at the top of the list. The US Army brass, in its determination to wage war against civilian populations, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, also comes in for its share of criticism. By comparison the enlisted men and low-

ranking officers who had to actually bear the brunt of the fighting come off relatively lightly, and are often seen as micro-managed by the generals.

The kill chain itself is the chain of command that authorizes lethal drone strikes and special operations. As this review is being written, the news is awash with reports of the death by drone strike of Mohammed Emwazi or “Jihadi John,” the British Muslim who executed hostages on video, and Wisam al Zubaidi, the head of the ISIS affiliate in Libya. Before we place too much credence in these reports, we should look at the results of some past drone strikes. On a cold night in February 2010, two small SUVs and a four-door pickup carrying 35 men, women, and children, four under age six, were traveling toward Kandahar on the way to Kabul. It was a slow trip with stops for engine trouble and a flat tire. On the seemingly deserted highway, unknown to the group, a Special Ops raiding party had landed nearby and a reconnaissance drone circled overhead. Backing up the drone was a ground crew including the pilot, intelligence analysts, and communications officers in Nevada and Florida. Instead of people, what they saw on their screens was blobs on the ground. When first picked up, the vehicles were headed toward the raiding party, but never came closer than 10 miles, and after an hour they turned away. Nonetheless, a helicopter gunship attack was called in which killed 23 people, including two boys three and four, and wounded eight men, one woman, and three children between five and 14. On the basis of pictures from the drone they had all been positively identified as military-age males.

In fact, the Air Force knew that this sort of thing was likely to happen when they put the drones into service. A military reform movement in the 1980s attempted to stem the tide of ever more expensive weapons of dubious utility, and in 1983 it succeeded in creating the Office of Operational Test and Evaluation, one of the least-popular agencies ever conceived. In 2001 new Director Thomas P. Christie took as his first project to test the Predator drone. He found that the Predator couldn’t take off or land except in near-perfect weather: snow, rain, ice, frost, or fog, it didn’t matter. Drones operate at 12,000 to 15,000 feet to avoid hand-held surface-to-air missiles. The team used a rating scale for visual accuracy to analyze data from 15,000 feet, from 1 for a large airplane to 9, the ability to recognize a human face. While “[t]he drones were supposed to score 6, ‘recognize supply dumps, identify vehicles’ at a range of 6 miles, the day TV scored no better than 2.7. Overall, Predator could find less than a third of its targets.” (p. 68) The images were never good enough to distinguish between a truck and a tank. People turn into blobs on the screen, with the result that the viewers engage in a kind of Rorschach test, and see whatever they want to see. The final report, sent to the secretary of defense, the heads of all the relevant congressional committees, and the top brass, said that “The Predator UAV is not operationally effective. This conclusion is based on poor performance in target location accuracy, ineffective communications, and limits imposed by relatively benign weather.” (p. 71) The report was ignored.

The book itself is a page turner: it reads like action fiction, sci fi, a detective novel, pick your favorite escape vehicle, and it draws you in in a similar way. It’s a series of stories around a theme, the endless fascination with technology as a means of war fighting, and the fiascoes that have resulted therefrom.^[2] We all know how the seemingly random killings have turned the people of the Middle East against us, and there’s enough of that in the book. For me, however, the main story concerns the increasing impotence of the US military despite, or perhaps because

of, its dramatic investment in technology. One early implementation of this profoundly mistaken direction was the \$6 billion electric fence intended to keep “the” Ho Chi Minh Trail from delivering supplies to the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. It took the North only a week to circumvent it, in part because there was no actual trail but rather a network that could be utilized to confuse and frustrate the electronics.

Another early implementation was the Air Force strategy in World War II that the war could be won by strategic bombing alone. The idea was that a modern economy relies on inter-connectivity, and that the destruction of key links could bring a whole country to a halt. However, it turned out that ball bearings weren’t the key to the functioning of the Reich, nor were hydroelectric dams, not were a whole list of other possible key links. The 1943 British firebombing of Hamburg, for example, had the effect of actually increasing production in that city. Before the bombing there had been a labor shortage in Hamburg. However, the bombs demolished the downtown, and people who had worked in the service sector, hotels, restaurants and the like, saw their places of employment destroyed, and went to work in the war plants on the outskirts. The result of the strategic bombing campaign was that we came close to implementing Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau’s vision of turning Germany into a cow pasture, yet the German war machine chugged on until it was defeated on the ground.

ater, facing more recent enemies without a military industrial complex, the key links came to be seen as people rather than things, which didn’t work any better. This strategy was tried out in the war on drugs, with the initial target being Pablo Escobar and the Medellin cocaine cartel. While numerous surveillance aircraft were employed in the hunt for Escobar, they were of no help and he was eventually located with the help of the rival Cali cartel. Alas, their assistance did them no good, and we destroyed the Cali cartel as well. If these moves had been successful in stemming the tide of cocaine, we should have seen prices rise in the United States. In fact, “cocaine prices ... immediately went into a precipitous decline.” (p. 101) The reason was that the cartels had created a duopoly, and once they were broken up they were replaced by a couple of dozen smaller but even more lethal operations which *competed* with each other, thereby driving the prices down. This led former Air Force pilot Rex Rivolo, then with Operations Evaluation, to suggest that “[t]he best thing would have been to keep one cartel over which we had some control.” (p. 102) More generally, shadowy organizations involved in crime or terrorism are decentralized, and don’t depend on their top leaders for their success. Rather, under the top leaders are younger, more violent guys ready to step up when the top guy goes down, and hence assassinating the leaders is a fool’s errand.

The first few months of the war in Afghanistan were a near-total success. After the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif, the leaders of the Taliban fled south to Pakistan and the lower level fighters were told to go home, with the result that the US military very quickly established control of the whole country. However, the Americans and the British insisted on targeting the now departed leaders, with the result that local warlords and even ordinary Afghans turned over their enemies as terrorists, thereby ingratiating themselves with the new rulers and turning a nice profit as well. After several iterations, the end result was the establishment of the “signature strike,” in which “it would no longer be necessary to identify the target. Merely looking like a terrorist would be sufficient to trigger a strike.” (p. 224) Group gatherings were especially suspect, so wedding

parties, Afghan local councils called jirgas, and funeral processions did not occur as people attempted not to act like terrorists were thought to act.

Incompetent as they may be against America's enemies, there is one battle the armed forces are good at: the budget wars in Washington. The branch that is actually able to fight a war all by itself is the Navy, together with its Naval Air Systems Command and Marine Corps. By comparison, the Air Force and the Army are hobbled by their mutual dependence and hence start at a disadvantage in the battle for the budget. To compensate, the Air Force developed the doctrine that strategic bombing could win a war all by itself, with a dramatic reduction in American casualties to boot. It didn't work in WWII, it isn't working against ISIS, and there is no evidence that it has worked anytime in between. It has, however, created the potential to incinerate the planet in a hypothetical nuclear exchange.

In a sense the drone is the ultimate high-tech weapon, (initially) inexpensive, lethal, putting no Americans in harms way, and (at least where there are no real air defense systems) virtually invulnerable. With its monitors widely available in generals' offices, it gives the illusion that they can conduct the battle themselves, never mind that they are over-riding and micromanaging the officers who have responsibility on the ground. Weaponized and with a license to kill, what could go wrong?

For all its faults, the Predator was relatively cheap at \$5 million per copy. The 2005 Reaper drone, at \$30 million plus \$5 million per year maintenance, much more than older manned aircraft, was billed as an improvement. However, "it carries essentially the same sensors as the Predator," (p. 178) i.e., people still appear as blobs with no ability to recognize gender, let alone whether they are armed or not. However, the prices were getting up to levels that could interest the major defense contractors, and Northrup Grumman came out with the Global Hawk, whose initial price tag ballooned from \$10 million to \$223 million each. Unwanted by either the Air Force or the Obama Administration, the high price turned out actually to be an advantage in the budget debates, since the work could be spread over more congressional districts. It replaced the U-2, which, as it turns out, took better photographs. (p. 181) One thing all these high-tech strategies share is the hubris of their proponents and their unwillingness to face facts as one after another of their failures are swept under the rug.

The whole high-tech system was tested at a war game called Millennial Challenge 2002.^[3] Marine Lt. Gen. Paul Van Riper commanded the Red (enemy) team as a rogue military commander in the Persian Gulf for some reason willing to take on the US Military. Full of scorn for the theories underlying the standard doctrine, Van Riper surmised that the implied rules were secondary, and he played to win. While the Challenge involved thousands of troops, ground vehicles, and aircraft scattered across the United States, much of the action was virtual, played as a computer game. In the first few hours, the Blue (US) team knocked out Van Riper's fiber optics, expecting him to be forced to use easily intercepted radio communications. Instead, he used motorcycle couriers and coded messages embedded in in the Muslim calls to prayer. As planned, a US carrier task force steamed up the Gulf. The Blue commander said "I have a feeling that Red is going to strike." (p. 135) However, "his staff was quick to assure him that their ONA [Operational Net Assessment] made it clear that this could not happen." (p. 135)

While previous Red commanders had used their missiles in dribs and drabs, Van Riper used them all at once in a salvo, sinking 16 virtual ships and taking 20,000 virtual servicemen and women to the bottom. “Only a few days in, the war was over, and the twenty-first century U.S. military had been beaten hands down.” (p. 136) The brass responded to this reverse as the good bureaucrats they were, and Van Riper was told that the ships had been refloated by magic and the game would continue. To his credit, he quit in disgust. “Afterward he wrote a scathing report, documenting how the exercise had been rigged and by whom, but no outsider could read it because it was promptly classified.” (p. 136)

Before I read *Kill Chain*, I knew that the military was the main source of fraud, waste, and abuse in the government, if only because it has the only budget that doesn’t receive effective oversight, and also because I observed fairly low level GS-9’s receiving expensive trips. The Millennial Challenge, among all the other things that went wrong about the new generation of high-tech weapons, left me with a much more grim assessment: the military as it has come to be structured may well not be capable of fulfilling its basic duty of providing for the common defense.

[1] Of course assassination is not permitted under Executive Order 11905, issued by Gerald Ford and reaffirmed by Carter and Reagan. However, “Administration officials later explained to the *Washington Post* some of the ways in which the ban might not really ban assassinations, suggesting ‘... the order could be revoked or simply ignored, arguing that covert action against terrorists could be defended as something other than ‘political assassination.’” (p. 90)

[2] See, e.g., Robin Williams in *Toys*.

[3] War games are essential to the development of military strategy. For example, war games in the 1930s showed that, after a Japanese attack, immediate retaliation against Japan itself would fail, while the island hopping strategy actually adopted would win.