

The Washington Socialist
Articles from the February 2014 Issue
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[The February 2014 Washington Socialist](#)

Tuesday, February 11th, 2014



Welcome to the February edition of the *Washington Socialist*, the monthly newsletter of the DC Metro Democratic Socialists of America. With DC's primary season heating up, Bill Mosley has written a [brief guide](#) to the unique politics of our nation's capital and DSA's endorsement process. Be sure to read it, as we will be considering endorsements at our next [membership meeting](#) on February 8th at Cleveland Park Library!

Carolyn Byerly has written an [insightful piece](#) on recent unemployment numbers that dives into the role of gender in employment figures. The overall news is good for men and women but the pay gap [persists](#).

Victory! Kurt Stand [reports](#) on the celebration of minimum wage increases in DC, Prince George's and Montgomery counties. As Kurt [notes](#), there are lessons to be learned as we push to build on these successes.

Worthwhile reads: Jose Gutierrez [reviews](#) Lane Kenworthy's new book: *Social Democratic America*. Lane, Jose writes, has outlined an ambitious program, more ambitious in scope than that of almost any progressive politician. Read his detailed review [here](#).

Hope Village Exposed: Kurt Stand [exposes](#) the scarcity of job training and support for those who have paid their debt to society, often many times over. This powerful call to action is well worth the [read](#).

Good Reads: DC DSAers [highlight](#) some of their favorite articles of the month.

[Good Reads](#)

Friday, January 31st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2014**

[Whatever happened to the War on Poverty?](#) It's been 50 years since LBJ's declaration. The NYT's Annie Lowrey runs the numbers and the prospects in what will doubtless be one of many such looks in the rear view mirror (and the crystal ball).

Metro DC Local co-chair Jose Gutierrez posted this one on our Facebook page and it deserves the [widest possible circulation](#).

Several takes on the National Security State: Tom Englehardt in [Common Dreams](#) and Dan Gillmor in [The Guardian](#), making the crucial link between surveillance and the choking off of the open Internet.

Sam Pizzigati's "[Too Much](#)" weekly blog provides juicy stories of excess and the reaction against it, including the "Petulant Plutocrat of the Week," the latest example of someone who has it all and wants... more.

[Help or Hindrance, Hope or Hopelessness: Hope Village and Prison Release](#)

Friday, January 31st, 2014

The combined stealings and robberies of all the thieves and highwaymen in the penitentiary at Atlanta would be but a trifle compared to the loot of a single [war] profiteer and this explains why the former are convicted felons and the latter eminent patriots and philanthropists. ...

If there is any one thing settled beyond question it is that the criminal, so-called, is the product of society, and in caging him like a beast, society in its blindness and brutality but bruises the body and scars the soul of its ill-fated off-spring for punishment of its own sins.

In the nearly four years I spent among them as a fellow-convict I came to know the inmates of prisons intimately enough to believe in them as human beings; to be convinced that as a whole they are far more sinned against than sinning, and to be willing to cast my lot with them as against the social cruelty and misunderstanding of which they are victims.

Eugene Victor Debs, [Walls & Bars](#), Socialist Party Press, 1927 pp 238-239

Help or Hindrance, Hope or Hopelessness

Hope Village and Prison Release

By Kurt Stand

The New Year is underway bringing with it new hope, even if that hope is often fleeting. For those in prison, this contrasts with the Christmas season, a difficult time for many whether they

celebrate the holiday or not. After all, it is a season of family togetherness and celebration, something difficult or impossible to fully embrace when locked up. January 1, on the other hand, is a happier occasion. No matter how long the sentence (except for those subjected to life terms), it marks a step in the journey home – “one year done, one less to do” is how the day is commonly seen. But the future, bright in the distance, can be a challenging time the nearer that final night behind the fence arrives. Release along with high expectations, hope and happiness, can bring its own tests – former prisoners must make their way with few resources when they re-enter what is often a vastly changed world. Without a strong network of family and friends (family and friends who themselves are able to provide help) it is an almost impossible challenge. Halfway houses exist to bridge that gap, to help prisoners with employment, housing, medical and other needs as they cross the line between incarceration and freedom. At least they exist for that purpose in theory; in practice they generally fall far short. Washington DC’s Hope Village, located in Southeast DC, provides a telling example of just how far short they can fall.

Last year, the District of Columbia Corrections Information Council (CIC) — established by the Revitalization Act of 1997 and the Jail Improvement Act of 2003 — confirmed what those who experienced Hope Village already knew. In a report based on an inspection of conditions at the facility as well as extensive interviews with residents, former resident, family members and staff, one sentence stands out:

The CIC heard on multiple occasions that incarcerated DC residents would prefer to stay at secure Bureau facilities than renter DC through Hope Village.

Translated into English, that means people would rather be in prison than stay in a halfway house that allows them to walk on city streets, visit home, eat “real” food, and have a degree of freedom not possible when locked up. That feeling is widespread and has nothing to do with nostalgia for prison, everything to do with how Hope Village functions. Findings included in the report may help explain why so many feel that way:

DC residents are returning to the DC community after periods of incarceration, and many have served long sentences and are disconnected from their homes, families, loved ones, government, and local services. Often DC residents in Bureau custody are incarcerated in states all over the country, as far as California, Texas, Arizona, and Florida. Upon return to the DC community, residents need assistance with employment, housing, medical and mental healthcare, substance abuse, reintegration, mentoring, therapy, identification, transportation, living necessities, and more. All of these needs, if unmet, present significant challenges to reentry.”

Detailing what that meant, the report provides documentation that supports the following observations:

- Some programs are offered at Hope Village; however, the quality of the programming is poor. Topics discussed in class are not related to the class (e.g. in Life Skills class, life skills are not discussed and residents do not learn anything; in drug programming many topics are discussed, none of which include drugs or drug use). The time spent and subjects discussed in programming do not further the goal of successful reentry.

- Residents feel unprepared to complete basic life tasks, such as taking the Metro or bus and navigating their way around the District, along with more complex tasks such as housing, employment and reentering a community they have been distanced from for an extended period of time.
- The vocational staff is not trained and lacks experience in employment assistance.
- The attitude of Hope Village staff is poor, providing punitive rather than supportive measures.
- Staff members lack training and competence to work with the ex-offender population.
- Staff does not offer enough support to residents at such a critical time in their lives to procure the most successful employment and life outcomes.
- Hope Village provides little or no assistance for residents seeking housing upon their release from the facility. Residents are often forced to reside in homeless shelters or on the street when they fail to receive such assistance.

To put a human face on this, I saw last autumn someone I knew in prison walking the streets at Gallery Place, living in a homeless shelter after 20 years of prison for street drug crimes that left him locked up while in his 20s and 30s. Still a young man, he has no job skills, poor reading skills and few prospects. Returning to a changed city, his family now lives in PG County, the neighborhood where he grew up no longer affordable. Though nearby, it is another jurisdiction and he would have to jump through bureaucratic hoops to get approval to live there – and themselves stretched financially there was little concrete help they could give. Lacking a car, Metro being expensive, he could see them only rarely. Desperate for help, there was nothing real offered by way of assistance before leaving prison, in the halfway house, or now when back on the street.

Another man I knew, older, who had held jobs and is better able to navigate through life, I saw working ripping out walls and pipes in a building about to be renovated. It was a temporary job that a friend helped him find, one he was happy to do, but offering nothing long-term or permanent. Living with family members, he had a roof over his head and was happy to be again a free man. But he wanted a permanent job. While at Hope Village he was consistently asking for help –knowing that it is hard for a semi-skilled laborer, 50 years old, with a history of convictions, to land work. The “booming” economy in DC is not for the likes of people such as he.

A third person faced a different reality. His younger brother is mentally disabled, his mother suffers diabetes; he didn’t want to come home to be a burden. In his 30s, very determined and upbeat in life, he managed to get a part-time retail job earning minimum wage. He was happy with the work, but it certainly didn’t allow him to rent an apartment. He too was caught in the

gentrification change, his family no longer living in the District. So he was living in a shelter, trying to maintain a positive outlook that enables him to see beyond day-to-day. He had tried to get housing assistance while at Hope Village, the only help he received were empty words. So today, he also works at trying to maintain a positive outlook that goes beyond his bleak day-to-day.

Others, of course, are doing better. But generally in those cases they had family and friendship networks with sufficient resources to help them get a decent-paying full time job, to put a roof over their head, and to re-enter life truly free rather than as a supplicant. For them, Hope Village wasn't a help, it simply was less of a hindrance. And even then, other costs abound – for myself, it meant a delay in getting work, a delay in being with family, a delay in restarting life – contrary to expectations and contrary to what official policy is supposed to be. For those who are in Hope Village today, or who will be there in the future, a different kind of re-entry program is needed. As the CIC report explains, the District government ought to increase funding for employment and housing needs, mental and physical health provision, transportation, supporting family and community reintegration because, as the report says,

... Increased provision of these support services will lead to DC residents spending less time incarcerated, overall safer communities, and monetary savings.

But those changes won't happen without pressure, without public concern and demand. At the end of last year, the Community Lawyering Project at Bread for the City, together with other organizations concerned about the rights and well being of people returning home after prison, called for a congressional hearing and town hall meetings to discuss the CIC Report and the beginning of a broad public discussion of how to implement its recommendations. Now, as we enter election season, these concerns need to be voiced loudly and insistently in the interests of justice and equity. For the essence of labor and socialist principles can be simply stated: all of us or none.

All quotes are from:

[District of Columbia Corrections Information Council \(CIC\) comprehensive report on conditions at the Hope Village Residential Reentry Center](#), May 14, 2013, Michelle R. Bonner, Chair
Katharine A. Huffman Reverend Samuel Whittaker

Information on the Petition can be found at:

“[Bring Hope to Hope Village](#),” Petition by Aja Taylor, posted by Community Lawyering Project, Bread for the City, December 2, 2013

[Metro-DC DSA to Consider Endorsements in DC Primary Election](#)

Friday, January 31st, 2014

By Bill Mosley

At its meeting on Saturday, Feb. 8, Metro-DC Democratic Socialists of America will consider endorsing candidates in the April 1 District of Columbia primary election.

The meeting will take place from 2:30-3:30 pm at the Cleveland Park Library, 3310 Connecticut Ave. NW, near the Cleveland Park Metro station.

Primaries are being held by the Democratic, Republican, Statehood Green, and Libertarian parties. Offices on the ballot are mayor; council chairman; at-large councilmember; councilmembers for Wards 1, 3, 5 and 6; delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives; U.S. senator; U.S. representative; and, for voters in the Democratic primary, members of the Democratic national and state committees. (The delegate to the U.S. House, a salaried position that dates back to the early 1970s, is the official representative of D.C.'s interests in Congress. The delegate, currently Eleanor Holmes Norton, serves on committees and can speak, but not vote, on the House floor. The unpaid positions of U.S. senator and representative were created in the early 1990s to serve as lobbyists for D.C. statehood. Sometimes known as "shadow" members, they are not recognized by Congress and don't serve on committees or have speaking or voting rights).

At the meeting, Metro-DC DSA will consider motions for endorsements to any of these offices. Any local DSA member in good standing in the organization – i.e., having paid dues within the past year – is eligible to propose and vote on endorsements. According to Metro-DC DSA's bylaws, decisions on electoral endorsements require a vote of two-thirds of the members present.

My article from last month's *Washington Socialist* discussing the race for D.C. mayor is available at [this link](#).

[Minimum Wage Victory Rally: Turning Setbacks Into Opportunity](#)

Friday, January 31st, 2014

By Kurt Stand

"Yes, we can" – "Si se Puede" has been the slogan of union and reform movements from the early days of the United Farm Workers union on through Barak Obama's first presidential campaign. Joslyn Williams, president of the AFL-CIO Metropolitan Washington Labor Council, opened a Wednesday, January 15 celebration of the minimum wage hike victories in DC, Prince Georges and Montgomery counties, by changing the phrase, leading a chant "Yes, we did." Good spirits were everywhere in evidence during the reception and the subsequent speech-making in the lobby of the AFL-CIO building as victories for working people – especially those

which translate into real and immediate gains for many who are in need – are rare enough. But not too rare was the hope of the crowd; cheers rang out with calls for support to press the campaign to extend the increase to the entire state of Maryland, to bring the campaign to Virginia.

Hopes for further wins are not idle. The success just gained points the way for other campaigns as it entailed turning a defeat into victory, turning a geographically limited initiative into a broader regional movement. The story of the initial setback should be well-known. Last year, an apparently victorious campaign to increase the minimum wage at big-box stores –specifically Walmart – was defeated when the Washington, DC government was confronted by the power of fear. Walmart, ignoring the reality that its business model is based on low-wage labor, objected to the plan on the basis that it shouldn't be singled out for special, “unfair” treatment. Leaving aside the peculiar understanding of what constitutes “fair play” for a billion-dollar corporation that uses its market strength to undermine pay standards, some local political and business leaders were willing to buy the argument. Most were not, and thus, added to argument was the use of raw power. Wielding as a club the high rate of unemployment among District residents who are not benefitting from local gentrification, Walmart threatened to stop its planned opening of new outlets in the city if the proposal became law. Mayor Vincent Gray surrendered to that pressure, vetoed the bill, as did enough Council members such that the veto could not be overridden. But that was not the end of the story.

DC City Council Chair Phil Mendelson explained to the gathering what happened next. Rather than accept corporate blackmail as a final answer, the Council took Walmart at its word and decided that the company would not be “singled out.” Instead of legislation limited to big box stores, Mendelson proposed a measure for an across-the-board minimum wage hike. Now Walmart would simply have to pay the same increased minimum as all retail and other low-wage employers. And this time the Council approved the measure with a veto-proof unanimous vote.

That unanimity was strengthened by the fact that suburban Maryland acted in concert with DC. Marc Elrich, Montgomery County Council Member at Large, explained how that happened. When he initially introduced local minimum wage hike legislation, the business community responded by claiming it was unfair to them for an increase to take place only in Montgomery County, implying that businesses might move out (the concept of “fair,” evidently not including workers interests). Elrich responded to that threat by reaching out to Mendelson and to other legislators in DC and Prince Georges, with the proposal that they introduce matching bills. By establishing the same increase in all three jurisdictional lines, employers could not so easily threaten to cross a street in order to higher lower-paid labor. Again, it was the ability to broaden the scope of the legislation that enabled progress to be made against corporate strategy to divide workers against each other. Expanding the range of progressive change, the blackmail failed — Walmart did not stop its expansion plans, nor did it or any other business move in consequence.

Important and vital as was legislative action, even more critical to the success won was pressure from the streets – it is hard to imagine the current momentum toward a minimum wage increase without the recent demonstrations, one-day strikes and rallies by Walmart and fast food workers across the nation. Williams in his opening comments emphasized the importance of mass

pressure through coalition efforts as being responsible for the victories being celebrated. As he called out the names of coalition partners active in this victory, the applause and cheers given to each – Respect DC, DC Employment Justice Center, Jews United For Justice, Faith Strategies, DC Fiscal Policy Institute, DC Jobs with Justice, Casa De Maryland, Restaurant Opportunities Centers-DC, Progressive Maryland & PG NAACP – was a sign that the unity established with the Metro DC Labor Council can have lasting meaning in overcoming parochial divides which in the past divided workers living in different parts of the region.

Elizabeth Shuler, National AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer, underscored the potential of that unity when she told the gathering that the successful campaign for a regional minimum wage was going to be used as a model for similar initiatives throughout the country. And, she added that unity of action built in the Metro DC area will be replicated in other regions through a new national community-labor-coalition – its formation first announced at his celebration.

Meanwhile, plans are underway to maintain this unity and build upon this victory in our area. As noted above, approval was shouted out for calls to bring the campaign for a minimum wage increase to Annapolis so that suburban Maryland's gains can be spread throughout the state – and to take the fight to Richmond and win a similar raise for Virginia's low-paid workers. And not to be forgotten is the campaign to raise the pay for tipped workers who can still, legally, be paid as little as \$2.13 per hour.

Beyond that we need fair wages and jobs for all, a need Elrich stressed in his comments. So too did National AFL-CIO Executive Vice President Tefere Gebre, an immigrant from Ethiopia, who spoke of the meaning of the American Dream as a struggle for social justice for all. It is that struggle which calls to all of us to turn *Si se Puede* into a continuing triumphs for working people so that many more “yes we did” victories can be celebrated.

[Review of Social Democratic America by Lane Kenworthy](#)

Friday, January 31st, 2014

By Jose Gutierrez

In *Social Democratic America*, Lane Kenworthy outlines an ambitious program, more ambitious in scope than that of almost any progressive politician.

Kenworthy suggests that the amount that the US spends on social insurance programs should increase by 10% of GDP, which would be equal to \$1.5 trillion. He believes that through a kind of policy drift all of the rich countries have expanded their social insurance systems and that this dynamic is also taking place in the United States.

Kenworthy mentions as evidence for his argument the creation and expansion of several programs since the 1970's including:

- * Expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit in 1986, 1990, 1993 and 2009.
- * Medicaid expansions in 1984-1988, 1998 and most recently in 2010.
- * Medicare prescription drug bill, 2004.
- * Creation and expansion of Child Tax Credit, 1997 and 2003.
- * Expansion of Head Start 1984, 1990, 1995, 2009.
- * Increase in disability benefits and expansion of access
- * Low-Income energy assistance, created in 1981
- * Public funding of after school activities in schools in low-income communities.

The major exception to his argument, which he mentions in his book, is Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

He believes that once a program is created it is difficult to eliminate that program.

Kenworthy suggests that reforms will come piecemeal and not all at once. His comprehensive list of reforms include:

- Universal health insurance
- Universal system of one year of paid parental leave
- Universal early education
- Increased Child Tax Credit
- Universal sickness insurance
- Eased eligibility criteria for unemployment insurance
- Wage insurance for unexpected drops in income
- State-run supplemental defined-contribution pension plans with automatic enrollment
- Extensive, personalized job search and (re)training support
- Government as employer of last resort
- Minimum wage increased modestly and indexed to inflation
- Earned Income Tax Credit extended farther up the income ladder and indexed to average wages or GDP per capita
- Higher benefit level for social assistance (i.e. TANF-like programs)
- Reduced incarceration of low-level drug offenders
- Affirmative action shifted to focus on family background rather than race
- Expanded government investment in infrastructure and public spaces
- More paid holidays and vacation time

Kenworthy mentions the idea of government as employer of last resort, which is the most popular of the five suggestions made by Jesse Myerson in his piece for [Rolling Stone](#).

There is also some overlap between his proposal and the [social and economic bill of rights](#) proposed by [Democratic Socialists of America](#).

He proposes that this agenda be funded by the following revenue increases:

- Value Added Tax of 12% (5.0% of GDP)
- Return to 2000 federal income tax rates (2.0% of GDP)
- New tax brackets at the top of the income distribution (0.7%)
- Elimination of the mortgage interest tax deduction (0.6%)
- Carbon tax (0.7%)
- Financial transactions tax of 0.5% on trades (0.5%)
- Increase the payroll tax cap so that it covers 90% of earnings (0.2%)
- Increase the payroll tax by 1 percentage point (0.3%)

Kenworthy is pessimistic about the prospects of a revitalized labor movement. He also doesn't think it's necessary to achieve the goals outlined in his book.

While it is not surprising that any progressive would feel that way, it is surprising that he thinks the goals he outlines are achievable without the support of a dynamic grassroots movement. A welfare state of the scope he describes has been achieved only in countries with powerful labor movements and strong socialists or social democratic parties.

He also doesn't think that major changes to the trade policy of the US are called for. He is not very optimistic about the US adopting a full-employment policy, which again, seems to contradict the fact that he is in favor of government being an employer of last resort.

There are some proposals in the book that would be difficult for many to embrace.

His proposal for a Value Added Tax, which is a type of consumption tax, would be one example, even though, as he points out, there is no country with a large social insurance system that doesn't have one.

Kenworthy also never discusses the need for worker control that would increase the likelihood that these reforms would not be reversed at a later time.

Still, it is a worthwhile book. At the very least the agenda mentioned by the writer would constitute a consensus position of immediate reforms for the American left.

For additional perspectives on the book and related topics:

1. [Interview with writer](#)
2. [Liberal critique of book](#)
3. [Socialist critique](#)
4. [How a more developed Welfare State could lead to a more radical change in the United States](#)

[Women's Paid Unemployment Rate Falling](#)

Friday, January 31st, 2014

Carolyn M. Byerly

Women's paid employment is not only bouncing back from the 2007-08 financial crash, but is higher than at any time in US history, according to a December 6 report from the [Institute for Women's Policy Research](#). The report said job growth for both women and men is in major recovery mode. The [IWPR report](#) was based on an analysis of U.S. Bureau Labor Statistics from November 2013.

The government stats showed women gained the most jobs in education and health services (39,000), professional and business services (17,000), and retail trade (15,600). Even though women's unemployment figures of 6.7 percent are lower than men's 7.3, men still hold more paid jobs than women overall, the IWPR report said. Even more important, when the women's figures are disaggregated, single mothers' unemployment rate is the highest of all at 9.7 percent.

These are important stats to consider, but they are incomplete, of course. The government's unemployment data don't include people who have been without jobs for long periods of time, the chronically unemployed. This means that the outlook for women could actually be even grimmer than the IWPR's analysis found. Moreover, in other recent research, the IWPR has found that the wage gap between men and women is not likely to close until 2058. In other words, women will not see equal pay during their working lives.

The IWPR, based in Washington, DC, was founded by Dr. Heidi Hartmann, a socialist feminist economist, in 1987.