

*The Washington Socialist*  
Articles from February 2016 Issue  
Archived October 2016  
Editor: Woody Woodruff

[Welcome to the February 2016 Issue of the Washington Socialist](#)

Tuesday, February 2nd, 2016



**Welcome to the February 2016 issue of the *Washington Socialist*, the free monthly email newsletter of the Metro DC local of Democratic Socialists of America.**

It's a pretty full issue because it has to last through February 29. Leap Year, y'know, meaning a presidential election cycle. Maybe you heard something about that.

In fact, our February newsletter is launched in the early morning of the first day something is actually happening in the 2016 campaign, impromptu gatherings in Iowa that have been the focus of much attention and activity. The candidates and tendencies engaged in that demographically unrepresentative US state are carving out communities to act on their behalf, in Iowa and after. And we know that the cozy term "community" most often defines a group not only by what actually characterizes it — practices and similarities — but by who gets excluded, who gets "Otherized."

This election cycle has featured the rhetoric of exclusion perhaps as much as any in memory, so it is gratifying for we socialists, who believe our concept of community is inclusive and humane, that some parts of the discourse of this election are pushing back on those terms. This issue of the newsletter has a strong focus on inclusion and its virtues, and on how much we have to learn anew, every day.

#### **ON THE AGENDA:**

An [Iowa Caucus Results Watch Party](#) is being sponsored the evening of Feb. 1, 9 to 11, by the independent group DC for Bernie at, appropriately, the Marx Cafe, 3203 Mt. Pleasant St. NW in D.C. The [Socialist Book Group](#) meets Sunday, Feb. 7 to discuss Polanyi's classic, *The Great Transformation* from 3-5 at the Kogod Courtyard inside the National Portrait Gallery, 8th and F Streets (Gallery Place). Metro DC DSA members and other Bernie Sanders advocates will be flyering the first weekend of February, Saturday Feb. 6 at the Columbia Heights Metro station from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and at the Silver Spring Metro Station on Sunday, Feb. 7 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. You can find out more on our [Meetup page entry](#) about the event. Check our Meetup page periodically for further announced opportunities for this kind of socialist political work.

Metro DC DSA's [Monthly Membership Meeting](#) is Sunday, Feb. 14 at at the Cleveland Park branch library, 3310 Connecticut Ave. NW, at 2:30. The Steering Committee meets prior to the membership meeting, at 1:30. THIS IS A CHANGE from the original newsletter location, though the date remains the same.

***Because all these events are subject to change, our [Meetup page](#) is the best place to stay current.***

**ALSO:** Our allies at Jobs with Justice are bringing their [national conference](#) to DC in mid-February (the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>)

## **IN THIS ISSUE**

Metro DC DSA members were in the vanguard, excuse the expression, of the March for Bernie Jan. 30 that stepped off in Lafayette Park that Saturday afternoon, sunny but brisk. [See photos and text](#) Racism and the work of countering it has been in the forefront of Metro DC DSA's concerns, accentuated by the violent events of 2015 and the struggle of the Sanders campaign to deal with it programmatically as well. Bill Fletcher Jr., who has worked and strategized in this since well before his work on the Jesse Jackson campaigns, brought history and analysis to the Socialist Salon in January. Participants in that wide-ranging discussion recount the details of Fletcher's talk and responses to questions. [Read complete article](#)

Being an historically (though certainly not intentionally) majority-white organization that allies itself with the struggles of people of color, DSA is in a constant process of internal education. Ingrid Goldstrom outlines the counsel that members of those organizations offer to white allies – uncomfortable or not. [Read complete article](#)

The tally of dos and don'ts from an allies organization capsulizes the “rules of the road” when working with other groups on antiracist projects. [Read complete article](#)

In a related article, Goldstrom outlines the scope of work against Islamophobia and actions in Maryland that are happening now. [Read complete article](#)

The District of Columbia and its environs are getting short-changed every time we turn around, but two recent events are particularly stinging. Walmart, which connived its way into the juiciest areas of the DC market with a promise to bring its stores and employment to some of the city's hardest-hit communities, has now reversed itself and canceled plans to include those (no doubt less lucrative) communities. And the city, which got none of those gaudy promises in writing, is stuck with no recourse. Bill Mosley anatomizes the Walmart betrayal. [Read complete article.](#)

Howard University's public television station, WHUT, has nourished the metro area for many years, often with programming that can't be found on other local PBS stations. The heavy bidding for spectrum space by big telecom companies has apparently been too tempting for Howard's administrators, who appear to have put the station's space in the bandwidth on auction with the FCC, Carolyn Byerly relates. [Read complete article](#)

In some good news, a potential loss of nearly 700 Prince George's County jobs in Safeway distribution centers was averted, mostly by resolute and methodical union action. Support from the community and local officials also helped win a privatization fight brought on by invasive hedge-fund thinking, as Kurt Stand details. [Read complete article](#)

The struggle for women's reproductive rights takes different forms and has different levels of intensity in our three jurisdictions – Maryland, Virginia and the District. But as veteran activists outlined for our January membership meeting, each locale has its own pesky problems. Merrill Miller recounts the discussion. [Read complete article](#)

There is a great deal that can be done to reduce the global carbon footprint by better control of methane escaping from extraction and application, Bill Boteler explains. But the infamous, uncontrolled methane leak in California's Porter Ranch wellhead shows how the worst effects of cost-cutting and slipshod energy management can emerge at any time to send the whole effort tumbling backward. [Read complete article](#)

“Socialism in our time” is more often spoken with an ironic twist by many of us than with any real hope

of seeing the goal reached in our lifetime (despite the astonishing evolution of discourse brought on by, or illuminated by, the Sanders campaign). Maybe you don't personally have high expectations of living to see our particular millennium, but does that mean you won't care about what the planet looks like absent you? The DSA national office has some thought-experiments for you. [Read complete article](#)

The Maryland General Assembly is, like the rest of us, shoveling out and working to keep to its schedule. Woody Woodruff checks off some of the progressive concerns that are in play as the legislators head toward their mid-April adjournment. [Read complete article](#)

Automation has been bringing big changes to the conditions and availability of work since the beginning of the industrial revolution, but the effects of today's advances on tomorrow's workforce could be really, really drastic. Andy Feeny reviews a book about robots and their role in our future. [Read complete article.](#)

Starting with a strong list of grownup readings for Black History Month, our "Good Reads" bring you articles you may have missed. [Read complete article](#)

**You can read these and other past articles in the *Washington Socialist* on our website where they are archived, [dsadc.org](http://dsadc.org)**

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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).*

## [BILL FLETCHER BRINGS HISTORY AND ANALYSIS TO THE RACE/CLASS TANGLE](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016**

*By Woody Woodruff*

Veteran activist and author Bill Fletcher Jr., believes the Bernie Sanders campaign needs to "expand its narrative" to include concerns and question of potential supporters beyond his largely white base and beyond the perspective of his hero, the socialist Eugene Debs, that "if you solve capitalism you've solved it all."

Fletcher shared his ideas on building a new, broad Left coalition at the Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America's Socialist Salon Jan. 28. Fletcher, a labor strategist and theoretician with deep experience in the Jesse Jackson presidential campaigns of the 1980s, spoke to a packed dining room of nearly 40 about the prospects for a left electoral strategy that addresses the immediate opportunity of the Sanders campaign but has a long-game strategy as well to match the right wing's successful movement-building approach.

“Here we go again on the left—we have nothing that resembles an electoral strategy,” Fletcher began. He described a cycle in which left activists work on electoral campaigns and are so alienated by the process that they immediately drop out of electoral work until the next cycle four years later, starting all over again.

Fletcher compared the well-documented ground-game strategy of the right beginning with Richard Viguerie’s direct-mail campaigns in the 1960s after the smashing defeat of GOP presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, building state-level organizations aiming “to reverse the 20<sup>th</sup> century.” Viguerie’s approach to organizing also contributed to coalescing the conservative base that would elect Ronald Reagan in 1980.

In contrast, for left activists electoral politics were felt to be “insufficiently revolutionary,” Fletcher recalled, with the exception of the black electoral effort in the decades following the civil rights era of the 1960s and ‘70s leading to the Jackson campaign, which was specific and had a city by city movement-building approach.

The right had an issue focus that allowed them to use guns and abortion, e.g., to capture non-urban areas and large sections of the white working class “to build a total reactionary movement.” Unlike the left, they didn’t expect total agreement ie: gun lobby supports might not be anti-choice, anti-choice activists were expected to demonstrate for the Second Amendment. But the right did create a narrative around which they could mobilize their otherwise disparate base.



Fletcher called right-wing populism “the herpes of politics” because it plays on elements endemic in the political system and erupts every time the system becomes compromised – whenever anxieties arise the theme (“narrative”) is the victimization of whites.

Fletcher anatomized the mistakes of the left, playing out again in this electoral cycle:

The Sanders campaign, he said, is creating a “narrow narrative” compared to the more inclusive Jackson campaigns. For example, Sanders’ campaign doesn’t reach important constituencies that it could and “doesn’t include the questions that many people are seeking the answers to – it’s not the full picture.” Though supporters often argue that it is a groundbreaking assault on inequalities in the capitalist system, Bernie is “dizzy with success” and doesn’t realize that doing better than expected is still not doing everything he can.

Fletcher faulted Sanders for being in elective office for several decades but doing little to try and use his position to mobilize a broad social movement to bring the Left back into electoral politics. Additionally, he pointed to Sanders' lack of effort to address problems of racism and sexism that cannot be explained by economics alone.



Sanders' campaign references both "racist oppression and capitalist exploitation" but "some populations are way worse off [in this equation] and need more help," Fletcher argued. Sanders talks about jobs and rebuilding the middle class, Fletcher said, but "when another policeman kills a black person, Sanders seems unable to connect the issues or address the underlying racism that still exists in the country."

Jackson got wild approval from white farmers and workers because he could connect their lives and issues to the broader narrative. Unlike Jackson, Sanders is not seen as "their champion" by people who are unlike him. Sanders is an inspirational "leader" but "we need an organizer" as well, Fletcher said.

Sanders's veneration of Eugene Debs is telling, Fletcher said. "Debs was a complicated man and the Socialist Party was [a] complicated" political formation in Debs' day. And Debs believed "philosophically that if you solve capitalism you solve it all." In fact there are no "common economic demands" that can unify people across race lines, Fletcher declared.

In an article posted in August 2015 on national DSA's [Democratic Left](#) blog, Fletcher declared: "The sort of "political revolution" that the Sanders Campaign proclaims has been a long time coming. Yet it will never arrive if there is not a full recognition that the class struggle overlaps that of racial justice. The ruling elites, for several centuries, have appreciated that race is the trip wire of U.S. politics and social movements. When will progressives arrive at the same conclusion?"

Fletcher reflected on his early days in 1960s-'70s politics when he opted out of electoral politics, thinking they were irrelevant. He has come to a different place after years of working in grassroots campaigns and realizing that change can only come systematically through regular involvement in the political process.

Among questions addressed to Fletcher after his formal talk, one queried whether left activists should work with Democrats or seek an independent electoral strategy. Fletcher recommends an inside-outside strategy, because the "two-party grip" on US politics "makes it hard for a third

party to emerge.” Within this strategy for the immediate campaign, Sanders’ narrative has to expand. Fletcher said dismissively that “these sectarian debates [about the Democratic Party] are not worth having any more.” Activists in this cause “don’t have to agree on everything ... let’s just get people together who aren’t going to shoot at each other. ... We are the left that is interested in electoral politics –even though we hate it.”

Fletcher advocates, instead, assembling a leadership whose members can find common ground on a few key issues and outline a strategy to address them. He favors local action to get progressive candidates onto school boards, city councils, and into state legislatures – “I want us to take over Texas, take over Alabama,” he said. “The right wing has been able to convince people in places like that that the Koch brothers are their friends” when this thinking really backfires on them.

Why has labor – where Fletcher has been engaged as a rank-and-file activist, educator and strategist much of his life– become so weak? Fletcher responded with history: “Labor was devastated” by the Taft-Hartley Act’s restrictions on organizing and by the Cold War anticommunism that stripped activists out of the union movement and reinforced Gompers-style business unionism. Coupled with the radical changes in the economy of the 70s that diverted more and more resources away from workers and into financial capitalism, the effect has been like the frog in a pot who is brought to boil incrementally without noticing his own demise.

Asked about remedies for the right’s dominance at the state and congressional level, Fletcher counseled left unity on a scale well beyond temporary alliances created by Sanders’s advocacy of democratic socialism. Somebody, he said, “has to call a meeting” to build a real bloc for a city by city left campaign to disrupt the right’s well organized and well financed grip by striking at the heart of its power. In trying to build a bloc, he said, who gets to be at the table is more important than who calls the meeting. Fletcher’s book [Solidarity Divided](#) expands on some of those themes.

Fletcher argued for a continued electoral strategy, a “long game” to match that of the right. He acknowledged that the chance for cross-racial unity was complicated by an “anarcho-reformist” strain within some recent, youth-driven movements like Black Lives Matter. The strategy as he described it was to engage instead in street actions that would “force elites to do what we want them to do.” BLM is resistant to talking about class because “it is a way of obscuring race” as a salient issue.

For more of Fletcher’s views, check out his website <http://billfletcherjr.com/> or tune into Arise, his weekly radio program on labor issues (WPFW – 89.3 FM – Friday mornings at 9 a.m.

*Carolyn Byerly and Kurt Stand contributed to this article.*

*The Socialist Salon of Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America meets monthly over dinner to hear and discuss issues of socialist politics and analysis. Our February Salon will address Socialist-Feminism; details will be on DSA’s [Meetup page](#) which always previews our upcoming events.*

[Fighting the Current Scourge of Islamophobia](#)

*The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016

By Ingrid Goldstrom

Rising violence against Muslims, Arabs, South Asians and Sikhs as well as concerted efforts to halt the acceptance of Syrian and other refugees fleeing the Middle East demand that all people of good will, especially socialists and other progressives, raise their voices against anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia. One national organization ([Showing Up for Racial Justice](#), or SURJ) and one statewide group focusing on the plight of Syrian refugees in particular ([Maryland for Refugees](#)) provide tools and serve as shining examples of just how to go about this. With just a few moments of our time, we can make a huge difference.

At the national level, SURJ ([see related article](#)) provides tools for organizations and individuals to support Muslims, Arabs, South Asians and Sikhs, especially critical since their communities have been traumatized by events in the wake of the San Bernadino shooting and the vitriol spewed by the Republican Party candidates for President. Simple actions that we can take to show our support include the following: displaying yard signs of [support for Muslim neighbors](#); writing op-eds for local papers; sponsoring letter parties where attendees write letters of support and deliver them to their local mosques; wearing buttons expressing support (DSA buttons are available at [www.dsausa.org](http://www.dsausa.org)); taking photos of DSA locals holding supportive signs such as “We Stand with Our Muslim Neighbors” and posting these on social media; and holding conversations at membership meetings/salons, etc, addressing Islamophobia. Simply smiling or engaging in chit-chat with women wearing hijabs can go a long way in demonstrating our solidarity.



*An impromptu group shot at the January Metro DC DSA membership meeting.*

An ongoing and fast-building example of local actions is the coalition of groups, including Peace Action and faith-based groups in Montgomery County, Maryland, spurred to action by the Maryland Governor Hogan’s (non-binding) rejection of Syrian refugees. The coalition quickly and successfully moved progressive local city councils in Greenbelt, Takoma Park and Rockville to introduce resolutions welcoming Syrian refugees. Four members of the Prince George’s County Council have cosponsored a similar resolution (which also opposes recent upticks in deportation of Latinos) to be considered Feb. 2. A

letter to Gov. Hogan opposing his stance, initiated by Takoma Park (Dist. 20) Sen. Jamie Raskin, had accumulated signatures from five Maryland senators and eleven delegates.

The [coalition](#) created a Facebook page ([Maryland Welcomes Refugees](#)), Twitter account and listserv, developed welcoming signs for businesses to put in their windows, sent a deluge of emails to state legislators, and actively continue to find new ways to counter the harsh rhetoric of our times.

*Lucy Duff contributed to this report.*

### [Gas Leaks in Porter Ranch — and DC](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016**

*By Bill Boteler*

In 2012, a study published in *Science* put forward the idea that cutting emissions of black carbon (soot) and methane could buy us time in the effort to slow climate change while we are trying to phase out fossil fuels. The study estimated that we could lower projected temperatures in midcentury by 0.5 degrees C. Methane can trap 84 times as much heat as CO<sub>2</sub> in the first 20 years after it enters the atmosphere. Sources include coal mines, fossil fuel producers and landfills. Also, cattle production facilities and rice paddies contribute as biological sources.

Cutting methane emissions is also cheaper and easier than replacing fossil fuels, but sources are widespread and natural emission of methane will increase as climate change warms permafrost in Arctic regions.

The [current natural gas leak at Porter Ranch, California](#) is a dramatic example of how serious methane leaks can be and how difficult methane leak reduction could be in a world of low-rent capitalist management of energy resources. Erin Brockovich has compared it to a BP Oil spill on land. The leak was discovered at Southern California Gas Company's Aliso Canyon storage field in late October. This is an underground storage facility created by capping a former natural gas well. Since its discovery, the leak has spewed 84 million kilograms of methane. At its peak, it was leaking 58,000 kil/hr but much more recently this was down two-thirds to about 18,400 kil/hr.

The amount is equivalent to the greenhouse effect of 440,000 cars over a one-year period. It is twice the annual greenhouse emissions of Los Angeles, and, [according to Counterpunch](#), it is thought fracking may have played a role in creating the leak.

Southern California Gas Company is digging a second well to reach and cap the leak, which is 8,000 feet under the surface. But the leak probably won't be stopped until sometime in February, according to the company's claim. In the meantime, 26,000 families have fled from their homes to escape the foul-smelling gas. Many have suffered nosebleeds, headaches and respiratory distress.

Southern California Gas Company has had to pay Porter Ranch residents for temporary housing in area hotels and residents' lives have been turned upside down. Real estate values and small businesses have been adversely affected.

In respond to the state of emergency that Governor Jerry Brown finally declared, the California Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources has issued a notice to adopt emergency regulation for natural gas storage facilities that would require ongoing monitoring. There are 330 such facilities in California alone, according to Counterpunch. But Linda Caputo, an activist with 350.org, says the regulations need to be “much tougher.” California’s two Senate members have most recently called for a full-dress investigation by the Energy Department.

Leaky methane is a problem throughout the United States. As gas lines age, our older cities, especially, are bleeding methane. A study released in 2014 by researchers from Duke and Boston Universities found 5,893 natural gas leaks in the District of Columbia alone.

Cars carrying special monitors and GPS equipment covered 1,500 miles of roads in DC. They produced maps showing the locations of leaks. They also found leaks with high concentrations of methane and decided to probe beneath manholes where they detected leaking. Twelve of these had concentrations high enough to cause explosions. They reported these, but to their dismay, on returning four months later, found that nine of these were still emitting dangerous levels of gas. They also conducted a survey in Boston and found a similar number of leaks per mile, [according to USA Today](#).

Older cities have pipes made of cast iron or steel that need replacing with newer PVC pipes. The Duke study recommended that other cities conduct gas leaks mapping.

U.S. Senator Edward Markey of Massachusetts has introduced legislation to fund the replacement of leaking gas pipes nationwide. Also, President Obama has just proposed new rules to regulate the release and flaring of natural gas on public lands, according to the journal Oil and Gas Investor.

It appears that after much pressure from activists and angry citizens, combined with new research findings, the government is finally clamping down on these sources of methane emissions. It remains to be seen how this will affect fracking, which is a major source of methane leaks.

[GOOD READS FOR SOCIALISTS <> FEBRUARY 2016](#)

Sunday, January 31st, 2016

GOOD READS FOR SOCIALISTS

*The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016

Welcome to February – a Leap Year, so one extra day for reading. We’ll lead off with Kurt Stand’s “**Seven Suggestions for Black History Month**”...

**One:** *A Future for Workers: A Contribution from Black Labor*, was issued last year by the Black Labor Collaborative and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists to frame a discussion around building a progressive agenda for the US labor movement that addresses economic exploitation and racism. [http://www.cbtu.org/pdf/a\\_future\\_for\\_workers.pdf](http://www.cbtu.org/pdf/a_future_for_workers.pdf)

**Two:** *And Still I Rise: Black Women Labor Leaders Voices/Power/Promise*, is a 2015 report – and an ongoing project of the Institute of Policy Studies. The report itself is based on wide-ranging interviews with African American women union leaders and activists.

[http://and-still-i-rise.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ASIR4\\_21.pdf](http://and-still-i-rise.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ASIR4_21.pdf)

**Three:** *#Black Workers Matter: Organize the South*, is the Conference Report from a two-day convening held in Raleigh, North Carolina (Sept. 14-15, 2015) on race and organizing. Amongst the featured speakers were Rev. Dr. William Barber, president of the North Carolina NAACP and leader of the Moral Mondays movement, and Cecil Roberts, president of the United Mine Workers of America. The event was sponsored by the Black Worker Initiative of the Institute for Policy Studies. <http://www.ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Black-Workers-Matter-online-version.pdf>

**Four:** *The Moral Bankruptcy of Capitalism: The Black Radical Tradition as Socialist Alternative*, was a conference held this year (January 11) in Philadelphia. Featured speakers included Cornel West, Johanna Fernandez, Angela Davis, Vijay Prashad and many others. The Roar Collective posted videos of all conference sessions. <https://roarmag.org/2016/01/11/the-black-radical-tradition-in-our-time-conference-in-videos/>

**Five:** *Struggle in Progress: Celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Union Victory and Emancipation*, is an issue of *Jacobin* (summer 2015), that focuses on the revolutionary legacy of Reconstruction, and of attempts in historiography, film and culture to erase its achievements from our collective memory. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/issue/struggle-and-progress/>

**Six:** *UN Experts Catalog Seemingly Endless List of Racial Discrimination in US* by Andrea Germanos, *Common Dreams* (1/29/16), reports on a United Nations Working Group 11-day fact find trip which took the delegation to Washington DC, Baltimore, Jackson (Miss.), Chicago and New York City. Chaired by Mireille Fanon Mendes France, the group called upon the US government to establish a national human rights commission, to pass pending criminal justice legislation and to ban the death penalty across the nation. A statement released by the group also includes the following: “Past injustices and crimes against African Americans need to be addressed with reparatory justice. A final report will be presented to the UN’s Human Rights Council in September. <http://commondreams.org/news/2016/01/29/un-experts-catalog-seemingly-endless-list-racial-discrimination-us>

**Seven:** *Who Was W.E.B. DuBois?* by Nicholas Lemann, a review of Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *Lines of Descent: W.E.B. DuBois and the Emergence of Identity*. A critical review of Appiah’s books that looks at the relationship between DuBois’ view of race and racial identity, Appiah’s concept of “cosmopolitanism,” and contemporary issues. Lemann writes: “The killing of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, and the subsequent demonstrations, provided a vivid example of the continuing need for a politics of racial protest, of the kind that Du Bois engaged in for his whole life. Appiah is right that protest against oppression is unnecessarily constricting if it’s the only available form of racial identity, but it has to remain available as one of the forms.” (*New York Review of Books*, 9/25/14).

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/09/25/who-was-du-bois/>

Some editors and interns at *The Atlantic* magazine talked to academic and expert practitioners in banking and labor markets about what's currently awful and what might get better in 2016. Their answers ranged from the USPS alt-banking scheme to better choices in the economics Nobel Prize to financial services innovators opting for lower profits per customer but a wider if less affluent customer base. <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/01/hope-despair-banks-institutions/421779/>

Maryland and other states that don't have real public power companies are trying to make it easy for alt-providers to access competitively-priced power from renewable sources. This piece from *Capital and Main* (via *Portside*) shows how hard that can be when big corporate-owned power companies dominate the market. The subtext: Public goods need public control, a lesson for Maryland and the region, which is already dominated by Exelon and teetering on the brink of total monopoly. <http://portside.org/2016-01-04/power-struggle-will-local-energy-groups-come-clean>

Thomas Edsall's recent piece on the way right-wing forces and money have taken over at the state and local level is also, crucially, about a decline of the left's capacity to engage and organize through local-level institutions like clubs and societies, the old Tocqueville standards – leaving a vacuum that the right has filled very effectively. [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/13/opinion/campaign-stops/the-republican-partys-50-state-solution.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/13/opinion/campaign-stops/the-republican-partys-50-state-solution.html?_r=0)

Our record-breaking snowfall from which we are now emerging brings questions about the increasing rate of weather catastrophes. *Thinkprogress* examines the link between big storms and climate change with several climate scientists, a piece written before the actual storm arrived. It reminds us that climate change is a quintessentially socialist issue; that mitigation of these effects can only come with collective will and action because so much profit is pinned to the status quo. First spotted in Sam Smith's *Undernews*.

<http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2016/01/22/3741287/climate-science-blizzards/>

Speaking of snow, Kurt Stand sends more recommendations as a result of being snowed in:

>>"The AFL-CIO has a new blog and the first installment is an interview with Dan Savage (gay activist, sex advice columnist) — it makes one wish there was an afterlife, I love to think how much George Meany would hate this:<https://medium.com/by-our-hands/a-sex-advice-columnist-says-unions-are-great-5dadcd7433e#.xocmqbwj9>

>>It turns out that Woody Guthrie lived in an apartment building owned by Trump's father in Brooklyn, and it turns out (no surprise) that Trump the younger inherited his racism from his father. *Portside* ran an article about Guthrie's encounter with Trump's "white's only" housing policy:

<http://portside.org/2016-01-22/what-woody-guthrie-wrote-about-old-man-trump-his-racist-landlord>

>>"The UE adopted a resolution in support of BDS, after which an Israeli law firm charged them with unfair labor practices (secondary boycott), the NLRB upheld UE's right to support the boycott. The article contains the resolution and explains the NLRB's decision:

<http://www.ueunion.org/ue-news/2016/ue-win-at-nlrh-harassing-political-charge-by-israeli-law-firm-dismissed>

Louis Cooper recommends Matt Karp, “The Bernie Coalition,” Jacobin, 1/28/16  
<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/01/bernie-sanders-democratic-president-primary-new-hampshire-iowa-caucus/>

A ranking techo-skeptic, Evgeny Morozov observes in *The Guardian* how some tech giants depend on fleecing the taxpayer for their prowess at invading our lives and squashing competition: “With investors like [Google](#), Amazon’s Jeff Bezos and Goldman Sachs behind it, Uber is a perfect example of a company whose global expansion has been facilitated by the inability of governments to tax profits made by hi-tech and financial giants.”  
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/31/cheap-cab-ride-uber-true-cost-google-wealth-taxation>

Bill Boteler (see his article in this issue) recommends this Common Dreams report that describes the threat in continuing fossil fuel development:  
<http://commondreams.org/news/2016/01/25/new-report-issues-dire-carbon-warning-keep-it-ground-or-else>

What are we really laughing at when we laugh at (or, guiltily, with) Donald Trump. *The Nation*’s “Mad Law Professor” Patricia J. Williams shows how devilishly skilled the GOP clown prince-in-waiting is at bringing out the worst in anyone, all in the name of humorous “play.” Suggested by our comrade Donna Hoffmeister. <http://www.thenation.com/article/cruelty-irony-and-evasion/>

## [Jobs Terminator 2](#)

Sunday, January 31st, 2016

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016**

Book review of Martin Ford, *Rise of the Robots: Technology and the Threat of a Jobless Future* (Basic Books, New York, 2015), 334 pp., \$28.29 paperback.

*By Andy Feeney*

Job markets around the world still haven’t recovered completely from the 2007-8 financial crisis and the global recession that followed. But judging from last month’s meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, another big shock to the international labor force is due soon.

According to a WEF report issued in connection with this year's Davos gathering, a pending "Fourth Industrial Revolution" driven by robots, online commerce, new advances in biotechnology and other disruptive technologies is likely to eliminate roughly another 7 million jobs worldwide between now and 2020. The same technically driven business revolution should create another 2 million new jobs, chiefly in high technology, for a net loss of 5 million jobs in the next half decade.

Technology-driven job losses for men and women will be approximately equal in absolute terms, the WEF report predicts. Yet due to existing gender imbalances in the most affected industries, women will lose five jobs for every new one they gain while men will lose only three. In sum, the Fourth Industrial Revolution will likely damage the employment prospects of both men and women while further worsening existing gender imbalances in the worldwide labor force. See <http://reports.weforum.org/future-of-jobs-2016/women-and-work-in-the-fourth-industrial-revolution/>.

The WEF's alarming predictions are consistent with what Martin Ford, a long-time Silicon Valley entrepreneur with 25 years' experience in computer design and software development, has forecast for the global job market in his new book *Rise of the Robots*. Ford devotes little time to exploring the expected gender or racial impacts of the robotics revolution – a real shortcoming in his book, compared to the WEF's report. But his overall analysis of what robotics, automation and related technological developments should mean for working people is even grimmer than the WEC's, and yet in some ways, much more interesting.

With his long experience in the computer and electronics industry, Ford has detailed knowledge of some of the technological breakthroughs that he sees as driving future employment impacts of potentially horrifying dimensions. He likewise has clearly thought a lot about some big economic trends that have shaped capitalist civilization since the first Industrial Revolution, including the dramatic rise toward increased income inequality that the United States and other rich western societies have experienced over the past several decades.

By marrying his insight into new technological innovations, some of them virtually unknown to the public, to his knowledge of broad economic trends, Ford has produced a book that should be of equal interest to computer geeks and labor economists. Unfortunately, its implications for a large fraction of humanity both here in the US and in low-wage developing economies overseas are frightening in the extreme, but at the same time the scope and the technical intricacies of the automation revolution we are undergoing are fascinating.

In the introduction to *Rise of the Robots*, Ford grounds his analysis in Moore's Law, the well-known idea in the computer field that for a variety of reasons, the overall power of computers tends to double approximately once in approximately every 18 months.

In the real world, Ford indicates, advances in microchip design, software programs and other variables have in fact enabled computing power to double some 27 times since the integrated circuit was invented in 1958. Thanks to the magic of exponential growth, this means today's technology is about 134 million times as powerful as computers were back in the early Sputnik age. This astonishing rate of progress in computer capabilities has provided the platform for the

advancement of the robotics revolution, although the development of robots capable of performing particular job categories has depended on sometimes quirky circumstances.

Take for example Ford's description of a robot recently designed by engineers at Industrial Perception, Inc., a small startup company in Silicon Valley, which has the ability to see well enough to stack, restack and unstack different boxes in an industrial warehouse setting.

Before the invention of Industrial Perception's warehouse robot, Ford writes, there already were industrial robots employed in doing many detailed manufacturing tasks, and some of these industrial robots had visual abilities. Yet until recently even the sighted machines lacked the capacity to see in three dimensions, and their inability to perceive depth gave them a limited ability to function in settings that were "to any meaningful degree unpredictable" – such as the selective stacking and unstacking of differently sized and shaped boxes in warehouses, for example. The result has been that in most warehouse settings, and in some other industrial settings as well, certain tasks have been kept open for human beings.

In 2006, however, the toymaker Nintendo introduced its innovative Wii game console, which included a wireless wand containing a new motion-detecting device called an accelerometer. An accelerometer, as it happens, is a device that can detect motion in three dimensions. Sony Corporation, a rival to Nintendo in the game market, then introduced its own motion-detecting wand in its popular PlayStations. Microsoft, a rival to both Sony and Nintendo in the game market, then leapfrogged its competitors by adding a feature to its Xbox 360 game console that uses infrared technology to "see" the actions of game players in three dimensions, even without a wand.

The new Microsoft add-on to the Xbox, priced at \$1.50 a unit, for the first time gave robotics researchers in the universities as well as tinkerers and hobbyists a cheap way to build machines with three-dimensional vision, Ford reports. Almost instantly, would-be developers responded by creating such robots, and Industrial Perception's automated warehouse worker soon followed.

Thanks ultimately to the revolutionary improvement of computing abilities according to Moore's Law, but thanks in this particular instances to rival developers of electronic games for children making improvements to Wii, PlayStation and XBox, corporate owners of industrial warehouses throughout our economy may soon have the ability to reduce warehouse operating costs by replacing relatively low-wage human workers with machines. Indeed, by the time *Rise of the Robots* was going to press, Ford noted that such warehouse giants as Amazon and the Kroger retail grocery chain had both begun to invest significantly in the robot option.

Ford, like some other recent writers on robotics and automation, goes to some trouble to demonstrate that low-paid, relatively low-skilled industrial workers are not the only potential victims of thinking machines in the economy. White-collar jobs are also at risk. Clever researchers and designers also have created automated systems that can compose musical symphonies, Ford observes; there is an existing program called Quill, commercialized by a startup company called Narrative Science, Inc., that can write short but coherent news stories for use in newspapers or over the Internet. Large automobile companies as well as Google already are at work trying to develop automated, driverless cars that can function well in traffic.

Similarly, some white-collar professionals in large corporations are at risk of losing their jobs to an “intelligent software platform” developed by a New York City startup company called WorkFusion, whose program “completely manages the execution of projects that were once highly labor-intensive through a combination of crowd sourcing and automation.” Today radiologists typically need 13 years of training beyond high school to develop the skills needed to interpret medical images accurately, Ford writes, and yet computers are getting increasingly good at this task. In the fairly near future, accordingly, “it’s quite easy to imagine that ... radiology will be a job performed almost entirely by machines.”

Ford therefore argues that the robotics revolution poses a significant threat to the future of today’s college students and recent graduates, who already in many cases are going deeply into debt to prepare themselves for well-paid professional jobs that don’t become readily available after graduation. As the automation and robotization of currently high-skilled white-collar jobs accelerates, new university graduates could face even greater challenges in obtaining jobs that will pay well enough to repay their costs of university educations.

Yet although he’s concerned about robotization dimming the job prospects of many white collar and professional workers, Ford predicts that the automation revolution will have its most damaging results among low-wage and relatively unskilled workers, both in the United States and other advanced western companies and in the emerging economies of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The most important job losses resulting from industrial robots will likely occur in China and other Asian economies where a large fraction of industrial manufacturing occurs, Ford believes. The increasing automation of low-paid agricultural work poses an enormous threat to the large agricultural workforces of African and Asian economies, and by a cruel irony of economic history, people who are driven off the land in these countries will probably not be able to follow the example of European peasants who were forced off their lands during the First Industrial Revolution and forced to find factory work in the cities – for in the Third World cities of the future, many of the factories are likely to be highly automated.

Here in the United States where the service sector now provides the most jobs, Ford concludes that the major employment impacts of automation and robotics are likely to occur in the fast food business, in the restaurant industry more generally, in some job categories within the educational and health care sectors, and in retail stores of all descriptions. Although robots and automation are growing ever more sophisticated and potentially threaten white collar workers performing relatively complex tasks, it is easier to design machines that can replace human labor in relatively simple and repetitive jobs, and such jobs are generally found at the bottom of the wage scale, not the top.

For this reason and other, more complicated ones that Ford articulates in the book but are too cumbersome to explain here, *Rise of the Robots* predicts that the increasing capabilities of thinking machines will contribute to, if they are not already major contributing causes to, such ongoing social and economic problems as increasing income inequality and the growing domination of politics in the United States by a highly automated financial sector and the super-rich.

How can the employment challenges and other negative economic aspects of the robot revolution be mitigated and/or prevented? Ford considers the idea some observers have floated, of trying to prevent the ongoing robotization of work either through government fiat or moral and economic appeals to employers, only to reject it.

Thus he cites the argument of Nicholas Carr, a contributor to *The Atlantic*, that computer programmers and designers have mistakenly adopted “technology-centered automation” as a “dominant design philosophy” that has induced them to design systems that prioritize the needs of technology over the needs of human beings. He also notes a “New Grand Challenge” that MIT economist Erik Brynjolfsson has issued to “entrepreneurs, engineers and economists” urging them to use technology to invent systems that are complements to human labor, not substitutes for it. As quoted by Ford, Brynjolfsson has called for such engineers and entrepreneurs to replace their “labor-saving and automation mindset” with a “maker and creator mindset.”

The problem is that this makes no economic sense, Ford argues. To wit:

“The bottom line is that, despite all the rhetoric about ‘job creators,’ rational business owners do *not want* to hire more workers; they hire people only because they have to. The progression toward ever more automation is not an artifact of “design philosophy” or the personal preferences of engineers; it is fundamentally driven by capitalism.”

Rather than the “rise of technology-centered automation” being the new problem that *The Atlantic* has described, Ford continues, it began at least 200 years ago during the first Industrial Revolution. “The only difference today,” in his view, “is that exponential progress is now pushing us toward the endgame. For any rational business, the adoption of labor-saving technology will almost invariably prove to be irresistible. Changing that would require far more than an appeal to engineers and designers; it would require modifying the basic incentives built into the market economy.”

One radical but seemingly logical way of handling the problem of the employment impacts and growing economic inequality that are being generated by automation and related technologies, Ford suggests, would be to make “everyone a capitalist,” by distributing the ownership of the companies doing automation much more widely, so that everyone could gain from the economic efficiencies associated with robotics and even those who lose their jobs because of it might benefit. But given the already bitter polarization of politics in the United States, Ford thinks large-scale redistribution of capital in our society is even less likely than a large-scale redistribution of income.

Yet Ford’s major recommendation on how to handle the job effects of increasing automation is based on an argument that is designed to appeal to economic elites, and potentially even conservatives. It is that ongoing automation, rising levels of unemployment, falling wages and growing inequality will weaken consumer purchasing power in any capitalist economy and, by weakening the purchasing power of the lower classes, will ultimately hurt economic growth. It might possibly be argued that job losses, low wages, high poverty rates and economic injustice are economic, social and even moral evils in themselves, but whatever Ford may believe, he

doesn't rely on this argument; he instead focuses on the threat to "continued prosperity" and economic growth.

His main solution to the economic dislocations to be expected from advanced computer technologies also is a "conservative" one, at least in a sense. To maintain a prosperous capitalist economy and maintain the consumer purchasing power of those displaced by technology even as robotization continues, Ford suggests, we should adopt a "universal basic income" as proposed several decades ago by the rightwing conservative economist F.A. Hayek. Although the government spending taxpayer money to provide a basic income to everyone would seem in flat contradiction to almost everything that American conservatives believe today, such a basic income would not only help to stabilize consumer markets and make for a more stable market economy; it might even make most Americans more willing to gamble their savings on investments in capitalist technological progress, and be good for entrepreneurship – an important conservative value.

The chances of a guaranteed universal income being adopted soon are nil, Ford concedes, but as the robotics revolution continues accelerating and its economic and social dangers become more obvious, policy preferences may change, even among the conservatives. In the meantime, in the absence of a universal guaranteed income, Ford identifies several temporary, somewhat stopgap measures that he thinks would help. They include first, a national program to rebuild the nation's crumbling infrastructure (as Bernie Sanders has proposed, although Ford obviously does not cite Sanders in support of this goal).

A second near-term priority for handling the robotics and unemployment crisis, according to Ford, is increasing the nation's investment in community colleges. Ford is skeptical of trying to address the robotization challenge through education alone, as noted above, since so many of today's college graduates already are forced to work at jobs that don't make use of their education. Yet in general, "community colleges represent one of our most important resources for enabling workers to navigate an increasingly dynamic job market," and Ford recommends doing "everything possible" to make it easier for displaced workers to get retrained through community colleges.

Two additional near-term palliatives for technology-induced unemployment that Ford admits are politically contentious are (a) expanding the existing Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income parents to increase its maximum benefits and open it up to single people who are between jobs – thus, Ford admits, moving it closer to being a universal guaranteed income; and (b) shifting federal taxes that support important social programs away from payroll taxes, which essentially punish corporations with large workforces, and toward "a form of taxation that asks more from those businesses that rely heavily on technology and employ relatively few workers."

Finally, Ford comments, there is one policy idea that ought to be obvious to everyone in this age of growing technology-induced jobs uncertainty. Given today's technology trends, "it seems evident that we should not now be setting out to dismantle the social safety net we now have in place." If there is any good time to slash social programs that serve the most vulnerable members of the U.S. population, Ford concludes, "then surely, *this is not that time.*"

There are many other economic and technological themes in Ford's book that cannot be summarized here, and democratic socialists may find fault with some of them. For example, Ford provides an extended technological argument against the common conception among mainstream economists, including many liberal economists, about job losses caused by robots and automation likely being temporary, since new and possibly better jobs are likely to be created as technology-based "creative destruction" proceeds. This has generally been true in the past, Ford concedes, but he argues that for both technical and economic reasons, it probably won't be true this time. Whether or not readers of the *Washington Socialist* ultimately agree with Ford's conclusions on this and other topics, it would be good for some of us to master Ford's reasoning to find out.

### [Maryland: HOGAN BUDGET DROPS, AND THE FUN BEGINS IN EARNEST](#)

Sunday, January 31st, 2016

#### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016**

*By Woody Woodruff*

Now that Republican Gov. Larry Hogan has dropped his budget on Maryland's Democratic-dominated General Assembly, the fussing and feuding about resources can begin. The budget is comfortably in surplus, but Hogan's passive-aggressive touch is visible throughout, as Department of Legislative Services director and longtime budget guru Warren Deschenaux discreetly pointed out in his briefing to the legislators (pdf [here](#) "fiscal briefings" under the green "Budget" tab). The legislature can move money around but not increase the governor's budget total without finding entirely new revenue sources.

In a year when money is less tight, ideology may regain some prominence in the legislative battles in this 90-day session between now and mid-April. The tone has been set early by the Assembly's override of five out of Hogan's six vetoes from last year. The remaining, perhaps most narrowly contested, override vote is to affirm a law passed last year giving the vote to ex-offenders, which Hogan vetoed. The House of Delegates successfully overrode that veto, but Senate President Mike Miller is waiting for the governor's appointment of a new senator from Montgomery County. The former senator in that district resigned and the county's Democratic Central Committee has nominating a sitting Delegate to replace her. Such appointments are generally a matter of courtesy. But Miller has scheduled the override vote Feb. 5. Neither of the bicameral legislature's chamber leaders, Miller or House Speaker Mike Busch, is a firebrand, but the Assembly is always ready to push back against a governor of the opposite party, and that can give impetus to progressive legislation that might otherwise languish.

As the region worked through a nearly two-foot blizzard the last week of January, the Assembly made a great show of continuing its work. In fact the House held numerous hearings on its 500-plus bills already filed. The Senate, about a third the House's size, had, by contrast, filed a mere 27 bills by the Friday before Feb. 1's resumption of business.

There is a fair amount of [extra money available](#) to be moved around in the Hogan budget. The Baltimore *Sun*'s Pamela Wood's rough estimate of Jan. 22 noted that "The proposed operating budget leaves about \$450 million unspent. Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle expect to debate whether to spend the money, hold onto it or return some of it to taxpayers."

One complication for the leadership is that many of the legislators will come in with pet local projects to be funded by state bonds. However, no pot of money has been included in the budget for that. That represents a bit of a time bomb of omission by Hogan. Setting statewide budgeting priorities of the Assembly against the legislators' needs locally is a potential divide-and-conquer strategy.

Baltimore catches the worst barbs in Hogan's budget – that'll teach them to riot over police use of deadly force in Larry Hogan's state. He has already canceled the much-wished-for Red Line mass transit project there. He's provided none of the promised money for demolition of blighted blocks (it's now promised... later). A \$24 million cut in the city's school funding is said due to declining enrollment, but other rural systems with declining enrollment get more than last year.

Prince George's – though Hogan grew up there in its white-folks political era and is the son of a local congressman – gets zero operational money for its [planned new hospital](#). Aggravated legislators included Senate President Miller, who vowed that if the governor doesn't add the \$15 million needed in a supplemental this year the legislature will pass a bill mandating spending \$30 million for hospital operations (transitioning to University of Maryland teaching-hospital status) next year as catch-up.

A panel of lawmakers put together a 22-item session agenda for police reform that notably includes changes to the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights, a framework that has made it difficult for citizens and other criminal justice officials to hold officers accountable for misconduct, including use of excessive force. Activists have said that Maryland's version of LEOBOR, which exists in many other states, is the worst of any state in blocking reform and accountability. Del. Curt Anderson (D-Baltimore) has spearheaded the panel and promotes a bill that along with LEOBOR reform "would grant more rights to victims of police brutality ... create a unified complaint system for tracking problem officers and allow the public to watch police disciplinary boards," [the Baltimore Sun reported](#).

The legislators are still steamed over Hogan's refusal in the last session to provide the mandated extra geographical schools subsidy to major urbanized jurisdictions (Baltimore City, Montgomery and Prince George's counties – none of which voted for him) while slipping extra cash to rural districts where he did well. They passed a law last year requiring him to spend that money this year, so he has.

State employees have a hypothetical raise that is, um, not funded, meaning the legislators will also have to scrounge funds for that from the fast-shrinking stash of movable money. There is money, however, for individual-increment step raises. To the extent those have a “merit” dimension that could devolve a lot of arbitrary power to Hogan’s agency heads. Hogan is proposing to cut state positions (not necessarily workers) by 553, out of roughly 50,000 in the executive/agency category.

Some places and vested interests make out well, though, in this document – Hogan budgets \$5 million to subsidize corporate contributions to private schools. Small businesses and low-income taxpayers get cuts in fees and taxes, reducing revenue by \$23 million. Giveaways to the affluent may be buried in the budget but nobody (including Deschenaux) has found them yet, other than the [tax breaks for contributions to private schools](#). A very recent proposal for college scholarships to students who finish high school early is getting a hard look from some Democrats and educators who worry that such students will not be academically or emotionally prepared for college. The possibility that this could be a boondoggle for students from affluent families who have already accumulated the demonstrated education-coping skills associated with that economic class has not been brought up.

The legislature has some money to play with as noted above, including \$25 million more in the pension fund supplemental than required. The annual supplemental aims to bring the pension fund to full funding sometime in the next decade. But it will be scrambled for by all, including those with (above) local bond issues to guarantee.

Chipping away Hogan-style at unionized state employees continues, as *Union City* reported Jan. 27:

**“MD Cooks and PT Aides Fight for Jobs:** Seventy food service and physical therapy employees at state hospitals in Maryland are fighting for their jobs after being targeted by Maryland governor Larry Hogan, reports their union, AFSCME 3.” The [current effort at worker privatization](#) targets hospitals and juvenile relief centers

A high and hoped-for priority this year, after three years of being blocked in committees, is the earned paid sick leave effort. In the early going it appears packaged by influential Democrats with several other measures [billed as improving the lot of working women](#), along with a “just hours” measure that would prevent employers from juking employees’ schedules around, disrupting family life and educational efforts. The powerful Senate Majority Leader, Baltimore’s Catherine Pugh, is a co-sponsor of the sick leave bill (she is a candidate for mayor in that city) and Prince George’s Del. Dereck Davis, the chair of the House Economic Matters Committee that has buried the sick leave bill for three straight years, is now running for the open District 4 Congressional seat and has told activists he will prioritize getting that bill to the floor this year. When Senate President Miller was asked his position on paid sick leave, however, he shifted the topic, saying his priority this year was closing the male-female pay gap.

Paid sick leave legislation has recently been the target of [a poll funded by opponents](#), claiming that support for the bill dropped off when questions were added about potential costs to business and job loss. Those were “scare tactics,” said Melissa Broome of the [Job Opportunities Task Force](#). “The hypothetical effects that (the poll) raises are not backed up with facts,” Broome said.

Environmental groups are pushing bills to ban plastic bags and put deposits on plastic drink bottles, as well as ban the neonicotinoid pesticides that, it is increasingly certain, are devastating pollinator populations including bees. But a major battle over electric power provision involves several bills that will increase the targets for the portion of electric power that comes from renewable sources. One of these, the [Clean Energy Jobs Act](#), will be sweetened with \$40 million dedicated to training for green jobs and bolstering the participation of women- and minority-owned businesses in the clean energy trade. Those big numbers are getting interest from legislators who have been tougher to get to for the largely white environmental groups in the past.

Advocacy groups are already lining up Lobby Nights, mostly for Monday evenings when the legislators hold office hours before the week's one evening session. Enviro groups have a Feb. 8 citizen lobby night for [Prince George's and Anne Arundel county](#) activists planned, plus one March 7 for [Montgomery and Western Maryland](#), and the [Maryland AFL-CIO political operation](#) lobbies every Monday night, meeting at their Annapolis lobby shop beforehand. Call 410-269-1940 for details and information. Baltimore-based [Job Opportunities Task Force](#) has a rich list of legislative priorities (pdf at "New on the site/2016 State Policy Priorities).

[Moving Toward "Walking the Walk": Allies in the Fights Against Violence, Injustice and Intolerance](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016**

*By Ingrid Goldstrom*

Is Metro DC DSA a non-racist or anti-racist organization? How about its individual members? To answer these questions, go to *The Guardian's* short video, ["Are you a racist?"](#) Basically, the clip distinguishes being non-racist (as a moral stance) from being anti-racist (action) by virtue of whether we "talk the talk" or "walk the walk."

One could argue that we are by and large a non-racist organization with a number of individuals doing anti-racist work. Some of us do work locally with umbrella groups such as Black Lives Matters and as members of African American-led coalitions in movements so critical to the success of the political revolution espoused by the Sanders campaign around mass incarceration, police accountability, gentrification, economic inequality, etc. Yet, in the effort to build a multi-racial anti-racist DSA, we have lots of work to do.

If we want to expand our anti-racism work, there is no need for us to start from scratch. We can work in coalition with groups like [Showing Up for Racial Justice \(SURJ\)](#)

SURJ is a national network of groups (over 100 throughout the country) and individuals organizing white people for racial justice. Through community organizing, mobilizing, and education, SURJ moves white people to act as part of a multi-racial majority. It provides a both a national and local “one-stop shop” for finding out about events and learning more about racial justice.

According to SURJ, the need for such an organization became evident when participants in the post-Ferguson actions and protests responded to reports that there also has been tension about how some white people specifically were showing up in a non-helpful way. SURJ was asked by people of color for two things:

- \*\*To show up at actions called and organized by People of Color (POC)
- \*\*To organize actions as white people to call attention to anti-Black racism and the threat to black lives and the lives of people of color

SURJ has sterling credentials. It was founded in 2009 in response to a call – by people of color and whites engaged in racial justice work – for more white people to challenge the racial backlash after President Obama’s election. It focuses on working with people who, like us, are already “in motion.” SURJ (formerly US for All of Us: No Room for Racism) comes out of the Highlander Research and Education Center, formerly known as the Highlander Folk School, a social justice leadership training school and cultural center founded in 1932 and currently located in New Market, Tennessee. Highlander has provided training and education for the labor movement in Appalachia and throughout the Southern United States. It played a critical role in the American Civil Rights Movement; among its trainees were Rosa Parks, John Lewis and other members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ralph Abernathy.

The SURJ website is rich in educational resources ([see checklist, related article](#)) and contains information on actions that parallel much of what DSA does around organizing; therefore, it can be useful for purposes of both anti-racism work and organizing in general. These include the following: notices of periodic “basebuilding” national telephone calls on such topics as strategies for rural and small-town organizing, combating anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia ([see related article](#)); action toolkits on how to undertake actions, including talking points for the media and messaging on such topics as police accountability and criminalization as well as a toolkit on how to start a SURJ chapters; yard signs; and a search tool to find local actions.

Nationally, DSA chapters and SURJ chapters and affiliates are co-located in about 30 cities, creating a great opportunity to collaborate with like-minded people. Activities such as joint reading groups on race and class, for example, could be explored. In addition, places where there are DSA chapters and where SURJ does not exist provide an opportunity for DSA to develop affiliates of SURJ. Where SURJ exists and DSA does not have a chapter, individual DSA members will undoubtedly find a welcoming home for racial justice work.

In Metro DC DSA, we are lucky enough to have three SURJ chapters in the region: in DC, Baltimore and Northern Virginia. The DC listserv provides a weekly calendar of events with specific requests for white allies to step up. An example of that is a call for SURJ members to

sign up for training on how to do childcare for Black allies who want to attend events critical to them. Events listed include notifications from not only Black Lives Matter but other organizations doing social justice work. For example, the listserv provides notices of vigils for: Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray Tamir Rice, Natasha Mckenna, and others, as well as local workshops and conferences on racial justice issues, and actions against Walmart and for farm workers. SURJ has also initiated a series of metropolitan discussion groups for white folk to speak with other white folk about stepping up to action around racial justice.

So, where to start? In our local, we can begin by inviting our metropolitan SURJ chapters to come and tell us how we can plug into the work they are so especially equipped to undertake. Perhaps with guidance from SURJ, a democratic socialist discussion group could be initiated and/or a joint DSA/SURJ event could be planned to move us forward in “walking the walk.”

[Reshaping Yourself and Your Surroundings as Anti-Racist \(Tips from SURJ\)](#)

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016**

*Compiled by Ingrid Goldstrom*

Some posts on the SURJ website provide “gentle reminders” of what it means to do anti-racism work. From the artist and organizer [Ricardo Levins Morales](#) in “Whites fighting racism: what it’s about...”

“You may not get the validation you hunger for... The thing is that when you help put out a fire the people whose home was in flames may be too upset to thank and praise you – especially when you look a lot like the folks who set the fire. That’s OK. This is about something so much bigger than that. “

According to SURJ (see [related article](#) for more), some of the basic do’s and don’ts below have been helpful to other white folks engaging in this work.

**Do:** Organize white people to participate in actions led by People of Color (POC). **Don’t:** Expect to lead those actions.

**Do:** Follow the directions of POC in actions. **Don’t:** Take over the action; Escalate the action (unless directed to do so); Get so into being the most radical person that your risky action becomes a distraction.

**Do:** Help white people understand our “mutual interest” (i.e. what is our stake) with POC in overturning a racist, oppressive system. **Don’t:** Tell white people that they are “helping,” “supporting,” etc. POC.

**Do:** Work as scouts, transportation, or other jobs as needed. **Don’t:** Waste time feeling that you should be doing something more “important.”

**Do:** Listen carefully to POC, especially when they are telling you to stop doing something. **Don’t:** Interrupt; Assume you already know what they’re going to say; Talk over.

**Do:** Educate yourself about interpersonal dynamics, racial justice history and politics, learn about the local POC-led organizations, etc. **Don’t:** Assume that POC will educate you; Assume that POC are or are not as educated as you are; Tell POC that you know how they feel.

**Do:** Be aware of how your white privilege pushes you to claim leadership and control. **Don’t:** Believe that struggling alongside POC gives you a free pass to do whatever you want without consequences; Think that you can ever get completely over your privilege and racism.

#### [SANDERS SUPPORTERS RALLY IN DC; DSA BANNER LEADS MARCH](#)



*The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016

*By Bill Mosley*

Nearly 200 supporters of Bernie Sanders’ presidential bid gathered at chilly McPherson Square on January 30 for a march through the streets of DC to the African-American Civil War Memorial, where they held a pro-Sanders rally.



*Metro DC DSA members Coleson Breen and Merrill Miller fire up the crowd*

Metro-DC DSA had a strong presence at the event and our banner led the march up Vermont Ave., drawing cheers from numerous spectators. Speakers at the after-march rally included DSAers Merrill Miller and Coleson Breen as well as representatives of pro-Sanders student groups in the area. Singer-songwriter Hall Williams performed at the rally, getting the crowd dancing with lyrics promising a “people’s revolution.”

“People appeared really excited to get more involved in the work and several signed up to volunteer,” Breen said.

To get involved in the DSA for Bernie Campaign please check out our [Meetup page](#) later this week.

The rally had been originally scheduled for January 23 but was postponed by the snowstorm.

### [Socialism After Our Time](#)

Sunday, January 31st, 2016

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016**

*From the DSA National Office:*

Many people believe that only the rich can leave a meaningful legacy gift to a cause. The truth is that even those of us with modest means have insurance policies, pension benefits, wills or living trusts for which we can designate beneficiaries like DSA.

Only about 50 percent of people have a will, but the truth is a bequest is one of the simplest ways to support DSA. These thoughtful gifts ensure that we can continue our critical work to fight for the values of cooperation, solidarity, and socialism.

A sentence in your will or living trust can help promote DSA’s work and our socialist values:

*“I give to the Democratic Socialists of America, Inc., 75 Maiden Lane, New York, NY 10038 [insert cash amount, or percentage of your estate, or ‘all’] to be used for general purposes.”*

Wills and trusts are legal mechanisms which usually require an attorney to set up. However, many other legacy gifts do not require a lawyer to establish. Many bank accounts including checking, money market, savings accounts and certificates of deposit or IRA accounts have survivor provisions allowing you to designate a survivor that assumes ownership of the account after your death, as do life insurance policies. This notice is not intended as legal advice, which should only come from an attorney.

If you do designate DSA as a beneficiary, we would appreciate it if you inform the DSA national office with whatever degree of specificity you are comfortable with so we can thank you for your generosity. To learn more about investing in solidarity for the future and putting DSA in your will, contact us at [\(212\) 727-8610](tel:2127278610) or see [www.dsausa.org/bequests](http://www.dsausa.org/bequests).

By making a generous legacy gift to DSA, you can greatly support the future of the socialist movement.

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[Socialist Solidarity with Reproductive Rights](#)

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016**

By M. Miller

Caroline O’Shea, director of NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia, and Diana Philip, director of NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland, spoke on January 10 at the monthly Metro-DC DSA meeting about the state of reproductive rights in Washington, DC, Virginia and Maryland. Each area has its own particular challenges to overcome to ensure that women have the right to make decisions about their own reproductive health.

Reproductive rights for many women in Washington, DC, for instance, are crippled by the Hyde Amendment, a law that prohibits federal funding for abortion coverage and that prevents women on Medicaid, federal government workers, women in the military, and members of the Peace Corps from accessing affordable abortions. Virginia also severely limits women’s reproductive

rights by imposing waiting periods, biased counseling and insurance restrictions on abortion care. Even Maryland, often thought of as a relatively progressive state, restricts minors' ability to obtain abortions and all too often fails to provide young people with sound sexual education and access to condoms and other forms of contraception.

I've [written here previously](#) about how abortion restrictions are not merely a women's problem but largely a working women's problem. While upper-class women will always have access to abortion, whether it is legally accessible or not, many middle-class women and certainly even more working class women are facing greater difficulties in obtaining not only abortion care but reproductive healthcare in general.

Despite abortion access's importance in the lives of working class women, the connection between socialism and the support for abortion rights may not be immediately obvious. However, socialist and feminist Sharon Smith, in her book *Women and Socialism: Class, Race, and Capital*, argues that women's oppression is related to the emergence of class oppression. (The book was discussed at a January Jacobin reading group meeting and is also to be discussed at a second [DC Jacobin reading group Feb. 4.](#)) She states, "...at the same time that men were playing an increasingly exclusive role in production, women were required to play a much more central role in reproduction." In other words, women's oppression is inherently linked not only to class but to women's physical ability to reproduce children.

Capitalism exploits women not only as workers but also for their free labor in bearing and raising the next generation of workers. Therefore, a full range of reproductive choices for women must be part of any socialist agenda for widespread change in our society and our economic system. True reproductive freedom must include not only the right to abortion but also the right of women to bring children into the world who will be supported by their communities. Women's reproductive choices then must include not only abortion access but also a myriad of issues that affect women and their children such as state-funded daycare, a robust public education system, and universal healthcare, among others. These are all issues that socialists are already passionately supporting, but even as we champion these causes for the working class, we should not forget that they significantly impact working class women.

Socialists certainly face significant challenges to implement these social supports for working mothers, and we perhaps have an even more arduous battle ahead of us to secure abortion access for *all* women, not just the wealthy few. The first step we can take is to educate ourselves about what the current landscape of reproductive rights looks like. Educating ourselves at the January 10<sup>th</sup> membership meeting was taking that first step, and I encourage my comrades to take that step even further by checking out updates from [NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia](#), [NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland](#), the [Guttmacher Institute](#) and other resources on reproductive rights. We might not always agree with these organizations, or particularly with NARAL's recent endorsement of Hillary Clinton, but we can stand in solidarity with their desire to see a society where women in our society have access to a full range of reproductive rights.

[Union-Community Unity Leads to Victory: 700 Safeway Jobs Saved in Prince George's County](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016**

*By Kurt Stand*

On January 21, members of Teamsters Local 639 and Local 731 voted to ratify a new contract for the nearly 1000 workers employed at Safeway Distribution centers in Upper Marlboro and Landover, Md. The union had to make some wage and benefit concessions, but preserved the job of every worker threatened by a permanent layoff. It was the culmination of a successful campaign that began in October when those workers were given notice that the warehouses were going to be shut down, with the work transferred to non-union facilities in Pennsylvania. Union unity, amongst Teamster members, from the Metro Washington Labor Council and its affiliated unions, and broad community support were the reasons why the jobs were won.

Moreover, local elected officials in Prince George's County and state-wide in Maryland were upfront and vocal in support of the workers. There was a great deal of anger, because Safeway had been given tax breaks by the county to build new state-of-the-art facilities to keep local jobs – facilities and jobs threatened with abandonment.

That, of course, is the problem now experienced in Washington DC where Walmart, after receiving preferential treatment in order to enter the city, then decided not to open stores in the neighborhoods where jobs are most needed (see related story this issue by Bill Mosley). What is at issue here isn't one particular company, but a model of business. The conflict in Prince George's began because Safeway had entered into a business relationship with C&S Wholesale Distributors, a huge private corporation that has a history of union-busting, shutting down organized workplaces and shifting work to their non-union center in Pennsylvania. In 2011, 1,000 organized warehouse workers lost their jobs in New Jersey when C&S shut down A&P operations in the area. A&P and other regional supermarket chains have filed lawsuits against C&S because of their monopolistic practices, which lead to business shutdowns. It is a model that respects neither workers nor communities, a model that drives local businesses out of business – symptomatic of the drift of our entire economic system.

The victory just won gains extra importance because it resulted in Safeway taking back control of its warehouses from C&S in exchange for financial incentives from state and municipal leaders. The six-year agreement signed with the Teamster locals guarantees no outsourcing during the length of the contract.

Nonetheless, vigilance is still needed – the layoffs likely would never have been proposed in the first place had Cerberus Capital Management not purchased controlling interest in the retailer along with other grocery food chains. Symptomatic of the entire drift of neo-liberal economics, Cerberus is a hedge fund that makes money by closing thriving, profitable, companies, and reinvesting the money elsewhere to reap even bigger financial rewards. This parasitic model of

corporate behavior is very much in line with the deregulation of banks, a model of the economy in which corporate profits and the production of goods and services have largely been severed.

Yet the preservation of the jobs shows that workers can fight back to preserve their jobs and their rights. In the words of Teamster Local 730 President Ritchie Brooks: “The key to our victory was that everyone banded together. Labor, political leaders and the community all came together to show Safeway our solidarity.”

Sources:

[http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/18520/cs\\_wholesale\\_grocers\\_safeway\\_layoffs](http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/18520/cs_wholesale_grocers_safeway_layoffs)

[http://www.nj.com/business/index.ssf/2011/02/1000\\_workers\\_laid\\_off\\_in\\_groce.html](http://www.nj.com/business/index.ssf/2011/02/1000_workers_laid_off_in_groce.html)

<http://www.dclabor.org/union-city-news>: 1/22/16, 1/20/16, 11/13/15, 10/18/15

**Teamster Website:** “Teamsters, Elected Officials, Community Leaders Tell Safeway To Keep Jobs In Maryland’ 10/16/15

[Update: WHUT-TV to participate in FCC auction](#)

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016**

*By Carolyn M. Byerly*

As anticipated, Howard University President Wayne Frederick announced in mid-January that the university, owner of public station WHUT-TV, would participate in the Federal Communication Commission’s reverse auction. That process (also called the incentive auction) allows station licensees to sell off all or part of their access to the electromagnetic spectrum they use for broadcasting.

Howard has three options – to sell all rights to its spectrum, to move the broadcast station from UHF to VHF spectrum, or to enter into a shared arrangement (partnership) with another public station. All deals are secret until finalized, which should be summer or fall 2016.

The university, which is experiencing a major fiscal challenge brought on by the Congress’s sequestration of \$20 million in funds to Howard, and the Howard Hospital’s continuous financial losses, is looking at WHUT to bring in somewhere between \$100 million and \$500 million in revenues. Congress created Howard University in 1867 to educate and advance research related to African Americans, and the university has received an annual allotment from Congress in all

the years since. While that allotment today makes up less than 20 percent of the university's budget, its loss at this particular time has contributed to Howard's fiscal problems.

WHUT is the only African-American-owned public TV station in the US, and presently has 2 million viewers. Marketing research has shown that the African American audience is increasing for all public broadcast stations, jumping from 17% to 23% between 2011 and 2012.

Our Howard Media Group has [posted another protest and analysis](#) of the decision on our website which puts the situation into a bigger context of the communication industry under neoliberalism. Telecommunications is the second largest income-generating industry in the world (second only to the pharmaceutical industry), and those who derive those profits wield enormous economic and political power both nationally and internationally.

Research by the civil rights group Operation Push shows that representation by women and non-white individuals on boards of directors of traditional media, cable, and new media companies ranged from only 7% to 30% in 2012. The matter of who has access to the channels of communication arises and who controls the policies of those companies is more than a scholarly concern for those of us who have followed the selling off of public airwaves. Who should speak for whom in a democracy also determines who has access to the public sphere, a discursive space required for democracy to function.

A [January 16 article in the Washington Post](#) claimed that Howard has until March to decide if it will withdraw its letter of intent, but that provision hasn't been verified by anything available on the FCC website.

As this issue of the *Washington Socialist* goes to press, members of Howard Media Group are planning to meet and discuss next steps in addressing the potential loss of this important station. These steps may include the calling of a public meeting to allow supporters of the station to air their grievances over the impending sale of WHUT.

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*Notes:*

See the [Spectrum Act of 2012](#), which enables the continued sale of broadcast licenses.

See the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's report [Facing the Spectrum](#): Incentive Auction and Repacking Process (2012).

## WALMART STAYS IN CHARACTER IN ITS BETRAYAL OF DC

*The Washington Socialist* <> February 2016

By Bill Mosley

Walmart's recent announcement that it would renege on its promise to build two stores in low-income, predominately African American neighborhoods of the District is par for the course for a corporation that built its fortune on exploitation – of its communities, its workers and its customers.

The “handshake agreement” that former Mayor Vince Gray reached with the company allowing it to build stores in higher-income neighborhoods in exchange for promising a store at [Skyland Town Center](#) was, as we have seen, not worth the sweat that exchanged palms. There was nothing on paper, nothing legally binding that required Walmart to do anything, and once the company got the properties it wanted most, it thumbed its nose at the DC residents who supported the new Walmarts for the jobs and shopping opportunities – in lower-income, African American neighborhoods where both are scarce – that the stores would bring. The Skyland neighborhood has actually wound up in even worse condition than before, with many of its aging stores having already been demolished in anticipation of the Walmart that now will never come. At the same time, Walmart also canceled its plans for a store at Capitol Gateway, like Skyland located in the retail- and job-starved portion of the District east of the Anacostia River.

Five years ago, as Walmart was gearing up for its entry into DC, Metro-DC DSA was part of the citywide “[Respect DC](#)” coalition demanding that Walmart meet a series of conditions if it was to come to the District, including local hiring, a living wage for employees, and protections for small businesses. These demands were based on the recognition that Walmart is no ordinary chain of big-box stores. It has become the [world's largest corporation](#) by adopting a business model of low wages for retail workers, hostility to unions, and relentless pressure on its overseas factories to keep costs down – resulting in manufacturing workers in such countries as China, Bangladesh and Honduras working in sweatshop conditions for less than a dollar a day. It also is infamous for moving into mostly smaller communities and driving locally owned businesses to ruin with its low prices – and then, when customers have no shopping options other than Walmart, often jacking prices back up. The company's foray into DC was part of a new strategy of opening in urban markets, as the company's exploitation of suburbs and small towns began to produce diminishing returns. But in the case of Skyland, Walmart killed off local businesses even without opening a store of its own.

But in the end, Walmart's opponents in the District had little leverage to force the company to either be a good neighbor or stay away. Walmart did sign a watered-down “community benefits agreement” that contained no promises on wages or worker rights. The DC Council considered but failed to pass a bill that would require big-box stores such as Walmart to pay a higher-than-minimum wage, with much of the DC political establishment eager to welcome Walmart with open arms. With many of DC's lower-income neighborhoods desperate for jobs and places to shop – many residents live miles from a supermarket – Walmart appeared to offer one-stop shopping for the District's economic needs. And so with the feeble promise extracted from Gray

to serve some of DC's neediest neighborhoods, Walmart proceeded with building stores near Union Station, on upper Georgia Ave. and at Fort Totten Square, the latter one opening last fall with a ribbon-cutting ceremony featuring Mayor Muriel Bowser.

After Walmart's announced it would not build the Skyland and Capitol Gateway stores, Bowser said she was "blood mad" about the company's treachery. (Bowser, it must be remembered, opposed the bill to require Walmart to pay a higher wage when she was a councilmember). But the ire of DC officials is matched only by their inability to do anything about it. Walmart holds all the cards; it can pull out of communities at will, and its cancellation of the two DC stores was part of an [announced shuttering of 154 stores nationwide, about two-thirds of which are the smaller-format Walmart Express stores, as well as over 100 stores in Latin America](#) Only rarely has a community blocked the company from moving in, even in the face of considerable opposition. A possible silver lining is that the company's retrenchment might indicate that its business model of retail shock-and-awe with low-wage labor is running its course.

Perhaps it is time for communities, including DC, to cease depending on the kindness of giant corporations for jobs and economic development. Instead, local governments should be doing more to incubate small, locally owned businesses that serve, and are responsive to, the needs of their neighborhoods. Providing aspiring local entrepreneurs with low-cost (or no-cost) loans, assistance in acquiring permits and overcoming other regulatory hurdles, and guidance in marketing themselves to the community could create businesses that keep wealth local while leading to true neighborhood revitalization.

In today's corporate-driven environment, the idea of communities taking charge of their economic development might seem utopian. But until they do, big business will be in charge, and cities and towns will have to dance to their tune.