

*The Washington Socialist*  
Articles from February 2015 Issue  
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Editor: Woody Woodruff

[DC Metro DSA's February Newsletter: Short month, long agenda](#)

Monday, February 2nd, 2015



**Welcome to the February 2015 issue of the *Washington Socialist*, the email newsletter of Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America.**

Well, February. A shortish month of great psychic length.

Our **February membership meeting** is on a Sunday instead of a Saturday – Sunday, Feb. 15 at 2 p.m. – and the speaker will be Dave Freeman, a veteran manager of public power systems like the TVA and skeptic about corporate power conglomerates like Exelon, which is lobbying to merge with Pepco. It's at the Watha T. Daniel/Shaw library branch, 1630 7<sup>th</sup> St. NW, just steps from the Shaw Metrorail station. Our **Socialist Salon** meets the following Thursday, Feb. 19, 6:30 p.m. at Hunan Dynasty, 215 Pennsylvania Ave. SE (closest to Capitol South on the Orange/Blue Line). A discussion of the Syriza victory in Greece's parliamentary elections and the possible reverberations in the Eurozone will be led by Simon Davis, a journalist who has lived in Greece. Our local's **Happy Hour**, unstructured discourse, meets Feb. 25 at 6:30 at Bread & Brew, 1247 20th Street Northwest, Washington, DC near the Dupont Circle Metrorail. Check our [Meetup site](#) for updates on all these events.

#### **OTHER FEBRUARY EVENTS:**

On Tuesday, Feb. 3 Busboys & Poets at 5th and K (Mount Vernon Triangle) presents a talk on [new scholarship on the Lawrence \(Mass.\) Textile Strike of 1912](#). The talk by AU emeritus prof Jurg Siegenthaler is at 6 p.m.

Metro DC DSA is a cosponsor of [Demystifying Syria – The Real Story Behind ISIS](#), a Feb. 21 forum in Rockville along with lead sponsor Peace Action Montgomery. The bitter and largely misunderstood situation on the ground in Iraq and Syria is outlined by some of the most well-informed analysts in the U.S. Speakers are Phyllis Bennis of IPS, Raed Jarrar, policy analyst for American Friends Service Committee, and Prof. Younes Benab of Strayer University. Questions, discussion and action plans to oppose the violence are included. It's Saturday, Feb. 21, 7:00 p.m. at Unitarian Universalist Church of Rockville, [100 Welsh Park Dr., Rockville](#).

The Labor Committee of the DC NAACP is hosting an open meeting Feb. 23 to set the activities

of the committee (the local NAACP's labor liaison group) for 2015, including work on minimum wage, labor solidarity activism and the racial justice component of worker activism. It's [Monday, Feb. 23 at 7 p.m.](#), NAACP Financial Freedom Center, Thurgood Marshall Center, Lower Level, 1816 12th St. NW, Washington, DC.

National DSA is offering a **DSA On-Line Virtual "Socialist School" Course** in "A Basic Introduction to the Thought of Karl Marx" with co-facilitators: Joe Schwartz, DSA Vice Ch, and Jared Abbott, Ch DSA Strategy Comm. It is open to all DSA and YDS members relatively new to Marx (how many of us does that cover? Maybe a few...). The course will be 1.5 hours during the 7 – 10 PM EST slot on **Feb 24, Mar 24, April 28 and May 26**. This will be a virtual discussion group. There will be either one or two sessions each night, depending on the number of members who sign up. This 4 session mini-course is designed to help socialists link theory with day to day activity. We will cover a manageable selection of Marx's reading – and signing up for the course means committing to doing these readings. **Space is limited: deadline for signing up is Feb 17**. Make the commitment to do all 4 sessions. It's open free to members, but of course [becoming a member](#) is the easiest part. Then comes the reading. Register here: [http://www.dsausa.org/introduction\\_to\\_marxism](http://www.dsausa.org/introduction_to_marxism)

Advance notice of a great-looking **academic event coming early in March** at the University of Maryland, College Park (tx to Bob Feldman and Ingrid Goldstrom for this tip): ["Organizing for Power and Workers' Rights in the 21st Century"](#) is being offered by the Center for the Study of the New American History at UMCP Thursday, March 5. It's a day-long session with the morning devoted to today's labor conditions and prospects (with UFCW's Dan Schlademan, the leader of the Walmart organizing campaign, on a panel and a keynote by AFL-CIO Treasurer Elizabeth Shuler) and the afternoon focused on labor aspects of globalization and immigration, including a panel with our DSA comrade (and Cal-Santa Barbara labor history prof) Nelson Lichtenstein. [The Southern Labor Studies Association](#), a co-sponsor on this event, continues its conference down at GW for the rest of the weekend.

## IN THIS ISSUE

One of our constant battles as socialists is to effectively define what we mean by public and democratic management, vs. the increasing, but well masked, manipulation of social and economic life by the private – the corporations and the wealthy ruling class. Public services that affect everyone are under the radar that way, but sometimes events make it plain.

- That dichotomy hits the public head-on when ubiquitous services like public power are exposed as (for instance in Maryland, Virginia and the District) the corporate monopolies that they are. Public hearings are under way in Maryland and the District because a big corporate octopus – PEPCO– seeks to be absorbed by an even bigger corporate octopus, Chicago-based and nuke-heavy Exelon. [A recent public hearing](#) on the proposed merger in DC is analyzed by *Andy Feeney*, and [a similar hearing in Maryland](#) by *Woody Woodruff*.
- Events in Ferguson, New York and Cleveland that have highlighted excessive force and murder by law enforcement have brought many [proposals for improving, constraining or making transparent the work of police](#) in communities. *Bill Mosley* points out that the estrangement of poor and minority communities from police has deep historical roots –

based in part on who police are really protecting and serving – and can only be alleviated by improving the conditions in those communities themselves.

- The plague of [gentrification in the District of Columbia](#) has its base in social ills of long standing and has brought a vibrant new movement to contest it, *Andy Feeney* outlines. A coalition of new and existing DC movement organizations is bridging some old divides in the progressive community.
- The former New York Times columnist Bob Herbert has taken a long look at the decline in social practice and in public policy that afflicts the US. *David Duhalde* reviews [Herbert's recent book, \*Losing Our Way\*](#).
- Metro DC DSA's January membership meeting hosted a longtime ally, Andrea Miller of Progressive Democrats of America. Her new parallel organization, [People Demanding Action](#), provides the local street heat dimension that Progressive Democrats, by their own charter, had to leave alone, and that new organization's strategic tools can offer lessons to a more traditional left organization like DSA, as *Andy Feeney* outlines.
- Allied [activists from Maryland and the District](#) also brought strategic and tactical tools to the local's monthly Socialist Salon. Activists Lucy Duff and Lisa Stand of Prince George's County, Wally Malakoff of Montgomery County's Progressive Neighbors, and neighborhood and electoral activist Eugene Puryear outlined the shape of activism in their respective jurisdictions. DC begins the term of another development-ensnared mayor, and Marylanders face a surprise Republican governor who has little relationship to the two large counties bordering DC. *Woody Woodruff* recounts the discussion.
- A Republican-controlled Congress finds one area of agreement with President Obama on trade, and their agreement could bring economic and climate disaster to workers in the US and hard-pressed people in the impoverished global South. [The Trans Pacific Partnership \(TPP\)](#) could enable corporate dominance – “insurance against democracy” for businesses and corporations, one activist says. *Andy Feeney* updates readers on the TPP fight and what it could take to win.
- The Maryland General Assembly pits its Democratic supermajority against the new Republican governor, and one hopes sparks would fly (though much conflict might be kabuki posturing considering the pro-business bent of both parties in ostensibly Deep Blue Maryland). Meanwhile the new governor has stocked his agencies with the same wrecking crew that made the Ehrlich administration such a disaster for the state. *Woody Woodruff* has a few observations about [the first weeks of Maryland's Assembly session](#).
- [Good Reads](#) include the usual suspects – corporate greed, bipartisan skullduggery, danger to the planet and the occasional heroics from the Left – an especially rich assortment this month, just the thing for weather that keeps us indoors.

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**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](mailto:woodlanham@gmail.com).*

## [Beneficiaries Line Up to Praise Exelon-Pepco Merger; Ratepayers Not So Much](#)

Sunday, February 1st, 2015

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2015**

*By Woody Woodruff*

Comments from the public in Prince George's County on a merger of two giant corporate utilities added up to near-uniform support and praise – mostly from nonprofit groups that had benefited from the corporations' largesse in the past and clearly hoped for even more.

A virtual "coalition of the billing" appeared at a Maryland Public Service Commission hearing Jan. 14 to praise Pepco Holdings, which provides power to D.C. and suburban Maryland counties surrounding it, and urge that Exelon, a giant Chicago-based utility dependent on aging and expensive nuclear plants, be permitted to take over Pepco. Only a few lone voices objected on behalf of ratepayers and the environment.

Merger approval would make Exelon the largest utility not only in Maryland but in the US, as [a coalition of 20 progressive and environmental groups in Maryland argued in late 2014](#) when presenting a united objection to the merger. "The proposed merger would harm consumers and the environment and prevent Maryland from realizing a clean, affordable, and reliable 21st-century electric grid," the coalition contended.

Instead, "this merger would lock over 80% of Marylanders into a 20<sup>th</sup>-century grid controlled by a single company based in Chicago" and one with a track record of actively opposing renewable energy policy, the coalition's statement continued.

Little concern about environmental effects or the vulnerability of ratepayers under the new regime was heard from the parade of well-dressed charitable organization representatives who testified before the PSC at the hearing at Prince George's Community College.

Instead, the merger supporters from United Way, the Prince George's Business Roundtable, the Arbor Day Foundation, one I.B.E.W. local and the Anacostia Watershed Society lauded the companies for their past contributions and purported commitment to minority hiring and subcontracting – expressing hope that crumbs would continue to fall from the corporate table.

Generally progressive organizations like the Prince George's NAACP fell into line, president Bob Ross expressing support for the merger and gratitude for Pepco's past financial contributions with no reference to the potential exposure of ratepayers. David Harrington, once a fairly progressive member of the Maryland Senate, endorsed the merger speaking as executive director of the county Chamber of Commerce, and citing Exelon's "unwavering track record of environmental stewardship."

Some local residents, less well-turned-out citizens appeared in small numbers to oppose the merger on the grounds that Exelon's recent record as corporate overlord of Baltimore Gas & Electric and its dependence on nuclear for over half its overall generating capacity threatened both ratepayers and the environment.

The most comprehensive opposition came from a self-identified resident and ratepayer from Upper Marlboro whose "household has been a residential solar generator for over three years." As did the earlier anti-merger coalition, he argued that distributed generation involving renewable sources would improve Maryland's overall power picture. "This case is about the shape of our grid and who gets to make money off of it. Exelon has all the wrong incentives here," he said. The giant corporation, facing increasing expense from its aging nuclear power plants, "is looking for a cash cow... to shift its financial risk onto ratepayers." He also cited the company's record of opposing renewable energy. Pepco, by comparison, will represent "ratepayers, not just shareholders," in the three-state regional power grid, he said.

But the well-manicured turnout from the nonprofit and charitable community was numerically overwhelming. Maryland, as one of 15 states with deregulated utilities, has comparatively little public authority over the corporate providers of power in the state. Maryland and DC are in the 5-state "PJM" regional grid, where Exelon has huge sway already. The [Department of Energy's statistics show](#) that states (mostly Atlantic Coast states) with deregulated (corporate) power providers rather than public power authorities have higher electrical rates. [One quite red state has a statewide public power utility – Nebraska](#). A national environmentalist perspective on this Exelon proposal is at <http://grist.org/climate-energy/the-exelon-pepco-merger-big-nuke-heavy-utility-looking-for-new-ratepayers-to-fleece/>

The PSC decision likely remains some time away, but the Maryland public hearings on the case have concluded. Comments from the public in addition to those made at the series of public hearings may be made by writing David J. Collins, Executive Secretary, Maryland Public Service Commission, 6 Saint Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202-6806. No comments are accepted at the PSC website. "Evidentiary hearings" on the merger, which is case no. 9361, are scheduled before the full PSC during the last week of January and [every day from Monday, Feb. 2 to Friday, Feb. 6](#).

[Chronicling the wreckage of bipartisan neoliberalism](#)

Sunday, February 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2015**

**Review:** *Losing Our Way: An Intimate Portrait of a Troubled America* by Bob Herbert (Random House, 2014)

*By David Duhalde*

The Great Recession's poverty is just as hidden from public view among the formerly rich as it is among the poor and working classes. Bob Herbert, the retired *New York Times* columnist, chronicles the façade of economic security in his latest book, *Losing our Way*.

Wealthy Hunterdon County in western New Jersey, known primarily for its horse farms and scenic rolling hillsides, had experienced a dramatic increase in families seeking federal food assistance during the recession and its aftermath. The director of a social service agency that found itself offering assistance to an entirely new constituency told *Bloomberg News* "Sometimes people will come in a Mercedes. Sometimes they come in [wearing] Ralph Lauren. But you never know. That may be all they have." (page 41)

These stories make Herbert's work as upsetting as it is uplifting. The self-proclaimed "intimate portrait of a troubled America" places summaries of academic work side-by-side with personal stories, including by my fiancé, about the four themes. The "way" was our willingness to spend heavily on public works, public education, and other social goods even if it means higher taxes and a long-term return on investment. Herbert walks the reader through 12 chapters about the themes of employment, war, education, and infrastructure.

He juxtaposes the seemingly separate, but interconnected, policies that our elected leaders enacted with deadly consequences. Herbert recalls the Bush administration's unprecedented call for simultaneous tax cuts *and* war. Foreign conflict was paid for with our money that was needed at home. The president and politicians of both parties sent our young people to fight Iraqis and Afghans, but were unwilling to battle our crumbling infrastructure.

Through profiles of wounded soldiers and workers, Herbert chronicles death, injury, and recovery on the international and domestic front. Soldiers continue to be killed and maimed long after many high-level government officials had concluded the wars had limited benefit. Congress and the president funnel billions into these conflicts while ignoring our outdated public works. Instead of terrorism, US residents are killed by broken levees or collapsing bridges, and are poisoned by compromised water systems.

Herbert also unmask the corporate agenda behind much of "education reform." He separates the proponents of education reform: the well-intentioned Bill Gates, the malicious Michelle Rhee, and the money-hungry Rupert Murdoch. Gates' oversized wallet propelled his social experiment of small schools within one building into existence. The scheme, which was abandoned with little fanfare, is unable to build community or significantly increase graduation rates, while successfully pushing the most troubled students into other, failing, schools.

Rhee's toxic mix of self-righteousness and an affinity for termination (she gleefully invites a news crew to watch her fire an educator) led to the downfalls of both her and the DC mayor she served. Murdoch and scores of other charter advocates cannot hide their interests in the profits from the privatization of public education. They work night and day to undermine the social support of school as a public good.

The chapters on the troubled job market cover both the young and old, and were deeply personal, especially to me. Herbert interviewed one of my own loved ones. He tells her story of frustration

at the inability to break into a profession that she not only went to school for, but was promised would have jobs in abundance. Instead, she found herself both living in cramped space at home and experiencing glass ceilings at work. For her, many others, and myself things have slowly improved as the economic recovery moves along. But many young adults remember when the question was what job you would have after college, not if you'd be working.

Herbert knows hiding poverty and economic insecurity are not new, and neither are the solutions to ending them. He cites Michael Harrington's 1962 classic, *The Other America*, which shocked many comfortable people at the time with the fact that poverty was not disappearing for millions of their fellow citizens. Thirty years after the first publication, Irving Howe asked: How can you allow such a scandal to fester in this country? Herbert writes "that question is no less relevant and the scandalous extent of poverty in America no less shameful." To combat inequality and injustice, Herbert advocates a heavily used tool of the 1960's: disruptive politics.

Bob Herbert's book is an unequivocal reminder that well-organized and disruptive protest is a proven method of social change. Our country's ideological extremes motivate much of the support for disruptive politics in the Obama era, such as the Tea Party, Occupy Wall Street, and today's Black Lives Matter movement. It is a refreshing call for collective action in a time when many liberals would rather embrace another messianic presidential run (substituting Elizabeth Warren for Barack Obama – because the first time worked so well) than question their own dismal track record.

In the epilogue, Herbert calls for new leadership — not of a president or a new party, but from grassroots leaders. As for how those people can make lasting change, Herbert opines:

The short answer is direct action. The legendary organizer Saul Alinsky taught that there were two main sources of power: money and people. As virtually all of the money is currently on the side of the entrenched power, the only viable option for ordinary Americans is the creative use of their own energy, intelligence, and superior numbers. Democracy might have taken a beating in the United States, but it is not dead. A tremendous amount of power still resides with the people. And history has shown again and again that direct action, when properly organized and sustained, can be remarkably effective. The abolitionists, civil rights activists, labor organizers, and feminists all understood that democracy was not meant to be a sporting event, a pastime for interested onlookers. Taking responsibility for one's individual circumstance *and* the well-being of the country has always required much more than merely casting a ballot... Without that kind of increased citizen involvement no real change for the better can be expected.

After three decades of bipartisan neoliberalism, it is hard to disagree.

*David Duhalde was the YDS national organizer from 2006 to 2008 and currently researches for a campaign finance reform group in Washington, D.C. He is a member of DSA's National Political Committee.*

## [Coalition Forms to Address Gentrification Crisis in DC](#)

Sunday, February 1st, 2015

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2015**

*By Andy Feeney*

Ever-rising rents and real estate values, growing inequality, the actions of private developers, lax laws and regulations, and a sometimes corrupt collaboration between politicians and developers have combined to create a crisis of gentrification in the District of Columbia over the years. In a January panel discussion before a packed audience at the Busboys and Poets at 14<sup>th</sup> and V Street N.W. in the District, several local anti-gentrification activists discussed a new campaign to bring the crisis under control.

The campaign, the People's Platform, is being led by ONE DC, an organization of roughly 400 members based in the rapidly gentrifying Shaw neighborhood. ONE DC describes itself as dedicated to many of the principles that inspired the late Ella Baker and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s, including participatory democracy; involving grassroots people in the decisions that affect their lives; minimizing hierarchy and professionalism in organizations working for social change; and engaging in direct action to resolve social problems.

Its mission, according to ONE DC literature, "is to exercise political strength to create and preserve racial and economic equity in Shaw and the District," and in doing so to "create a community in DC that is equitable for all." Its organizing campaigns center on popular education, community organizing, and alternative economic development projects, and the People's Platform campaign against gentrification incorporates several of these ideas.

Joining with ONE DC in the People's Platform campaign are D.C. Jobs with Justice (DC-JwJ), the local Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC DC); Our DC, an organization working for better jobs and wages for low-income District residents; and Empower DC, an organizing group working to "enhance, improve and promote the self-advocacy of low and moderate income DC residents in order to bring about sustained improvements in their quality of life."

The objectives and demands of the People's Platform campaign are many and varied. One is to raise the minimum wage in the District to \$15 an hour, a goal that will be the focus of Metro DC DSA's main organizing campaign this year. However, other campaign goals are focused almost entirely on fighting gentrification, among other means by making a number of changes in D.C. law and regulations affecting rent subsidies, the availability of public housing, and financial assistance for tenants who wish to take advantage of the District's existing TOPA law allowing residents to purchase units in their own buildings when building ownership changes.

Another key focus of the People's Platform is ending the District's current practice of auctioning off abandoned vacant lands and empty buildings to private developers for redevelopment, which



generally occurs in a fashion that eliminates housing stock for low-income residents, often people of color, with children and developing new units aimed at occupancy by higher-income, younger professional people, often white, who can afford significantly higher rents while requiring fewer services. In the place of such practices, the People's Platform calls for several measures to keep abandoned lands and buildings in public ownership and make them available for cooperative housing developments to be owned by low-income residents themselves.

According to Bob Schlehuber, an individual member of the People's Platform coalition who emceed the panel discussion at Busboys and Poets, another focus of the campaign is on eliminating or reforming the often corrupt financial arrangements that currently enmesh DC politicians with real estate developers hoping to profit from gentrification.

For more information about ONE DC, please click here: <http://www.onedonline.org/>. For more information about the People's Platform campaign, click here: <http://www.onedonline.org/peoplesplatform>.

### [Cozy Bipartisanship So Far with New GOP Gov. in Md.](#)

Sunday, February 1st, 2015

#### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2015**

*By Woody Woodruff*

In the National Lampoon's brilliant 1978 parody of a Sunday newspaper, the *Dacron (Ohio) Republican-Democrat*, the radical premise about the illusion of US two-party politics is exemplified in the paper's nameplate. Close readers of that classic come to realize that, while members of the two parties ostensibly represent the local power structure, all important planning boards, letting local contracts, ownership of property and the means of production inhere in an unelected power. In the 1978 classic newspaper parody, the local power structure was an organized crime family, but hey, that was the era of *The Godfather*. Socialists understand that capitalism, which is organized crime, was the ruling power in Dacron, Ohio, "Motor Home Capital of the World," behind the façade of two-party government.

Its parallels emerge every time the Maryland General Assembly, with its overwhelming Democratic majority, makes nice with the new Republican governor even as Gov. Larry Hogan rolls back whatever limited progress was made during the O'Malley administration. An avuncular front man, Hogan has reinstated much of the Republican agency infrastructure – and people – that made the previous (Bob Ehrlich) Republican administration such a disaster.

**The Hogan budget** reflects a bipartisan unwillingness to raise revenues consonant with a wealthy state... instead a "structural deficit" is used as an excuse to cut vital services to keep the rapacious business community quiet. They get more every time they ask.

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/politics/bs-md-budget-briefing-20150126-story.html#page=1>

**A much-challenged law** requiring major counties to reduce the pollutants they send to the Chesapeake Bay has survived so far, despite being ridiculed as a “rain tax” by Republicans. Under the Hogan regime, the counties that elected him are feeling free about [rolling back their stormwater management fees](#). Individual homeowners were paying pretty low fees under the requirement, but the fees were hitting hard on developers with large tracts and big, heavily polluting parking lots (and quite a few mega-churches, especially in Prince George’s County, where huge tracts of church land are otherwise tax-exempt). The Sun article doesn’t background the situation sufficiently – if the federal EPA does not find the Bay pollution mitigated, the state and its jurisdictions face big fines. The same applies to Hogan’s casual rollback of an O’Malley plan to regulate chicken manure disposal on the Eastern Shore, where it is another major polluter. The big industrial chicken farmers knew that their boo-hoos would register on a Republican administration, and now they’ve got one. [There’s a push-back](#), though, from House leadership.

**Some further progressive goals** hoped-for in this session look like a much heavier lift when facing the GOP regime. Lawmakers will attempt to double the 2025 goals for renewable energy use in the state to 40 percent, based on the state’s being ahead of the previous target so far. But it looks as though the proponents will plow ahead; the Renewable Portfolio Standards bill has a Senate sponsor and environmental forces are working on the House members. In other good news, earned sick leave for all workers is returning to the agenda for the third year this session: <http://www.baltimoresun.com/business/bs-bz-gbc-sick-leave-20150126-story.html>. And Sen. Paul Pinsky will file a [bill to make Maryland the fifth state to call for a constitutional convention](#) to overturn Citizens United....

[DC Utility Watchdogs, Ratepayers, Climate Activists Unite in Opposing Proposed PEPCO-Exelon Merger](#)

Sunday, February 1st, 2015

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2015**

*By Andy Feeney*

For many years, politicians and utility customers in the service area of Pepco, the Potomac Electric Power Co., have complained about Pepco’s repeated failures to ensure reliable electricity service, especially in the wake of major wind storms and snowfalls that can topple trees and take down power lines. Now, there is a chance that Pepco’s operations will be absorbed by an enormous, multi-state utility company headquartered in Chicago, which might be just as bad at ensuring reliable service as Pepco and probably won’t be as responsive to DC-area customers and elected officials.

That's one reason why the Office of People's Counsel (the government unit in the District charged with representing the interests of utility consumers), and several groups and individual voices representing local ratepayers and green energy advocates are opposing the proposed merger of Pepco and its holding company Pepco Holdings, Inc, with the Exelon Corporation and its associated business entities.

What some of the merger opponents are saying, essentially, is that an Exelon takeover of Pepco would help to reverse the beneficial impacts of a basically "capitalist" reform in utility operation and regulation that has gone into effect in PEPCO's service area and much of the nation over the past few decades. The capitalist reform in question was the legal, regulatory and economic separation of electric energy generation from electric energy distribution.

Smart business economists have long recognized that the distribution of electricity to a wide customer base, because of the centralized network of transmission wires needed, is a "natural monopoly," a service that only a single corporate entity can carry out efficiently over a big customer base. The generation of electricity from coal, nuclear power, oil, natural gas, wind power or solar cells, however, is a potentially competitive business. To provide individual customers with lower prices, and also to allow cleaner and greener energy sources like solar energy and wind power to compete in the electricity market with big coal-fired and nuclear-based generating plants, it makes a kind of economic sense to allow electric power providers to compete for business, but to continue having the juice delivered to ratepayers through a regulated monopoly distribution company.

Many years ago, the District and the state of Maryland therefore largely deregulated electricity generation across Pepco's present service area, while keeping Pepco itself as a distribution company to get power to its traditional customers. But the proposed merger of PEPCO with Exelon, the critics are saying, would potentially negate the "deregulation" that has occurred.

Why? As Alex Doukas of the climate activist group DC Divest testified in December before the D.C. Public Service Commission, Exelon as a company is a "generating giant," and "fundamentally a generator of electricity" – not, like present-day Pepco, a company focused on distribution. In fact, Exelon owns some 35,000 megawatts of power generating capacity scattered across a number of states, and some of its power plants produce electricity at "above market rates," meaning it has an incentive – if it can do so – to force its customers to buy power from it at higher prices than they could receive from other electricity providers.

If Exelon, the "generating giant," gains control over Pepco as a regulated monopoly provider of electricity distribution, the merged entity will have an enhanced opportunity to force D.C. consumers to eat its higher generating costs, Doukas and other critics of the merger argue.

"In many ways, the interests of a [generating] company like Exelon . . . and the interests of electricity consumers are inherently in conflict," Doukas further testified in December. "Consumer savings, including through energy efficiency, represent a cost to generators. History has shown that there is a grave risk to progress on energy efficiency if it's left to companies who, like Exelon, have dominant interests in electricity generation."

In oral testimony also submitted to the District's Public Service Commission (PSC) in December, local environmental advocate and researcher Marchant Wentworth pointed out that nuclear energy has recently provided some 57 percent of Exelon's power generating capacity, according to the company's own 2013 10-K filing.

"Nuclear power plants are vulnerable to increased costs" due to several different factors, Wentworth added. In the wake of the recent Fukushima nuclear reactor disaster in Japan, they face additional costs related to safety improvements needed to address the risks of such disasters. They also face added costs related to the storage of nuclear waste as well as additional costs "due to needed upgrades in [their] use of cooling water" under EPA Rule 316(B). Still another cost that older nuclear reactors face – and many of Exelon's reactors are aging – consist of the projected costs of "decommissioning" old reactors at the ends of their useful lives and disposing safely of some of their components that are radioactive.

Financial losses to Exelon "derived from sources that would not be regulated by this Commission," Wentworth concluded, "could force Exelon to attempt to recover money from District ratepayers in order to keep its stock price up and satisfy its shareholders."

Citing these and other factors, the D.C. Office of the People's Counsel on Nov. 3 called on the PSC to reject the proposed \$6.8 billion merger proposal. People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye filed testimony with the PSC acknowledging that Pepco and Exelon have proposed a \$14-million "Customer Investment Fund" to shield local ratepayers from negative economic impacts in the short run. However, the OPC testimony added that the proposed fund is "small compared to the substantial risks created by the merger," and that its benefits would be negated by risks "associated with the three 'R's: Reliability, Rates and Renewables – all major areas where this application falls short."

Warning of the likelihood of "serial rate cases" to raise prices once the proposed deal is completed, Ms. Mattavous-Frye warned: "If the merger is approved, consumers are likely to see higher rate increases than if the merger were not approved." Her prepared testimony continued: "because Exelon has a riskier financial profit than Pepco, consumers will pay even higher rate increase than [they] would under Pepco."

PEPCO's problems with reliability and recovery from power outages might have made it unpopular locally, but according to the OPC's testimony, "Exelon will deliver a lower level of reliability than Pepco would provide," partly because its merger proposal is "devoid of any best practices to address vegetation management and feeder maintenance – two areas critical for improving reliability."

The OPC also has expressed concern about the economies of scale normally associated with corporate mergers leading to the loss of DC-area jobs now provided by Pepco, and has warned that the merger will "likely have a detrimental impact on ... wholesale electricity markets" once Exelon supplants Pepco Holdings, Inc. (PHI) in the stakeholder negotiations of the regional PJM pool of linked electricity providers. PHI has "traditionally" advocated for customer interests in the PJM stakeholder process, but "Exelon's generation-driven priorities ... would conflict with and may nullify PHI's historic emphasis on cost implications and reliability for consumers."

For climate activists and renewable energy activists commenting on the merger proposal, a major factor is Exelon's record to opposing federal tax subsidies for wind energy generation, on the one hand, and its opposition to "distributed" electricity generation, on the other.

Back in the late 1980s, the Carter administration pushed through federal regulatory reforms that encouraged states to allow individuals and small businesses that generate their own power from small solar energy, wind power and other renewable sources to sell back some of the electricity they produce to the utility distribution grid. The policy of "reverse metering" or "net metering," so called, essentially enables a small producer of solar-generated electricity to generate more than enough power for its own needs during a sunny day, for example, and to sell that extra power back to the local electricity distribution utility. Then during the night, when solar cells obviously are not providing any electricity, the owner of the solar cells can buy electricity from the grid, just like anyone else.

Such reverse metering, by allowing multiple owners of small renewable energy producing units to contribute to the grid collectively, has the potential to make solar and wind energy production more affordable and to reduce the long-term need for more coal and nuclear plants. Pepco as a distribution-only utility currently supports such "distributed energy" production.

However, merger critics say, Exelon as a large power generator has every economic reason to oppose distributed power generation, and in recent years it has done so in several states, in some cases working in alliance with ALEC – the rightwing American Legislative Exchange Council – to argue against small solar and wind power producers being able to sell to the grid. The company also has lobbied in Congress against federal tax credits for wind energy production.

Although Exelon in the past "has supported clean air laws and ... energy efficiency," the OPC said in its testimony, "these notable efforts are substantially outweighed" by the corporation's "vocal" opposition to wind power and distributed generation.

Accordingly, a number of individuals and groups supporting small-scale renewable energy production are opposing the merger.

Despite the reasoning of merger foes, however, the Dec. 17 PSC hearing on the proposal, which I attended as an individual, featured striking turnout of individuals representing local utility contractors and a host of DC-area charitable organizations all firmly supporting Exelon's bid to take over Pepco.

In statement after statement, individuals testified that Pepco has historically been very generous in contributing to local black-owned businesses and social service organizations, and they were virtually unanimous in predicting that Exelon would be even better than Pepco has been. The merger will produce greater service reliability, an increase in local utility-related jobs, and economies of scale that generate lower electricity prices for consumers, many of them insisted.

Dave Freeman, a former chairman of the board of the giant Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and a former operating manager of several other large, publicly owned utilities, including the New York Power Authority and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP),

began his testimony to the PSC by saying that at TVA he, too, had ensured that his public utility contributed generously to local businesses and charitable groups.

Contributing to local charities was a well-known way of buying local political support with utility money, Freeman suggested. He went on to praise the Pepco and Exelon public affairs departments for likely preparing the testimony of many individuals supporting the merger at the hearing.

The District PSC's hearings to solicit public testimony on the merger have now concluded, but interested individuals can still submit written testimony on the proposal until March 26, 2015. Written statements may be submitted by mail or in person to Brinda Westbrook-Sedgwick, Commission Secretary, Public Service Commission of the District of Columbia, 1333 H Street, N.W., Suite 200, West Tower, Washington DC 2005, or they can be emailed to [PSC-CommissionSecretary@dc.gov](mailto:PSC-CommissionSecretary@dc.gov), or submitted through the Commission's eDocket system at <http://www.depsc.org/edocket.asp>.

For DSAers interested in hearing more from former TVA chairman Dave Freeman, he is scheduled to speak on the history and future of public power in the United States at our next general membership meeting. It will occur Sunday, Feb. 15 at 2 p.m. at the Watha P. Daniel/Shaw Library in the District.

### [Fight to Block Pacific Trade Deal Accelerates](#)

Sunday, February 1st, 2015

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2015**

*By Andy Feeney*

Labor, environmentalist and other organizers are stepping up their campaign to block Congress's giving President Obama "fast track" authority to negotiate the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). On Jan. 7, hundreds of anti-TPP activists participated in a national conference call featuring Naomi Klein, author of *The Shock Doctrine* and *This Changes Everything*, on the subject of how existing trade treaties such as NAFTA undercut the ability of elected governments at the state, provincial and national levels to promote green energy policies and combat climate change.

The establishment of the TPP would make matters worse, Klein said: the proposed treaty is essentially a "corporate insurance policy against democracy" that would enable affected corporations to challenge if not overturn citizen efforts to restrain carbon emissions, provide incentives for local renewable energy production and block the construction of pipelines and ports to facilitate exports of fossil fuels. In reaction to the climate change threat, Klein said, a global entity she calls "Blockadia" has come into existence that seeks to stop fossil fuel exports

on the ground, and “as Blockadia spreads, there are going to be more and more desperate efforts by the fossil fuel companies to use trade policies to win battles in trade tribunals that they have lost in public opinion.”

Participating in the conference call with Klein were regional organizers for MoveOn.org, Alyssa Simons of Public Citizens Global Trade Watch, Andrea Miller of People Demanding Action (PDA), and AFL-CIO trade specialist Celeste Drake, along with Ilana Solomon, head of the Responsible Trade Program for the Sierra Club.

Speaking for the Sierra Club, Solomon labeled the climate change challenge “the major environmental crisis of our times” and stated that combating it “is going to mean making several major changes to our economy” that would be far more difficult to achieve under the TPP as well as a companion proposal, the Trans Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Solomon added: “The TPP would actually grant new powers to the coal, oil and natural gas industries,” including by mandating that the U.S. Department of Energy automatically approve exports of natural gas. The proposed pact also would “fundamentally prohibit national governments from incentivizing local energy production.”

The corporations, the Obama administration and pro-corporate Republicans and Democrats are stepping up their efforts to get “fast track” authority for Obama to negotiate the treaty passed by Congress within the very near future, PDA’s Andrea Miller told conference call participants. To fight against that, PDA and other organizations have organized recurring “twitter storms” to bombard the Twitter accounts of House members with anti-TPP messages. PDA’s web site also has devised form letters that anti-TPP activists can send to local newspapers to oppose the proposed treaty, and possible variations of these letters include language suitable “for contacting newspapers in your area if they are a little right-wing.”

Organizers of the anti-TPP coalition, who have been holding periodic conference calls on this issue for almost two years now, also are thinking about scheduling actions in the home offices of individual members of Congress during the President’s Day recess in February, participants in the conference call said.

Celeste Drake of the AFL-CIO said people looking for fact sheets to use in making anti-TPP arguments to members of Congress may be able to find fact sheets on TPP, TTIP and the “fast track” issue through the AFL-CIO at the web site [AFLCIO.org/issues/trade](http://AFLCIO.org/issues/trade). Individuals who are interested in participating in the anti-TPP Twitter storms should look to the PDA web site at [www.peopledemandingaction.org](http://www.peopledemandingaction.org).

[GOOD READS FOR SOCIALISTS FEBRUARY 2015](#)

Sunday, February 1st, 2015

*The Washington Socialist <> February 2015*

## **Human Activities Are Pushing the Earth Past 4 Dangerous Limits: Report —**

Ongoing economic expansion, inappropriate technologies and human population growth together are pushing past four environmental boundaries that are critical to the stability of the “Earth System,” according to a new study published in *Science*. Together, warns one of the report’s coauthors, the impacts of these changes could destabilize the global ecosystem over a time span ranging from a few decades to the coming century. Unless current conditions change, Earth in the future “is likely to be much less hospitable to the development of human societies.”

The study, by a team that in 2009 explored some similar boundaries, identifies global deforestation rates, the rate of species extinctions, atmospheric carbon dioxide levels, and the release of nitrogen and phosphorous nutrients into the oceans as the four critical areas in which human activity, and especially economic growth, is pushing into the danger zone. The study was reported by Joel Achenbach in the Jan. 16 *Washington Post*,

Achenbach’s article includes several researchers not connected with the study differing slightly on the immediacy or irreversibility of these effects. But neither suggests they are anything but bad news.

A separate account of this study that was first published in *Common Dreams*, and recently republished in the *Moyers Journal* online, is headlined, “That Was Easy: In Just 60 Years, Neoliberal Capitalism Has Nearly Broken Planet Earth.”

For the Common Dreams article, click here: <http://commondreams.org/news/2015/01/16/was-easy-just-60-years-neoliberal-capitalism-has-nearly-broken-planet-earth>. For Achenbach’s story, click here: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/scientists-human-activity-has-pushed-earth-beyond-four-of-nine-planetary-boundaries/2015/01/15/f52b61b6-9b5e-11e4-a7ee-526210d665b4\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/scientists-human-activity-has-pushed-earth-beyond-four-of-nine-planetary-boundaries/2015/01/15/f52b61b6-9b5e-11e4-a7ee-526210d665b4_story.html). At *WS* press time it seems difficult to access the abstract of this article in the Jan. 16 issue of *Science*, but interested readers can find a number of interpretations of it online.

- ***Andy Feeney***

### Syriza Victory Challenges Austerity Politics

In the wake of Syriza’s victory in last month’s Greek national elections, the national office of Democratic Socialists of America issued a [statement](#) celebrating the vote as a rejection of the European Union’s austerity politics that have driven Greece to economic desperation.

Also, the current issue of Jacobin Magazine includes an [extensive interview](#) with Stathis Kouvelakis, a member of Syriza’s central committee, on how Syriza pulled off the victory and the its prospects for challenging the global and European corporate political and economic establishment.

- ***Bill Mosley***



Matt Yglesias in *Vox* links the (future) Hillary Clinton campaign to the economic program outlined in a report from the Center for American Progress. It has Larry Summers' explicit fingerprints but shows appealing features for the electorate at large, if not the Democratic left, Yglesias suggests. Our comrade Ben Davis first posted this on Facebook.

<http://www.vox.com/2015/1/16/7557803/inclusive-prosperity-hillarynomics>

- WS

We've linked to a lot of stuff about Piketty's *Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* before, but our DSA comrade Bill Barclay, by not showing off, shows more than almost anybody about the value of this popular book (including the value of its popularity)...

[http://www.dsausa.org/capital\\_kapital\\_and\\_the\\_continuing\\_struggle](http://www.dsausa.org/capital_kapital_and_the_continuing_struggle)

- WS

Fine piece of analysis on the downside of cheap gasoline by Ben Ptashnik, who is also board president of People Demanding Action, the streetheat offshoot of Progressive Democrats of America.

<http://truth-out.org/news/item/28406-russia-blamed-us-taxpayers-on-the-hook-as-fracking-boom-collapses>

- WS

Sam Gindin's review of Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Planet* in Jacobin. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/12/naomi-klein-capitalism/>

- WS

Tom Edsall, from his occasional corner at the NYT, analyzes the perils of finance capitalism and the prevailing market fundamentalism. His headline says it all:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/21/opinion/can-capitalists-save-capitalism.html?ref=opinion>

- WS

Another fine piece by Edsall, summarizing research on the convergence of social and political estrangement. When we think about our message and its recipients, we should think about these findings...

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/28/opinion/how-did-politics-get-so-personal.html?ref=opinion>

- WS

For the hardcore science fiction fans in our readership (there are at least two), here's a great piece from the website of the Solidarity organization about socialist-oriented or -flavored science fiction. The author passes along and comments on a quote from Marx's correspondence:

“ ‘we cannot make the recipes of the future until we are in the kitchen of the future’ – which is as awesome a gendered Marx quote as I have ever come across. So we tend to hopefully look at science fiction as one place one might see glimpses of these future recipes.” Much attention is paid to the excellent Kim Stanley Robinson. The comment threads are a bonus...

<http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/2137>

- WS

This issue has several articles about the struggle to keep our local power companies from becoming even more corporate and conglomerative. Out there in one of the reddest states, a statewide public power authority delivers low-cost power to Nebraskans. This article from the blog of the Democracy Collaborative sketches the difference real democratic control of resources can make...

<http://community-wealth.org/content/nebraska-s-community-owned-electricity-system>

- WS

*Added Feb. 2 2015 after original posting:* Sam Pizzigati’s invaluable blog *Too Much*, chronicling the evils and excesses of inequality, features a discerning interview with economist Robert Frank, plus the “Petulant Plutocrat of the Month” and the amusing behavior of billionaires at Davos... <http://toomuchonline.org/tmmonthly.html>

- WS

**Action Needed to Avert “Extinction Event” In Oceans, Scientists Warn** — Industrial civilization is on the brink of causing mass extinctions of animal life in the oceans, according to a new scientific study published by *Science* magazine on Jan. 16. A summary of the study by Carl Zimmer of the *New York Times* quotes on study coauthor, ecologist Douglas McCauley of UC-Santa Barbara, as saying “We may be sitting on a precipice of a major extinction event” in the oceans.

Factors driving toward that outcome include overfishing, the alteration of roughly 20 million square miles of ocean bottom by fishing trawlers dragging huge nets along the ocean floor, and global climate change coupled with the dissolving of growing emissions of carbon dioxide into the water, according to the *Times*. As the article quotes another coauthor of the study as saying, “If you cranked up the aquarium heater and dumped some acid in the water, your fish would not be very happy.”

Yet despite the growing dangers of mass extinction, humanity has a good chance of averting this kind of disaster, Dr. McCauley told the *Times*. The study recommends several steps to address the problem, including limiting mining and other industrial uses of the oceans, establishing protective reserves in which threatened and endangered species can rebuild their populations and long-term limitations on industrial CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and climate change.

For access to the Times article and other articles summarizing the study, click here: [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/16/science/earth/study-raises-alarm-for-health-of-ocean-life.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/16/science/earth/study-raises-alarm-for-health-of-ocean-life.html?_r=0) and here: <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/the-underwater-industrial-revolution-is-driving-ocean-life-to-extinction> and here: <https://greenwatchnews.wordpress.com/2015/01/17/ocean-extinctions-may-have-crossed-the-tipping-point/>.

For a brief abstract of the original article in *Science*, click here: <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/347/6219/1255641>.

[January Socialist Salon views activist terrain in Md., D.C.](#)

Sunday, February 1st, 2015

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2015**

*By Woody Woodruff*

Opportunities for progressive advances exist for both the District and the suburban Maryland counties surrounding it, but pitfalls in both areas are substantial. Activists from Maryland's suburbs and the District of Columbia described the prospects and hazards of the local political landscape at Metro DC DSA's Jan. 15 Salon.

Lucy Duff and Lisa Stand of Prince George's County, Wally Malakoff of Montgomery County, and Eugene Puryear, a recent at-large candidate in the DC Council election, analyzed their respective locales after the election of Muriel Bowser as DC Mayor and the upset win of Republican Larry Hogan in the Maryland gubernatorial race. Both are expected to continue the business- and developer-friendly policies common to both parties, but the control of Maryland's governor over the budget process may hamper efforts to get progressive policies and measures rolled into the next round of legislative action.

Duff works in the Prince George's Peace and Justice Coalition, a largely white and aging north-county group centered in Greenbelt. PGP&J also joins with an offshoot of Montgomery Peace Action called Fund Our Communities, which agitates for a reduced dependency in Maryland on military spending and employment and for reductions in the Pentagon budget in favor of human needs spending. PGP&J also is a key agent in the "Reel and Meal," a Greenbelt-based monthly progressive-themed film shown at the community-supported New Deal Café. The group operates in informal coalition with numerous other groups, including often with the Greenbelt Climate Action Network, which is lobbying at the local and state level on environment and sustainability issues and developing a local sustainability-resilience network. Opportunities include working with groups that have paid staff such as Progressive Maryland, and groups focusing on

immediate trends such as Get Money out of Maryland (GMOM) and Move to Amend, both of which fight the effects of the Citizens United decision and corporate influence on campaign finance.

Lisa Stand, of Progressive Cheverly, described the group's lobbying efforts within the Prince George's County town of that name as well as at the county and state levels. Acknowledging that the environment for progressive action is "weak" and in a "holding pattern" as the new governor jockey for influence with the veto-proof Democratic majority in both houses of the General Assembly, Stand said the strength of her group is in its consistent lobbying presence over the years in coalition with other progressive groups such as Fund Our Communities and environmental activist organizations. Progressive Cheverly makes political endorsements judiciously, she added, suggesting it was important to weigh the group's effectiveness in each race and "balance what [influence] you have against what you need.

For this year, Stand offered her own assessment that P\progressives' best issue in Maryland is tax fairness, she argued. A future goal for DC and Maryland activists is to find policy themes that echo with Northern Virginia progressives, such as the minimum wage campaigns that have already had success in Maryland and DC.

Where Duff and Stand focused on Prince George's County, Wally Malakoff's group, Progressive Neighbors, is concentrated in the Takoma Park and Silver Spring areas of Montgomery County, where it originated in an electoral campaign – to elect a new state senator, Jamie Raskin. Progressive Neighbors expanded its scope into a Progressive Working Group that backed progressive state legislation. The group's decline after several vigorous years, Malakoff said, came because most members of the larger coalition were single-issue organizations – "we haven't solved that problem." "Maryland is a place where you can get some things done" in a progressive vein, he said, but there's a ceiling on many economic issues which "the ruling class is solidly against." As an example he cited the 2014 legislative session's major rollback on estate taxes, a knuckling under to business and wealthy interests that was hardly touched on by local media. The need for a stronger presence in Annapolis has led Progressive Neighbors to undertake fundraising to support a lobbyist during the session.

Puryear shifted the conversation to the District, where, he said, a distinct working-class political movement is still lacking and some younger, essentially progressive residents have lost interest and faith in the political system. Still, he argued, there is a growing progressive movement – not just sentiment – among the District's youth, and it could be sharpened if activists are "a little more bold in who we say we are" and "get a deeper hearing on socialist and anticapitalist issues."

He cited his own recent at-large Council campaign on the Statehood/Green ballot line as an example, saying there was "an acknowledged level of serious intent" in the campaign recognized by the political culture and even the press, and "no red-baiting" about his membership in a socialist organization. [The Party of Socialism and Liberation](#). Despite the victories of Democratic candidates or those backed by Democratic forces (in the case of the independent at-large race, "more young activists are seeing politics as relevant" though (or perhaps because) "young people have lost a sense of agency." The task is to rebuild a network among young

workers, and progressives need to realize the fundraising prowess it will take to staff such undertakings, Puryear said.

Comment from the thirty-plus attendees ranged from suggestions that the political process had to give way to revolutionary organizing, to arguments that young people in the District and generally were more apathetic about politics than Puryear had portrayed. Discussions of how to make progressive politics and policies more appealing to young people – a frequent concern of the somewhat graying DSA local – focused on credibility and identification of progressive organizations. “There has to be some non-Democratic Party force,” Puryear declared.

Responding to the discussion, Duff stressed long-term relationship-building and Stand a “development of social space” for progressive activism – “part of it is cultural,” she added. Malakoff said progressives had to improve their voter education through personal contact, noting that unlike the members of the Progressive Working Group coalition, “DSA is not a single-issue group.” Puryear said one discouraging lesson from his campaign was that “knowing the most about the issue” had no effect on the electability of a candidate. Organization is the key, without “getting too program-based,” he added, and suggested that the financial flexibility of a 501(c)4 “social welfare” organization designation (an IRS category) should not be an advantage enjoyed only by the moneyed right wing.

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*Metro DC DSA’s Socialist Salon Is a monthly discussion group on socialist and progressive issues. It ordinarily meets the third Thursday of the month at 6:30 in a restaurant. For updated information on future salons see [the local’s Meetup site](#).*

#### [New Populist Coalition in the Making Is Focus of Chapter’s Jan. 10 Meeting](#)

Sunday, February 1st, 2015

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2015**

*By Andy Feeney*

The launching of a new national coalition aimed at building a renewed populist movement in the U.S. around the key values of economic, social and environmental justice was the topic of a presentation delivered by Andrea Miller, Co-Executive Director of People Demanding Action (PDA), to the Metro DC DSA general membership meeting on Jan. 10.

Miller, born into a leftwing Chicago family and associated in her teen years with members of the Black Panther Party in Chicago, is a former organizer with MoveOn.org, the Dennis Kucinich presidential campaign, and Progressive Democrats of America (PDA), a progressive political action committee founded by a former DSA member, the late Tim Carpenter.

“Tim felt comfortable calling himself a Democrat,” Miller told DSAers at the Jan. 10 meeting, but some members of Progressive Democrats have decided to spin off People Demanding Action as a separate but allied organization, partly to reach out to disaffected Americans who do not necessarily consider themselves either “Democrats” or “progressive,” but who are demanding action to improve the conditions of their lives.

Another reason for the spinoff was that Progressive Democrats of America, as a registered political action committee, primarily focuses on federal issues and electoral politics. People Demanding Action, however, cannot endorse candidates, although it can lobby on anything, and it is primarily focused on national politics. “We’ll work with you on local dog-catcher races if that’s what’s important to your neighborhood,” she said.

Commenting on the name of the new organization, Miller added, “People Demanding Action has a nice Tea Party ring,” and she said members are already finding certain areas of common ground with some Republicans.

For example, she said, in PDAmerica’s work to block the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), “our primary ally on the right was Michelle Bachman,” because of Bachman’s valid concern that the TPP would take away U.S. national sovereignty over issues affecting global corporations.

PDAction is active in the coalition effort by labor activists, environmental groups, local community organizations and other concerned Americans to block the TPP, Miller indicated. Other currently important campaigns include pushing for three additional states to approve of the Equal Rights Amendment so as to get the ERA passed, to address the “number one issue for women: economic inequality.”

PDAction has another campaign to pressure all nonprofit organizations with headquarters in Washington DC to press Congress for statehood for the District, Miller said – “Full statehood with two senators and an elected representative.” However, the organization plans to put much of its energy into facilitating and supporting grassroots organizing at the state and local level: “We’re going to be looking for as many community partners as we can find.”

PDA literature that Miller distributed with her presentation indicates that the group’s mission is to “bring together activists, organizers, faith leaders, social justice leaders and legislators to advance the core solutions of promoting household stability through economic justice, climate justice and social justice, while protecting the integrity of democratic elections and voting rights.”

PDA describes its strategy for accomplishing these aims as working to build a “state-by-state network of activists” who will work for reform “through education, legislation, mobilization and non-violent direct action,” so as to facilitate the building of a “populist movement for justice.”

To build supporters, Miller said, PDA has recruited a board that includes Rev. Rodney Sadler, chief organizer of the “Moral Monday” movement in South Carolina; Ben Ptashnik of the American Sustainable Business Council, a solar engineer and former Vermont state senator who

recently has been active in fighting mass water shutoffs in Detroit; Dr. Gabriela Lemus, president and executive director of Progressive Congress, a 501(c) (3) organization associated with the Congressional Progressive Caucus; Joel Segal, former staffer for Rep. John Conyers who played a key role in writing Conyers' "jobs for all" bill; Alex Lofton, of Social Security Works; and as honorary PDA chair, Harriet Fulbright, the widow of the late Sen. J. William Fulbright, early critic of the Vietnam War and creator of the Fulbright Scholarships.

In addition to fighting the TPP and DC statehood and working for the final adoption of the Equal Rights Amendment, Miller said, the organization also is increasingly involved in trying to fight against bad court decisions at the state and local level that in recent years have helped conservatives to silence, and often to jail, local whistleblowers and progressive politicians working for change. Still additional campaigns listed on the PDA web site include working for zero carbon dioxide emissions in the US, fighting water shutoffs in Detroit, ending the mass incarceration of black men, and fighting against cuts in funding for educational and other social programs.

Looking forward to the challenge of the coming year, in which activists face a Republican-dominated Congress with no apparent tolerance for progressive priorities, Miller said the left needs to imitate what the Tea Party did in the wake of the crushing Republican defeat in 2008. When we don't have representation in Congress, she said, leftists need to be "kicking up shit" and raising a furor through the media, a strategy that mostly worked for the numerically outnumbered Tea Party and that can work for progressives, too.

For more information on People Demanding Action, please check out the organization's web site at <http://www.peopledemandingaction.org>.

### [To Stop Police Brutality, Change the System](#)

Sunday, February 1st, 2015

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2015**

*By Bill Mosley*

The mainstream media's coverage of recent incidents of police brutality would lead readers to think there's simple solution to the problem. Suggestions for quick fixes abound, such as requiring police to wear video cameras, de-militarizing police forces and adopting more gentle policing methods. But even in the progressive media, discussion of the underlying problem – centuries of exploitation and oppression that have alienated poor and minority communities from society – isn't as common as one might think.

Even the nicest, most transparent policing won't compensate for the fact that for millions of Americans, the police are the most visible arm of a government that seeks to control and confine

them, not to help or protect. One of the most perceptive articles written in the wake of the Ferguson, New York and Cleveland incidents was an analysis by [Sam Mitrani in LaborOnline](#), the newsletter of the Labor and Working-Class History Association. Mitrani points out that police forces in the United States were created largely to repress dissent and keep minorities in their places, with general public-safety duties being an afterthought. What constituted a crime was often defined as any attempt by the poor and working class to better their lot (hence the long-time criminalization of unions) and perceived threats by African Americans and other minorities to the economic status of well-off whites. Examples of the latter abound, from re-enslaving African Americans after the Civil War through the use of work gangs, to targeting black communities for enforcement during the “war on drugs,” to stigmatizing Latinos through heavy-handed enforcement of immigration laws. All of this has produced an us-versus-them mentality among those on the short end of the nightstick. Another perceptive article along these lines is [Johann Hari’s piece in the current \*In These Times\*](#) about how the government brought the full weight of anti-drug enforcement on black jazz artists such as Billie Holiday while giving prominent white dopers a pass, over the fear that jazz represented “evidence of a recurrence of the primitive impulses that lurk in black people, waiting to emerge.”

This is why many communities, especially lower-income African American communities, justifiably regard the police as an occupying force. Efforts started in the 1960s to hire more minority officers (which, as we have seen, didn’t go very far in Ferguson and other cities) were correctly seen by many as putting a more familiar face on a still-oppressive relationship.

Blaming the police only goes so far, for they didn’t create the poverty, racism and exploitation that they’re charged with keeping in check. Indeed, individual officers are themselves victims of the system, thrown into communities that don’t want them around. Rare these days is the police officer setting out on patrol with the intent of killing anyone, but the combination of arms and fear (on both sides) can cause routine enforcement to spiral into violence. Darren Wilson certainly didn’t gain anything by killing Michael Brown; Brown lost his life, but Wilson lost his job and will go through life a marked man.

The only solution to police violence, therefore, is to end the conditions that cause it. Minority communities need good jobs, health care, affordable housing and high-quality education; without these things they will rightly feel more like occupied territories than part of America. This will take much greater political will than simply asking police officers to smile and giving them cameras. It will take a re-thinking of how our society functions, of how to make our country work for everyone. It will take, in short, a generous dose of socialist thinking.