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Editor: Woody Woodruff

[Metro DC DSA's January 2016 Newsletter: A busy year in the rear-view mirror and a year of real promise ahead](#)

Saturday, January 2nd, 2016



Welcome to 2016, a year that actually has some promise for socialists and affiliated radicals and progressives. As always, of course, that promise is not going to be kept by... somebody else. Yep, looking at you.

As the *Washington Socialist* launches into its fourth year as an online monthly, the value of alternative access points to news and information went up as the value of mainstream media keeps going down. The day this newsletter prepared for its Jan. 1 appearance, Harold Meyerson [announced that his *WaPo* column of Dec. 31 would be his last for the paper](#). Our comrade saved the announcement for the shirt-tail on his latest portrait of outrageous corporate behavior going undeterred by the captive regulatory agencies that are supposed to keep those top predators in line. You can keep on reading his columns in the [American Prospect](#), of course, but his insights apparently (after 13 years) no longer fit the mold of an opinion page that increasingly oscillates between neoliberal and neocon. The [backlash to the announcement was notable](#) and quite public. We share Meyerson's hope that he will find another big-circulation soapbox, but in the meantime we'll be sure to keep you up on his *oeuvre* in "[Good Reads.](#)"

EVENTS

Metro DC DSA's January **general membership meeting** is Sunday, Jan. 10 at 2:30 pm with speakers (in formation) on women's reproductive health. For location email democraticsocialistsdc@gmail.com or check our [Meetup site](#) for the latest.



Bill Fletcher Jr. speaks at January Salon

>*DSA and the Sanders Campaign: the Necessity of Joining the Struggles Against Racism and Economic Injustice* is the theme that Bill Fletcher Jr. will address at the January 28th **Socialist Salon**. The topic could not be of greater urgency for the Sanders campaign which will have to build greater support within the African-American and Latino communities if his challenge to corporate power is to make a lasting difference. And it is equally necessary for DSA as an organization, for we need to integrate the issues of class, race and gender in our everyday work, need to become more fully multiracial in our composition if we are to effectively organize around social justice issues locally and nationally. Socialism – and the “political revolution” advocated by Sanders – needs to look like the Rainbow, needs to reflect the multiplicity of concerns and needs of all segments of the public, of all segments of the working class.

Fletcher, a former senior staff person at the AFL-CIO, past president of TransAfrica Forum, current editorial board member of Black Commentator and Senior Scholar at the Institute for Policy Studies, brings decades of experience to his analysis of current political issues and challenges facing the Left. His perspective on the Sanders campaign in an article in *Democratic Left* was encapsulated in [an article posted in Democratic Left](#) on August 28, 2015: “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 discusses this dynamic in more depth in [an article in the Progressive](#), posted in February 2014, if his campaign moved beyond “a rising tide lifts all boats” perspective to address racial and gender oppression in their specificity.

As always, there will be plenty of time for discussion following the presentation. 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.

The Salon will be held at the Hunan Dynasty (215 Pennsylvania Ave. SE – near the Capitol South Metro station) from 6:30 – 8 p.m. – *Kurt Stand*

Potter’s House and DC *Jacobin* reading group present “Women & Socialism,” a talk by author Sharon Smith Thursday, February 4, 2016 7- 9 p.m. at [The Potter’s House](#) , 1658 Columbia Rd NW, Washington, DC ([map](#)) This is a mark-your-calendar notice for an early February event; we’ll have more information in the February issue.

ROUTINE MATTERS...

Any organization, DCDSA definitely included, has not only its highlights-reel moments but its everyday, its routines.

Raymond Mungo wrote a still-useful account of how radical organizations work in 1970's *Famous Long Ago: My Life and Hard Times in the Liberation News Service*. One recent historian of this bubbling period (1967-68) said LNS "shaped and united the nascent New Left underground media" by mailing packets of news to all the little papers struggling to get traction. Even in those heady days, Mungo relates, there were those who were show horses of prancing Marxism and those who did the work. He called that work "PED-Xing" after the large letters painted on the road at intersections, indicating safe crossing of the streets of the Upper West Side, New York, where LNS plied its trade when not riven by staff conflict.

"PED-Xing" is crucial to any organization, even one that pursues radical change as DSA does. And although we have no Marxist show horses here, of course, there is almost always more work to do than hands ready to the task of regular, routine organization-building, not always exciting but regularly needed.

It's good to remind ourselves that we do this regular stuff, and not too badly either. DCDSA has a regular membership meeting – these days, on the second Sunday of the month (except when, occasionally, it is not). And we have a monthly Socialist Salon, generally for a meal and discussion. We have enjoyed the hospitality, and explored the menu, of the Hunan Dynasty restaurant on Capitol Hill, most often.

In the course of 2015 this routine has accumulated to the level of the extraordinary, if we look in the rear-view mirror. Let's walk through it before we get to the new articles for this issue (below). If you missed the articles, links are provided...

In January, our [membership meeting](#) hosted a longtime ally, Andrea Miller of Progressive Democrats of America. Her new parallel organization, [People Demanding Action](#), provides the local street heat dimension that Progressive Democrats, by their own charter, had to leave alone, and that new organization's strategic tools can offer lessons to a more traditional left organization like DSA, as *Andy Feeney* outlines. Allied [activists from Maryland and the District](#) also brought strategic and tactical tools to the local's January [Socialist Salon](#). Activists Lucy Duff and Lisa Stand of Prince George's County, Wally Malakoff of Montgomery County's Progressive Neighbors, and neighborhood and electoral activist Eugene Puryear outlined the shape of activism in their respective jurisdictions. DC begins the term of another development-ensnared mayor, and Marylanders face a surprise Republican governor who has little relationship to the two large counties bordering DC. *Woody Woodruff* recounts the discussion.

For February, our membership meeting was slammed by cold weather but a warm discussion of the controversial merger of Pepco and Exelon was held by those who attended even though our speaker, Dave Freeman, has to postpone (but he'll show up later). As the victory of the radical anti-austerity party Syriza in Greek elections brought the country's financial problems with the Eurozone to a head, the Socialist Salon [heard from our expert on Greece](#), Simon Davis (he will be heard from later, also).

In March the membership meeting tackled the vexed question of [Net Neutrality](#) and the corporate money that was implicated in the battle over internet access. Matt Wood of the organization Free Press laid out the stakes in the contest. The Socialist Salon heard from a veteran of the women's movement and longtime DSA activist, former Vice Chair Christine Riddiough. [Her account](#), beginning with the Chicago reproductive rights underground in the 1960s pre-Roe, contextualized the second wave of feminism.

April's Socialist Salon was foodless for a change but nourishing as members were guested by Howard University for [a film on the British cultural Marxist Stuart Hall](#) and the groundbreaking work he led at the Open University.

In May, the membership meeting was devoted to the annual election of a new Steering Committee for the local. The DSA book discussion group began meeting in the Kogod Courtyard at the Smithsonian Portrait Gallery Museum to discuss *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* by George Lakoff. Lakoff, a linguist, has entered the popular consciousness through his discussion of how "framing" works to promote a dominant political culture, and suggestions on how to counter that effect. The May Socialist Salon saw [the first of a number of discussions](#) within the local about supporting the campaign of Sen. Bernie Sanders through national DSA's independent expenditure group "We Need Bernie," requiring care to keep the organization within the rules.

June's membership meeting heard the delayed [discussion of public power](#) from former Tennessee Valley Authority executive and public-power gadfly Dave Freeman on "The Past and Future of Public Power in the US." The book group discussed Terry Eagleton's attractively titled [Why Marx Was Right](#).

July's Socialist Salon explored white racism, its origins and how it is layered into US culture with input from a graduate student at the University of Maryland who has studied hate groups. The membership meetings in July and **August** were devoted to training and planning for the local's work in the "We Need Bernie" independent expenditure activity. The book discussion group was active during the summer, reading Steve Fraser's [The Age of Acquiescence](#) and Ian Haney Lopez's [Dog Whistle Politics](#).

Activity in **September** and **October** saw much of the time at membership meetings and Salons devoted to the Sanders campaign and October's pro-Sanders event featuring Jim Hightower, [a significant non-routine event](#) that nevertheless hoovered up our routine time. September, nevertheless, saw a [membership meeting devoted to the upcoming climate summit](#) in Paris with a presentation by Ben Schreiber of Friends of the Earth. Time was also devoted to preparations for the November national convention, held near Pittsburgh, including the local's slate of nine

delegates. The major DSA strategy document, being revised for the first time in more than a decade, was a [lengthy and time-consuming](#) but [highly rewarding](#) pursuit.

November was dominated by the convention, but there was also a well-attended Salon on gentrification that is described in this issue (below) along with supporting material and theoretical angles.

December? Well, it was the holidays, and there was a certain amount of post-convention relaxing and here-comes-the-2016-campaign resting up. But our membership meeting, devoted mainly to housekeeping, turned into an unnerving lockdown at our meeting place, the MLK main library, while a possible gunman was sought (see Bill Mosley's reference to it in our second article).

The reader will have noticed that much of the routine events of our activism are reflected in this quite routine monthly email newsletter – plus much more. Our accomplishments — and they are that — have more meaning when preserved and portrayed. And in the rear view mirror, where as you know things may be closer than they appear, our routine compressed into the view finder looks pretty full and rich.

AND IN THIS ISSUE:

It was the Year of Living Bernie in 2015, and Merrill Miller shows how our socialist practice and outreach, and the careful tap-dance of participation in an “independent expenditure” effort for Sen. Sanders's candidacy, dovetailed to make socialism as publicly relevant as it has been in decades. [Read complete article](#)

Bill Mosley examines the many ways that the US mania for guns and the tight relation of firearms to corporate interests and the fever dreams of the Right make it an issue that socialists might want to prioritize. [Read complete article](#)

The relationship of big money, city politics and gentrification is well studied but always, it seems, worse than we thought. Andy Feeney offers a package of gentrification studied through different lenses. It was the focus of our November Salon (above). [Read complete article](#) It is central to the recent book on urban economics by David Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, which Feeney reviews. [Read complete article](#) And it was at the heart of a surprising get-together that included Mayor Muriel Bowser and a gaggle of developers. [Read compete article](#)

The looming threat of climate change and the Paris climate summit, Bill Mosley relates, appeared to have no effect on the thinking, as it is called, of the bipartisan Congressional coalition that brought forth a surface transportation bill this past Fall that prioritized road

building, more road building, and still more road building. Mass transit? Over there in the corner with the bike path money. [Read complete article](#)

About equally impervious to the facts about our deadly carbon-based energy regime, big agriculture renders the soil little able to absorb carbon, Bill Boteler reports. The value and necessity of regenerative agriculture on organic principles to turn the soil into a carbon sink is clear, but common sense will require a fight, as always. [Read complete article](#)

Philadelphia has installed a visionary arrangement for public access to Internet resources and made the city's hometown giant, Comcast, swallow it. It is a genuinely pro-consumer regime with special accommodations for low-income parts of the greater city, Carolyn Byerly relates. Unfortunately, not all the news on the telecom front is good, as cash-strapped Howard University considers shutting down its iconic public TV station in order to sell the spectrum space at auction. [Read complete article](#)

Bill Mosley looks over the disappointing (for progressives) first year in office of Mayor Muriel Bowser, indicating that Andy Feeney's portrait of Bowser cavorting among the big money developers (above) was no anomaly but very much business as usual. [Read complete article](#)

This month the Maryland General Assembly gets together for its 90-day session, with the Democrats – who rule both houses – digging in against a GOP governor. But the business-friendly Democrats of Maryland, reports Woody Woodruff, have a tough time battling Gov. Larry Hogan when they have so many well-off friends in common. [Read complete article](#)

The 100th anniversary of Joe Hill's execution has brought many tributes to the IWW stalwart, including one by singer Joe Uehlein and his band last month. Kurt Stand starts with Hill's legacy and spins a rich history of labor resistance and provides lyrics to a lot of songs you have heard of but may never have heard. [Read complete article](#)

Joe Hill's legacy extends to today and union resistance to anti-immigrant bigotry, as Kurt Stand outlines in a sidebar to his Joe Hill history. [Read complete article](#)

Michael Lewis's portrait of nine circles of greed in competition within the eventually fatal housing bubble that led to the Great Recession is now a movie. Daniel Adkins reviews this docudramatic films with unorthodox pedagogy about high finance. [Read complete article](#)

Good Reads for socialists provides links to lefty sorts of 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

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.*

[A Contemporary Side Bar to the Joe Hill Concert](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2016**

By Kurt Stand

Thirty members of the Amalgamated Transit Union – in DC for an education and training program – attended [the Joe Hill concert](#) by Joe Uehlein and bandmates, as did ATU President Larry Haney. It was a reflection of that union leadership's understanding of the importance of promoting an understanding of solidarity as something that begins at the workplace but which has to extend much further to become meaningful. And so it was little surprise to read a Thanksgiving message posted by Haney on the ATU website a few days afterwards about the plight of Syrian refugees, a post which reflected the spirit expressed everywhere in Hill's music. It reads:

“Thanksgiving is one of our most enjoyable and universally celebrated American holidays. Today, regardless of religious tradition, political persuasion, or social status, many of us will sit down to a wonderful meal, visit family, talk about our union, and maybe, watch some football.

“We all have so much to be thankful for that sometimes we forget about those who are struggling just to find a place to live in peace with their neighbors. I'm referring of course to the refugees fleeing the hellish life they've endured in Syria and other countries.

“The despicable terrorist attacks in Paris have cast a long shadow over these desperate émigrés – *with some* lumping them all into the ranks of suspected terrorists.

“It's understandable that people are afraid. Who isn't?

“Unfortunately, however, some are exploiting that fear for personal or political gain, and, in the process discarding the very principles that make America great.

“Rejecting people running for their lives because of their religion is about as un-American as anything that has been proposed in the war on terror. The mood today is reminiscent of that of pre-war America in 1939 when 937 Jews were fleeing the Nazis. The men women and children aboard the passenger ship St Louis were rejected first by Cuba and then the United States. Two hundred and fifty-four of them ultimately met their deaths at the hands of the Nazis. We look back in shame at that time.

“The truth is that the United States has one of the lengthiest most meticulous immigration processes in the world. If any nation can prevent terrorists from entering its territory it’s the United States.

“Obviously, we cannot take everyone, but we can certainly do our part to help these suffering families. And to refuse any of them on the basis of their religion is flat out un-American.

“We’re are a better country than the one in the world of the fear mongers.

“So, today we commemorate the story of a group of Native Americans who welcomed Pilgrims, who were fleeing religious persecution. We should remember our own history as I remember my ancestors who came to this country fleeing starvation because they were Catholics from Ireland.

“We can and must remember that our country was founded as a nation of immigrants and refugees. Defending America starts by defending that heritage.”

Words which speak to the living tradition of working-class unity and solidarity in today’s labor movement, which, for all its very real limitations, contradictions and divides, still expresses values in organization, democratic values, that stand in conflict and opposition to the values and practices of corporate power which preaches hatred and practices the politics of division, The revolutionary hopes of the IWW remain as an aspiration and are important as such, but even though the realization of such aspirations are not immediately graspable, it is a hope that is made more concrete in every such expression of solidarity with those defamed, denounced and oppressed.

[Another Angle on Gentrification: Mayor Bowser at the Developers’ Ball](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2016**

By Andy Feeney

The Kogod Courtyard lying between the National Portrait Gallery and the Smithsonian Gallery of American Art is normally a public space, but sometimes it’s rented out for private occasions.

Such was the case on the evening of November 3 of this year, when by accident a *Washington Socialist* reporter wandered into a “Benchmark DC” event for local commercial real estate professionals hosted by Newmark Grubb Knight Frank (NGKF), a global real estate development firm with an office in downtown Washington and more than 370 other offices scattered around the property markets of six continents.

Elizabeth Daoust, the Major Gifts Officer for the Smithsonian American Art Museum, kicked off the evening by welcoming NGKF and several hundred guests to the museum, noting that President Andrew Jackson commissioned the construction of the classic Greek Revival building in 1838 as the future home of the U.S. Patent Office.

Over the years, Daoust told the crowd of real estate investors and developers, the building’s visitors have included Walt Whitman and Clara Barton, and Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural ball was celebrated on the building’s second floor. Isaac Singer’s sewing machine and other pathbreaking American inventions were once stored on the premises. In 1953 the building was scheduled to be demolished to make way for a parking lot, Daoust said, but a nascent historic preservation movement then lobbied successfully to save it from the wreckers — a reminder to the assembled developers, perhaps, that it’s sometimes a good idea to preserve interesting old buildings rather than razing them.

Then, following Daoust’s welcoming remarks, several top officials with NGKF addressed the crowd, along with the National Director of Commercial Real Estate Practice for Cohn Reznick, a large accounting and tax advisory firm that cosponsored the event, and the chair of Eagle Bank, another event cosponsor which currently is the ninth largest bank in the Metro Washington region.

Then came an extended analysis of various megatrends shaping local markets and prices for commercial real estate in our area delivered by NGKF’s Senior Managing Director of Market Research Greg Leisch, a 45-year veteran of the commercial real estate scene, and after this a panel discussion of the megatrends that Leisch had described.

The panel’s most prominent member, interestingly, was Washington’s Mayor Muriel Bowser, who joined representatives of such development firms as Boston Properties, Forest City Washington, Clarion Partners and the Bozzuto Group in speculating on what local real estate trends are likely to mean for the area over the next few years, and vice versa.

There was nothing very dramatic or scandalous in anything Bowser said during the panel discussion. Yet at a time when political battles and protests over gentrification are occurring in a number of different locations around the District of Columbia, there was something striking about the Mayor’s presence among a set of professionals that some advocates for the city’s homeowners and apartment dwellers residents may view as possible allies, but other advocates probably look on as scourges of the poor and disadvantaged.

The only potentially controversial statement Bowser made on the panel was that while she thought DC has been successful in attracting enough investment in retail development, the city hasn’t yet succeeded in attracting retail development in all the right locations. Accordingly,

Bowser said, she plans to take some commercial retail people with her on her next trip to China, presumably in hopes of interesting some Chinese investors in building more big retail-related projects here.

Beyond this, Bowser said in reply to a question about whether the District is making a special effort to attract millennials that she thinks it's important for the city "to attract all people," by providing affordable housing and housing for people with families as well as housing for single-person or dual households.

She agreed with Deborah Ratner Salzberg, a representative of the Forest City Washington firm that's currently building the enormous Yards area project, that improving the performance of Metro is essential to this area's continued development, and that achieving better cooperation among the different political jurisdictions in the region is essential to fixing Metro.

For this reason, the Mayor echoed Salzberg's regrets that Washington didn't succeed in winning its bid to host the 2024 Olympic Games, a challenging regional project that might have inspired local governments to come together to make the Olympics a success. As it is, Bowser said, it won't be easy to persuade local political jurisdictions to cooperate, but "we need to build tools to do that."

With the population of the District expected to grow from around 650,000 to some 860,000 residents over the next 20 years, the Mayor added, "the biggest challenge will be keeping up with our infrastructure needs," and in "growing, but not growing in inequality."

Asked what she would do with an extra \$500 million if she had it over the next several years, she replied that she would invest heavily in affordable housing, "every year," while also allocating more money for schools and for Metro, "the engine for the whole region."

There was no smoking gun to be found in any of Bowser's remarks to NGKF and its guests, no indication whatever that the Mayor is insincere in her stated commitment to focus on the development of more affordable housing in the District and the elimination of homelessness. Yet the context in which she and the other panel members discussed future commercial real estate trends in the region held some threatening omens for local low-wage workers and young millennials who have moved here with large student debts and less than lucrative jobs.

In his analysis of regional megatrends, NGFK's Greg Leisch noted that commercial real estate investments and commercial real estate prices took a hit following the financial crisis of a few years ago, but he added that over the past 20 years, large institutional investors have increased their investments in commercial real estate nationally by some \$1.5* trillion. In large part, this is because capital investments in commercial real estate have outperformed investments in the stock market as well as the bond market. The national financial crisis of 2007-2008 temporarily put a dent in this trend, Leisch said, with investments in commercial real estate dropping from more than \$500 billion in 2007 to less than \$100 billion in 2009, but CRE investment totals have risen since then, with Leisch expecting them to regain roughly their 2007 peak by the end of this year.

The Metropolitan Washington market, moreover, has become a prime destination for CRE investments, partly because of the stability that federal government spending lends to the region and partly because of a “dynamic private sector anchored by the best workforce in the U.S.”

Consequently, Leisch expects capital to continue to pour into the local market for high-end retail development projects and into investments in apartment and condominium buildings, with the implication being that for commercial real estate professionals, the long-term prospects for making money will be good. But will a continued flow of real estate investment capital in Metro Washington be positive for DC area tenants, especially members of low-income households and young college-educated millennials with limited job opportunities?

Leisch noted in his talk that for several years now, there has been an oversupply of both commercial retail properties and commercial residential properties on the market compared to demand, and this has limited the ability of landlords to charge their commercial retail customers and tenants of office buildings, at least, higher rents.

But a bad job market until recently has forced one-half of the millennials to share residential space with unrelated adults, he added, and as their incomes and job prospects improve, these millennials mostly will be unable to afford to buy their own homes, requiring them to rely on rented apartments and condominiums.

Currently, Leisch acknowledged, there is a temporary oversupply problem for developers in terms of apartment dwellings, one which is allegedly depressing rents and profits. Indeed, Leisch told the audience, “an outsized pipeline will deliver a huge number of units to the apartment market over the next few years,” causing local real estate professionals in this sector of the industry to go through a “rough patch.”

But he predicted that by 2019, the Metro DC apartment market will return to its historical average of a 4% increase in rates per year – to the long-term benefit of the developers and the landlords, no doubt, but to the likely disadvantage of everyone outside of the upper classes who is in the local market for housing.

In short, there was nothing said in the NGKF Benchmarks DC event to indicate that gentrification pressures in the Metro DC area are going to abate soon, and a good deal to indicate that they are likely to intensify. The prospects of this occurring were apparently worrisome to some participants in the panel discussion following Leisch’s presentation.

Deborah Salzberg of Forest City Washington, for example, stated that “We have a city where social inequity, income inequity and racial inequity are going to become a major issue if we can’t solve our problems with [low] wages ... We’re seeing a battle of haves versus have-nots in San Francisco, and we don’t want that here.”

There was little if any discussion by members of the panel, however, on how to avert that kind of class and race war in the region. At least one other participant in the panel discussion also expressed worries about the millennials, given the current job market, not being able to earn high enough incomes to move up in the residential real estate market as they grow older.

The income and wealth inequalities and racial divisions facing the Metro DC population, however, were only one of the topics that were covered in Leisch's presentation and the panel discussion afterwards. Another topic of interest to panel members, for example, was the notion of creating a regional transportation authority similar to New York's Port Authority to oversee the operations of Metro, and another idea that sparked interest was that of developing a regional high-technology center for Washington similar to Silicon Valley in California or the Route 28 complex in metropolitan Boston, so as to spark continuing economic growth here.

Still another topic, one raised by moderator Alexander (Sandy) Paul, NBFK's National Manager of Market Research, is how local business leaders and political officials can continue to attract foreign investors to commercial real estate opportunities in Washington. According to some of the panel participants, however, this is not a problem: the foreign investors are attracted already.

The CEO of NBFK, Barry Gosin, concluded the Benchmarks event with praise for the NBFK professionals who had prepared it, as well as for Eagle Bank and Cohn-Reznick for serving as cosponsors. "What an interesting conversation. I almost felt I was at Davos at the World Economic Forum," Gosin commented. As the event drew to a close, Gosin invited all the real estate professionals present to an NBFK reception on the second floor of the museum, where they would be able to view the Smithsonian's fine collection of historic portraits.

[Bowser's First Year: For Progressives, Low Expectations Fulfilled](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2016**

By Bill Mosley

When then-D.C. Councilmember Muriel Bowser announced her candidacy for mayor last year, progressives in the District didn't exactly jump for joy. Her thin record on the Council and her past as a protégé of former Mayor Adrian Fenty – known for his brusque governing style and hostility to teachers' unions – inspired little confidence that she would embrace a progressive agenda. And indeed, she ran a cautious, almost issue-free campaign, painting herself as the "ethics candidate" while scandal-ridden incumbent Mayor Vince Gray sank from his own dead weight, and well as from insinuations from U.S. attorney Ron Machen that he would imminently be indicted for campaign finance violations (he wasn't). Many activists and organizations on the left – Metro-DC DSA among them – flocked to the underdog candidacy of Busboys and Poets owner Andy Shallal, who most fervently championed racial and economic justice and other issues high on the progressive agenda.

Bowser's strategy of tiptoeing to the Democratic primary was a successful one, as she won handily with Gray a distant second. She continued to avoid entanglement in the issues in the

general election campaign, winning in a landslide over independent Councilmember David Catania. And, despite some promising early-administration moves, her first year mostly fulfilled the low expectations that progressives held for her. Indeed, [her inaugural address](#) seemed designed to dampen expectations, as she steered away from grand initiatives to stress better management, creating a “greener, healthier, safer and more fiscally stable” city, and winning the 2024 Summer Olympics (a quest that failed).

Of course, when it comes to D.C. politics, the left and right poles of the spectrum fall closer together than in many places. The District electorate is heavily liberal-to-progressive, the Republican Party is largely despised and most elected officials want to at least *seem* progressive. The most “conservative” Democrat on the D.C. Council might get tarred and feathered in some Texas town as a raving Commie. Nevertheless, sometimes the progressivism of D.C. politicians can often be for show, consisting of their spouting politically correct rhetoric as wealthy interests grease their palms while (they hope) no one is looking.

So it was with Bowser, who could talk a good game but, by year’s end, was fully entrenched with the money boys.

In her first proposed budget, Bowser did press for [substantial increases in funding for affordable housing](#) – and got her way over the objections of some councilmembers to the \$100 million price tag. Bowser also showed a willingness to sharpen the battle for more autonomy from the federal government, dropping the lawsuit against the Council-passed bill unilaterally declaring the local budget free of the federal appropriations process. While Gray and Irving Nathan, his attorney general, questioned the legality of the bill, Bowser grasped – as Gray did not – the potential of the action to provoke conservatives in Congress and give D.C. democracy activists an issue to rally around.

But for other critical issues in 2015, Bowser came down on the side of money rather than the people. She set the tone early in her administration when she killed a [proposed arts center](#) that would occupy the historic Franklin School building, opening the door for commercial developers who are salivating over getting their mitts on an architectural gem in the heart of the city. (The District is weighing proposals from developers for the site). While an arts center might not meet as pressing a need as a homeless shelter, which was located in the building until 2008, her support of commercial over public interests was a hint of things to come.

Among the latest and most egregious slaps in the face of the public interest was her cutting a deal with Pepco and Exelon that would allow the two companies to merge, this coming after the District’s Public Service Commission (PSC) nixed the deal as detrimental to consumers. In exchange for some questionable short-term public benefits (see [Andy Feeney’s November article](#) in the *Socialist* on the proposed merger), Bowser pressured the PSC to reopen the case. She even strong-armed D.C.’s Office of People’s Counsel, which is supposed to be a watchdog of the public interest, convincing it to reverse its previous opposition to the deal. As a result, a merger is barreling down the tracks that would have Exelon, an electric-generation company that is heavily invested in nuclear energy, taking over Pepco, a distribution company that has been open to renewable energy sources. Independent analysis of the deal shows that the merger will result

in a Chicago-based firm taking over a historically D.C.-based company, dampen the conversion to renewable energy, and result in higher utility bills in years to come.

Why was Bowser so eager to push the Pepco-Exelon deal through? It seems no coincidence that while the mayor's staff was negotiating over the terms of a revised merger bid, [Pepco offered \\$25 million](#) to help build a new soccer stadium and a practice facility for the Washington Wizards basketball team in the District. Once again, money talks. And the fact that one of Bowser's closest advisors, [Beverly L. Perry](#), is a former Pepco executive raised questions about the administration's coziness with one of the District's biggest companies.

Then there is "[FreshPAC](#)," the slush fund established by Bowser to stack the D.C. Council with her allies. Under law, a PAC can take in unlimited donations in years when it isn't supporting specific candidates, meaning Bowser could raise big bucks this year – the PAC's goal was \$1 million – and mete out the money to her favorites in the 2016 races. D.C. Attorney General Karl Racine fretted that this could mean "the return of flagrant pay-to-play politics," especially since many of the contributors to the PAC had business before the city or hoped to in the future. D.C. councilmembers, especially those who feared becoming targets of the PAC, began a move to shut it down – until Bowser's allies, feeling the heat, killed it themselves and returned the money. And in another example of Bowser's incestuous relationship with business interests, the [former chair of FreshPAC, Earle "Chico" Horton III](#), moved on to become a lobbyist for the Pepco-Exelon merger. The "ethics mayor," indeed.

On the criminal-justice front, Bowser's efforts to address rising crime rates in the District showed a tin ear in the aftermath of Ferguson, Baltimore and other cities where deaths of unarmed African Americans at the hands of police sparked demonstrations and a new look at how police relate to minority communities. Instead, Bowser opted to [double down on aggressive policing](#) by proposing that police be allowed to search the residences of ex-offenders without a warrant. The proposal drew protests led by members of the Black Lives Matter movement, a number of whom interrupted her press conference introducing the initiative, as well as criticism from a number of D.C. councilmembers, notably Kenyon McDuffie (Ward 5) and Mary Cheh (Ward 3). The Council is weighing the proposal but Bowser seems to be facing an uphill battle.

So as we ease into 2016 – a year that will feature not only a national election but also D.C. council races – the battle lines are becoming drawn more starkly between D.C. politicians who try to serve the public good and those who pay lip service to progressive values while carrying water for the monied interests. Bowser has staked her claim in the latter camp. This clarifies issues for progressives looking to have an impact during this election year.

[GOOD READS FOR SOCIALISTS – WELCOME TO 2016](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2016**

As the climate agreement is implemented (we hope), Bill Boteler recommends this piece from SciDev about the difficult but essential concept of “degrowth.” <http://www.scidev.net/south-asia/sdgs/opinion/sustainable-development-and-de-growth.html> and see Bill’s piece on agricultural practices in this issue [here](#).

Jacobin parses Naomi Klein’s *This Changes Everything*, pluses and minuses... Three pieces in their symposium, first Alyssa Battistoni: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/naomi-klein-climate-change-this-changes-everything-cop21/> ; on the urban frontlines by Daniel Aldona Cohen: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/this-changes-everything-naomi-klein-climate-change/> ; and from Trish Kahle, post-capitalist scenarios: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/capitalism-naomi-klein-this-changes-everything-cop21/>

If the climate change debate, as some might argue, signals the failure of the nation-state as a way forward to human survival, a compact called the “Under 2 MOU” signed by many “subnationals” in Paris is a material alternative. Provinces and states (notably California) signed on to a pledge to keep the planet’s anthropogenic temperature increase under two degrees Celcius – something the nations themselves were unable to face up to at the UN climate summit. <http://legal-planet.org/2015/12/06/california-led-under-2-mou-agreement-gaining-steam-in-paris/>

Several writers on TruthOut are quite unimpressed with the Paris accord: http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/34016-world-leaders-signed-a-death-warrant-for-the-planet-at-cop21#st_refDomain=&st_refQuery=

Michael Klare, on the other hand, has a well-reported piece in *TomDispatch* (coming our way by way of *Portside*) about events and compacts “on the periphery of Paris” that he believes will have long-term positive effects: <https://portside.org/print/2015-12-18/paris-climate-accord-and-our-renewable-future>

The irresistible 88-year-old James Lovelock is consulted by the *Guardian* in the rural headquarters of Gaia Central and is optimistic, but not about this civilization... the next one, maybe, if the lessons of this era take hold (and survive the transition) ... <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2008/mar/01/scienceofclimatechange.climatechange>

Seattle’s socialist city council member, Kshama Sawant, notes the increasing ubiquity of the term and concept of “socialism”:
http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/dec/19/socialism-definition-most-searched-word-of-2015?utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=GU+Today+USA+-+Version+A&utm_term=144945&subid=7923761&CMP=ema_565a

The labor input to the Trans Pacific Partnership was nominally formalized with labor reps in the negotiating sphere, but David Dayen reports in *Naked Capitalism* that the labor group was kept

in the dark and on the sidelines until too late. His account of the labor group's full, aggrieved report, and a link to that document, is by way of *Portside*.

<https://portside.org/print/2015-12-19/labor-advisory-committee-report-tpp-synthesizes-everything-wrong-about-trade-deal>

And speaking of "Naked Capitalism," here is Harold Meyerson's [last *WaPo* column of 2015](#), on predatory corporate behavior in the stock buyback arena. Alas, as you'll hear from him at the bottom, it is also his last column for the *WaPo*, which is trending more neocon than ever (our words, not his). More discussion in the introduction to this issue.

Bill Mosley recommends two pieces from *In These Times*: "The January issue of *In These Times* has two especially pertinent articles for DSA members. "[Bringing Socialism Back: How Bernie Sanders is Reviving an American Tradition](#)," by DSA National Vice-Chair Joseph M. Schwartz, discusses how the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign is reviving a seemingly lost American tradition of confronting capitalism and advocating the democratic control of wealth. Schwartz argues that even if Sanders does not become president, his campaign has the potential to help build "a stronger organization of long-distance runners for democracy – a vibrant U.S. democratic socialist movement." And if you knew you were against the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) but couldn't explain to your brother-in-law exactly why, the same issue includes "[8 Terrible Things About the Trans-Pacific Partnership](#)," which breaks the agreement down into its component provisions and enlists experts, such as United Steelworkers President Leo Gerard and Center for Economic Policy and Research Co-Director Dean Baker, to explain each one in layman's terms – and what's wrong with it. Bring it along to the next anti-TPP rally as reference.

Jonathan Chait, a largely neolib writer, nevertheless nails a distinction between the economic thought of "liberals" and "conservatives" and its effect on shifting arguments on climate change: "conservatives have shifted their emphasis from denying the science to denying the possibility that policy can change it." <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/12/climate-change-isnt-real-also-cant-be-stopped.html#>

Portside has published an extraordinary release from a coalition of media access advocates in Philadelphia celebrating a new city franchise agreement with Comcast (which is headquartered in Philadelphia) that pushes the company to provide far more access to low-cost cable for low-income communities in the city. Still to be confronted: "we live in a city with the third worst broadband penetration of any big city in the US" according to Hannah Sassaman, <http://www.mediamobilizing.org/updates/release-communities-across-philadelphia-praise-historic-comcast-cable-franchise>

Further discussion of this and other telecom news is in Carolyn Byerly's [article](#) in this issue.

Kurt Stand's excellent [article](#) in this issue on the 100th birthday of IWW hero Joe Hill is complemented in *Portside* by a Paul Buhle review of two books on Hill, a "life and times" history by Franklin Rosemont and an edition of Hill's letters curated by Philip Foner. <https://portside.org/print/2015-12-24/joe-hill-again>

[High Rises, High Rents and Homelessness: What Better Investments Are There?](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2016**

By *Andy Feeney*

A book review of David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Verso, 2012, 2013). Paperback, 187 pp., \$16.95.

The high-end real estate development and rapid gentrification affecting metropolitan Washington are not unique to this city or this region, according to the Marxist geographer David Harvey. The same sort of massive real estate transformation is currently reshaping hundreds of cities around the world, from Boston and San Francisco to London, Pretoria, Mumbai and scores of newly created mega-cities in China.

The urban development, under-development and redevelopment process is global in scope and increasingly entangled with massive flows of speculative capital investment that have become central to the operation of the world economy, Harvey observes. The process in many places is heavily influenced by class-based elitism, racism and the use of both state-sanctioned and illegal violence to clear poor and working class people out of economically desirable locations that can be rebuilt for the benefit of the rich and powerful – not to mention the tourism trade.

But what is most fundamental to the global gentrification process, in Harvey's view, is the chronic need that modern market economies have for outlets where an ever-expanding accumulation of investment capital can be reinvested, so as to prevent buildups of unused and "surplus" capital, as well as growing populations of surplus workers, from generating severe economic crisis.

As Harvey puts it in *Rebel Cities*: "Let us look ... closely at what capitalists do. They begin the day with a certain amount of money and end the day with more of it (as profit). The next day they have to decide what to do with the surplus money they gained the day before. They face a Faustian dilemma: reinvest to get even more money or consume their surplus away in pleasures. The coercive laws of competition force them to reinvest, because if one does not reinvest then another surely will."

Yet the result of capitalists, under pressure from competition with other capitalists, perpetually reinvesting their profits is "the expansion of surplus production." Indeed, Harvey concludes, "it

entails expansion at a compound rate – hence all the logistical growth curves (money, capital, output, and population) that attach to the history of capital accumulation.”

It follows logically, then, that the politics of capitalism is chronically “affected by the need to find profitable terrains for capitalist surplus production and absorption.” There are a number of different barriers to capitalist success that can interfere with both the economic production of surplus capital and its useful employment, *Rebel Cities* notes, and not all are determined by what happens in urban real estate markets. However, capitalist urbanization in all its forms “plays a particularly active role (along with other phenomena such as military expenditures) in absorbing the surplus product that capitalists are perpetually producing in their search for surplus value.”

This makes urban real estate development and the development of urban infrastructure, high-end urban housing and high-end urban retail districts central to the economic evolution of capitalism over the past two centuries, Harvey believes. The economy’s need for ever-growing outlets for surplus investment capital repeatedly motivates both private business interests and governments to gamble heavily on the development and redevelopment of the urban landscape. Yet over the long haul, massive urban redevelopment schemes cannot solve capitalism’s reinvestment dilemmas, which are inherent in the way the system functions. Therefore all economic booms based on the restructuring of cities, although they may be intended as cures for crises of surplus capital accumulation, eventually end in new crises that are very similar to what the urban redevelopers originally hoped to escape.

The urban crises of the future also may be worse than any we have seen to date, Harvey suggests, for the economic importance of cities and what happens to real estate values in cities is now going into hyperdrive. Over the past generation, real estate financing and financial speculation have become global in scope, as well as fatally entangled in dangerous financial speculation. Meanwhile, the astonishingly rapid development of entirely new Chinese cities over the past decade has become crucial to the health of world markets for steel, cement, construction equipment, and various raw materials, suggesting that much of the world economy may crash when the Chinese urbanization craze ends.

For Harvey, the historical development that is most essential to understanding today’s surge in urbanization was the massive redevelopment of Paris in the mid-1800s that occurred under the French dictatorship of Emperor Napoleon III and the man the Emperor placed in charge of reconfiguring the city – Georges-Eugene Haussmann, often referred to by historians as “Baron” Haussmann.

Napoleon III, a nephew of the famous Napoleon Bonaparte, seized absolute power in France a few years after the failed French revolution of 1848. Yet the 1848 revolution, in which a young Marx played a minor role, was in fact a European-wide uprising of the discontented and oppressed. As Harvey sees its origins,

“The crisis of 1848 was one of the first clear crises of unemployed surplus capital and surplus labor side-by-side, and it was European-wide. It struck particularly hard in Paris, and the result was an abortive revolution on the part of unemployed workers and those bourgeois utopians who saw a social republic as an antidote to capitalist greed and inequality.”

When Louis Napoleon essentially liquidated the results of the revolution by taking power in a *coup d'état* and, in 1852, declaring himself Emperor, he moved quickly to impose severe political repression on the pro-republican forces that might have otherwise challenged his rule. But the newly minted emperor, Harvey notes, “also knew that he had to deal with the capital surplus absorption problem, and this he did by announcing a vast program of infrastructure investment both at home and abroad.”

The sweeping redevelopment of Paris under Haussmann’s bold and iron-fisted direction, and the partial solving of a severe unemployment problem facing Parisian workers through the creation of new jobs related to that redevelopment effort, were two keys to Napoleon III’s economic and political success over the next 18 years, judging from Harvey’s book as well as other sources.

Thus Wikipedia, for example, notes that under Haussmann’s implementation of Napoleon III’s agenda, entire lower-class neighborhoods in the center of Paris were cleared away, along with the overcrowding and bad sanitation that had made them prone to epidemics and other public health problems, not to mention crime and repeated attempts at violent insurrection. Enormous new boulevards improved transportation between the center of the Paris and the outskirts; new railway stations such as the Gare de Lyon and the Gare du Nord were built; the Paris sewers were rebuilt and improved; the Parisian water supply system was revolutionized, and the Paris Opera was erected, becoming the largest theater in the world for its era.

In addition, handsome new residential apartment buildings built in a distinctive “Second Empire” style were erected along major boulevards where the state had used its eminent domain powers to clear away previous structures for the benefit of private developers financed by some of Napoleon III’s favorite bankers. The world’s first modern luxury department stores were established in Paris in the wake of Haussmann’s schemes, and the “City of Light” that foreign tourists have admired ever since had come into being – via urban planning done on an imperial scale, with an emperor’s backing.

As Wikipedia reports, however, Haussmann himself stated in his memoirs that his redevelopment efforts had caused the displacement of at least 350,000 Parisians. Rents rose on average by 300 percent during Haussmann’s reign, while wages remained essentially flat for Parisian workers not directly employed by the construction industry. Consequently, the poorer sections of the working class were generally displaced from the center of the city and forced into new neighborhoods on the city’s periphery, which in many cases had been forcefully incorporated into Paris under Napoleon III’s direction.

A pair of French bankers who had been critical financiers of Haussmann’s reconstruction efforts, the Pereire brothers of the Credit Mobilier bank, suffered from a financial crisis in 1866-67 and lost control over their company, and a growing opposition to Haussmann resulted in Napoleon III dismissing him in 1870 – relatively shortly before the Emperor himself was captured in the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. Following the French surrender in that war, German troops surrounded Paris, which briefly came under the revolutionary control of the Paris Commune.

In Harvey's view, what happened to Paris under Haussmann's redevelopment schemes is emblematic of what the investment of surplus capital has meant for many other cities, for good and for ill, since Haussmann's day.

For example, as politicians in the United States surveyed the history of the Great Depression of the 1930s and looked forward to a postwar order in which it was unclear how capitalist prosperity might be assured, the New York State park commissioner Robert Moses, in an American architectural journal, "documented in detail" what Haussmann had done in Paris "and tried to draw useful lessons from Haussmann's mistakes."

Following the close of the war, Harvey reports, Robert Moses then "did to the whole New York metropolitan region what Haussmann had done to Paris," in part by building massive public housing structures for the poor, in part by engineering the creation of an extensive highway complex throughout the area and thus facilitating a rapid growth of the New York City suburbs.

What Moses's redevelopment and transportation planning schemes meant for the New York metropolitan region, Harvey writes, the Eisenhower administration's building of the Interstate Highway System in the 1950s (along with the nationwide expansion of suburbs that occurred along the interstates, and the expansion of the Detroit auto industry to populate suburban roadways) meant for the United States as a whole. The New York metro economy and the national economy both boomed, at least temporarily, as urban and national planners radically changed the ways that millions of Americans were housed and transported to work.

In the early 1990s, President Bill Clinton made a similar attempt to put unused investment capital and unemployed labor to work by promoting minority and low-income home ownership through some rather dubious financial arrangements, including the securitization of home mortgages and subsidies from the private but federally sponsored agencies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. The result, for many years, was a remarkable rise in real estate values around the country. Unfortunately, Clinton's well-intentioned initiative, along with other factors, helped pave the way for a catastrophic "subprime mortgage" crisis in the US financial markets, and ultimately in the world economy, between 2007 and 2009.

Similar crises have punctuated other major efforts by capitalists and capitalist governments to solve over-accumulation problems via urban development and redevelopment, Harvey argues in *Rebel Cities*. The radical reworking of the New York metropolitan area under Robert Moses's authoritarian direction eventually led to a political backlash on the part of historic preservation activists and champions of neighborhood autonomy, and Harvey believes it likewise contributed to the bankruptcy of New York City in 1975 and the subsequent imposition of harsh austerity on the city's working class for the benefit of the bankers.

The 1950s economic boom that interstate highway construction and rapid suburbanization helped to create nationwide also imposed severe environmental damages, prompted political alienation among the suburban young and may have contributed to the neglect of the inner cities and the major urban uprisings of the 1960s, Harvey suggests. The full consequences of China's breakneck urbanization effort of the past decade are not known yet, but they may already be appearing in the form of severe Chinese industrial pollution and the financial instability of

Chinese developers who have built enormous new cities that in some cases are still largely empty.

Poor and minority residents of big cities are particularly apt to be hurt by the sort of Keynesian investments in urban infrastructure and high-end real estate development that Haussmann first perfected in Paris and that capitalist planners in other societies have employed ever since, Harvey argues.

Writing about the consequences of Haussmann's efforts in 1872, Friedrich Engels commented that "the growth of the big modern cities gives the land in certain areas, particularly in those areas which are centrally situated, an artificially and colossally increasing value; the buildings [already] erected on these areas depress this value instead of increasing it ... [and] they are pulled down and replaced by others. This takes above all with workers' houses which are situated centrally and whose rents, even with the greatest overcrowding, can never, or only very slowly, increase above a certain maximum."

Therefore urban redevelopment and even urban housing "reform" in the Haussmann style, Engels argued, invariably means "making breaches in the working class quarters of our big towns, and particularly in areas which are centrally situated," so that upper-end business premises and transportation corridors end up driving poor people from urban centers without providing them adequate housing opportunities elsewhere. Under capitalist auspices, Engels believed, dangerous and unhealthy slums are never really eliminated, but "merely shifted elsewhere," since "the same economic necessity that produced them in the first place, produces them in the next place."

For Harvey, Engels' critique is as valid today as it was a century ago, and potentially revolutionary conclusions flow from this perspective on urbanization.

On the one hand, the repeated need of capitalist economies for new outlets for investment capital, along with the demonstrated utility of urban development and redevelopment schemes in providing such outlets, arguably makes battles over urban space and urban problems at least as central to western economic and political history as the workplace battles between factory owners and their workers that many Marxists have traditionally considered the "real" heart of class struggles under capitalism.

Cities are where most people live and work, Harvey notes; they are the locations where capitalist merchants and landlords often win back from working people any momentary gains that successful labor movements win in the form of higher wages. As outlets for surplus capital investment, cities are equally as important to the survival of capitalist economies as the workplace in which surplus capital – e.g. as profits – can be generated. Therefore what happens to in cities in the form of urban reconstruction and urban real estate development can shape the future of the capitalist system.

Because urban redevelopment so regularly displaces working people and the poor, on the other hand, it regularly inspires radical political movements aimed at resisting the imperatives of big banks and developers. Indeed, by threatening to eradicate or gentrify beyond recognition many

middle-class neighborhoods of special cultural and/or historical significance, capitalist urban redevelopment also threatens many urban residents who do not consider themselves poor or working class, and who do not necessarily belong to oppressed ethnic minorities.

Is there a chance, then, that urban residents of many different backgrounds can come together to fight for the “right to the city,” as the radical French intellectual Henri Lefebvre argued in a book of that name in the quasi-revolutionary year 1968, in Paris?

Harvey is unsure of the answer, for history has demonstrated that it is much more difficult to organize a unified resistance to capitalist corporations among diverse urban residents than it has often seemed to organize Marx’s “industrial proletariat,” the industrial working class, to fight against factory owners. Particularly difficult to organize are low-income, insecurely employed workers in many urban retail enterprises – the so-called “precariat” that many leftist intellectuals have written about in recent years.

Unlike the historic industrial proletariat, which in certain times and places was concentrated in huge factories where working class coordination seemed both urgently necessary and relatively easy to achieve, members of the “precariat” are scattered across many small workplaces, come from many different ethnic and even class backgrounds, and do not interact with each other often enough to make organizing them easy.

Nonetheless, Harvey suggests, it may be possible to organize a “right to the city” movement featuring the urban precariat as the crisis of the cities accelerates, and as ongoing capitalist investment patterns and the actions of urban politicians hoping to benefit from them make such kinds of organizing seem increasingly urgent.

Rebel Cities unfortunately is not a very useful recipe book on just how to organize a revolt of the urban precariat. Harvey makes a number of fascinating detours in the book to discuss different aspects of today’s urbanization realities – such as the rise and fall of Occupy Wall Street, for instance, and the economic benefits to developers of unique cultural and historical resources in different cities – that can distract at times from the immediate problems facing victims of gentrification.

Nevertheless, this and other books that Harvey has written on cities and “capitalist accumulation by dispossession” are important resources for democratic socialists hoping to understand today’s urban crisis. In Washington DC and the nearby suburbs in particular, what Harvey writes may help local housing activists to appreciate some of what local politicians may be hoping to accomplish when they forge alliances with large developers and bankers. Ideally, the book will help us understand what some of the developers and bankers are hoping to accomplish, too.

[Is Regenerative Agriculture the Key to Saving the Planet?](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2016**

By Bill Boteler

The world is having a difficult time agreeing to phase out fossil fuels despite the emissions they create. Strong binding commitments to cut emissions and leave fossil fuels in the ground haven't yet emerged from the COP21 talks and may not. Yet with each passing year the threat of losing all control of our climate future looms closer. This is where the role of carbon sequestration comes in. We can try to stop more carbon from being emitted but we can also scrub up some of it using various natural processes. There are ways to take carbon out of the atmosphere but can it be done quickly enough to make a difference? The ground under our feet may offer a clue.

The soil as a major carbon sink

According to [Onti and Schulte \(2012\)](#), the total amount of carbon in the world's soils is approximately 3.1 times greater than the amount in the atmosphere. The total carbon found in all terrestrial ecosystems is about 3170 gigatons (billions of tons), of which 80% is stored in soil as compared with only 20% stored in living plants and animals. It's thought that the amount of carbon stored in soil has declined 50% – 75% since the widespread clearing of land for agriculture by humans ([Swartz, 2014](#)).

Scientists are still not sure how climate change will affect the release of this carbon. Warming will lead to drying out of soil, which generally leads to release of carbon, but there is also the action of soil microbes in different climates – which is hard to predict. While it was previously assumed that increasing temperature would cause soil microbes to store more carbon, a 2014 study showed it might cause them to release more carbon (University of Arizona, 2014). There is definitely a danger of large amounts of carbon being released from warming and drying soils worldwide but there is also a tremendous potential to use the soil for storage of carbon that is currently in the atmosphere.

What would need to be done?

Most intensive agriculture in the world currently involves practices that discourage the buildup of soil carbon. Farmers are encouraged to use all their land without leaving part of it in fallow, pasture, or natural states. They are encouraged to plant the same profitable crops without varying or diversifying what they plant (crop rotation). They are encouraged to use energy intensive machinery which contributes to carbon emissions and to use chemical fertilizers synthesized from petrochemicals which discourage the growth of soil microbes that sequester carbon from the air. They are not encouraged to use composting or to plant cover crops that can be plowed under to enrich soil's organic matter and fertility. The sum of these practices means little organic matter, or carbon, gets added to the soil on these farms. The outcome is quite different on farms using organic techniques.

An organic farm is a richer ecosystem than a corresponding area of land under conventional farming. The rich ecosystem of microbes in the soil forms the base of a food chain with a greater diversity of life, including earthworms, beneficial insects and spiders, small mammals and birds. Such farms may also be bordered by strips of unused (fallowed) land or by small wooded areas or hedgerows. These areas provide shelter for wildlife that help control pests and pollinate plants on the farm. Such small natural edges may be completely eliminated on large industrial farms that seek to maximize production.

By converting a larger portion of today's industrially-managed farmlands to organic production, a huge amount of carbon could be pulled out of the atmosphere. The Rodale Institute, an organization that is dedicated to furthering organic farming, has made some estimates of how great this effect might be. In a 2014 white paper, Rodale compared data from organic farms in the U.S., Egypt, Iran and Thailand. It stated that: "If management of all current cropland shifted to reflect the regenerative model as practiced at the Iranian or Egyptian sites, we could potentially sequester more than 40% of annual emissions..." It further stated that: "If, at the same time, all global pasture was managed to a regenerative model, an additional 71%" would be sequestered" ([Rodale Institute, 2014](#)). In other words, even without a reduction in overall anthropogenic carbon emissions, using regenerative, organic farming and pasturing techniques could result in decreasing atmospheric carbon.

Wouldn't agribusiness resist these changes?

Yes, they already do. For example, an effort was made by environmentalists to reform the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to make it greener. These activists hoped to achieve three things: increase the land in permanent pasture, encourage farmers to rotate their land with at least three crops, and set aside 7% of their land for wildlife. This effort did not succeed, but advocates were able to protect existing pastures, require 30% of land to be planted in crops other than a main crop and set aside 5% for ecological purposes ([Knops, 2014](#)). This shows how commercial agriculture in developed countries is resistant to change even when consumers increasingly demand organic foods and are willing to pay more for them. The farm lobby in the EU was resistant mainly over fears of lost competitiveness. Industrial agriculture seeks to maximize output per hectare and produce a large quantity of food at a lower price. But this price does not reflect the cost to the health of humans and the environment and it doesn't reflect sustainability.

Encouraging smallholder agriculture

According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, 70% of the world's food is produced by smallholder farmers ([Wolfenson, 2013](#)), such as the majority of farmers in developing countries. These farmers are not using the highly mechanized, chemical systems of industrial agriculture and could become instrumental in a global program to encourage regenerative agriculture. By channeling development funding to regenerative farming, the world could boost the levels of soil carbon globally while helping small farmers achieve higher incomes and consumers greater food security and better nutrition. Such a policy could also have a number of other environmental benefits such as preserving pollinators, cutting down on erosion, reducing the damage to fresh and saltwater ecosystems from pesticide and fertilizer runoff and saving

valuable genes from traditional plant varieties now ignored by agribusiness. The need to help small farmers cope with climate change is already urgent and requires a commitment of international funding.

An urgent need requiring new ways of thinking

Too much debate about agriculture breaks down to an argument between those who criticize intensive, industrial, chemical-intensive farming and those who seem to believe that organic methods are a luxury that would let the world starve. A more creative approach might recognize that appropriate technological intervention could include both traditional and highly technological practices adapted to a rapidly changing environment to help small farmers, the environment and the global climate crisis.

Resources for further information:

Soil Carbon Ecology

<http://www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/library/soil-carbon-storage-84223790>

Rodale Institute

<http://rodaleinstitute.org/reversing-climate-change-achievable-by-farming-organically/>

Historic Loss of Carbon

http://e360.yale.edu/feature/soil_as_carbon_storehouse_new_weapon_in_climate_fight/2744/

Common Agriculture Policy

<http://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/new-eus-common-agricultural-policy-greener/>

Effects of Climate Change on Soil Microbes

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/10/141022131434.htm>

Earth Democracy

<http://www.navdanya.org/>

IFOAM

<http://www.ifoam.bio/>

[Legislating Like It's 1965: Transportation Bill Ignores Climate Change, Puts Pedal to the Metal on Highways](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2016**

By Bill Mosley

With climate change having moved to near the top of the national agenda and world leaders having just reached a historic agreement in Paris to limit greenhouse gas emissions, the US Congress and President Obama have just agreed on a five-year transportation bill that will continue to prioritize highways and motor vehicles as the way to move Americans for years to come.

[The \\$300 billion Fixing America's Surface Transportation \(FAST\) Act](#), signed into law by Obama in early December, will pump \$227 billion into highways over the next five years compared to \$61 billion for mass transit. In 2020, the bill's final year, federal highway spending will total \$56.1 billion, \$6.1 billion over current levels and, transit spending will be \$10.6, up \$2 billion. The remainder of the spending will go to alternative transportation options such as bicycling and walking, which not long ago were hardly considered transportation by policymakers.

With 28 percent of carbon emitted in the United States coming from transportation, according to the [U.S. Department of Transportation](#), and much of that from car exhaust, one might have expected that Congress would use this must-pass transportation authorization bill to get serious about alternatives to motor vehicles. But if you were expecting sensible legislation in the public interest, you haven't been paying attention to this dysfunctional, Republican-addled Congress. Not that Democrats were offering any grand visions themselves; they were quite happy to see a bill that kept the backhoes operating in their district while throwing transit interests just enough bones to keep them content.

The [American Public Transportation Association](#) (APTA), representing the nation's mass transit operators, fell all over itself to praise the bill, with APTA Chair Valarie J. McCall hailing its passage as "a great day for America." [Smart Growth America](#), a leading national organization in promoting transit-oriented development and less reliance on cars, praised the bill's pedestrian-friendly street design provisions.

The advocacy group [Transportation for America](#) was one of the rare national organizations that had little good to offer about the bill. It said that "while this new law does make a handful of notable improvements, the final product misses the mark on far too many counts and overall doubles down on a status quo approach to investing in transportation. The majority of our elected representatives, along with most of the traditional transportation industry, were all too willing to

pass a bill at almost any cost. . . This bill falls far short of the transformational, outcome-based approach needed to keep our cities and towns prospering as our nation experiences profound shifts in demographics, consumer preferences and technology.”

In some quarters, transportation seems not to be regarded as an environmental issue at all; the Sierra Club, for example, posted no statement on its website when the bill passed.

Many members of Congress, and even more state and local transportation officials, were simply eager to get dollars into the federal grant pipeline. No long-term funding bill had been passed since 2005 and the series of short-term extensions over the past several years has made it difficult for states to plan multi-year transportation projects.

Congress, in passing a business-as-usual bill that will keep the concrete pouring, could have seized this opportunity to change the way Americans view mobility. There could have been, for example, measures to encourage more people to live closer to transit hubs, giving them transportation options other than driving. It could have taken a step further by subsidizing rent or mortgages for people who live near their jobs, making long commutes less common. A number of cities and states, as well as companies, have programs to encourage people to live near their jobs, [including the District](#), which is conducting a pilot program to match funds with employers to subsidize mortgages for employees who buy homes near their workplaces.

Congress also could have addressed the need to make drivers pay the true cost of auto use, including its impact on the environment. The federal gas tax has been stuck at 18.4 cents per gallon since 1993, and even a modest increase could have been used to increase funding for transit and programs to develop renewable energy. Instead, once again elected officials were too afraid of the auto lobby and the “T”-word to do the obvious. The gas tax today doesn’t even pay for current highway programs, and Congress chose to fund the new bill through [a series of financial gimmicks](#), including selling oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, raiding customs fees and tapping the Federal Reserve’s surplus, rather than touch the third rail of higher taxes.

In a nation addicted to profit, it’s no mystery why highways continue to dominate transportation policy – they mean income for developers and highway builders. They also mean jobs, which makes them attractive to local and state governments as well as unions representing transportation workers. This is why any movement to link transportation reform to the environment must also address the need for good jobs in improving mass transit, improving bicycling and pedestrian facilities, and projects that go beyond transportation such as conversion to solar and other kinds of renewable energy.

For a quarter century now, Congress and successive president administrations have failed to build on the landmark 1991 transportation bill – the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act – that for the first time acknowledged that [continual highway-building was not the solution](#) to mobility and finally gave transit its due as a critical part of the transportation mix. Instead, a stream of transportation bills have provided big bucks for highways, lesser lucre for transit, and no grasp of the need to fundamentally rethink the way transportation affects the environment.

Back in the 1990s, there was an organization called the Alliance for a Paving Moratorium which called for a full stop to the building of highways. They might have gone a bit too far, but the now-defunct group was almost alone in pushing for a radical overhaul of transportation priorities. Sadly, such vision is lacking today, and until that changes there will be no one pressuring Congress to stop passing bills that push us closer to climate catastrophe.

[Maryland Legislature: Dems Battle GOP Governor – and Each Other](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2016**

By Woody Woodruff

Maryland progressives will start the legislative year working through the burden of a botched election in 2014 that put a Republican governor in charge of the state budget. Gov. Larry Hogan, who snuck into office because a lackluster Democratic candidate was complemented by a lackluster campaign and a turnout crash, gets to set the ceiling for state spending and the Democratic-dominated General Assembly can largely just tinker with the parts of the budget but not change the bottom line.

But the upcoming January-to-April legislative tilt is near-guaranteed to be full of drama, starting with attempted overrides of a half-dozen of Hogan's vetoes after last year's session. Progressive legislation will be on the docket, including an earned sick leave proposal that will be before the Assembly for the fourth year in a row. But there will almost certainly be major defensive moves needed against Hogan's attempts to wrench the state's course into a business-friendly groove at the cost of workers' and consumers' interests.

Hogan won't set a formal budget until he has to – Jan. 20, a week after the Assembly convenes on Jan. 13 – but early indications are that he is “lowballing” the top number, as Del. Tawanna Gaines, a Dist. 22 (Prince George's) Democrat, said in early December.

In fact the Spending Affordability panel said Dec. 15 that [state revenue would be up 3.2 percent for the next fiscal year](#), a pretty big number in a \$16-plus billion revenue picture. That despite the fact that “the state continues to underperform the national economy” because of the effect of sequestration on the greater DC region, said Warren Deschenaux, the Assembly's longtime budgetmeister, recently elevated to chief of the Department of Legislative Services.

Whether Hogan will include any of the half-billion-dollar surprise in his spending plan is another question. He has roiled the legislators – even his sometime ally, Democratic Senate President

Mike Miller – by first withholding budgeted money from the state’s most expensive school systems in Montgomery, Prince George’s and Baltimore City and then shipping some of the extra cash to Republican counties where he got many of the votes that put him over the top in 2014. The Assembly had put \$68 million on the table in front of Hogan to fully fund the three districts that were forced to make equivalent cuts, but he has made no move to release it.

An irate Assembly, with large Democratic majorities, passed a bill that requires Hogan’s budget to include full funding for the geographic disparities in schooling expenses. Hogan persists, however, in cutting taxes and fees wherever he is able, including highway tolls. “The bill is coming due,” said Sen. Paul Pinsky (D-22nd) at a meeting with constituents in early December. Revenues for transportation are flagging. And Hogan gained another formal set of opponents when two civil rights organizations sued the administration for blatant discrimination in zeroing-out funds for the Red Line light rail system in Baltimore while shipping extra roads money to rural districts – again, where his electoral support is.

And speaking of electoral support (following paragraph is from Jon Shurberg’s [Maryland Scramble blog](#) on Dec. 26):

The candidates going to Annapolis for [around 90] days starting on January 13: Kumar Barve, Ana Sol Gutierrez, Jamie Raskin, Dereck Davis, and Joseline Pena-Melnyk. Barve and Davis are committee chairs. How will they and the others manage the competing demands of session and a primary that is now 123 days away? Striking a balance is critical: too much Annapolis means you lose the primary, but too much campaign means you get criticized for not doing your job, which means you lose the primary. See Cardin, Jon, 2014.

But most of the interesting activity in the three-month Assembly session, besides tinkering with the budget, will pit progressive against pro-business forces within the Democratic majorities. This would be a perennial conflict no matter what party controlled the governor’s mansion. But the fact is that Hogan, in part because of his feisty and apparently successful battle with cancer while in office, is remarkably popular. He does not exhibit the hard-edged, overt conservatism that kept Bob Ehrlich, the last GOP governor, from similar popularity. But many of the central actors in his administration are revenants from the Ehrlich era and what’s happening on the killing floor of state agencies is not pretty.

So the general public’s sense of the value of public provision is being eroded by Hogan’s highly visible reductions of fees even as the less-noticed consequences to the state’s revenue lower the potential for public provision.

The Republican emphasis on cuts [will likely extend to taxes](#), particularly on lower taxes for business. A GOP mantra has been that Maryland is seen as too expensive for business compared to other states – a point strongly contested by Democrats, who argue that the state’s high marks for education, infrastructure and amenities overcome any tax concerns. A commission initiated by the legislature’s Democratic leadership is about to uncork some much-anticipated – or dreaded – recommendations on the state’s tax structure. The commission has already made suggestions that grieved many Democrats but [have been welcomed by Hogan and his minions](#).

The beleaguered earned sick leave measure both gained and lost momentum in the session interim – a solid county-level measure was passed in Montgomery County but a failure of nerve in the Prince George’s County Council saw a similar version tabled with a call for a statewide bill. Over 700,000 Maryland workers have no ability to earn sick leave on the job, leaving many facing the choice of going to work sick or risking job loss – and certainly loss of a day’s pay – by staying home for personal health or a sick child. It becomes a public health issue when food service workers go to work sick or children go to school or day care with a communicable illness.

House and Senate money committees have bottled the measure up for three years without a floor vote. The House Economic Matters Committee’s chairman, Prince George’s Delegate Dereck Davis, is running for the open District 4 Congressional seat and suddenly shows signs of “getting it” on the sick leave issue, so hopes have risen. The [Working Matters coalition](#) of dozens of Maryland groups, which was deeply involved in the successful Montgomery County effort, continues to make earned sick leave a top priority.

Other major issues in the environment, workplace, social and economic justice and provision of services have plenty of advocates.

Environmental organizations are backing renewal of the state’s umbrella Greenhouse Gas Reduction initiative and an increase in the “Renewable Portfolio Standards” that will require the renewable-source portion of state power generation to increase to 40 percent by 2030. Turning the ban on fracking for natural gas from temporary to permanent in the state, stopping development of a compressed natural gas shipping facility at Cove Point on the Chesapeake, bills to control plastic bottles and bags, putting the brakes on manure pollution and antibiotics abuse in the state’s poultry industry, and banning neonicotinoid pesticides – linked to colony collapse in bees – are also part of the environmental priority list.

Social justice and criminal justice issues likely to get Assembly action include additional safeguards on police abuse and excessive force. The Maryland Association of Counties has prioritized state help with a vexing by-product of the increased use of body cameras by officers – the cost of storing and managing the imagery. MACO will ask the state for help on the cost, meaning money will be a big issue on the justice front, as often happens. House Speaker Mike Busch, a Baltimore-area legislator, will promote [a package of bills](#) to remedy the chronic social ills of Baltimore in “jobs, housing and food,” as the city’s delegation chair, Del. Curt Anderson, summarized it.

“Separately, a panel of lawmakers has been examining ways to increase police accountability. The workgroup, which was formed several days after the rioting in Baltimore, is considering shortening the time stipulated in a rule that prevents a police officer suspected of a crime from being interrogated for up to 10 days after an alleged incident. Police reform advocates also have been critical of a rule requiring claims against police to be filed within 90 days.

“The panel is scheduled to release its recommendations two days before the session officially begins on Jan. 13. Miller said while the panel will make recommendations regarding police discipline, he also wants to create provisions to reward police who do a good job/ .(AP article

published by CBS News [Baltimore] on Dec. 24)

<http://baltimore.cbslocal.com/2015/12/23/criminal-justice-reforms-urban-decay-to-be-session-focus/>

Both Maryland's school boards and its unionized teachers go into the session seeking full funding according to the so-called "Thornton" formula agreed on a decade or more ago, that boosts funding to hard-pressed (mostly urban) jurisdictions like Baltimore City and Montgomery and Prince George's counties to equalize resources around the state. Hogan's method of playing rural school systems against the urban centers may divide the school boards, but the legislators seem particularly exercised about school funding and the governor may have little room for maneuver. The Maryland State Education Association is wary of Hogan's efforts so far to give wider latitude to for-profit charter schools and afford state aid to private schools through tax breaks for private donations to them.

Most of the state's labor unions, without an array of specific bills to be for or against, argue simply in favor of fewer tax breaks for the wealthy and corporations. Efforts to trim the advantages of big business will come up against several recent commission reports – including one commissioned by Miller and Busch – that focus on making the state more "business-friendly." Reduction of taxes on business has been a mantra of the Hogan forces since he began his campaign for governor and he will have the recommendations of panels stacked with his allies to help him sell those ideas.

Legislators will have until the first week of February, almost three weeks after the session begins and two weeks after the administration's deadline for submitting a budget, before the deadline for filing their own bills. It is at that point that many of the real battles will be joined.

[Our Corporate Media Diet: Ups and Downs in Telecom News](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2015**

By Carolyn M. Byerly

It was good news for the folks in the city of brotherly love in mid-December when the entire [City Council of Philadelphia approved](#) – and [the mayor subsequently signed](#) – a new 15-year franchise with Comcast.

The agreement has far-reaching benefits for Comcast customers as well as low-income residents of the city, with increased cable and Internet discounts, expansion of affordable Internet and even free Internet access, and greater protection for Internet customers and employees.

The campaign for what is now being hailed “the Philadelphia model” was led by [Hannah Jane Sassaman](#), a longtime advocate for community-level access to both low-tech and high-tech services. Sassaman was director of the Prometheus Radio Project when the group (with the aid of public interest lawyers) filed the successful [Prometheus Radio Project vs. the FCC](#) suit in 2003, challenging the Federal Communication Commission’s proposed rule to further deregulate ownership within an already greatly deregulated and conglomerated communications industry. She is presently the policy director at Media Mobilizing Project.

Nearly half (44%) of [Philadelphia County’s 1.56 million](#) people are African American, and 14% are Latino/Hispanic. A majority of City Council members and the mayor reflect these same demographics. The Comcast deal is an instance where elected officials acted in the interests of the people they serve.

The campaign began two years ago when neighborhood representatives, senior citizens, parents, high school students, immigrants and others from the Germantown to West Philly communities coalesced into the Corporate Accountability Project to advocate for better telecom services at more affordable rates. The campaign was unique not just for its eclectic composition of people but because [its provisions](#) had the added goal of getting Comcast to pay its workers higher wages.

In her online report of the Philly Comcast franchise, Sassaman noted that “the provisions of the Philadelphia deal were considered so groundbreaking” that the City of Seattle paused its own franchise negotiations with Comcast, and “[refused to proceed with it until Comcast granted extended digital inclusion benefits](#) as a part of the negotiations.”

On December 14, the [Seattle City Council approved its own version](#) of the Philly model, with [benefits](#) to include Comcast offering discounted Internet service to low-income seniors, providing the city with a \$500,000 digital-equality grant, and entering into a partnership arrangement with the city to provide digital devices to youth for accessing the Internet. Seattle has franchise agreements with multiple telecommunication companies, whereas Philadelphia honors a sole-source franchise to Comcast, which makes its [corporate headquarters](#) in that city.

Telecom news was not all that good on another front, when Howard University President Wayne Frederick announced in October that he was considering a sale of WHUT-TV through the [FCC’s auction process](#). The FCC has sought to increase access to the electromagnetic spectrum presently occupied for broadcast channels for use by private broadband companies.

Frederick’s announcement set off a maelstrom of activities by faculty, students, alumni and friends of the station who sought to save the station. Students and alumni launched the [#KeepWHUTBlack](#) campaign to gather signatures and Twitter comments. [Howard Media Group](#), a faculty and graduate student collaborative focused on communications policy, in Howard’s School of Communications, published a [position paper](#) on November 3 arguing that the station should not be sold. Members listed the value of Black- and other ethnic-oriented programming, and progressive news shows like Democracy Now! that are not available on other local channels.

[WHUT-TV was launched in 1980](#) and remains the first and the only African-American-owned public television station in the US. The station presently has 2 million viewers in the DC-metro area. The station is potentially worth more than \$400 million, but members of the Howard Media Group (who include the author of this article) noted in its position paper that the actual sale would likely yield substantially less than that.

In fact, the sale of WHUT-TV would follow the tragedy of privatization of the public airwaves that began at an accelerated pace with passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The electromagnetic spectrum used for broadcast radio and television was established as a public resource to be used in the public interest in the Communications Act of 1934. However, the emergence of the digital age half a century later brought competition for the spectrum for use by Internet-based services – services provided by private companies in nearly all parts of the US. Complicating this is that most residents in the US receive broadcast TV via subscription cable services that are required to carry them.

[Media reform groups](#) have argued, however, that a significant number of households in low-income (of all ethnicities) and rural communities still receive broadcast television via antennae, not cable. In addition, [few cities in the US](#) have established public-sponsored broadband Internet service, which means that licensing the electromagnetic spectrum for broadband use means turning it from public interest to private profit.

The FCC set December 18 as the deadline for application by stations wanting to offer up their stations for public auction. That date passed quietly by with no announcement from Howard President Frederick. Is no news good news for those who argued for WHUT's survival? Or did he file the application without disclosing it to the campus community he serves? The university closed that same day and doesn't re-open until January 4, 2016. Watch this space for the update with the next edition of this newsletter.

[THE BIG SHORT — A POLITICAL FILM](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2016**

Review by Daniel Adkins

“The Big Short” is a dramatized version of the housing market collapse that created the Great Recession of 2008. It was based on the book called *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine* by Michael Lewis. The film is a comedy/drama which is almost played as a documentary. In an effort to explain the financial tools (scams) that facilitated the Great Recession, the film uses loud music, two hours, female nudity, and weird personalities to keep

the audience awake while it teaches us about finance. The film succeeds, maybe because we remember the millions of people who lost savings and their jobs.

The plot is centered on a few insightful finance analysts who believe there is danger in how the housing market is structured and played. Parts of the film explore the techniques, relationships, and motivations of the big banks and the housing markets. Other sections focus on verifying the risks of the mortgages that are turned into investments. There is much debate of whether the motivations are criminal or whether the people are just stupid. The answer may be both and wrapped in hubris. In the end the bankers were justified in believing that they would be bailed out and almost nobody went to jail. However the star analyst used credit default swaps to bet against the big banks and made millions.

Not covered in the film were intelligent and honest staff who told their management that there were problems with a housing marketing system that was heading for a downturn. These staff were often fired for being troublemakers or forced to change jobs. This often happens in hierarchal organizations that are not unionized and therefore staffers speak at their own risk.

Bank profits have risen as of late and the big banks are even bigger and too big to fail too. The only downside for the big banks is that Occupy Wall Street, and now Bernie Sanders, are campaigning for a more functional and just society. Having a presidential candidate who refuses to take money from the billionaires is a first step in breaking up the big banks and creating a more humane, functional and just America.

[The Silent Horror of Accelerating Gentrification Draws Members, Advocates to Metro DC DSA's November Socialist Salon](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2016**

By Andy Feeney

It would have been nice if Claire Cook, an organizer with the cooperative housing advocacy group ONE DC, had provided easy solutions to this region's ongoing crisis of rising rents and increasing gentrification to all who attended DSA's Nov. 19 Socialist Salon. She didn't. Moreover, at least one of the other non-DSA members who came to the Salon questioned how effective ONE DC is likely to be with its program of promoting community-based land trusts, and the establishment of tenant-owned cooperative apartments, as a way of shielding low-income and minority tenants in the District from displacement and homelessness.

In a remarkably cheery voice and with a big smile, however, Cook led those of us who attended the Salon through a series of ostensibly "fun" quizzes that quickly brought the gravity of the

local gentrification crisis into focus. For starters, she asked us, “What is the current minimum wage in the District?” The correct answer: \$10.50 an hour.

Cook asked us again, “What’s the median household income for the District and the nearby metropolitan region?” Two years ago, the U.S. Census Bureau pegged this number at more than \$90,000 annually, making the Greater Washington area, on average, the nation’s richest metropolitan area. But according to Cook, the correct number currently is roughly \$109,000 a year.

This means that when politicians in the DC Mayor’s Office and the District Council speak about “affordable housing,” using official definitions of what “affordable” means, they can legitimately refer to housing that’s affordable for District households earning up to 60% of the regional median income – i.e., households with incomes of more than \$60,000 a year. “Affordable” housing need not be affordable for Washingtonians earning minimum wages and earning only about \$21,000 or less.

Cook then asked us to guess the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment in this region. The correct answer: \$2,000 monthly.

This means that if District residents devote no more than 30% of their household income to rent – which is theoretically all that people are supposed to pay – a single person earning the minimum wage needs to work more than 100 hours a week to afford the metro area’s median one-bedroom dwelling. Most normal human beings simply can’t do this.

There were a few unrealistic assumptions built into Cook’s questions, some of us noted after the Salon. For example, many apartments by definition are priced below the median level. Also, low-income DC residents often crowd many people into small apartments in order to afford the rents. And in reality, how many DC residents today, of almost any income level, really expect to pay only 30% of their earnings for housing?

Still, Cook’s Socratic approach dramatically illustrated the housing crisis that faces low-income and even middle-class residents of the District and the surrounding region. This may account for the fact, as another of Cook’s questions pointed out, that there were some 72,000 names on the waiting list for DC public housing a few years ago — before the housing authorities closed the list to new entrants.

Unfortunately, local housing prices have continued rising since then, and the District has been allowing developers to tear down older housing for low-income and working-class tenants in order to build shiny new structures that many Washingtonians can’t afford.

According to a “People’s Platform” drawn up by ONE DC, metro Washington in fact has become “the most expensive city in the country.” Since the early 2000s, there has been “a drastic change in the District. Thousands of luxury condominiums have been built; valuable community space has been lost and live-wage, [and] unionized jobs have disappeared.”

Meanwhile, “City officials have promoted privatization of public assets including public housing and shelters, disinvestment in social welfare programs, [and] transfer of public ownership to private interests while calling for more investment in the police which has resulted in more surveillance and harassment of youth of color.”

What to do about this is the challenge facing local affordable housing activists and other progressives fighting for economic and racial justice.

ONE DC’s approach, as articulated by Cook in the November Salon and as ONE DC has outlined it in the People’s Platform, is to focus on the collective economic empowerment of black and low-income DC residents through measures to promote the development of worker-owned cooperative enterprises and tenant-owned cooperative housing.

The theoretical and historical basis for ONE DC’s cooperative approach partly reflects the research of Dr. Jessica Gordon Nembhard, an associate professor at John Jay College of the City University of New York, who has also been a visiting professor at Howard University and Morgan State University in Maryland.

In her 2014 book *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*, Dr. Nembhard argues that “African Americans have a long, rich history of cooperative ownership, especially in reaction to market failures and economic racial discrimination.” Indeed, she reports, African Americans have a history of economic cooperation dating back in some places to the 1790s and extending forward in time to 2012, when Nation of Islam members in Houston launched a new food store cooperative in that city’s Third Ward.

However, Nembhard writes, the saga of African-American experiments with cooperation “has often been a hidden history and one obstructed by White supremacist violence,” and when it has been publicly acknowledged, it has generally been portrayed as a history of failure. In *Collective Courage*, Nembhard seeks to excavate this buried history of black economic cooperation and to link it to the ideas of such African American leaders as W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, civil rights activist John Lewis, A. Philip Randolph, E. Franklin Frazier, Dorothy Height, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Ella Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer, among other notable black leaders over the generations.

In the District of Columbia today, ONE DC’s People’s Platform calls for a number of specific steps to facilitate the development of African-American cooperatives to address the city’s crisis of affordable and low-income housing as well as depression-level rates of unemployment and underemployment among nonwhites. The People’s Platform also calls on the District government to take other steps, not directly related to coop development, to address the housing and job-creation needs of Washingtonians.

The major points of the People’s Platform include:

- A demand that the City strengthen its existing “First Source” law requiring developers who receive public subsidies to offer at least 51% of the positions on construction

projects and in corporate job-training programs to DC residents, rather than mostly hiring non-residents for such positions.

- A demand that the City allocate funding for a city-wide training program for participants in worker-owner cooperatives, which provide more stable employment opportunities than other kinds of businesses, and that can “generate income, jobs ... [and] economic independence” to participants.
- A demand that the City provide space for the development of a Black Worker Center in Ward 8, which could serve as “an incubation space for alternatives to low-wage work, such as worker owned cooperatives, collectives, and small businesses created, owned and operated by Black workers.”
- A demand that the City place “an immediate moratorium on all demolition and redevelopment of public housing,” and also invest at least \$100 million in the rehabilitation of public housing stock.
- A demand that the City introduce legislation to protect tenants from displacement in buildings with expiring affordability covenants.

As the People’s Platform explains, “Forty[-]five buildings financed through low-income housing tax credits and tax-exempt bonds have affordability restrictions set to expire in the next five years. Losing these affordable units will further exacerbate the affordability crisis in the District.” This is particularly the case since many of these buildings are located in rapidly gentrifying areas, “where owners have the financial incentive of opting out” of affordable housing programs.

To address this situation, ONE DC states, the District should introduce legislation to ensure that tenants are warned of the expiring subsidies for low-income and affordable housing “exactly two years in advance of said expiration dates” and that the warnings are repeated at three-month intervals afterwards. In addition, new legislation needs to ensure that tenants have the opportunity to purchase their buildings “at a price and terms which represent a bona fide offer of sale” so that they can take advantage of an existing DC law allowing them to purchase such buildings before they are sold off to private developers.

- ONE DC also demands that the District Government “place all current vacant properties into a community land trust, where a governing board comprise of longtime DC residents determines how the land is developed.”

In explanation of this demand, the People’s Platform notes that community land trusts (CLTs) are institutions whereby a single nonprofit corporation acquires titles to “multiple parcels of land, scattered across a targeted geographic area,” and withdraws these properties permanently from the markets, to be managed in perpetuity on behalf of community residents. Some 250 CLTs already are in operation across the United States, the People’s Platform states, and they “have been excellent in promoting neighborhood revitalization without displacing residents.”

- The People’s Platform also demands that the District Government establish a working group with ONE DC as a community partner to oversee a pilot form for the development of a now-vacant property in the Shaw neighborhood known as Parcel 42. ONE DC has

been campaigning for the creation of affordable housing on this property since 2002, the People's Platform notes. In 2009 a deputy mayor promised to allocate \$7.8 million to the proposed development, yet the city never made good on this promise. It needs to do so, with ONE DC playing a role in planning and overseeing the process.

In addition to the immediate demands included in its People's Platform, ONE DC has drawn up a People's Platform Manifesto that Cook had DSA supporters read aloud at the Salon. The Manifesto includes a number of principles that some of us at the Salon considered visionary, even utopian, and that ONE DC sees as guiding its organizing activities over the long run.

The principles include "equitable development that values people over property," "government transparency, accountability, and political democracy," "access to safe and affordable transportation" for all, "housing for every person," based on the idea that housing is a human right and not an opportunity to exploit people for profit; "decent, dignified, and sustainable work or occupation for everyone who wants it," and a "right of return and reclamation for those who have been forced out of the District by developers and gentrification," as well as several radical demands relating to education, reform of the criminal justice system and changes in how capitalism relates to the earth.

Cook's articulation of ONE DC's vision was not the only approach to the anti-gentrification and anti-poverty fight that was expressed at the Salon, however. Two other visitors to the Salon were G. Lee Aikin, a Statehood Green Party member who ran unsuccessfully in the last election for Phil Mendelsohn's seat on the District Council, and Angela White Narain, a longtime housing activist, former Williams and Fenty administration official and consultant on social enterprise development who ran for the Ward 4 Council seat this year.

Another non-DSA member who attended the Salon and contributed some commentary to the proceedings was Lucas Turner-Owens, an associate of Operation Hope, an organization devoted to Black economic empowerment through the diffusion of entrepreneurial skills and greater financial literacy within African-American communities.

Angela White Narain argued that ONE DC's reliance on community land trusts is in part misguided, since some past efforts in the District to rely on cooperative housing development based on CLTs have failed. Some large financial institutions have lost money by investing in such housing ventures and are unlikely to provide financing for new CLT-based housing development, White Narain suggested.

White Narain conceded, however, that other efforts by the District Government to address low-income and moderate-housing needs have failed as well. She cited as an example the New Communities Initiative (NCI) in the District that was supposed to succeed the HOPE VI programs promoted by the federal government in bringing about the redevelopment of decaying, crime-ridden public housing projects into more economically attractive and safer mixed-income neighborhoods, where poor people displaced from the older projects could live in physically improved housing alongside neighbors of higher income levels.

In Washington, the HOPE VI process has generally been a failure, White Narain suggested at the Salon. The New Communities Initiative has largely resulted in the displacement of poor people from their old neighborhoods and the replacement of their housing by high-value real estate developments catering to the wealthy.

(In local media coverage of the New Communities Initiative that backs up White Narain's allegations, Robert Samuels of the *Washington Post* reported back in 2013 that the District originally planned for one public housing project razed under the NCI, the Temple Courts project near Union Station, to be succeeded by more than 1,000 units of new housing, to be financed through a mix of public and private money, that would include some 180 apartments for former Temple Courts tenants. However, between 2005 when Temple Courts was razed and 2013 when Samuels' article appeared, no Temple Courts tenants had been rehoused under the plan, and part of the former public housing project had been converted into a parking lot, while the shiny new building that houses National Public Radio went up across the street).

In fact, White Narain indicated, DC politicians and city officials have used programs designed to promote "affordable housing" to promote high-end real estate development instead, and to push poor people out of the District. As evidence of the District Government's bad faith, White Narain noted that Washington DC could qualify for some \$140 million in federal HOME Investment Partnership funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to promote low-income housing in several different ways. HUD's web site indicates that these could include housing rehabilitation, the construction of new housing, and tenant-based rental assistance. However the District has failed to apply for the \$140 million in HOME Investment Partnership funds in question.

"The fact is that you have people around this country who really do not like poor people and black people," White Narain said. "It's also a cross-racial thing: some middle class black people do not like poor black people. Sometime you have to deal with that ... it's about classism and about racism, really."

One way local DSA members could become more proactive on gentrification issues is by attending public meetings in DC on the Department of Housing and Community Affairs' plans regarding the HOME Investment Partnership subsidies and other federal monies, White Narain said.

1. Lee Aikin, in her contributions to the Salon, focused more on how to raise the incomes of low-income Washingtonians than on efforts to rein in rising rents and gentrification pressures. Under federal regulations, Aikin noted, there have been repeated increases in the levels of income that individuals can earn while not paying any income taxes to the IRS. Currently the cutoff level for individuals being exempt from all federal income taxes is above \$20,000. However, the District Government, despite repeated pleas by advocates for the poor to raise its income cutoff levels, today allows individual Washingtonians to earn only about \$10,000 per year before being subjected to DC income taxes. Low-income Washingtonians would receive a major increase in their disposable incomes if the District Government would adjust its income cutoff levels in accordance with the federal government's, Aikin said.

She also stated that the District needs to stop raising property taxes on homeowners who have not invested in improving their houses, but who find their property tax assessments rising when their neighbors invest in gentrification.

The diversity of approaches to the anti-gentrification struggle that Cook, White Narain and Aikin outlined in the Salon, and the complexity of the journalistic exposes of gentrification problems that have appeared in the local media, indicate to me that members of Metro DC DSA are only at the start of a long effort to understand the political, social and economic forces driving high-end real estate development, gentrification and the displacement of low-income and black residents here in the nation's capital.

Democratic socialists cannot simply ignore the gentrification problem, which poses urgent moral and political issues relating to racial and economic justice in this city, not to mention its effect on the rising rents and housing prices facing individual DSA members, including many who count ourselves as middle class rather than working class or poor. Yet currently, many of us lack the knowledge of real estate and gentrification issues that we require to address the problems both responsibly and effectively.

What this Salon indicated to me is that at least some members of our local DSA chapter need to embark on a more or less intensive learning process to become much more familiar with the metro DC region's gentrification problems than we are now.

In the meantime, the interest that this Salon sparked in longtime DSA members as well as several outsiders with an interest in gentrification suggests to me that DSA may be able to serve as a useful catalyst for action on this issue by other local activists and local organizations, even if we are not taking a lead role on gentrification problems ourselves. The conversations that occurred among Cook, White Narain, Aikin and Turner-Owens after the Salon officially ended indicate that we may have helped activists on local housing issues do some useful networking on the problems under our auspices, even if most DSA members at this event were not directly involved.

[Three Chords and the Truth: Commemorating Joe Hill](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2016**

By Kurt Stand

November 19 marked the 100th anniversary of the day Joe Hill was executed by a firing squad in Utah. A Swedish immigrant, seaman, itinerant laborer, IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] union activist, revolutionary, singer and songwriter, Hill's life embodied the hopes of a generation of working people who sought to build "one big union" to better the lives of all oppressed by capitalist exploitation, to build a better world where such exploitation – and its cousins of war, hunger, discrimination – would be eliminated once and for all. The character of his politics and his character as a human being may be gleaned from this excerpt from a letter he wrote to the IWW's journal *Solidarity* while in prison:

"Tomorrow I expect to take a trip to the planet Mars and, if so, will immediately commence to organize the Mars canal workers into the IWW and we will sing the good old songs so loud that the learned star-gazers on earth will once for all get positive proof that the planet Mars really is inhabited ... I have nothing to say for myself only that I have always tried to make this earth a little better for the great producing class, and I can pass off into the great unknown with the pleasure of knowing that I never in my life double-crossed a man, woman or child. (October 1915)."

Joe Uehlein and the U-Liners (Aaron Gibian, Jessica Lake, Avril Smith, Barry Warsaw), performed a concert of music by and about Hill before a capacity crowd at the Takoma Busboys and Poets in Washington DC on that anniversary. Reflecting the meaning and appeal of labor music, the crowd was itself diverse in every way – thus there were many children in the crowd, so too were people of an older generation who came of age at the tail end of the Great Depression, including Mildred Glazer, widow of Joe Glazer – one of Uehlein's mentors, a founder of the Labor Heritage Foundation and himself a union singer who helped preserve Hill's music and legacy in concerts before union members and in a recording produced through the Smithsonian Institution. Union members, cultural workers, activists of all types joined together in a musical memorial that linked the legacy of struggle for workers' rights and social justice in the past with those of today; a legacy carried on in music.

The concert was sponsored by Metro Washington Labor Council's monthly Bread & Roses program to promote working-class and trade union culture. Uehlein – retired director of the AFL-CIO's Center for Strategic Campaigns, and a founder of Labor Network for Sustainability – combines knowledge, experience and commitment to trade unionism with over four decades of performance as a musician, making a perfect combination to pay tribute to Hill not as a relic of the past but as a voice for the present. All the songs quoted below were amongst those the U-Liners performed during this tribute.

A Bit of History

Hill was in Utah helping out the IWW in the midst of a strike of 1500 workers. It was his misfortune that during the strike a robbery took place which left a grocery clerk dead. A recent book, William Alder's **The Man Who Never Died**, examines all the evidence and concludes that he was innocent, his arrest and conviction a frame-up. Labor activists, socialists, anarchists, radicals of all types already knew that in 1915; organizers and striking workers had been

frequently victims of brutal repression –legal and extra-judicial – especially during the period from the end of the Civil War through to the triumph of the CIO on the eve of World War II. Founded in 1905, the IWW was in particular subject to ruthless persecution throughout the first two decades of its existence when it led numerous mass organizing drives, numerous mass strikes, uniting skilled and unskilled workers irrespective of race or nationality, trade or craft. Winning great victories and suffering awful defeats, it was essentially destroyed as an effective labor organization by the mid-1920s, done in by repression and internal conflict (though the IWW survived and continues to this day, albeit on a smaller scale and effective more as a vehicle for education and agitation than for permanent organization).

One difference within its ranks and the labor left generally (then as today) was over the efficacy of the electoral system, for it shunned political action. That said, the IWW, in addition to its industrial battles, engaged in struggles eminently because the right to unionize is of necessity also a fight to make real in practice constitutional rights to a free press, to free assembly and to free speech. Free speech was a particular focus, because public speaking was one of the only ways to reach the mass of working people who were unorganized. Municipal authorities would pass ordinances making such public speaking – soap box oratory – illegal. In response, IWW members (many of whom were migratory or itinerant workers like Hill) would flood into such a city, withstand police violence and get arrested by the hundreds or thousands until the municipal budget began to break and the ordinance was repealed. San Diego was the site of one of the harshest of such campaigns, and Joe Hill was very much in the middle of it. And there he encountered another of the employers' tactics. The Salvation Army tried to reach a similar part of the population – those down and out – with a doctrine of acquiescence and individual self-help. Employers would pay them to play their music and hold counter rallies to drown out IWW speakers. That led to one of Hill's most famous songs, *The Preacher and the Slave*:

Long-haired preachers come out every night

Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right

But when asked 'bout something to eat

They will answer with voices so sweet:

You will eat, bye and bye,

In that glorious land above the sky;

Work and pray, live on hay,

You'll get pie in the sky when you die

[That's a lie]

While the last stanza goes:

Workingmen of all countries unite,
Side by side we for freedom will fight:
When the world and its wealth we have gained
To the grafters we'll sing this refrain:

You will eat, bye and bye.
When you've learned how to cook and to fry;
Chop some wood, 'twill do you good,
And you'll eat in the sweet bye and bye.

Connections and Legacies:

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was one of the few women organizers in the IWW; from the Bronx tenements where she grew up to the copper mines of the Messabi range in Minnesota, from Spokane to Chicago and on to Duluth and Butte, she was in the thick of many of the union's most storied battles. And she had played a leading role in the Bread & Roses strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1905 and in the successful defense of two IWW leaders – Joseph Ettor and Arturo Giovanitti – who had been arrested there on murder charges. On a national speaking tour a decade later, she went to Utah to visit Hill in his jail cell and became active in the campaign for his freedom. Although they only met in prison visiting rooms, he penned one of his most famous songs for her. In a letter composed only a few hours before he was shot, Hill wrote: “Dear friend Gurley ... you have been more to me than a Fellow Worker. You have been an inspiration and when I composed *The Rebel Girl* you were right there and helped me all the time as you furnished the idea. ... be sure to locate a few more Rebel Girls like yourself because they are needed and needed badly”

Flynn would go on to play a leading role in the campaign to free Italian American anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti who were themselves executed in Boston in 1927; that campaign leading to the formation of the American Civil Liberties Union (which expelled her in a witch-hunting moment of its own in 1940). She herself, often arrested for brief spells during her IWW years, did a lengthy time in prison in the 1950s when jailed along with other members of the Communist Party which she joined in 1938. Along the way she helped ensure Hill's legacy

remained alive for the next generation of unionists; she gave the private papers entrusted to her by Hill to the Almanac Singers. A labor/left folk song group in the 1940s that group included amongst its members a then-young Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. As to the song itself, it has become a standard in labor circles, and inspired the late Hazel Dickens, a feminist pro-union bluegrass singer-songwriter from West Virginia who wrote and performed her own version of *The Rebel Girl*. The last lines of Hill's original from 1916 go as follows:

Yes, her hands may be hardened from labor

And her dress may not be very fine;

But her heart in her bosom is beating

That is true to her class and her kind.

And the grafters in terror are trembling

When her spite and defiance she'll hurl.

For the only and Thoroughbred Lady

Is the Rebel Girl.

The song was not for her alone; Hill wrote in a letter published in the IWW's magazine, *Solidarity*, that they had "created a kind of one-legged freakish animal of a union," because its membership, especially in the western states (where the IWW was strongest) had become overwhelmingly male – and he proposed that the union hire more women organizers like Gurley Flynn to be used "exclusively for building up of a strong organization among the female workers."

Numerous other singer songwriters were influenced by Hill, singing his songs, re-writing them to bring them up to day, for folk music itself is a living tradition where authenticity lies not in replicating what was done, but using that past for the meaning it holds for the present. Hill is himself remembered today as much by a song written about him as he is for his own music. Earl Robinson – a Hollywood songwriter blacklisted in the McCarthy years – wrote *The House I Live In* – recorded by Frank Sinatra in the 1940s as an affirmation of the New Deal, *Black and White* — a celebration of *Brown v. Board of Education*, recorded by, amongst many others, the rock band Three Dog Night, and *Ballad for Americans* — a cantata, sung/declaimed by Paul Robeson as an expression of a multi-racial, multi-ethnic vision at the core of the CIO that channeled an aspect of the IWW's heritage. And Robinson (collaborating with English poet Alfred Hayes) wrote the song *Joe Hill* which was popularized in the 1940s by Robeson who frequently sang it a union rallies and public events and then reached an even broader audience when Joan Baez sang it at Woodstock in 1969, dedicating it to her then-husband David Harris in prison at the time for resistance to the draft. That a song about Hill would move easily from labor protests to

opposition to the Vietnam War was a natural progression, for he too early on opposed the horrors of war – be it the Spanish American War in 1898 or World War I. The spirit at play continues to inspire:

I dreamed, I saw Joe Hill last night
Alive as you and me
Says I “But Joe, you’re ten years dead”
“I never died” says he
“I never died” says he

“The copper bosses killed you, Joe”
“They shot you Joe” says I
“Takes more than guns to kill a man”
Says Joe “I didn’t die”
Says Joe “I didn’t die”

And standing there, as big as life
And smiling with his eyes
Says Joe “What they can never kill
Went on to organize
Went on to organize”

From San Diego up to Maine
In every mine and mill
Where working folks defend their rights
It’s there you find Joe Hill
It’s there you find Joe Hill

A United Working Class

Hill’s anti-war sentiment, like that of the IWW as a whole, was rooted in their conception of industrial unionism. Their objection to craft unionism was that it set worker against worker – and unions that are divided by skill are unions that can easily accept or reinforce exclusions based on race, gender or nationality. Setting workers to war against each other is, from that point-of-view, akin to workers in one trade going to work while workers in the same industry are out on strike. This was the basis of the IWW’s anti-racism, it was also the logic behind its opposition to signed contracts – they never wanted to be in a position where they legally had to have their members cross picket lines to go to work when other workers had walked out.

This notion of class solidarity was central to the IWW’s vision of a cooperative commonwealth (which was, indeed, the vision of the early socialist and cooperative movements everywhere) – and was the reason strikebreakers – scabs – were so vehemently reviled. It was practical; unions when they strike need to stop production and thus keep people from crossing picket lines; but it was also ideological – freedom lies in cooperation, not competition. It stands in contrast to the philosophy of “rugged individualism” so often preached in the US, a philosophy that stands as the cover for the exploitation of the many by the few and – central to the IWW outlook – by the

embrace of that exploitation by workers who identify with that “few” and not with their brothers and sisters. A choice must always be made – strikebreakers and striking workers share the same harsh circumstances, but take different paths: to sacrifice with others so as to benefit with others, or to privilege oneself or one’s family against everyone else. That is, the doctrine of one against all versus a commitment to the common good. Hill, like other IWW and industrial unionists, learned to overcome the prejudices instilled within our society by acting upon (and learning from) the logic of class unity rather than the “unity” bred of race or trade or region which inevitably accepts subordination within the capitalist system.

And this ideological divide was expressed itself sharply in the contrasting usages of the historical figure of Casey Jones – a train engineer who died in 1900 in an accident while driving a train in the middle of a railroad strike. Jones was turned into a folk hero by the capitalist press, numerous songs, stories and legends grew up around him as a self-sacrificing worker dedicated to his job. But to the IWW – and to militant unionists on the railroads and beyond – he was a traitor pure and simple because making sure the trains ran on time ought never be thought more important than standing with fellow-workers striving for better pay and safer conditions. That Jones was a member of an elite craft union only made outrage at his behavior all the sharper. Hill’s song, Casey Jones – Union scab, tells the story:

The workers on the S.P. line to strike sent out a call;

But Casey Jones, the engineer, he wouldn’t strike at all;

His boiler it was leaking, and its drivers on the bum,

And his engine and its bearings, they were all out of plumb.

Casey Jones kept his junk pile running;

Casey Jones was working double time;

Casey Jones got a wooden medal,

For being good and faithful on the S.P. line.

The workers said to Casey: “Won’t you help us win this strike?”

But Casey said: “Let me alone, you’d better take a hike.”

Then Casey’s wheezy engine ran right off the worn-out tack,

And Casey hit the river with an awful crack.

Casey Jones hit the river bottom;
Casey Jones broke his blooming spine;
Casey Jones was an Angeleno,
He took a trip to heaven on the S.P. line.

The song goes on to explain that the angels were on strike, so St. Peter puts Casey to work scabbing on them. But “Angel Union No. 23” objected and fired Casey down the Golden Stair, leading to the song’s last stanza:
Casey Jones went to Hell a-flying;

“Casey Jones,” the Devil said, “Oh fine:

Casey Jones, get busy shoveling sulphur –

That’s what you get for scabbing on the S.P. line.”

Amalgamated Transit Union members who attended the concert later showed their solidarity with refugee communities — [see the sidebar.](#)

There is Power in a Union

Joe Hill grew up in a family of agricultural laborers at a time when industrial development was making a harsh but secure life increasingly precarious. An emerging union and socialist movement gave voice to that discontent, as did a movement for religious freedom against the dominance of the Lutheran church (which was also in the business of promoting the Salvation Army). Hill like many others learned his music from the church and his politics from organized labor – and perhaps one can see in him the roots of some of the thinking which created the strength of Swedish labor. Although Sweden today is viewed as a model of social welfare and industrial peace, it was not always so – harsh conflicts during Hill’s youth undoubtedly predisposed his radical labor politics. And, in fact, there was an emergent syndicalist movement (i.e. a workers movement that sought to bring about social change through direct action at the workplace and union solidarity rather than political action) in pre-World War I Sweden. Swedish labor conflict exploded in 1907 with a defeated general strike, during the 1920s the country was

rife with labor disputes and localized strike movements. It was only after a more successful general strike in 1930 that the preconditions were laid for the labor-management cooperation that subsequently characterized Swedish society. But that strength also relied on unity – the large Swedish Social Democratic Party was always willing to coalesce with the smaller Communist Party on its left and to coalesce with a farmer’s party, thus inhibiting the strength of rural reaction experienced elsewhere, while the Social Democratic and smaller (but through the 1930s not insignificant) syndicalist labor federation – though sharply differing — avoided the internecine warfare of other divided labor movements.

Although the radicalism of those with Hill’s perspective weakened through the years in Sweden, one truth held and still holds – labor’s strength depends on a politics of peace and social justice and all depend on solidarity. In fact, the Swedish labor federation helps support a national museum at his birthplace (Glazer, in his autobiography, describes performing Hill’s music there while on an AFL-CIO tour in 1974). Sweden’s retreat from some of the policies and practices that made it a model of progressive social democracy in the 1970s is due to a weakening of solidarity within its society – between low-paid and better-paid workers, between Swedish and migrant workers — and due to weakening of the country’s anti-militarism. Such weakening is a reminder that labor strength cannot be isolated from a country’s broader social conflicts which must constantly be addressed and readdressed. So too, it is a reminder that past truths and past history needs to be constantly taught and relearned.

A successful IWW-led construction contractors strike in Salt Lake City is likely what drew Hill to Utah. The strike won because of the IWW’s wall to wall solidarity from production through to transport workers, which itself was rooted in its strength amongst copper miners. And Hill, no doubt, became active in the next phase of the struggle – for the copper bosses, unable to defeat the union head on, resorted to repression, using the local police to break up IWW street rallies and public meetings; which, in turn, led to a call for a free speech fight. But in this instance, the combination of government, church and private capital proved too strong — just like with strikes, not all such fights were successful. The years 1917-1918 saw the IWW’s renewed growth and steps toward a consolidation of power which had previously eluded it. But that too, was not to be. Hill’s execution was followed by the lynching of IWW leader Frank Little in Butte, Montana in 1917 during a cooper strike, the mutilation and hanging of IWW activist Wesley Everest during a lumber workers’ organizing campaign in Centralia, Washington; and by the arrests, raid and prosecutions of IWW leaders and members across the country with a false and distorted “patriotism” used as an excuse during and immediately following World War I.

Repression is never the only reason any movement it defeated. The IWW made its share of errors, and was not able to establish the level of internal coherence and unity needed to learn from those errors. In the wake of its demise, Socialist, Communist, anarchist, and more mainstream militant unionists within its ranks tended to break apart – though people from those backgrounds, each in their own way, came to contribute to the eventual success of industrial unionism in the 1930s which, if unable to achieve revolutionary change, did help, briefly, make the US a more just and even a more equal society. Allowing disagreement to turn into disunity, allowing disagreement to undermine solidarity, weakened the labor movement in subsequent years, and always inhibited the ability to use disagreement to come to new understandings, new truths, out of which alone is a more rooted unity possible. That said, each period in which

working-class and social justice movements gain ground leaves traces that can be and are used to build that better tomorrow. This is a line of thinking expressed by nonviolence activist Nadine Bloch in an article (cited during the concert by Uehlein) listing the lessons activists can learn from Hill 100 years after his death: 1) there is power in a union; 2) to build your movement, be inclusive; 3) creativity gets the goods; 4) you can't eat promises; 5) don't mourn, organize. Five points at the heart of all labor music and at the heart of all organizing.

And all are a reflection of how Hill's legacy remains alive. A park now occupies the space in Salt Lake City where he was imprisoned and executed. On Labor Day in 1990 local unions organized a festival at that site in Hill's memory. Amongst those who performed were Joe Glazer, who identified with the Social Democratic tradition and who was throughout his life was close to mainstream AFL-CIO leadership in the especially conservative trade union environment that prevailed in the US during the years after World War II. Also on stage were Utah Phillips, a proud Wobbly, who remained an IWW member until his death in 2008; Earl Robinson, who remained close to the Communist Party with which he had sympathized since the 1930s; and Pete Seeger, ever radical, ever on the side of working people in struggle, and ever willing to challenge those in labor and the left who forgot their roots or who allowed ideology to inhibit solidarity. Coming from different and often conflicting social justice traditions, they made common cause not only as a tribute to Hill, but to carry forward his vision and hopes. Glazer who brought labor music with a radical vision to mainstream union audiences, and Seeger who brought the same tradition to union audiences often in opposition to the mainstream, embodied that unity, which was and remains at the heart of the work of the Labor Heritage Foundation – and embodies the hope expressed in Hill's, *There is Power in a Union*:

Come, all ye workers, from every land,

Come join in the grand Industrial band;

Then we our share of this earth shall demand.

Come on! Do your share like a man.

There is pow'r, there is pow'r

In a band of workingmen,

When they stand hand in hand,

That's a pow'r, that's a pow'r

That must rule in every land

One Industrial Union Grand.

Three Chords and the Truth

And today we have Billy Bragg's lyrics:

There is power in a factory, power in the land

power in the hands of a worker

But it all amounts to nothing if together we don't stand

there is power in a union

A song that consciously refers back to Hill's, a song that is increasingly heard at union rallies on both sides of the Atlantic, and a song – like Hill's music – that refers not only to what is, but also to what could be. To speak of union power at a time when unions are losing ground around the world may seem like an anomaly, but no more than the assertion of union power during the IWW's heyday where victory was repeatedly followed by defeat and where despite the efforts of countless workers and unionists in the US, in Sweden, elsewhere around the world, Hill could not be freed. Bragg sings that song acutely aware of the devastating defeat of British miners in the 1980s, it is sung in the US by those acutely aware of labor's defeats at PATCO, Phelps Dodge, the Detroit Free Press and too many other strikes crushed in the 1980s and thereafter.

But that power is real nonetheless, seen at moments of solidarity when expressed in action, existing everywhere as a potential that can be realized through organization once the IWW motto "an injury to one, is an injury to all," becomes a way of life. Or perhaps it has meaning something like the line, "we are not afraid," in the song *We Shall Overcome* – for, Seeger, prefacing that stanza in a concert during the height of the civil rights era, noted that of course, each of us at times is afraid, and not least those who at rallies and picket lines face dogs, water hoses, billy clubs and more. But standing up to the reality of fear makes the assertion of defiance all the more important for only through such assertions can oppression, exploitation and injustice be overcome, can a cooperative society be built. A cooperative society which will only come about when the suppressed power of the working-class is proclaimed as a power that can be won.

Proclaiming such power then means not only denouncing existing power's corruptions, it also means confronting those in labor's ranks who accept capitalist ideology, who play along with divide-and-rule politics. This Hill did in his satirical *Mr. Block*, "a credit to 'Our Red, White and Blue,'" and *Scissor Bill*, who says, 'This is my country,' with an honest face/While all the cops they chase him out of every place,' and who hates, "foreigners," "Coons," and the "man in the moon." And that is the message contained in Steve Earle's *Christmas in Washington* – which has little to do with DC, but a great deal today with the despair working people face in trying to make a living while our political system serves only the rich. The song calls upon labor to recall its Red roots, and invokes the memory of Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston, Emma Goldman,

Malcom X, Martin Luther King Jr. – and Joe Hill. It is a song that speaks of truths popular music too often glides over and was performed by the U-Liners as was Ry Cooder's *Three Chords and the Truth*, which tells of Joe Hill refusing to buckle under to the threat of a firing squad, Paul Robeson standing tall before racist, anti-Communist mobs at Peekskill in 1949, and Pete Seeger remaining true to his beliefs when called up before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee. In each case they were standing firm in using their music to speak truth to the disposed and exploited, keeping faith with the belief that working-class unity is as possible as it necessary. Music is a form of communication that goes back to the earliest stages of social development, because it is a form of communication able to teach through its form of expression. Music combines the concrete with the abstract; that facilitates its ability to speak to aspiration as well as hardship.

The day before his execution, Hill wrote his will in the form of a poem. Uehlein, following the path of many, wrote music to accompany the words which he performed at the Takoma concert. It remains a fitting tribute to Hill and a reminder of the values that continue to lie behind the struggle and search for a world worthy of all people everywhere:

My will is easy to decide,

For there is nothing to divide,

My kin don't need to fuss and moan –

“Moss does not cling to rolling stone.”

My body? – Oh! – If I could choose.

I would to ashes it reduce,

And let the merry breezes blow

My dust to where some flowers grow.

Perhaps some fading flower then

Would come to life and bloom again.

This is my last and final will.

Good luck to all of you.

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[We Need Bernie and We Need Democratic Socialism: A Review of DC DSA's We Need Bernie Campaign in 2015](#)

Thursday, December 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> January 2016**

By M. Miller

A year ago, if someone told me that a candidate who openly espoused democratic socialism would be running a highly successful presidential campaign in 2015, I would have cynically retorted, "I wish!" Yet in the past year, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) has done exactly that. Despite the mainstream media silence and the Democratic National Committee's tacit obstruction of his campaign, Sanders is going strong with over 2.3 million in donations as of this writing, which breaks the fundraising record for most contributions to a presidential candidate. And those contributions are from ordinary, working Americans, not super PACs. While some on the Left might criticize Sanders for being more of a social democrat than a true democratic socialist, his success and popularity has inspired interest in democratic socialism and spurred a much-needed progressive presence within the Democratic Party.

Taking advantage of this unique opportunity, Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) launched its own flourishing campaign, We Need Bernie, to encourage Americans not only to vote for Sanders but to identify as democratic socialists if Bernie's message of economic justice resonates with them. The campaign seems to be working. DSA hosted one of its most well-attended national conferences in November, and its membership is increasing significantly. And the Metro DC DSA chapter has been an active participant in that campaign. Working within the We Need Bernie campaign has raised the profile of DC DSA and brought the group's members together in sustained, focused action that can only grow our members and our activism.

Since the summer, DC DSA members have attended farmers markets in the DC area to pass out information about Sanders, democratic socialism and our chapter. From this activity, we've collected a sizable list of emails and other contact information from individuals who are interested in participating in the We Need Bernie campaign. We've also canvassed DC neighborhoods to talk to local voters about Sanders' positions and democratic socialism. These canvassing events have been fruitful not only in raising awareness of DSA but also in the opportunities they present to listen to DC area residents about issues that concern them in the 2016 presidential election and their communities. From these discussions, DC DSA can learn what local and national problems we should be focusing on to reach out to new members, particularly people of color.

The pinnacle of DC DSA's We Need Bernie campaign this year was undoubtedly our October rally for Sanders. Held at Busboys and Poets in downtown DC, the event featured keynote speaker Jim Hightower, a progressive speaker, writer and all around rabble-rouser, best known for his *Hightower Lowdown* newsletter. Busboys and Poets owner Andy Shallal also spoke at the event, as well as DSA's own Barbara Ehrenreich, the feminist socialist author of *Nickel and Dimed*. Larry Cohen, currently an advisor for Sanders 2016 and former president of the Communication Workers of America, also gave a talk and deftly fielded questions after the event, when a hoarse Hightower needed to depart early. Approximately 100 people attended the event, and many showed up to pass out literature about Sanders and DSA at Eastern Market that weekend. DC DSA also recruited a number of volunteers to our We Need Bernie campaign, one of whom has generously given substantial amounts of his time and skills to the effort.

With the We Need Bernie campaign galvanizing our local in 2015 and Sander's campaign only gaining energy, we will continue making great strides in 2016. Already, the recently formed committee of DC DSA members dedicated to building the DC We Need Bernie efforts has plans

for “introduction to democratic socialism” sessions to educate those who have expressed an interest in Sanders what democratic socialism is and why it’s needed in the U.S. now more than ever. We’ve also discussed more targeted canvassing efforts in places like Virginia and the Latino neighborhoods of DC, as well as how DC DSA can best harness the excitement generated by Sanders to support local progressive and maybe even socialist candidates after the 2016 presidential election. The Sanders campaign has presented DSA with an excellent opportunity to remove the stigma from the term “socialist,” and DC DSA intends to demonstrate that democratic socialism is alive and well in our community.

Throughout his campaign, Bernie Sanders has called for political revolution, and DSA should position itself both nationally and locally to seize this moment to build that kind of lasting change. The United States, particularly in the DC metro area, is facing economic and social injustice that cannot continue. Economic inequality is at levels not seen since the Great Depression, union membership has hit an all-time low, and more and more Americans are feeling disenfranchised and disillusioned with our current political system. In the short term, we need Bernie and his message of progressive economic change. But in the long term, we need democratic socialism to promote an equitable vision of a democratic economy for the betterment of everyone, not just the wealthy. DSA’s We Need Bernie campaign could be the beginning of this political and economic revolution. In 2015, through its We Need Bernie efforts, DC DSA started laying the groundwork for this revolution. In 2016, we will continue building upon this momentum to grow our local and fight for a more just and equal economy.

[Why Socialists Should Support Gun Control](#)

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By Bill Mosley

In just over one month we have witnessed, via the media, yet two more mass shootings in the United States, with the killing of three and wounding of nine at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs, Colo., followed by the massacre of 14 and wounding of 22 in San Bernardino, Calif.

The circumstances and motivations of the two shootings are very different. Robert L. Dear Jr., the lone gunman in the Colorado Springs attack, was on an anti-abortion crusade, yelling “no more baby parts” as he was arrested. How much the attacks on Planned Parenthood by Republican presidential candidates and members of Congress motivated Dear is a matter of conjecture, but clearly the inflammatory rhetoric has put the organization in the crosshairs. The more lethal San Bernardino massacre was much better planned and apparently inspired, if not orchestrated, by the Islamic State, the group claiming responsibility for November’s attacks in Paris.

But what both killings have in common is the ease with which the killers obtained their weapons. Even in San Bernardino, investigators have found that at least some of the weapons used [were purchased legally](#).

The San Bernardino and Colorado Springs killings add to the sickeningly long list of mass shootings in the United States in recent years – following Aurora, Colo; Newtown, Conn; Washington Navy Yard; Virginia Tech; and Charleston, S.C, to name only a few of the most deadly. And the media frenzy over the mass shootings obscures the fact that these deaths are dwarfed by the daily one-by-one carnage that occurs every day in our cities, suburbs and countryside due to the easy availability of guns, with about 30,000 deaths by firearms each year. In 2014, for the first time in 60 years, [guns killed as many Americans as car crashes](#).

Is stopping gun violence an issue that socialists should concern themselves with? So far it has not been a priority; it was not the subject of any of the resolutions or the priorities document adopted at the 2015 DSA Convention that took place last November – which was, to be sure, before either the San Bernardino or Colorado Springs incidents. And with the justified focus on the Sanders campaign and issues of economic and racial justice, restricting guns doesn't seem the most "socialist" of issues.

Perhaps it's time to re-think this outlook. It's not hard to imagine the ways in which the persistence of gun violence undermines our other priorities. Repeated mass shootings create fear and hysteria that stifle openness and democracy and give rise to right-wing hysteria of the sort that we are seeing from Republican presidential candidates and member of Congress. Also, in some cases, violence becomes a tool for directly attacking gains that come from democratic struggle. Thus Dear, enraged by public policies that have enhanced reproductive health services for women, attempts to overturn this progress at the point of a gun.

The evidence abounds that reducing the availability of guns reduces gun violence, a bit of logic that escapes the National Rifle Association and its wholly owned members of Congress. Most other developed countries restrict private gun ownership, in some cases making guns practically nonexistent. (Many adult Britons have never seen a gun in private hands, I learned on a recent trip to the United Kingdom). The United States has [five times the number of gun deaths per capita](#) than Portugal, the most violent country in Western Europe. [Great Britain](#) seldom reaches 50 homicides by firearm in a year, less than one-half of one percent of the U.S. total. Britain has similar economic and social pressures as the United States. What it doesn't have is guns.

Part of realizing the economic and social goals we socialists are working for is a safer, less violent society, one in which extremist groups and lone psychotics cannot aspire to undo democratically achieved social change with firearms. Getting rid of guns is a major part of the solution, and we should be part of it.

POSTSCRIPT: I had just finished drafting this article before attending the local DSA meeting on December 13 at Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library. As the meeting was nearing an end, a library staffer came into our room to inform us that a man with a gun had been spotted in the building and that we should all go into the auditorium for safety. We entered that room with a theater ensemble that had been rehearsing there; the staff locked the doors and we sat and waited.

Some hid under tables, others in an alcove where tables and chairs were stored. The recent mass murders were on everyone's mind. After a half hour we heard a gentle "hello" as a door was unlocked, and a library staffer announced that the coast was clear. It was not a mass killing, or a killing at all; rather, a man with a gun had robbed a library patron and escaped the building. As we left the library, it occurred to me that with all the attention given to the mass shootings, the incident we almost witnessed, a gun used to commit a robbery, was the much more common product of our gun culture. Non-fatal robberies involving guns are such a routine occurrence that they often don't make the newspapers, and Sunday's incident at the library went unmentioned by the *Post*. But these day-to-day uses of firearms to commit crimes can undermine our feeling of safety in public just as much as mass killings.

Guns causing interruptions of DSA meetings, it seems to me, is a sufficient reason in itself for socialists to back gun control.