

*The Washington Socialist*  
Articles from the January 2013 Issue  
Archived October 2016  
Editor: Woody Woodruff

['A free world-class education for anyone anywhere'](#)

Monday, January 7th, 2013

**By Daniel Adkins**

***The Washington Socialist, January 2013***

An interesting step forward in education occurred when hedge fund analyst Salman Khan turned from the dark side to tutor his cousin Nadia in math long-distance. The tutoring spread to other young members of his family, and evolved into YouTube lessons. Once on YouTube, his audience expanded to millions world-wide. Khan was able to quit his job and create an educational nonprofit that became subsidized by the Gates family, Google, and many individuals. The aim is to develop software and course material on many subjects including mathematics, science, computer science, finance, economics, history, humanities, and test preparation. He has recently released a book on his visionary mission.

Khan Academy's innovative approach, part of a broader online education movement, has the potential to be a tool against inequality, especially the kind perpetuated by educational attainment.

The online education technique he developed has the students doing homework in the classroom (or home) by themselves and getting the teacher's tutoring as needed. This actually increases the teacher-student contact while allowing the student to repeat sections on his own until mastered. The teacher has a software "dashboard" to monitor the progress of each student, including the ones needing help. This method has allowed "slower" students to master subject matter and become "A" students. These techniques are being used by public schools in California, and web-based students around the world. When I was in college, I would have loved to have access to these techniques when struggling with math. It would have been extra work but I would have completely mastered the subjects.

The Khan Academy's mission statement is "A free world-class education for anyone anywhere." This puts it firmly in the midst of the MOOC (massive online open courses) phenomenon, in which university and other courses are put online for free consumption. Much of the discussion in the MOOC world is about how to enable students to get the most out of the course by self-pacing.

Interviewed last month in the *Stanford Daily*, Khan said "I think that the general narrative is that people learn when it's active and when it's at their own pace...as opposed to passive, and at somebody else's pace." Khan's material is brief and task-oriented, where many MOOCs are

aligned with the way the world is divided up into a semester-length curriculum by college courses. The recent MOOC overview in *The New York Times* education section notes that “Thanks to [Khan Academy](#)’s free archive of snappy instructional videos, MOOC makers have gotten the memo on the benefit of brevity: 8 to 12 minutes is typical.” Interactivity and self-paced quizzes are frequent.

The Khan Academy does not give degrees, something that can be problematic for those seeking jobs that require one. It does not distinguish a student by his or her purpose – if you become a hedge fund analyst or make ICBMs for North Korea, or become a socialist organizer. It holds the potential to give poor and other students all around the world a leg up in understanding math and other subjects and avoiding the cost of repeating classes. The less-advantaged will become more competitive. But how that education is used depends on the social organization of their countries and the individual’s own personal goals.

Khan’s innovation, in the context of the MOOC surge, obviously has promise as a tool to reduce inequality.

Khan Academy is available at, what else, <https://www.khanacademy.org/>

For fun see the history class on communism and the ones on capitalism. Khan himself is a capitalist by all appearances but does set the ground work for a great discussion. An example is that he credits socialism with redistributing wealth. That is true but most Americans are waking up to the reality that capitalism seeks to and has redistributed US and the world’s wealth to the 1%, leaving the rest of us struggling.

DSA and its perspectives should get into this game too.

The book: [\*\*The One World Schoolhouse: Education Reimagined\*\*](#) by Salman Khan (Oct 2, 2012)

The *Stanford Daily*’s two-part series of interviews with Khan (who’s based in Mountain View, Calif.) begins at <http://www.stanforddaily.com/2012/12/05/salman-khan-and-the-reinvention-of-college/>

A broader recent account of the MOOC phenomenon is at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/04/education/edlife/massive-open-online-courses-are-multiplying-at-a-rapid-pace.html?pagewanted=all& r=0>

**Bob Auerbach, Socialist: 1919-2012**

## *The Washington Socialist <> January 2013*

*By Lucy Duff and Woody Woodruff*

Bob Auerbach, a longtime socialist and activist in Prince George's County who was among founders of the state's Green Party, died Dec. 12 after being struck by a car while crossing a street in Greenbelt. He was two days short of his 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

Bob ran for the U.S. House three times, including in the 2012 election, when he ran as a Green Party candidate against Steny Hoyer in the 5<sup>th</sup> District of Maryland. He was active in pushing for changes in state law to reduce the exclusionist legal hegemony of the two major parties.

The *Washington Post's* obituary reported that Bob "was a lead plaintiff in a 2003 lawsuit charging the state with discriminating against alternative political parties. Maryland's highest court, the Court of Appeals, ruled that it was unconstitutional to require third parties to submit two separate petitions to have a spot on the ballot." He chaired the People's Party in 1972 when its presidential candidate was Dr. Benjamin Spock.

His demeanor was so unassuming that folks, even comrades, often underestimated his determination and his ability to take the long view on social change and stick with it. A longtime vegan, he was active in animal rights campaigns and declined to use animal-based products like leather. His low-impact lifestyle included extensive use of mass transit.

Bob's long life on the left included joining the War Resister's League in 1939 and serving as a marshal at the 1963 March on Washington that foregrounded Martin Luther King Jr.'s great speech. He joined YPSL (the Young People's Socialist League) in the 1940s and the Socialist Party in 1952. He moved to the Washington area in 1961, and as a leader in the local chapter of the SP made sure May Day was celebrated annually – no matter what day of the week it fell on.

Bob, according to the *Post* obituary, was "born in 1919, in New York City. He received a bachelor's degree in political science from New York University in 1948 and a master's degree in library science in 1956 from Peabody College, now part of Vanderbilt University in Nashville." He worked as a librarian for many years, including at the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the University of the District of Columbia.

A major project, nearly finished but still unpublished at his death, was a book-length scholarly compendium of quotations about peace and pacificism. Its sources ranged from ancient to contemporary and from leaders of all religions to many military figures. Friends who worked with him on the project are discussing how to complete it, now that he won't be coming up with those one or two more quotations that just have to be included.

[Book Review: We're Still the 'Belly of the Beast'](#)

Two Canadian Leftists Offer a Fresh Look

At the Economic Americanization of the World

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2013**

*By Andy Feeney*

*The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire*, by Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin.

Like the Sherlock Holmes story involving the clue of “the dog that didn’t bark in the night,” the last four years of global economic crisis have featured some striking absences – some things that many people expected to happen, that surprisingly didn’t.

Many economists agree that the U.S. financial meltdown that struck shortly before Barack Obama’s election to the presidency in 2008 soon triggered the worst economic crisis in global capitalism since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Yet while the Great Depression created a political crisis in Germany that brought the Nazi Party to power, the financial meltdown of 2008 and the “great recession” that followed have so far failed to generate a rightwing authoritarian takeover in any leading capitalist country.

The 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression that followed also spurred the U.S. Congress to pass the notoriously protectionist Smoot-Hawley Tariff, which soon inspired other capitalist powers to adopt extreme tariffs of their own – causing a drastic and ruinous contraction of world trade. Yet since 2008, the leading capitalist governments of Europe, North America and Japan and even the aggressively interventionist government of China have largely tried to coordinate their efforts to stabilize the world economy, although some of their efforts at cooperation have been flawed

During the global economic crisis of the 1930s, again, hyper-nationalistic governments in Japan, Germany and Italy pushed the world towards war – seemingly validating Lenin’s earlier argument that the “highest stage of capitalism” is imperialism, and that it almost inevitably produces war. Yet fortunately, the global economic crisis of 2008-2013 has so far failed to generate serious military competition among leading capitalist nations, and no new global war seems imminent..

Why hasn’t the dog barked in the night? Why is it that while the 2008 financial crash originated in the United States, and while the US Treasury has racked up huge new levels of debt since 2008 while the Federal Reserve Board has been inflating the U.S. dollar, foreign investors and foreign governments are not shunning U.S. Treasury bonds – as many conservative economists expected – but are eagerly buying our bonds instead?

According to Canadian labor economists Leo Panitch, long-time editor of *The Socialist Register*, and Sam Gindin, former research director of the Canadian Auto Workers union, the answer is that the U.S. government since the 1930s has successfully worked along with the New York financial sector to stabilize, regulate and dramatically expand the scope of global capitalism as a whole.

To a degree often unappreciated by the American left, Panitch and Gindin write, a largely informal American empire – resting partly on the global reach of U.S. corporations, but also encompassing a strong U.S. state sector practicing extensive financial and economic regulation – has become critical to the functioning of the entire global capitalist system.

Rather than simply serving the narrow interests of U.S. business in expanding American export markets and foreign investment outlets, or even access to important resources like oil, the informal empire has established itself as the best protector of capitalist enterprises everywhere – even those that are potential rivals to American firms.

Citing former Secretary of State Madeline Albright's words, Panitch and Gindin suggest that in terms of global capitalist stability, the United States has in fact become the "indispensable nation," so much so that even such potentially serious rivals as the French, the Japanese and the Chinese are relying on Washington to lead the way out of the current global slump.

In reaching this conclusion, Panitch and Gindin show some striking disagreements with Lenin's analysis in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, and they also partly reject the argument made by the American revisionist historian William Appleman Williams, in *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, about American empire primarily arising in response to U.S. business interests seeking foreign markets as a supposed cure for domestic market gluts.

Their analysis is likely to be controversial among many supporters of European social democracy and American "New Deal" liberalism, too.

Essentially, Panitch and Gindin see New Deal liberalism, higher working class incomes and living standards, and the "social contract" that prevailed between American labor unions and American corporations in the immediate postwar period as constituting the main way in which global capitalism recuperated its strength and expanded globally in the aftermath of the 1930s Depression and World War II.

Rather than seeking out foreign markets and foreign investment outlets in the colonial world to compensate for glutted markets or working class "underconsumption" at home, they believe, global capitalism under American leadership relied on rising working class living standards in the postwar period to provide the capitalists with the markets and the investment opportunities they needed.

Panitch and Gindin therefore consider New Deal liberalism in the United States and the reforms won by European social democracy to be key elements in an ultimately capitalist and globalist project.

Social democracy and New Deal liberalism both helped to resolve the explosive economic and political tensions of capitalism that had severely threatened the system in the 1930s, according to the book. Yet they did so not by empowering the workers or feeding their militancy, but by encouraging working-class consumerism, working class home ownership supported by effective financial regulation and growing levels of consumer debt, and similar reforms that made it more easier for western workers — at least until recent decades — to live in a mixed-market economy, rather than battling corporations for control of it.

Rather than trying to use the process of economic globalization to escape entirely from government regulation in the developed countries, Panitch and Gindin add, large multinational corporations (MNCs) today are still relying heavily on government protection to stabilize the global investment and production system as a whole. Admittedly, today's MNC's may rely on many states for protection, not just one. Yet they are far from trying to hollow out the state or destroy its power entirely, for such power remains central to the corporations' profitability, if not their survival.

#### [DC Proposal to "Ban the Box" for Ex-Inmates Deserves Another Look](#)

Monday, January 7th, 2013

#### ***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2013**

*By Bill Mosley*

Just before Christmas, the DC Council put a lump of coal in the stockings of ex-convicts trying to get their lives in order. The Council rejected a bill introduced by Councilmember Marion Barry that would bar employers from asking job seekers about past criminal convictions during the application process. The proposal had gathered more media attention for Barry's parliamentary maneuvers to get the bill before the Council, and for Council Chair Phil Mendelson's equally determined opposition, than for the merits of the issue.

But first, some background. Approximately 65 million Americans have had some sort of brush with the law that has left them with a criminal record. [A disproportionate percentage is made up of persons of color](#) – about 62 percent of incarcerated persons are African American and 27 percent are Latino – with arrests heavily weighted to men in their late teens or early twenties. Many of them are the products of poor neighborhoods and troubled families where disincentives to antisocial behavior are weak or missing, and where the full weight of the criminal justice system tends to fall on even minor transgressions. [If current trends continue](#), three out of four young African American men in DC are likely to be incarcerated at some time. For these young men, even a minor crime can come with a life sentence of near-unemployability, since most job applications ask whether the applicant has ever been convicted of a crime. Those who check the “yes” box often find their resume landing in the trash.

Especially in the United States – which [incarcerates more than seven million people, more than any other country](#) both in absolute numbers (even more than China) and as a percentage of the population — ensuring that former prisoners can obtain gainful employment after release is a critical part of rehabilitation. To be sure, the U.S. criminal justice system pays little more than lip service to rehabilitation while focusing on removing prisoners from society and meting out punishment. But the specter of thousands of ex-convicts being dumped on the streets each year, many of them driven back to crime by lack of meaningful employment opportunities, should give everyone pause – especially given the fact that [of all persons arrested for alleged crimes, half of them have prior convictions.](#)

With this in mind, starting in the late 1990s, advocates for ex-prisoners began advocating restrictions on employers’ ability to ask about the past criminal convictions of job seekers. Under “ban-the-box” proposals, employers would be allowed to ask about criminal records only after an interview – and deny employment only if the conviction indicated the applicant would be unsuitable for the specific job. For instance, an embezzler could be denied a job handling money, and a child molester could be kept out of a daycare center. But no one could be routinely denied employment for, say, a teenage drug-possession rap.

The first statewide ban-the-box law was passed in [Hawaii](#) in 1998, banning both public and private employers from asking about an applicant’s criminal record until after being offered employment. The idea spread, if not exactly like wildfire; since then seven other states have adopted similar measures – although only one state, Massachusetts, goes as far as Hawaii in banning discrimination by both public and private employers; the laws of the other states (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Minnesota, Rhode Island and New Mexico) apply only to hiring by state agencies. In addition, [over 40 cities around the country](#), including Baltimore, have passed their own municipal versions of the law. Most “ban the box” for only city hiring or for vendors who do business with the city, but a few – including Philadelphia and Newark, N.J. – also cover private employers in their bans.

The District of Columbia is the only Washington-region government to pass a ban-the-box law. Its 2010 measure applied only to hiring by the DC government. Under Barry’s proposal, the ban would have been extended to private employers as well.

Cynics have said Barry’s sympathy for ex-convicts stem from his own celebrated run-ins with the law. But more likely, he draws his inspiration from his long career as an elected official serving mostly minority constituents, many of them suffering under employment discrimination due to their criminal records – including Barry’s current constituents in Ward 8, with its high concentration of poverty and overwhelmingly African American population. His activism, prior to being in elected office, in SNCC and the Free DC movement, also undoubtedly inform his understanding of discrimination against ex-convicts as a civil rights issue.

It is understandable that many employers might believe it is in their interest to avoid hiring ex-convicts. But it also is in the interest of society at large to reintegrate ex-convicts into society, and to stop adding to the large underclass of former prisoners with minimal prospects of earning an honest living.

Studies are lacking on the impact of ban-the-box laws on recidivism. However, when one looks at [crime trends in Hawaii](#), the state with the longest experience with these laws, it's notable that overall crime rates and the rate of property crime have declined dramatically – by 32.0 and 34.4 percent, respectively – since the law was passed in 1998, compared to [nationwide](#) declines of 28.6 percent in overall crime and a 28.2 percent in property crimes. Crimes against property – burglary, larceny and vehicle theft – are what one might expect less of if ex-convicts are able to find work in the legal economy. (Interestingly, Hawaii's rate of violent crime has risen over that period, while that of the United States as a whole has dropped).

Of course, helping ex-convicts find legal employment should be only part of the reform of the prison-industrial complex. Other problems abound: the lack of meaningful training and rehabilitation opportunities in prison, the trend toward prison privatization (which provides a financial incentive for prison-owning corporations to lobby for more incarceration and harsher sentences) and the tendency of government to view low-income communities of color as largely law-enforcement problems rather than people in need of jobs, education, health care, better housing and other services that affluent Americans take for granted. Nevertheless, ban-the-box statutes could provide a first step toward breaking the stranglehold of past mistakes on millions of Americans' future life prospects. The Council should take a fresh look at a comprehensive ban-the-box bill in the new year.

[DC-area action on GMO foods, labeling on tap](#)

Monday, January 7th, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2013**

*By Andy Feeney*

If you eat food products containing corn, soybeans or canola grown in the United States, there is a good chance you're consuming food affected in some way by commercial genetic engineering. If you wear clothing made from American-grown cotton, you also have more than a 50% chance of being a consumer of fibers from plants whose DNA has been artificially modified. What's more, there's a good chance the genetically modified food and fiber you're consuming is not clearly labeled, so that you may be purchasing it without knowing.

Out of growing concern over this situation – and in many cases, out of outrage – a growing number of environmentally-minded activists are employing political, legal, and direct action strategies to put pressure on Monsanto, a leading promoter of genetically engineered crop plants in the US and the world and a bullying presence in the electoral arena and the courts to enforce its control of its major patents and products.



For democratic socialists in the metro Washington DC area who want to join the fight against Monsanto and genetically modified food, several opportunities for activism invite your participation over the new few months.

But would-be activists should be warned: the scientific and legal issues at stake are complex, and some factual issues in question are bitterly disputed. To paraphrase the title of a famous John Steinbeck novel about a Communist-led farm workers strike in the 1930s, it may be that in some cases, the activists and company are engaged “In Dubious Battle,” a battle that may not appeal to the finicky.

Among the organizations leading the anti-Monsanto, anti-genetic engineering fight are the Organic Consumers Association or OCA, and the direct action group “Occupy Monsanto.” Both groups were represented at a January 3 meeting, held at the Friends Meeting House in Washington, on Monsanto and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in food.

A key strategy of OCA in the anti-GMO fight, according to OCA’s director Ronnie Cummins, involves state-level ballot initiatives on “right to know” legislation, to ensure that consumers can tell from clear labeling whether GMO ingredients are present in food. In last November’s election, some 6 million California voters – nearly 40 % of those who went to the polls – voted for Proposition 37, a ballot initiative that would have required GMO labeling.

Opinion polls taken before the ballot indicated that a large majority of Californians, from both major parties, want to have the right to know whether they’re purchasing GMO-modified food, Cummins said.

But Monsanto and other corporate interests involved in genetic engineering and agribusiness waged a \$45 million scare campaign against the labeling measure, and although ballot proponents got financial support from several organic food related businesses and were able to mount a modest media effort to counter the corporate barrage, the ballot question lost by a narrow margin in November. Many “no” voters indicated that they ended up opposing the measure because they feared it might hurt small family farmers, or that it would cause large increases in food prices, or that it would subject California agriculture to an unwieldy state regulatory bureaucracy.

OCA and its allies are studying the reasons why people who want more information about GMOs in food nevertheless rejected the ballot measure, Cummins said. But activists are not considering the California vote a real defeat. Instead, organizing efforts are underway to pass ballot initiatives on GMO labeling in more than a dozen other states, with the state of Washington being a special focus for the near future.

Many activists in the GMO labeling campaign are opposed to all use of genetic engineering in foods, Cummins acknowledged at the Friends Meeting event, but the focus of the campaigns is on “honesty,” on the public’s right to know.

In addition, Cummins said, the anti-GMO and pro-labeling activists are reaching out to activists in other movements, notably the ones against the overuse of pesticides and the abuse of farm

animals in agribusiness feedlots, as well as environmentalists working to battle global climate change.

Most genetically modified grain crops are fed to animals, not directly to human beings, Cummins said, and there is a clear connection between Monsanto's promotion of GMO crops, excessive use of agricultural chemicals, and the fattening of animals in overcrowded feedlots where large doses of antibiotics are needed to prevent outbreaks of disease.

Animal-based agriculture also is a major source of "greenhouse" gases, both because of the methane generated by animal feedlots and because of the fossil fuels used in farm equipment, in transporting meat to market, and in agriculture chemicals used to grow feed grains. By forging closer ties among animal welfare groups, anti-pesticide activists, climate change activists and the anti-GMO movement, it may be possible to organize a much stronger movement for fundamental change.

Two recently organized activist campaigns in the metro DC area are poised to join the fight, according to Alexis Bader-Mayer, the political director for OCA, who organized the Jan. 3 meeting at the Friends Meeting House. A new organization in the District called "GMO Free DC" and a sister organization, formed only last month, called "GMO Free Maryland" both are organizing to for local labeling laws to inform consumers about GMO foods.

Addressing the issue of GMO foods from another angle is Adam Eininger of "Occupy Monsanto," a loose coalition of activist groups in many different states and several foreign countries who are using nonviolent civil disobedience and other forms of direct action to spread awareness about Monsanto and GMOs.

One focus of Occupy Monsanto activism in this coming week will be a demonstration outside the courthouse of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit at 171 Madison Place, N.W., in Washington, as the court prepares to hear an appeal in the case OSGATA v. Monsanto.

In this case, the Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association (OSGATA) originally sued to prevent Monsanto from engaging in the practice of bringing "intellectual property" suits against non-purchasers of the company's genetically engineered "Roundup Ready" crops – including corn, soybeans and canola – who find their own organically raised crops cross-pollinated by pollen from nearby fields using Monsanto's products.

In the past, Monsanto has filed some 144 lawsuits (and settled around 700) involving non-purchasers of Monsanto seeds genetically engineered to be resistant to the company's popular "Roundup" herbicide. The company has won several lawsuits in which it claimed that farmers whose fields have been pollinated by pollen drift from "Roundup Ready" crops had violated Monsanto's patents, by raising Roundup-ready plants without paying Monsanto for the privilege.

Monsanto in its defense has claimed that the farmers in question were not raising Roundup-ready crops by accident, but were deliberately making use of pollen drift and accidental pollination to take advantage of Monsanto's technology without paying for it. In its defense against the

OSGATA lawsuit, it argued that it had no intention of bringing suit in the future against organic farmers who did not welcome cross-fertilization from Roundup-ready fields.

In February 2012, the federal district court for the Southern District of New York sided with Monsanto in the case, ruling that the organic seed farmers' allegations against Monsanto were "unsubstantiated" and that the plaintiffs had no evidence that Monsanto had threatened them with legal action due to their crops being pollinated with Roundup-Ready genes through "inadvertent means."

In its appeal of the lower court ruling, however, OSGATA and a number of public interest groups filing amicus or "friend of the court" briefs are arguing (among other things) that Monsanto's patents and its practice of taking aggressive legal action to prevent the unauthorized use of its patented GMO crops have created a situation of fear and uncertainty for organic farmers.

According to the plaintiffs, this has subjected organic seed growers to unwanted expenses in the form of spending large sums to plant buffer crops between their crops and neighboring fields, so as to prevent cross-pollination, and spending extra money to clean their equipment to make sure it is not contaminated with patented Monsanto GMOs.

As the court of appeals prepares to hear the appeal on Jan. 10, Occupy Monsanto plans to join organic farmers from around the country in a demonstration outside the courtroom, and Eininger is inviting other concerned activists to attend.

Occupy Monsanto also will hold a small, basically friendly demonstration at President Obama's second inauguration celebration on January 21, Eininger said.

The demonstration is not designed to be overly critical of Obama, given the overall celebratory atmosphere of the second inaugural event, Eininger said. But demonstrators will seek to inform the President's supporters of Obama's promise on the campaign trail in 2007 to exercise adequate oversight over large agribusiness – a promise seemingly belied by the Obama administration's later appointment of Michael Taylor, a former vice president for Monsanto, to become Deputy Commissioner for Foods at the FDA.

*Washington Socialist* readers who are interested in learning more about the anti-Monsanto and anti-GMO fights may access more information about these issues at the web sites <http://occupy-monsanto.com/>, for Occupy Monsanto, <http://www.gmofreedc.org/>. for GMO Free DC, <https://www.facebook.com/GMOFreeMD>, for the recently formed GMO Free Maryland, and <http://www.organicconsumers.org/>, for the Organic Consumers Association.

[Democracy in the workplace](#)

Monday, January 7th, 2013

## ***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2013**

*By Luke Abel and Coleman McFarland*

*Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism* (Haymarket Books) is Richard Wolff's passionate argument for Workers' Self-Directed Enterprises as a social project, a way forward for egalitarians to change the organization of production in a globalized world.

The book – less than 200 pages – feels like a pamphlet, and is divided into three parts. Part I is a historical treatment of the various crises of modern capitalism from a Marxist perspective. We get a somewhat dry summary of causes and consequences of the crisis of the 1930s that will be familiar to everyone who's done any political reading at all for the past 10 years. This is the “boring but necessary” part, needed to educate readers without much exposure to post-capitalist politics and thought. Wolff tries to show that crisis is built into the economic system itself, and that an alternative way of doing things is necessary.

Part II deals with the kinds of alternatives we have already tried, from social democracy to Stalinism. The “actually existing socialisms,” Wolff claims, were (and are) actually state capitalisms. This rhetorical move, familiar to the left, might frustrate the general reader. However, it speaks to the central point of the book. The revolutionaries of 20th Century socialism only removed capitalism from the economy's commanding heights, but kept it in the workplace. And it's there, Wolff argues, where democracy matters most.

The final third leads us to Wolff's proposed solution, the (awkwardly named?) Workers' Self-Directed Enterprises (WSDEs). WSDEs are reorganized cooperatives where the workers not only collectively own and/or manage the business, but direct it as well. This entails appropriating and distributing the surplus – paying workers, paying taxes, choosing community endeavors to support (like education), and determining reinvestment. In a WSDE this is handled democratically, with elections of actual workers to a larger board of directors.

Other than that, the WSDE is like any other autonomous firm in the market: buying inputs, selling outputs, and generating environmental externalities. Wolff explicitly states that WSDEs have good incentives in the market and society, where capitalist firms – whose owners may live thousands of miles away from the river they're polluting – do not. For instance, when faced with a decision of how to deal with industrial waste, we can imagine a firm directed by its workers to decide to purchase technology that minimizes pollution rather than paying out more profits in dividends. This is because the workers live near the site of production and raise their families there as well. He speaks again to the general reader steeped in market ideology: We should want good behavior from our firms. The question is what kind of organization achieves that?

The descriptions of the inner workings of the WSDE are where the book really shines. Every worker would have two jobs with a particular task within the division of labor, and also the job of directing the firm by deciding what to produce and where, and what to do with the surplus. Day-to-day management could take many forms – and Wolff glosses over this a bit. Perhaps the firm's board will maintain a traditional management structure, or maybe workers would decide to use other approaches to coordinate decisions, such as rotating management positions or using consensus-based decision making. It's up to them.

If the aim of the WSDE as an organizational form is to democratize the directorial decisions of firms, Democracy at Work would benefit from a more serious treatment of how to democratize roles in the division of labor that have been historically assigned along gender lines, or how a movement for WSDEs would incorporate struggles against racism and sexism. These topics were conspicuously lacking, and they deserve a higher profile in further commentaries on workplace democracy.

Like any good pamphlet, Democracy at Work ends with assessing what is to be done in our current political context. Wolff favors lobbying the state for a federal jobs program that could, in the vein of Italy's 1985 Marcora Law, provide startup capital to workers committed to building a WSDE. This is an alternative to vague provisions to support "small businesses" – a regulatory distinction much abused. Proponents of WSDEs should also seek alliances with existing worker cooperatives as well as trade unions. Wolff also argues for founding a broad-based political party that supports WSDEs in its platform.

Should there be any doubt, Wolff explicitly locates a movement for WSDEs in the socialist tradition, but he is far more interested in engaging mainstream liberals and conservatives on some fresh terrain, away from the old fields of right vs. left politics and closer to contemporary politico-economic language. An exciting aspect of WSDEs is that economic democracy – within firms themselves – is something that anyone can argue for in our current political climate without committing himself or herself to the margins of debate. Workplace democracy – having workers set production targets and decide what to do with profits – is something that the average person can discuss at lunch with their coworkers.

See <http://democracyatwork.info> for more on Wolff's project.

### [New Year's 'Revolutions' for Socialists](#)

#### ***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2013**

*By Bill Mosley*

Many of us enter a new year with a commitment to turn over a new leaf, to usher in a new and improved "us" to accompany the change in the calendar. For many, New Year's resolutions may include losing weight, spending more time with the family, spending more time at work, spending *less* time at work, etc.

But as socialists, shouldn't the changes we envision in ourselves revolve around the goal of creating a more just and egalitarian society? We can't exactly "resolve" social change – saying "I resolve to bring about a single-payer health care system" doesn't make it so. Real social changes requires being part of an organization or movement of like-minded individuals over a lifetime of struggle.

Nevertheless, there are numerous changes in our individual behaviors and practices that can help move the struggle forward, if only a little, by injecting a little socialism at the grass roots. After all, virtually every important social change started with an individual taking action.

So following is my (very incomplete) list of “revolutions” individual DSA members can take to make 2013 a more “socialist” year than any other in U.S. history (at least since 1912):

- 1) **Come out of the socialist closet** – Do you identify yourself as a socialist outside of DSA meetings or other progressive gatherings? If not, try displaying the “rose and hands” at unusual venues. Wear your DSA button at the supermarket; show up at a family reunion in a DSA T-shirt. Drop quotations from Michael Harrington or Joe Schwartz where least expected. Think about showing the colors at work, especially if you work in a lefty/progressive organization, and even if you don’t.
- 2) **Patronize small, local businesses** – Seek out the true Mom and Pop businesses in your neighborhood and shun the giant corporations whenever possible. Buy your produce at farmer’s markets instead of Safeway. Seek out your local co-ops.
- 3) Especially – in a corollary to 2 – **don’t EVER shop at Wal-Mart** – The world’s most hegemonic corporation hasn’t broken ground in DC – yet – but it’s ensconced in the suburbs and online. I don’t need to go into detail here about its abuse of its workers, its destruction of local businesses, its contribution to sprawl, its shameless exploitation of near-slave labor abroad. Think what would happen if everyone adopted this.
- 4) **Create more, consume less** – As David Byrne writes in *How Music Works*, “[T]hose in power don’t want us to enjoy making things for ourselves – they’d prefer to establish a cultural hierarchy that devalues our amateur efforts and encourages consumption rather than creation ... Capitalism tends toward the creation of passive consumers.” Instead of buying a CD or downloading an MP3, why not spend an hour playing an instrument (or learning one if you don’t know how?) Reading a book or article is fine; but why not occasionally write something instead (like an article for the *Washington Socialist*)? Instead of watching football, go out and toss a ball with a friend. Instead of watching a commercial movie, put on a puppet show (especially if you have kids, but even if you don’t)!
- 5) **Subvert advertising** – Just because a product is being pushed online, on TV or in print doesn’t mean it’s any good, but only that someone wants to make a profit by selling it to you. I’ve adopted this “revolution” for several years running: I make a note of the products advertisers are most aggressively pushing at me and will make a point of NOT buying any of those things. (I may not be the only one: I recently bought “No-Ad” sunblock whose very name touts its refusal to advertise – and implies that at least some shoppers are attracted to the idea).
- 6) **Be a “Pistachio Socialist”** – Mix some green with your red! Any just, egalitarian future must include protection of the environment as a central cause. We can’t save the Brazilian rainforest in a day, but there are lots of things we can do: If you drive, do so as little as possible; walk, cycle and use transit; recycle and use recycled materials; turn off the lights when you leave a room; plant a tree.

None of this substitutes for the basics: being active in political work, paying dues, and making financial contributions to the extent you can. But being a socialist should be more than checking the right boxes – it should be a way of life. Try working more of the “S-word” into your daily life in 2013.

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### [Prospects for Reducing Mass Killings](#)

Monday, January 7th, 2013

#### ***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2013**

*By Bill Boteler*

“We need to make access to mental health care at least as easy as access to a gun” said President Obama in a recent speech addressing the need for policies to prevent future recurrence of mass killing tragedies such as the one in Newtown, Connecticut on December 14th.

This would be a worthy policy goal but can it happen in a political system like the contemporary United States? I decided to explore recent efforts to address these issues and how special interest groups have supported or opposed them.

One reason for inadequate access to mental health care is discrimination by the insurance industry, which has been unwilling to pay for mental health treatments on a par with other health treatments.

To address this, the mental health parity act, HR1424, was designed to require insurance companies to require coverage of mental health care as they cover so-called physical illnesses. But according to MapLight.org, a nonprofit organization that tracks campaign contributions and relates them to politicians’ votes, opponents of health care parity gave five times as much in contributions as did proponents over a two-year period.

Groups such as AFLAC, Inc., the National Restaurant Association, America’s Health Insurance Plans and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce lobbied heavily against passage of mental health parity in the US House of Representatives and, though they did not prevail, were able to outspend the bill’s proponents, which included groups such as the American Psychiatric Association.

Clearly, there are many groups trying to influence these sorts of policies. These groups are motivated by financial gain as well as other values. The National Rifle Association is supposed to represent the interests of private gun owners and their constitutional rights. According to Sourcewatch, a nonprofit watchdog group, NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre made over \$900,000 a

year, circa 2007. This is not to say that he doesn't believe deeply in the Second Amendment. But according to the Better Business Bureau, in 2004 the NRA spent 46% of its contributions on fundraising.

The NRA has called for putting more guns in schools and creating a bigger list of people treated for mental illness, which would be quite a large one since it is estimated that 1 in 4 Americans are treated for a mental illness each year.

The Gun Industry has its own lobby group, the National Shooting Sports Foundation located, ironically, in Newtown, Connecticut. The NSSF spent over \$500,000 on lobbying in 2012. The NSSF has been promoting military-style assault weapons to increase sales in a saturated gun market. It has lobbied to keep assault weapons on the market.

One law that was intended to control the mass gun violence was the 1994 Assault Weapons Ban, which expired in 2004. There has been some question about whether or not the ban was successful in halting mass shootings since such events are too few to be statistically analyzed. Nevertheless, the number of mass shootings has doubled since the ban expired.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) stated she will be introducing new legislation after the beginning of the year to regulate assault weapons. Her bill will ban the sale, transfer, importation and possession of assault weapons. It will not affect assault weapons that people already own. It will also affect big clips, drums or strips of more than 10 bullets.

Clearly, there is a lot of momentum now for some kind of action on these issues. Other cultural factors such as the effects of violent media are not part of this article but similar interests will come into play with any attempt at regulation. The question is whether strong public support can lead to the persistent pressure needed to overcome the power of well-heeled interest groups with professional lobbyists. Will the public get the effective action it wants, or watered-down and underfunded laws that fail to follow through on promises?

[Resolved Watch your \(socialist\) mouth](#)

***The Washington Socialist <> January 2013***

*By Woody Woodruff*

We take our text today from Frank Luntz, the GOP strategist who taught right-wingers, including the early Newt Gingrich, the power of words (particularly, nasty ones).

We socialists should watch our mouths. A lot of the ideological work that goes on in our everyday lives (often to our grief, as socialists) takes place in the sentences we utter and the



sentences we allow to get uttered without challenge. In other words – a familiar term – ideology lives in “the discourse.”

Luntz knew this in 1994 when he helped Gingrich author the well-known/infamous “GOPAC memo.” Based on focus-group cullings, “Language: A Key Mechanism of Control” contained what Wikipedia calls a list of “contrasting words” and “optimistic positive governing words” for use in describing political factions, self and “other.”

This seminal path to power in the era of Newt’s original incarnation[Cc1] has much to do with the contested terrain of today’s political discourse, and we socialists and progressives recognize the specific areas where we have to fight uphill battles past terms like “entitlements” and “fiscal cliff” – let alone “Kenyan socialist.”

So, a good resolution for socialists in 2013: Take control of the language in public discourse, or (realistically) more control than we have now.

Luntz and Gingrich were thorough, intuiting the emotional language of metaphor that we see echoed in the work (on our side of the political fence) by George Lakoff, of whom more below.

The GOPAC memo shows that opponents can be labeled or emotionally associated with words like decay, fail(ure) collapse, destructive, sick, pathetic, traitor. These qualities can be applied to liberals, union “bureaucracy” and, of course, “they” or “those people.”

Words and emotions to associated with “our side” include share, change, opportunity, legacy, challenge, control, truth, moral, courage, reform, prosperity, movement, children, family, competitive, candid, humane, provide. These qualities apply to “we” and “us.” After the triumphalist linguistic mishaps of the Iraq war, the 1994 good-guy term “crusade” may, however, have discreetly vanished from the current right-wing glossary. But it may be back someday. Luntz is still in business with many clients on the right, including the religious right.

Socialists and progressives need to recognize the truth in some of what Luntz says, and recognize, too, that his glossary of positive terms spills over with language (“change,” “reform,” “prosperity”) we already use in our progressive discourse. The argument here is not that we have to reverse course, but that we should be more conscious of:

>>the values expressed in the words and combinations we use and

>>the additional value of using terms like this consensually, systematically and as a matter of organizational practice. We need to sharpen our vocabulary and consciously use it in our organizational statements and in concert with other progressives.

The immediate reaction – maybe yours, the reader’s – will be to freeze up at the thought of “political correctness” in language, of the – yes, Orwellian – label often applied to regulated language within an organization. And it is a concern.

Still, we need to be opportunistic. Our glossary of positive language should not be exclusive and reductionist, but inclusive and accumulative. When contesting a pernicious meme like “fiscal cliff,” we should gleefully jump on a great piggyback meme-reverser like “fiscal bluff,” which NPC member Theresa Alt tossed into the mix on the DSA Activist listserv recently.

George Lakoff, surely our ally in most things and a regular linguistic analyst of the metaphoric meme traffic in political discourse, points out that “fiscal cliff,” for instance, partakes of a cognitively rooted linkage that says up is good, down is bad. Lakoff (a HuffPost regular) has much to offer us when we test-drive our potential organizational memes.

We (in our local DC-DSA) are already engaged in this kind of work. Our “GETUP” training sessions are designed to provide alternative terminology and narratives for the conventional-wisdom pseudoeconomic labels that mask ruling-class control of resources, workers and the reins of government. Terms like “job creators” and “mismatch of jobs and skills” need to be vigorously countered.

As socialists and progressives we need to be conscious of the power of our words, phrases and narrative schemas, and whenever possible float and refloat the successful ones. We as socialists need to develop specific, easily graspable narratives that power our vision of democratic public control and management of resources and provision, of putting market power to the service of people rather than making people servants of the market.

And, when we as an organization see this language is successful in pulling off the mask, we need to put that language out there much more competitively than we are now – make DSA statements and issue DSA working papers that get some resonance in the main channels of information.

Resolved?

[The passing of Gerda Lerner, 92](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2013**

*By Carolyn Byerly*

Gerda Lerner, a pioneering feminist scholar, lived a long and unusually grounded life for one who was radical in spirit and deed. A refugee from Nazi-occupied Europe and later one of several co-founders of NOW, the National Organization for Women, she grounded her feminist analysis in her own experiences as a wife and mother but also addressed women’s roles from a class perspective over the course of her career. She died Jan. 2 at age 92.

As a major influence in my own consciousness-raising, Lerner offered an important starting point for those of us grasping for real information about women's place in society. She made her mark as a feminist scholar for her leadership in women's studies, having founded the first university program in women's history at Sarah Lawrence College in 1972. What drove her, she said, was the absence of women's presence in historical accounts. She told the *New York Times* in 2002 that whatever contribution she might make to women's history and studies "came out of my practical life experience."

Lerner's work was anchored in her own daily life and its varied experiences, including six weeks spent in an Austrian prison in the late 1930s. She later said that everything she needed to survive the rest of her life was learned from those women she lived in close quarters with during those difficult weeks. In the course of her life, she experienced anti-Semitism, misogyny, and McCarthyism.

Gerda Hedwig Kronstein was born April 20, 1920, into a prosperous Jewish family in Vienna, according to the *Washington Post* (Jan. 5, 2012, p. B4). She came to the United States in 1939 with a fiancé who would become her first husband in a short-lived marriage. It was her second husband, Carl Lerner, who became her intellectual partner for life. They collaborated on a 1951 musical, "Singing of Women," published a novel on the rise of fascism in Austria, and co-wrote the screenplay for "Black Like Me," a story about a white man who disguises himself as black in the South.

Gerda Lerner spent most of her academic life at University of Wisconsin, Madison. She leaves behind a significant body of work that included numerous books, including *Black Women in White America* (1972), *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) and *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness* (1997), and *Fireweed: A Political Biography* (2003), among others. In leading the establishment of women's history as a recognized field of study, she was never narrow in her own research pursuits. She was, for instance, concerned about white women's role in the abolitionist movement, about black women's place in history, and about housewives and mothers.

Various obituaries have cited Lerner's autobiographical writings in which she explored her own central identity as "a typical American housewife who stayed home to raise my children." Lerner didn't begin her college education until age 38, when her children were older. She completed a bachelor's at the New School and master's and doctoral degrees at Columbia. Toward the end of her graduate studies, she joined with feminist labor activist Betty Friedan and others to found National Organization for Women.

One of Lerner's well-guarded secrets until she began to publish her autobiographical works, e.g., *Fireweed*, was her membership in the Communist Party. Her husband Carl was a member when she married him in 1949 and she later also joined. Her memoirs state that what was important to her was what she believed to be "a strong international movement for progress and social justice." No lover of the Soviet Union, she was nevertheless interested in the "vibrant experiment" that was going on within that country. As witness to history, she predicted the capitalist nations would unite against the Soviet Union, as they had done against Russia after the

Bolshevik revolution (<http://jwa.org/media/gerda-lerner-writes-about-communist-party-and-hollywood-10>).

Lerner's Marxist feminist analysis can be seen in her understanding of class relations, but most markedly in concerns about women's role in domestic production and reproduction (aspects of women's experience which she believed feminist scholars neglected). In her efforts to theorize patriarchal social systems, she factored in women's birthing and caretaking roles, which she believed had served to differentiate gender roles in ways that gave men more power. She inspired other socialist feminist scholars globally to advocate for women's unpaid domestic work. Lerner and others who agreed with her have argued women's domestic labor should be figured into nations' GNPs, and women who stay at home should be compensated through social security.

Lerner was a private person who gave few interviews. A few years ago, a media activist filmmaker I know, Janet Fitch, managed to make contact with Lerner who agreed to give her a 15-minute interview for her film on gun violence. Gerder Lerner remained engaged in social justice to the end of her life.