

The Washington Socialist
Articles from the February 2013 Issue
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Editor: Woody Woodruff

[Welcome to the February Washington Socialist: A guide and links to this month's offerings](#)

Friday, February 1st, 2013

Welcome to the February issue of The Washington Socialist. If you didn't get this by email, you can — every month. Email dsadcxchange@gmail.com. Select individual articles below from the abstracts, or scroll down and find the full articles.

Since Bill Murray's star turn, Groundhog Day has been synonymous with doing the same thing over and over again and wondering why it always turns out the same way. Several DSA writers tackled that theme as applied to our organization's decades-long struggle to emerge from the classic white-male dominance that has plagued many organizations, not all of them left. But left organizations have diversity in their declared DNA, so our failure in the broad left is particularly galling. How can DSA express its diversity DNA better? See below.

Beyond Groundhog Day: *Bill Mosley*, a DSA member since the 1980s, reviews the national and local efforts to broaden the organization's membership and reach. Could the success of the one leftist organization that had success in recruiting minority members – the Communist Party of the 1930s and '40s – be duplicated in a more “open, democratic” and less top-down organization like DSA? Mosley points out that our lack of minority members masks a parallel non-diversity of class, of working families in a DSA of mostly college-educated members, comparatively few of whom are raising or schooling children. Could that be the problem we should address in order to tackle our diversity problem? How much of the roadblock is our own organizational culture and social practices? [Read complete article](#)

Opening Political Spaces: Mosley noted that approximately three-fourths of the delegates to last year's DSA convention were men despite years of agonizing. Metro DC-DSA steering committee member *Carolyn Byerly* explores that other “groundhog day” in greater depth, and details the way that DSA's organizational culture during her decades of membership has remained, in many ways, unwelcoming to women and male in style and process. The good news, if that's what to call it, is that DSA is not alone on the left in this. The bad news is that we exist in a wide left culture and absorb our social practices from our surroundings. And the “head space” that excludes not only women but feminist perspectives is also deeply entrenched in the academic and intellectual spheres from which we draw much of our ongoing, evolving analysis. We have, Byerly says, much work to do. [Read complete article](#)

Shift Change: “Alienated labor” is still a factor in our DSA practice, but it's often eroding workers' power, even union workers, more than ever these days. Worker-owned cooperatives are

mounting a challenge to this condition, and making a stand in a variety of locations in and out of the US. DC-DSA Co-chair *Jose Gutierrez* relates how these examples are growing, portrayed in a recent film, “Shift Change.” A recent showing at the AFL-CIO headquarters in D.C. included a panel of commentators. Leo Gerard of the United Steel Workers noted that in cooperatives, workers do not feel threatened by higher productivity because it doesn’t get raked off by management. They are management. Gar Alperovitz, a political scientist at the University of Maryland and author of *America Beyond Capitalism* said “This is not a new type of capitalism or socialism, it’s something new.” [Read complete article](#)

Statehood Plus: The government of Washington, D.C. has been chafing under the thumb of Congress for many years. This year, and with a new Congress, the District government is pushing back with a ballot measure that would end Congress’ control over D.C. budgeting. As *Bill Mosley* recounts, the measure, on the special election ballot April 23, removes the DC government budget from the congressional appropriations process. Observers say it marks a change from a conciliatory approach toward Congress to a more confrontational one. Advocates of full statehood worry that the measure is a distraction, but its proponents say it dares Congress to vote against democracy. [Read complete article](#)

Maryland Legislative Session: Deep blue Maryland has just entered its annual legislative session with a better financial picture than previous years and the progressive momentum from significant ballot-measure victories on the state Dream Act and marriage equality. Progressives, *Woody Woodruff* writes, have high hopes for offshore wind, death penalty repeal, a state minimum wage increase and other top items on wish lists of several years’ standing. With some vivid personalities, including the Senate president, suddenly making nice toward progressive goals, hopes are high. But the legislative session’s tangled web has hog-tied many hopes before. [Read complete article](#)

And a word to our readers about becoming our writers and our advocates:

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. Individual article addresses from their permanent website home here 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.

It is an article of faith with us, and perhaps with you, dear reader, that most people are socialists. Whatever barriers the S-word might represent for them, the long litany of today’s essentials that started out life as socialist initiatives – and, of course, politically impossible – becomes a persuasive one: social security, medicare, public goods of all sorts, nationally and locally. Socialist mayors installed sanitary sewer systems – what a ridiculous idea – in the first part of the 20th century and suddenly well-run cities became healthy, and imported more enthusiastic migrants than they exported disease-felled corpses. Imitators, even non-socialist politicians, rushed to follow.

Few of us were born with the word “socialist” in our mouths. We came to know it as a useful — even stirring — term for the social justice goals and practices we came to love and pursue separately.

So we hope that you, our readers, will

- spread this newsletter as widely as possible, reminding friends and contacts that they can sign up to get it themselves.
- get mad, or amused, or enthralled at an article in the newsletter and write a piece to amplify, contradict or improve the informed opinions (always, of course, buttressed by facts) that you read here.

Be a participant.

[A DSAers Plan to share MLK’s Vision: Humanity, Not Warships](#)

Thursday, January 31st, 2013

DC DSA Blog post by Nick Lyell

Many of us have protested, often loudly. We fight for equality, justice, and sanity. But speaking volumes louder than any megaphone is the influence of the powerful and the wealthy on our politicians. Our voices have increasingly been drowned out by these inequalities in influence.

We are faced with a seemingly insurmountable situation. Politicians have little incentive to challenge their source of campaign cash, the news media is faced with similar incentives, and regular citizens can’t afford to produce or run advertisements.

Favorably, as events from Tahrir Square to the re-election of Barack Obama have shown, the Internet can be a powerful tool to leverage grassroots advantages in the face of concentrated wealth and power.

Still, Americans get the vast majority of their entertainment from television. Many get almost all of their political knowledge from ads and news on TV. The trick then, is to turn these online advantages into on-screen messages.

[Loud Sauce](#) is an innovative startup company which provides a platform for [crowd-funded](#) issue-ads, an incredible development which would have only been pipe-dreams a couple years ago. From the web-based platform, individuals can see the ad for free, share easily with their friends across social media, and pledge to the campaign.

Importantly, the pledge is not equivalent to a donation. Like [Kickstarter](#), another crowd-funding platform, those pledges will only be drawn upon in the event that the project meets its fundraising goal, so no one throws money at a project that will never happen. None of the risk and all of the reward.

It is with all this in mind that a friend and I created a political issue ad. Think of it as an experiment in Democracy. The logic of collective action, in a world of declining unionism, applied to advertising. Can two regular American citizens, with the support of hundreds of others, get the same kind of influence as a corporation, billionaire, or bank who can afford to run advertisements?

Incredibly, this may be a first. This may be a proof-of-concept for the idea of grassroots-funded political ads, a game-changer. In this democratic effort, the process is the experiment and the message important and timely.

The fiscal cliff is looming, and our critical social safety-net programs are being threatened in negotiations by both Republicans and Democrats. In a scramble to balance the budget, Congress is likely to leave those without the money and influence to hire lobbyists behind. This means the underrepresented: minority, poor, and working-class Americans who are already experiencing the brunt of The Great Recession will be stripped of the meager social support that the state currently offers them.

As Americans we all share an interest in our common values: being our brother's keeper, expressing our political voice, sharing our scarce resources without waste, and humanity in the most general sense. Our budget is way out of whack with these values. We currently waste trillions on useless and ineffective weapon contracts like the J-35 fighter and this spending comes at a cost, not just over \$500 million per jet, but over 2.2 million that could have been fed, or over 652,000 that could have been housed for a year. This is the message we hope to inspire with – that humanity needs to be a budget priority.

As Democratic Socialists we know that we win and lose not as individuals but as a society and as a nation, that we are always judged by the least well-off among us. For moral and spiritual reasons, Dr. King stressed the need to alter our course. For moral and practical reasons, President (and former-General) Eisenhower stressed the need to restrain wasteful military spending.

For all of these reasons and more, we must make sure that the 99% has their voice heard in the budget negotiations. It's time to change the national political conversation around our budget priorities: Humanity, not warships. This grassroots advertising experiment is one giant leap for the cause.

Be a part of this grassroots democracy experiment! [Donate \\$5, \\$10, or whatever you can and share with your friends. If only 150 people donate \\$20 each, we could put this ad up on TV in a competitive, high-visibility spot.](#)

[Beyond “Groundhog Day” — DSA and Persons of Color](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2013**

By Bill Mosley

In the 1993 film “Groundhog Day,” an arrogant newscaster played by Bill Murray is condemned through some magical intervention to live out the same day (February 2, of course) over and over again. The character has to try to find some way to break out of the loop and reach February 3, but over seemingly hundreds of successive Groundhog Days his efforts fail – until the happy ending, of course.

Activism sometime seems like “Groundhog Day,” with the same questions and issues arising time after time which, after much debate and many proffered solutions, nothing changes. And no issue Democratic Socialists of America has faced more resembles a repetitive loop than the old question: Why are there so few persons of color in DSA?

DSA hasn’t conducted any recent polls or surveys on members’ race or ethnicity. However, to attend nearly any DSA meeting or convention, local or national, over the organization’s lifetime (back to the founding in 1982, and earlier than that in the predecessor organizations) would bear out the fact that DSA is, and has been, a nearly all-white organization (“white” being a notoriously slippery term, but that’s a topic for another day). And for nearly as long, DSA has regularly engaged in self-flagellation over this fact. How, we ask, can we call ourselves a progressive organization, working for the benefit of the entire working class, while we have so few African-American, Latino and other minority members – the very people who would benefit most from the policies we champion?

First, I should say that in recent years, DSA has largely moved beyond its earlier hand-wringing and acknowledged the difficulty of organizing across racial lines in this racially polarized society. It is often said that the only successful multiracial national organizations in the United States are trade unions – and these consist of workers banding together out of necessity. When one looks at other organizations on the left, DSA is about as diverse as most of them.

However, as recently as 1992, the DSA National Board (a now-defunct body that met in the years between biennial national conventions), meeting in D.C., adopted a resolution calling for 10 percent of the organization to be composed of “traditionally underrepresented racial, ethnic and linguistic minority groups” by 1994. The resolution, however, was accompanied by no specific strategy to achieve this ambitious goal. I was a delegate to the Board and confess to being swept up in a wave of optimism and voting for the resolution, and then almost immediately regretting my support for such an empty gesture. (Someone – OK, it was me – quipped that we could achieve this almost overnight by convincing most of the white members to quit). Needless to say, the resolution was a spectacular failure. Later during the 1990s, a proposal circulated within DSA to achieve instant diversity by merging with the Black Radical Congress, but the idea failed to gain traction.

Any attempt to achieve solidarity across racial lines swims against the tide of more than four centuries of white oppression of persons of color that have poisoned race relations in the United States — including two and one-half centuries of black slavery followed by another century of Jim Crow, as well as genocidal wars against Native Americans. Persons of color have understandably preferred to chart their own agenda rather than leave their fate in the hands of majoritarian society, and to nurture their own movements rather than consign themselves to being minorities in majority-white organizations — whose members may be well-meaning but lack an understanding of the real needs of minority communities. While some saw the election of Barack Obama as a sign that we may be the cusp of a post-racial society, the rise of the Tea Party — a movement rife with white racial resentment — indicates otherwise. And while the false charges from the far right that Obama was a closet socialist helped raise awareness of and interest in socialism and DSA, it didn't result in a noticeable boost in minority recruitment.

Reaching out to and recruiting Latinos involves its own challenges, the language barrier being only the most conspicuous. The transnational character and isolation of a large segment of the Latino population pose obstacles to attempts by the U.S. left to build bridges, while the same characteristics make Latinos inviting scapegoats for racists and nativists.

Relations between persons of color and the U.S. socialist movement had a troubled beginning. During the early days of the U.S. Socialist Party, its leader Eugene V. Debs spoke out against racial prejudice and refused to appear before segregated audiences. However, according to Debs biographer Ray Ginger, he “refused to concede that poor Negroes were in a worse position than poor white people” and believed that the achievement of socialism would sweep away racial divisions. Even this was more enlightened than the views of other Socialist notables such as Victor Berger, who wrote that “the negroes and mulattoes constitute a lower race.” African Americans of the early 20th century, faced with lynching, segregation and job discrimination, were understandably not prepared to lay aside their own pressing concerns while waiting for the socialist millennium to arrive.

However, one socialist organization enjoyed success for a time in recruiting African Americans — the Communist Party USA. Especially during the period between the world wars, the CP made an aggressive effort to reach out to African Americans and immerse itself in their struggles. According to Fraser M. Ottanelli's history of the CP, African Americans made up some 11 percent of the organization's membership in the mid-1930s. The party's notables included leading African-American writers and intellectuals such as W.E.B DuBois, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. However, unlike DSA, the CP was a cadre organization — the party's leadership, taking its direction from Moscow, could simply order its members to work on priority issues. An open, democratic organization such as DSA can't do that. Of course, the CP's collapse in the early 1990s ended that experiment in multi-racial socialism.

If DSA had been founded as an explicitly multiracial organization, its history may have been different. We have to live with the legacy of Michael Harrington's founding of the DSA's predecessor organization, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, which espoused solidarity with the struggles of minorities but included few persons of color in its leadership. DSOC and DSA were thereafter tagged as “white” organizations. DSA has included

a number of prominent minorities – Cornel West, Dolores Huerta, Manning Marable – on its list of notable members, but their presence has had scant effect on recruitment at the grass roots.

But even with the best intentions, DSA’s organizational culture poses a barrier to appealing to and recruiting minorities. People tend to seek out and stick with organizations where they feel comfortable and welcome, and that usually means those whose members have similar backgrounds and common experiences to share. DSA’s culture, like it or not, is one of highly educated, talkative white people who have significant amounts of free time. Rather than obsess over the lack of African Americans and Latinos, we might take note of other groups largely absent in our membership (many of these overlapping): blue-collar workers, low-wage service workers, people without college degrees, the homeless and chronically unemployed, recent immigrants and people not fluent in English, persons with disabilities and (at least among active members) parents with young children. Within these groups are countless people who might be attracted to our politics but would probably not be comfortable with, or not have enough free time for, participating in our meetings and activities. In addition – and this is an important topic for discussion in itself — women are woefully underrepresented among DSA activists and leadership; for example, approximately three-fourths of the delegates to last year’s DSA convention were men. Many women in DSA have cited the “maleness” of the organization’s culture as a reason they’re not more active.

So where do we go from here? I don’t have all the answers, nor does anyone else. But I can suggest a few places to start. First, let’s make sure we don’t fall back into our habits from the 1990s of setting unrealistic diversity goals and then beating ourselves up when we don’t achieve them. Let’s build an organization we can be proud of, not one to berate for not being perfect.

Nevertheless, we should continue looking for ways to engage communities of color in a constructive and fraternal way – not because we want to pirate their members or tell them what to do, but out of genuine interest in their causes. We should focus on issues that are of concern to minority communities – poverty, immigration, criminal-justice reform, health care, jobs – and seek out organizations rooted in minority communities to work in partnership with them. Minority activists have learned to sniff out condescending and know-it-all whites from a mile away – so to make this work we have to make it clear that we’re in it to help, not give orders. Unlike the CP, DSA can’t simply order its members to drop everything and work on campaigns of the organization’s choosing; we’ll need to get our members’ buy-in and interest and not ask them to step too far out of their comfort zones, at least at first. Helping resolve gang disputes may be too daunting a project, but walking a picket line with janitors is just our speed. Our aim must be to show that we’re serious and reliable partners with grassroots communities. We don’t want to be heavy-handed in pushing DSA’s line or collaring people into joining the organization (which we generally don’t do anyway) – but if DSA is seen as important and relevant enough to these struggles, recruitment will be easier and more natural.

Transforming DSA into a broad, majoritarian, multi-racial organization should be the aspiration of all of our members. However, the road to that goal may need to be traveled in small steps. But if we start now, we can put another Groundhog Day debate behind us and help bring about DSA’s flowering as a more diverse organization.

[Film, Panel on Worker Coops Gets Buzz](#)

Thursday, January 31st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2013**

By Jose Gutierrez

“Shift Change” was shown on December 17th in the Gompers Room of the AFL-CIO building in Washington DC. I found it to be an enormously inspiring movie.

“Shift Change” shares the stories of the many employee-owned businesses that successfully compete in today’s economy. These companies are special in that they provide secure, dignified jobs in democratic workplaces. As a result of the current economic crisis, citizens and public officials are ready to look for new solutions. Workers and managers alike strive to reinvent our failing economy and to restore employment in a more egalitarian way.

Before the movie was shown, a panel discussed the potential of cooperatives. The members of the panel included Leo Gerard, from United Steelworkers Union; David Madland, from the Center for American Progress; Liz Bailey, from the Cooperative Development Foundation; Gar Alperovitz, from the Democracy Collaborative, and John Cavanagh, from the Institute for Policy Studies.

The first speaker was Leo Gerard. Gerard championed unions and coops as natural partners. He cast the Mondragon company in the Basque province of Spain as a useful model. He averred that all cooperatives train their workers and pay them well. In Canada, the union movement had tried to increase employee ownership. However, they were harshly criticized by many members of the Canadian left for working with the business bosses. He added: “My father was a socialist. I’m a socialist. My father said that it was important for workers to own the means of production.” In the course of his presentation he stated: “No one would give us money. We sold our shares and we lost control. This (the creation of American cooperatives that are modeled after Mondragon) is the next step.”

In cooperatives workers do not feel threatened by higher productivity. Gerard recommends that Steelworker coops through out this country be closely modeled on the Mondragon coops. He stresses that we should not rush this conversion and in this way cause it to fail.

David Madland of the Center for American Progress argued that Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) companies, profit sharing, and cooperatives are all part of a type of “inclusive capitalism.”

Companies like these provide higher wages to their workers. They are all about building a better type of capitalism. Organizations of this variety have had a good track record in the US. There is

potential for bipartisan support for such efforts. Ronald Reagan called these types of enterprises “people’s capitalism.”

Liz Bailey of the Cooperative Development Foundation informed the audience that CDF members are raising funds for cooperatives in New Orleans and New York City. NOLA Coops helped displaced residents in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The CDF has also organized participants in “welfare to work” programs into coops. She concurred that coop workers get better training and are paid better, adding that they are on a professional track. She also spoke briefly about how the Affordable Care Act promotes home care and how this could be a great opportunity to organize new workers into coops.

John Cavanagh of the Institute for Policy Studies stated that cooperatives could be the cornerstone of a new economy.

Gar Alperovitz, Democracy Collaborative (and a professor at the University of Maryland) said that there is a development process driven by pain and failure leading to something new. Cooperatives are part of a historical process that might lead to a new political movement. “This is not a new type of capitalism or socialism, it’s something new.”

Some projects featured in the film:

Mondragon Cooperative: Begun in the 1950s, the Mondragon co-ops have transformed a depressed area of Spain into one of the most productive in Europe with a high standard of living and an egalitarian way of life. These co-ops produce computer chips, high tech industrial machinery, household appliances, and many other products. They are owned and managed by their workers. Seeing the achievements of Mondragon helps to overcome the idea—widespread in North America—that worker run cooperatives can only exist on the economic fringe.

The Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, Ohio: This is an ambitious urban redevelopment model, directly inspired by Mondragon, where local institutions and public officials are supporting green cooperatives of previously marginalized, predominantly African American workers, who provide commercial laundry services, install solar energy systems, and grow vegetables in vast urban greenhouses.

Arizmendi Association of Cooperatives: Started 30 years ago, there are now six of these independent worker owned and managed cooperative bakeries in Northern California, concentrated around San Francisco, that work together to provide the financial and legal services they need, and to incubate new coop bakeries.

Cooperatives of immigrant workers: Often the most marginalized in our current economic system, immigrant workers are starting cooperatives to create secure, environmentally friendly jobs. The non-profit WAGES helps low income women, largely Latina immigrants, organize green house-cleaning cooperatives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Isthmus Engineering and Manufacturing in Madison, Wisconsin: This proudly worker owned and managed company designs and builds custom high tech manufacturing equipment for the

medical, automotive and energy industries. They have a strong commitment to improving solar technologies. They've joined with other longstanding coops in Madison, including Union Cab and Community Pharmacy, plus many others, to form a network of worker cooperatives that can support each other and encourage new cooperative businesses to form.

Cooperatives are an example of democracy in the workplace that democratic socialists can support but that can also appeal to moderates and even conservatives.

Further: A website where you can purchase the movie:

<http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/shift.html> ;

A Facebook page with visual info: <http://www.facebook.com/shiftchangemovie>

[Jobs and environment top progressive agenda in Md. Assembly](#)

The Washington Socialist<>**February 2013**

By Woody Woodruff

Maryland's economic prospects are looking up, somewhat, and at least for now, the General Assembly session is looking sunnier too.

Gov. Martin O'Malley's budget, submitted to the legislature a few days after the Jan. 17 opening of the three-month session, seeks no major cuts of the sort that made previous sessions so painful and adds some sweeteners to programs favored by progressives.

Even the retrograde, tax-averse Senate President Mike Miller has turned some kind of corner at age 70, promising that after two failed attempts, a state-driven offshore wind project will get through the Senate, and proposing an overlaid sales tax on gasoline to fund transportation projects.

Progressive legislators and their organizational allies rate many other critical projects favorably or at least with a fighting chance, including a clean water and pesticide disclosure package, a fully financed study of hydraulic fracturing, death penalty repeal and – more a long shot – an increase in the state minimum wage.

But a lot can go wrong in three months, as progressives have found to their dismay in the past. As with many legislatures, the Assembly has a history of taking two or three tries to pass even the most attractive and well-supported bills. And the legislators can't increase the governor's budget, but they can make cuts and move money around among the line items.

And best-laid plans may be ruffled by a new, large gun control initiative by O'Malley driven by reaction to the massacre of elementary school children and their teachers at Newtown,

Conn. The package of new gun control regulations, including an assault weapons ban, is high on the public agenda but also the kind of high-conflict issue that could hog a lot of the oxygen at the session.

The [National Association Education of Maryland](#), which represents the bulk of the state's teachers, is gearing up to defend and if possible augment a respectable budget level of "Thornton" funding for schools, somewhat equalizing the disparity between high-income counties like Montgomery and Howard counties and low-income systems like Prince George's County and Baltimore City. Alvin Thornton, a Prince George's school board member and chair, led a state-appointed panel that in 1999 created a formula and framework for equalizing school resources around the state.

Maryland is still emerging from tough times in the public sphere and private business. Maryland unions, who according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics lost 30,000 union jobs between 2011 and 2012, are working separate paths during the session to hold or increase jobs, insiders say. Construction unions in a welcome alliance with green forces continue to back the offshore wind project, with its promise of 15,000 jobs over 20 years. The O'Malley budget offers minority small business sweeteners in this latest offshore wind version that should keep traditional allies together on the project, and proponents argue that the state can become a hub of turbine technology research and manufacture as well.

Additional transportation money, for roads and transit, may make Miller's notion of a sales tax on motor fuel attractive; the fight then will be between new-road advocates and transit buffs. The bad taste left by the Inter-County Connector, a hugely expensive and underutilized toll road from Montgomery to Prince George's, could tip sentiments toward transit and the Purple Line. The ICC single-handedly maxed out Maryland's bond capacity and environmentalists see it as a stealth segment of an Outer Beltway that would confirm the region as the gridlock capital of the Western world. The long-planned Purple Line light rail from Silver Spring to New Carrollton, also a job-generator, benefits from the shadow the ICC throws on big new road projects.

Miller's plan for adding an overlay sales tax to gasoline sales wasn't to be released until around Feb. 1, though Lou Davis of the MPT program "State Circle" joked Jan. 25 that "he's been leaking it all week." It appears to have a regional structure, with counties permitted to apply the tax for their transportation projects as well as a state cut. Miller's considerable clout will be tested; the other two major players, O'Malley and House Speaker Michael Busch, appear to be keeping their powder dry.

Environmentalists consider the [offshore wind bill](#) a top priority as well, but feel more confident about its chances now that one of the principal roadblocks, Sen. Anthony Muse of Prince George's, has unceremoniously been shifted out of the Senate Finance Committee to another spot. His replacement, Prince George's Sen. Victor Ramirez, is a committed friend of the offshore wind bill, which failed to get out of the Finance Committee last year on the hectic final day of the session. Again, Miller – who took some heat for the Senate's role in the fiasco – swapped Muse for Ramirez unilaterally and guaranteed the offshore wind bill would get to the floor this session.

The green forces also back a package that would require full reporting of pesticide use by agriculture. The state [League of Conservation Voters](#) describes it as “a simple and cost-neutral, centralized online pesticide reporting database paid for by a modest fee increase for chemical manufacturers.”

Environmentalists also hope to pass a “bag bill” at either state or county level. Bills allowing a five-cent county-level fee on plastic bags – a huge source of litter – have been introduced covering both the state and just Prince George’s County. The county bill would allow the county council to pass the bag-fee legislation, something it can’t do without a legislative OK. The state bill would enable all counties to do the same. Prince George’s is flanked by jurisdictions – Montgomery County and the District – where the bag fee is already in place with demonstrably good results, visible to the public eye.

Maryland has a moratorium in place on [hydraulic fracturing](#), the method of extracting natural gas from shale formations that has roiled Pennsylvania and New York state. Impoverished Western Maryland lies over a portion of the vast Marcellus Shale rimming the eastern piedmont and homeowners want to sell drilling rights – but evidence is strong that the method, which involves pumping toxic liquids into the deep shale, threatens ground water supplies and aquifers as it has been practiced.

The moratorium will remain in place until a study required by a law sponsored by Montgomery Del. Heather Mizeur is completed, and because the study was never funded it was feared pressure from drillers and property owners in the western counties would remove the constraint.

But Mizeur told activists at a Greenbelt Climate Action Network meeting in mid-January that the governor’s budget, to be released the next day, would contain full funding for a real analysis of the risks. That funding, too, has to be defended during the session.

The state [Green Party](#) is backing offshore wind, death penalty repeal and an effort to restrict corporate spending on elections in the state, reversing (at least for Maryland) some of the worst effects of the Citizens United decision on campaign financing by “Prohibiting business entities from making contributions to a campaign finance entity to support or oppose a candidate.”

Admirably, the Green Party is also backing the creation of a Maryland state bank that would be the depository for all state tax and fee revenue, on the model of the 91-year-old state bank of North Dakota. Bills providing for that bank were filed last year, but failed.

The Green Party, perennially under the threat of losing its ballot line, must generate 10,000 valid petition signatures in each election cycle; they propose lowering that to 5,000 because “third party candidates [are forced] to spend most of their resources on ballot access instead of campaigning.” Sen. Paul Pinsky, a progressive Democrat from Prince George’s, has frequently filed similar ballot access bills but the interest of the Democratic majority does not appear to align with such notions.

And at the level of real poverty, legislators are proposing an increase in the state's minimum wage, which has been at the federal level of \$7.25 an hour for years. Nineteen states and D.C. have higher minimum wages than Maryland.

Del. Aisha Braveboy of Prince George's and Sen. Rob Garagiola of Montgomery have announced they will cross-file bills in their respective chambers that "would raise the minimum wage to \$8.25 in July, \$9 in July 2014 and \$10 in July 2015.... The minimum wage for employees who rely on tips also would rise, to 70 percent of the minimum wage from 50 percent," according to an account in the *Gazette* newspapers.

Unions and progressive groups including Progressive Maryland have formed "[Raise Maryland](#)," a coalition to back the minimum wage bill; it held a demonstration in mid-January in Annapolis.

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[Opening Political Spaces: Some Personal Reflections](#)

Thursday, January 31st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2013**

By Carolyn Byerly

My DSA Comrade Bill Mosely's piece "Beyond Groundhog Day" (in this same issue) has helped me think (again) about the many women's and leftist organizations I've belonged to through the years that have taken up the question "Why are we a white organization and how can we change it"?

The question is an honest one. We want to be inclusive in our political work at every level including membership. But too often we do carry out our good intentions within the realities of our white (and gendered) identities . . . perhaps.

For me, moving outside my own white, female experience has started with opening space in my head and shifting the ways I get politically involved. I've had some great teachers, and some awkward (even painful) moments trying to do this. Thus, I can share a few personal lessons about "white" organizations. These are essentially to:

- 1) Embrace what many African American radicals have taught me through the years: "Work on racism in your own [meaning my] communities."
- 2) Stop trying to bring people of color into my organizations; instead, join theirs with the intention of staying and working through their leadership. (p.s., This doesn't mean to stop outreach or to be welcoming in our own groups, just to diversify our own strategies.)

- 3) Find ways to build coalitions across organizations either on an issue basis, or an ongoing basis – this echoes Bill’s article in one aspect, allowing white majority groups to work with civil rights and other minority majority groups in common purpose.
- 4) Read more black and Latino writers with a left political conscience, both women and men.
- 5) Spend more social time in the company of people from other races and ethnicities. Develop greater ease with their cultures and explore friendships where possible.

Bill’s article also mentioned the often-touted accusation that DSA lacks female members, citing its male culture. This is something that resonates with my own experience, not only in DSA but other left organizations and, frankly, in general in this society. Good men do not mean to be exclusionary or sexist – they seem to become both because they “live” in a male-centered head space. Everything around us affirms and reinforces this.

Less discussed these days is how leftist men participate.

For example, I am regularly struck by some of my favorite white leftist intellectuals who assume that their analysis of social institutions “works” for women (and also people of color) the same way it does for men. One example is related to communication policies, something I’ve studied and worked to change for a number of years. The male scholars and political analysts who write most of the books on concentration of ownership and the public policies that enable it fail to acknowledge the impact of conglomeration on women and racial minorities. They espouse a “one analysis fits all” philosophy.

One reason this happens is because even smart, left-leaning men I know don’t read books or articles by women. My own feminist scholarship is rarely cited by my male academic colleagues, even though we meet up at conferences and talk about the same concerns. It just doesn’t occur to them that I (or other feminist media scholars) have anything to offer them. When a Canadian Marxist colleague contacted me about five years ago to ask me to suggest some of my articles on media ownership and women’s employment, I was pleasantly surprised. He has started citing my (and other feminists’) work now, which brings gender into his own research in ways it was previously missing.

These are breakthroughs that matter.

But let me add an illustration of how women also become marginalized across racial lines. In the course of drafting this short commentary, I received an email announcing the “African American Economic Summit” to focus on needed policies in Obama’s second term. The event, to be held February 1 and sponsored by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, is to be hosted by my own campus, Howard University. The announcement lists about 10 “distinguished scholars and policy experts” from Duke, Howard, and a range of think tanks, only one of whom is a woman. I have contacted the event’s sponsor and organizers and learned that some half dozen women are scheduled to be on various panels at the Summit, but they are all but invisible in the advance publicity. Did the male speakers have more perceived value for attracting attendees in the organizers’ minds?

These slights aside, we are wise to see that this is a historical moment with an opportunity to mobilize a new-New Left, and I believe that this can only happen if women and people of color are all involved.

I have chosen to do make a portion of my contribution to expanding and building DSA, but it's not the only venue where I exercise my activist spirit. Wherever we choose to work, I think we need to keep talking openly about race and gender, doing what one of my favorite writers, Paul Gilroy, calls "saying some things that are messy and disagreeable" in the process.

[The Local Gets Busy: Looking Back on 2012](#)

Wednesday, January 16th, 2013

At the risk of sounding like every other 'we did a lot give us money and volunteer' email I got at the end of the year; I'm happy to report that the DC DSA local really did accomplish a lot in 2012. I am proud of what we did and, after some badgering from more than a few of you, I have finally sat down to write about what we did (and didn't) get done last year.

In January 2012, if you had told me that in one year the DSA DC local would have a monthly [newsletter](#), a [website](#) that works, two new committees, a reformed steering committee *and* a megaphone... I might have raised an eyebrow.

If you then went on to tell me that we would increase the DC DSA presence in many local progressive campaigns like [Occupy DC](#), [Dignity at Darden](#), [Our Walmart](#), and [Stop the TPP](#) and several others; I would probably have laughed.

If you continued onward – despite my social cues indicating not to – and said that we would also coordinate and run a big [GET UP training](#), a training explaining the causes and solutions to the economic crisis for progressive activists;

and that we would go on to observe the [50th Anniversary of the Other America](#) with a movie showing and expert panel, as well as campaign for Democrats we had mixed feelings about, I would have told you to lay off the paint thinner.

But the truth is we really did do all of that, and more. So yes, the truth is stranger than fiction.

But as socialists we know that there is always opportunity for progress. Among the projects we hope to undertake in 2013 are further improvements to the website (including an events calendar), attracting more diversity in our membership, and working to improve transparency and communication from the steering committee. Not all of these issues have an easy fix, but at the risk of sounding like a paint thinner abusing nut who needs to take it down a notch; I think that the DC DSA local can do all that – and more – in 2013.

I think that we can do more training, more actions, more reading, and more writing than we did in 2012.

We already have events planned for this weekend including participation in the MLK Peacewalk and leafleting at Inauguration Day. With your help, we can make 2013 even more successful than 2012.

[Join us](#) as we make 2013 even better than 2012!