

The Washington Socialist
Articles from the June 2014 Issue
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[Welcome to the June issue of the Washington Socialist](#)

Tuesday, June 3rd, 2014



Welcome to the June 2014 issue of the *Washington Socialist*, the email newsletter of Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America.

Our postponed election to the local's steering committee was accomplished at the May meeting, and we welcome new SC members Ingrid Goldstrom and Kurt Stand. Members who successfully stood for re-election were Co-chair Jose Gutierrez and incumbents Andy Feeney and Ross Templeton.

The local also approved and issued a statement at the May meeting on two conjoinable issues before the US government (the FCC and the Justice Department): supporting "Net Neutrality" and opposing the pending merger of Comcast Cable and Time Warner Cable, which would deliver 40 percent of cable subscribers to one megacorporation and further monopolize the delivery of broadband services. The statement was filed as a comment with the FCC and is posted [on the local's website](#), where you'll also find a path to make your own individual comment to the FCC.

This newsletter will keep you up on actions by the local during the summer. However, a summer schedule will obtain as it did last year: Our next appearance will be a combined July/August issue on Bastille Day, July 14. Our following September/Labor Day issue will mark the email newsletter *Washington Socialist's* second full year.

Several **important events** are coming up. First and soonest, DSA member and author Steve Early will read from and speak about his new book, *Save Our Unions*, at Busboys and Poets (the 14th and V location) tomorrow, Monday June 2, from 6:30-8 p.m. Details at <http://www.busboysandpoets.com/events/event/author-event-steve-early>

On June 12 our ally organization [Jobs With Justice celebrates its successes with an awards evening](#). DSA is involved in JWJ's work and several DSA members sit on the board. Kurt

Stand's article, below, fleshes out JWW's goals and actions and has more about the event and the awardees.

DSA member Cecily McMillan, whose trial and conviction for allegedly assaulting a police officer who manifestly mistreated her in a 2012 police sweep on the Occupy Wall Street site at Zuccotti Park outraged many, is in prison in New York City. The local is planning an event July 17 to raise and discuss her case and the larger questions of official retaliation against the Occupy movement; save that date [**UPDATE which is subject to change because an important court date for McMillan may intervene. Metro DC DSA will alert email newsletter recipients**]. Here and in the "Good Reads" article you can link to [Todd Gitlin's excellent summary](#) of the Cecily McMillan case.

Finally, we're going to be hitting you up for money this summer. Our annual dues campaign should reach you through this email stream, through the mails, or both, before the next midsummer issue of the newsletter is issued. We've got your issues and we're tackling them in a non-conventional, quite socialist manner. Give us, and yourself, a hand at keeping our place at the table.

WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE:

Local socialism

Kurt Stand outlines the work of Jobs With Justice and how it dovetails with ours: "A living wage for all, wage theft for none, demands for immigrant rights and the right for all workers to organize..." among other goals. The organization's June 12 awards event and the honorees are detailed in this account. [Read complete article](#)

Rain, rain, rain... we've had a lot this spring and the year is young. *Andy Feeney* explores the possible relationship between our quite damaging local weather and the climate change that corporations and their friends in office are resolutely doing nothing about (conversely, they're drilling and fracking with abandon). Should local governments beef up their defenses – and their zoning rules – to prepare for the likely worsening of these conditions and trends? [Read complete article](#)

Metro DC DSA backed Andy Shallal's candidacy in the mayoral primary with an endorsement and successful fundraiser. *Ingrid Goldstrom* reports on a post-election assessment by supporters and allies that traces a path for an improved radical presence in DC politics. [Read complete article](#)

In Maryland, the steady work of Maryland United for Peace and Justice underpins many political campaigns and social movements. *Kurt Stand* reports on the group's annual conference and the growth of a peace movement that is including many who wore the uniform in Iraq and

Afghanistan. [Read complete article](#)

Radical Practice

The barriers to a full eradication of racism and sexism in everyday social practice are well known to all. *Dan Adkins* explores the ways that those barriers emerge in surprising places and suggests ways to overcome them individually and collectively. [Read complete article](#)

The local had a very fruitful Socialist Salon session in April examining the fractured socialist left and proliferation of groups and tendencies. Here we continue documenting work that was presented at that Salon with *Andy Feeney's* historical exploration of how the left got to where it is. [Read complete article](#) And as a postscript, Feeney notes a possible disturbance in the force as ideology is questioned in the official publication of one of those current groups. [Read complete article](#)

Reviews

Many of today's political memes are covert appeals to deep social divisions – racial, mainly, but class and gender as well. Ian Haney Lopez's book, *Dog Whistle Politics*, outlines how the Right (mainly) exploits these divisions in seemingly innocuous ways, as *Bill Mosley* explains. [Read complete article](#)

Elizabeth Kolbert has detailed, in the *New Yorker* and in her books, how the age of humans has put the environment we know and the ecosystem we depend on at risk of disappearing. *Bill Boteler* reviews her latest, *The Sixth Extinction*. [Read complete article](#)

When we look for material for the socialist “elevator pitch,” a short and well-organized book by a witty writer can be a big help. *Woody Woodruff* reviews Terry Eagleton's aptly titled *Why Marx Was Right*. [Read complete article](#)

Ralph Fasannella, an artist whose work unabashedly celebrates labor's struggles and the lives of working people, is the subject of a significant exhibit at the Smithsonian American Art Museum for the 100th anniversary of his birth (he died in 1997). *Bill Mosley* has an appreciation and some personal memories. [Read complete article](#)

The remarkable new series *Cosmos*, updating Carl Sagan's 1980 blockbuster on the universe, is being masterfully conducted by Neal deGrasse Tyson. *Dan Adkins* has an update. [Read complete article](#)

FINALLY, our “Good Reads” roundup includes the Cecily McMillan article by Todd Gitlin, Sam Pizzigati's catchup on Piketty-arama, and a call from Bill McKibben to come to the barricades on climate change in September. [Read complete article](#)

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[Making Connections: Jobs With Justice Awards Dinner](#)

Sunday, June 1st, 2014

The Washington Socialist <> June 2014

By Kurt Stand

Under the pressure of events, the need to address immediate concerns against both business and political pressure, many unions and social justice organizations develop a narrow focus. The need to respond to membership interest or community need often puts causes and organizations in separate tracks of action, looking after their own without direct engagement with the issues of others. It is this narrowness that lies behind the success of neo-liberalism dating back to the Reagan era, and the ability of a corporate minority to define our nation's political agenda. It was the recognition of the need to break out of that box by building mutual support between various union and social justice organizing initiatives that led some AFL-CIO affiliates to found Jobs with Justice in 1987 as an independent network of locally-based labor-community coalitions – including in Washington DC.

A living wage for all, wage theft for none, demands for immigrant rights and the right for all workers to organize – the breadth of accomplishments being celebrated at [DC Jobs With Justice 12th Annual “I’ll Be There Awards”](#) celebration is a reflection of the interconnection of struggles with which the organization is engaged. The event will be held on Thursday, June 12, at AFL-CIO, 815 16th Street NW, between 6:00 – 8:00 pm honoring two individuals and two organizations that reflect the values and commitment at the heart of JWJ's work. The names and some of the arenas of engagement of each awardee tell the story of those values and commitments. Alya Solomon, formerly of the Metro DC Labor Council, played a critical role in the successful campaign to raise the minimum wage, and in the ongoing campaign to pass legislation granting all workers paid sick days. Her work embraced meeting the needs of private and public sector workers, defending union members facing unfair treatment, and initiatives to create more union jobs. Reverend Graylan Hagler, the Senior Minister at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, who has served as UNITE HERE Local 25 chaplain, currently directs Faith Strategies, an interfaith group that brings together labor and community concerns – concerns manifested in efforts to ensure that Walmart treats workers and consumers fairly, to ensure patient safety and safe staffing at DC hospitals, reclaim quality public education for all students, and to end deportations.

Also being honored is *Sasha Bruce Youthwork*, an organization that has worked for decades amongst teens, including homeless youth, and expanded it to youth-adult worker-rights advocacy by joining with the Washington Interfaith Network, the DC Jobs Council, and DC JWJ in several campaigns, including that in defense of public transit and for a living wage. They have also been engaged in initiatives to end hiring discrimination against people with criminal histories; in particular supporting legislation to “Ban the Box,” – the box referring to the part of a job application which asks potential new hires about their criminal history, s an impediment to employment for individuals after they have served a prison sentence. Finally, there is *Trabajadores Unidos de Washington*, which developed out of an organizing project at various day laborer hiring sites around DC and has developed as an independent organization that has won wage theft victories against employers that failed to pay workers the pay they had earned, the granting of drivers licenses without regard to citizenship, and abolition of the anti-immigrant

“Secure Communities,” which was designed to use local law enforcement to aid and abet deportations.

Listing the accomplishments of *Alya Solomon*, *Reverend Graylan Hagler*, *Sasha Bruce Youthwork* and *Trabajadores Unidos de Washington* speaks to the breadth of DC JWJ’s concerns and the way it implements its program of mutual support. In addition to supporting diverse initiatives and campaigns, JWJ has been holding meetings to develop an anchor campaign – which will shortly be announced — that will bring together the concerns of as many of its constituencies as possible. This form of organizing that pulls unique concerns together rather than building coalitions based on the lowest common denominator (and thus ignoring the concern of many, particularly the most marginalized) has been an element in DSA’s approach to building alternative politics throughout our history – which is why Metro DC DSA is one of the 60 member organizations of DC JWJ. This is all the more reason why members should attend the “**I’ll Be There Awards**” on June 12 – as an act of solidarity and as a means of furthering our own engagement in working-class social justice struggles. Divide-and-conquer politics will only be overcome when all organizing unites particular needs with general interests; that is the way to unite equality with rights, justice with freedom.

[“Dog Whistle Politics”: How Silence on Racial Justice Helps the Right](#)

Sunday, June 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2014**

By *Bill Mosley*

Review of *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* by Ian Haney Lopez. Oxford University Press, 2014, 230 pp.

Barack Obama’s election to the presidency in 2008 gave hope to many liberal-to-progressive Americans that the post-racial era had truly arrived, or at least was within sight. Did the election of an African American president portend a new era where the nation could put the legacy of race behind it? Perhaps then it would be possible to build a united progressive movement where racial divisions no longer prevent class unity.

Alas, as we now know, race and racism are very much still with us. In *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class*, Ian Haney Lopez makes a compelling case that racial politics are only growing more pernicious, exploited by the right to advance an agenda favoring corporations and the wealthy. Liberals and the left,

meanwhile, in avoiding the issue of race, offer no opposition to right-wing race-baiting. Obama himself has consistently avoided emphasizing his race or using his office to promote race-specific remedies – in large part, Lopez says, *because* of his race, to avoid being marginalized at a “black” president.

Lopez defines using a dog whistle as “speaking in code to a target audience,” using language that would resonate with the target group but that would lack salience to the larger public – much a literal dog whistle is audible only to dogs. Groups across the political spectrum use “dog whistle” language to communicate to their in-crowds (heaven knows socialists often speak in jargon unintelligible to the general public). In Haney’s usage, “dog whistle politics” refers to “coded talk centered on race” that would be offensive if expressed in explicit racial terms. Hence the right uses rhetoric excoriating such targets as welfare cheats, predatory criminals and drug dealers that registers in the ears of their white audiences as referring to racial minorities, although no racial terms are used. When challenged, the “whistlers” stoutly deny any charges of racial bias and turn charges of racism back on their accusers.

The goal of dog whistle politics is not racial oppression itself, but rather to attack programs that benefit the wider middle and working classes and to promote the conservative agenda of lower taxes, reduced regulation, attacks on worker rights and the like. By connecting such liberal programs as health care, public education and income support in the public mind to “undeserving minorities,” the right can fan opposition to these programs among whites of modest means, even though many of these programs benefit them as well. Thus, racial solidarity trumps class interests to the detriment of most Americans.

Dog-whistle rhetoric enjoys a long history. After open discrimination on the basis of race began to break down after the Supreme Court’s *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision banning school segregation, southern racists employed the coded term “states’ rights” as their defense against federally mandated desegregation. Barry Goldwater used racially coded language in his 1964 presidential campaign, which was refined for Richard Nixon’s “Southern Strategy” and developed further in Ronald Reagan’s attacks on “welfare queens” and affirmative action.

Dog-whistle politics reached full fruition during George H.W. Bush’s 1988 race against Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis in the ads featuring Willie Horton, the Massachusetts convict on a weekend furlough who stabbed and bound a man and raped his fiancée. Bush’s ads never employed specific racial terms, but the images of Horton, an African American, got the message across, helped Bush paint Dukakis as soft on crime and send the Democrat to defeat.

While white voters’ response to racial appeals often undercuts their economic interests, Lopez argues that their behavior is not necessarily irrational. The advancement of racial minorities’ interests threatens their social and economic status, stoking fears that minorities will take their jobs or cause their property values to fall. Many lower-income whites feel that efforts to improve the lot of minorities, such as school and residential integration, have made them the guinea pigs for social experiments, while wealthy whites float above the fray in their private schools and pricy, exclusive neighborhoods.

Lopez cites studies showing that while many whites are susceptible to coded racial language, explicit race-based appeals turn them off. For instance, after the Willie Horton ads had badly wounded Dukakis, Jesse Jackson condemned them for their racial pandering. After Jackson spoke up, support for Bush declined, although not enough to cost him the victory. Likewise, Senate Republican Leader Trent Lott suffered a rapid fall after he publicly waxed nostalgic about Sen. Strom Thurmond's segregation-based 1948 presidential campaign.

Lopez makes a compelling argument that racial resentments were a major, if not the major, factor in the rapid rise of the reactionary, nearly all-white Tea Party movement after Obama's election. "The fire that put so many Tea Partiers into the streets in 2009 and into the voting booths in 2010 was a fury at Obama himself . . . The contradictions others have noted in the Tea Party, so difficult to resolve without reference to race, become intelligible when looked at through the lens of dog whistle politics," he writes.

The solution for liberals, then, is to stop avoiding discussion of race. Rather, it is time to talk openly about how America's history of slavery and Jim Crow produced a society in which African Americans, Latinos and other minorities continue to be disadvantaged. Such a frank discussion, Lopez maintains, is a necessary precondition to uniting working-class and middle-class Americans around an economic program that will challenge the privileges of the wealthy.

Lopez's analysis echoes the thinking of Thomas Frank and his landmark 2004 book *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, which also focused on how the right bamboozles whites of modest means to get them to vote against their economic interests. Lopez, however, takes issue with Frank's de-emphasizing race as a factor in white support for conservative politics – Frank gave greater weight to social issues such as gay rights, religion and abortion. Lopez doesn't dismiss these, but argues that the primacy of race in American politics and society far outweigh the "moral" issues Frank cites. Especially given the rapid gains in LGBT rights since Frank's book appeared, Lopez has a point – race is the more persistent problem.

While Lopez doesn't excuse Democrats who have used coded racial appeals – he indicts both Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton on this score – he also shows how dog whistle politics is a central pillar of Republican strategy and is used as a cudgel against even moderate Democratic policies. Obama and other Democrats must fight back by directly addressing racial justice while articulating a positive vision of government, Lopez says.

Lopez's analysis is sound as far as it goes, but for socialists, he falters when he states that "it is not great wealth itself, or corporations writ large, that are the problem." Rather, the culprits are "self-interested billionaires and giant corporations that attempt to distort the democratic process to serve their own narrow interests." "Distorting the democratic process" is what corporations do on a daily basis. To follow Lopez's argument on a logical path that he himself does not take, one must conclude that race will continue to play a corrosive role in American politics until wealth is removed entirely from the democratic process. Liberal solutions will help, but radical ones will be needed to build a politics based on the fundamental interests of economics and class, rather than the socially concocted diversions of race and ethnicity.

[Analysis of Shallal Campaign Points Way to Progressive Electoral Politics in DC](#)

Sunday, June 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2014**

By Ingrid Goldstrom

On April 28, a standing room only crowd of city-wide DC activists packed the Institute for Policy Studies to critically analyze progressive Andy Shallal's run for mayor of Washington DC. The highly energized group sought to create next steps for when, not if, Andy and other progressives seek elective offices. (You may remember that Andy was endorsed by the local DC Metro area DSA, which held a successful fundraiser on his behalf in March.). The meeting was chaired by E. Ethelbert Miller and presenters included Donna Brazile, Steve Cobble, Jonetta Rose Barras, and Joy Zarembka.

On the plus side, it was acknowledged that Andy brought an open discussion of race and inequality, gentrification, and education reform to the forefront of the campaign; in many instances, other candidates adopted his stance on issues and labeled themselves progressives.

Andy's personal reflections included his thoughts about the wisdom of running within the Democratic Party. He felt that raising money for the campaign was the toughest hurdle to overcome and noted that progressives tend to give to causes and not political candidates.

Lessons learned were also addressed. A recurrent theme was that the city lacks an infrastructure to support progressive candidates, unlike those coalitions that successfully helped bring to power Chokwe Lumumba in Jackson, Mississippi, Bill deBlasio in New York City and Kshama Sawant in Seattle. There was even a mea culpa from one organization's head who admitted that while he and others supported Andy as individuals, he didn't press his organization to commit to Andy's campaign. (We need to ask ourselves if this was true of the DC local unions. DSA can feel good in this regard because it did literally put its money where its mouth is.)

Another theme was the need to bring the "millennials" into local politics. Many who came to DC were brought here by the Obama wave, yet few have transferred their interest in national policy to local issues. This largely transient population is less likely to even register to vote in DC.

So, where do we go from here? There is plenty to be done. A first step is for us to be at the table to develop a strategy to build the infrastructure of a (real) progressive coalition so that the bodies are in place for Andy's (or any other true progressive) next run. We need to make certain that any coalition is like the Rainbow Coalition, bringing together people of all ethnicities and social classes to recognize and fight for our common interests. For those of us more comfortable with

taking concrete immediate actions, we can become involved in the movement to introduce rank order voting/run off voting to DC and/or join a movement to register and energize the youngest or newest city residents.

[Can the earth survive the Age of Man?](#)

Sunday, June 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2014**

By Bill Boteler

A review of *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* by Elizabeth Kolbert
Henry Holt and Company, \$28. 2014

In her new book, *The Sixth Extinction*, Elizabeth Kolbert sets out to explain why the planet seems to be in a spasm of mass extinctions of plants and animals and to introduce the relevant scientific concepts, illustrated by her globetrotting visits to locations where these are taking place.

For those new to the concept of mass extinctions, the book's title refers to the big five prehistoric mass extinction events as well as the current feared mass extinction. What these events all have in common includes a reversal of the ordinary rules of gradual change and adaptation and a loss of a large percentage of species in a relatively short time. During such periods, the traits which allowed species to thrive are rendered useless by sudden environmental change.

Kolbert is an engaging science writer for *The New Yorker* and the short chapters are quick reading and should help introduce scientific concepts easily. She starts out with early naturalists trying to make sense of the fossilized remains of extinct animals within the context of the discovery of evolution. The uninitiated will discover how the idea of geological strata – a layer cake of rock going back in time – was discovered along with the existence of previous “creations”.

Initial theories of evolution favored the gradual change of living things adapting to their environment favoring survival of the fittest. The idea of catastrophic mass die-offs was resisted until evidence gradually began to mount and it is only in our lifetimes, for example, that the near-total annihilation of dinosaurs by a meteor strike was finally accepted with great resistance by the scientific community.

What has emerged from these studies is a picture of extreme geological events taking place, making life on earth suddenly difficult for a large number of life forms – sometimes in a very short timespan. A lot of this is geological sleuthing. Whole groups of creatures suddenly vanish

from the geological strata. What happened? Sometimes it was continents crashing together and altering global weather patterns, other times it may have been massive volcanic eruptions spewing gases into the atmosphere and killing off life in the oceans.

Once she introduces us to the idea of cataclysmic environmental change, Kolbert shows how it relates to our own epoch, which some geologists want to rename the Anthropocene (age of man). Humans are burning fossil fuel stored away in rocks over hundreds of billions of years and, in the process, changing the composition of the atmosphere back to what it was before prehistoric forests sucked the carbon out of the air. As we do this our climate returns to prehistoric conditions. Few currently living things are adapted to such a climate.

But as the book makes clear, there is more at work than climate change. Humans have unleashed a whole host of drastic changes that by themselves and, in interaction with each other, make it difficult for current plants and animals to adapt quickly enough to avoid going extinct.

Some of these include: acidification of the oceans as CO² mixes with seawater, conversion of large areas of the land surface to human uses, destruction of forests, and moving plants, animals and their diseases across oceans where they can wipe out the native species that encounter them.

Kolbert goes everywhere. She is hunting frogs with a flashlight in the jungle of Panama, diving on the Great Barrier Reef, observing experimental forest fragments in the Amazon, walking on bat carcasses in an abandoned mine in upstate New York or watching a rhino being inseminated at the Cincinnati Zoo. All the while she meets local scientists and conservationists at work. This makes for lively reading for people who may find a discussion of science to be off-putting.

But she lays out the relevant concepts clearly enough. We are an ingenious species that has managed to invade all corners of the planet in a period of just tens of thousands of years. On the way we gradually killed off most of the large animals that had not evolved to be wary of us. We created agriculture and modified a large part of the vegetation covering the earth's surface. We created the industrial revolution and began to alter the composition of the atmosphere and the acidity of the oceans. We moved organisms across oceans where they reduced the native species. In fact, we even killed off or out-competed our near relatives, the Neanderthals, but not before mating with them.

She suggests we are a restless, "Faustian" species out to change everything in our path without always realizing we are doing it. At the end of the book she tries to add an upbeat note that we are also very caring about other species and what we are doing and that we can still do things which may help the situation. I expect future books may have more upbeat stories about how people are trying to address the problem.

As for the human impact of these events, I was impressed by a couple of things. She discussed one experiment where scientists off the coast of Italy are studying sea life near ocean vents where natural CO² is bubbling into the water. Where the level of acidity reaches what it may be in the world's oceans by 2100 AD, at that location she describes: "...the underwater equivalent of a vacant lot" (page 122). In other words, if we stay on our current path as far as climate

change, we are looking at a wipeout of life in the ocean by the end of the century, or at least that is how I interpret it. The ocean is responsible for producing not just fish but a large part of the oxygen we breathe – about half. How will this much extinction affect our supply of oxygen?

I was also struck by a description of what happened to the inhabitants of “biosphere 2”, the experimental, closed ecosystem created decades ago in Arizona. Four bionauts entered that sealed environment for two years to live in a simulation of the planet’s ecosystems. It had farmlands, a rainforest, and its own mini ocean with a coral reef. Toward the end of their stay, the inhabitants didn’t have enough food or oxygen to breathe. Is this just a coincidence? What happened to biosphere 2 is not identical to what is happening to biosphere 1, but we are also experimenting with what happens when you put 7-9 billion human beings and their pollution-spewing industries into an enclosed bottle.

Also, members of DSA may be interested in the observation that one of the reasons for the success of our species, unlike other primates, is our capacity to cooperate. That, along with our ability to create and use symbols such as language rather than our use of tools, which are used by other species, is probably at the root of the Sixth Extinction.

[Fasanella captured the pain, joy of working-class America](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2014**

By Bill Mosley

I met Ralph Fasanella in June 1988 at New York’s Roseland Ballroom during a tribute to Michael Harrington, the founder and co-chair of Democratic Socialists of America. Harrington was suffering from a cancer that would claim his life a year later. But in the summer of 1988 he was attempting to fight the disease, and was still actively working to build DSA and the American left – possibly working harder than ever, knowing how little time he had left. Harrington’s appreciative friends and supporters organized this tribute while Harrington was still with them, and hundreds of people turned out to hear a galaxy of stars of the left – including Barbara Ehrenreich, William Winpisinger, Edward Asner, Eleanor Holmes Norton – and others speak of what Harrington’s life and work meant to them and to politics in the United States.

Fasanella was there as well, not as a speaker but at a table selling print versions of his paintings. I had admired Fasanella’s work and went over to chat with him. About a minute into our conversation Fasanella, no doubt identifying me as someone with more free time than cash, said he had to step out for a few minutes, and would I watch his table for him? I readily agreed, and over the 15 minutes or so he was away I sold a couple of his prints. When he returned, he signed

three prints and gave them to me as thank-you gifts. They now hang in my house as some of my most treasured possessions.

By then Fasanella had been “discovered.” A 1972 cover story in *New York* magazine came after three decades of churning out his large, detail-packed canvases of the joy and pain of American working-class life – especially through the lens of early 20th-century New York. His paintings were already known and appreciated in union halls and to connoisseurs of “naïve” art (a label Fasanella hated), but after the story and a full-scale one-man show he became something of a celebrity in the art world.

“Celebrity” was a label the blunt, plain-spoken Fasanella would wear uneasily, for his painting was always rooted in the everyday life of the American worker, the men and women who toiled long hours in the factory, struggled to provide for their families, and – a critical part of his narrative – fought for their rights by organizing unions and taking to the streets. But I think Fasanella, who died in 1997, would be pleased at the exhibit of 27 of his works currently on display at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. [“Ralph Fasanella: Lest We Forget”](#) arrives on the 100th anniversary of the artist’s birth and covers works from 1947, near the beginning of his artistic career, to the end of his life. The exhibit is only a slice of Fasanella’s extensive body of work, but includes some of his best and most representative paintings.

Accompanying the May 2 opening of the exhibit was a showing of the early 1990s documentary “Fasanella” at AFL-CIO headquarters, part of DC LaborFest. Appearing at the showing were Fasanella’s son Marc and two grandchildren, as well as Glen Percy, the film’s producer. A short clip from the film runs at the Smithsonian exhibit.

Fasanella never took an art lesson, and his paintings were dismissed by some critics for their lack of polish and their almost-but-not-quite realism. Perhaps most of all, Fasanella fell outside the conventions of late 20th-century art because his paintings were *about* something; they had a point of view and lacked the fashionable detachment of the high-art circles. Fasanella worked for years as a union organizer before taking up painting, and labor struggles and the effort to organize unions are the subjects of many of his paintings. The 1912 Lawrence, Mass. “Bread and Roses” textile workers’ strike is featured in several of his paintings, including his monumental 1977 work “Meeting at the Commons: Lawrence 1912” with its dramatic scenario of a huge workers’ demonstration under empty factory windows and troops marching to suppressing the uprising. A more somber work is “Mill Worker: Night Shift” with women visible in the factory windows, Hopperesque in their loneliness and isolation.

Fasanella drew from his own family life in his paintings, especially from his childhood in which his Italian immigrant parents struggled to support a growing family. His father Joe, an iceman, consumed by anger and bitterness over hard work that failed to lift him and his family out of poverty, abandoned the family when Ralph was a child. A series of surreal paintings from the 1950s depict Joe as a crucified Christ figure, with ice tongs serving as a crown of thorns. Fasanella’s depictions of his family culminate in his 1972 “Family Supper.” An image of Fasanella’s mother Ginevre dominates a scene reminiscent of Da Vinci’s “Last Supper,” and the missing Joe is visible in his familiar crucifixion pose on a wall calendar. The motto “Lest We Forget” is inscribed in brickwork above the scene.

From early in his development as a painter, many of Fasanella's works had an explicitly political edge. One of his earliest paintings, 1947's "Pie in the Sky" – the title drawn from the chorus of the old Joe Hill song "The Preacher and the Slave" – contrasts scenes of poverty and hardship with a gleaming stained-glass church that seeks to distract the masses with promises of heavenly riches. His political vision sharpened in the 1950s with complex, multilayered canvasses attacking McCarthyism and depicting Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, executed for alleged spying, as sacrifices to the era's hysteria. "McCarthy Press" centers around a pyramid of news headlines – not only political news but also sports and Hollywood gossip – as a crane lowers the Rosenbergs' coffin into the ground. "The Rosenbergs' Grey Day" shows the couple stoically awaiting their fate, their children playing at their sides, while all around are images of incarcerated prisoners, a "Save the Rosenbergs" demonstration, a garden party, laborers hard at work in a factory. Even in the face of momentous events, life goes on, Fasanella tells us.

Perhaps the most disturbing canvas in the exhibit is "An American Tragedy," which tells numerous stories within its 40×90 inches. The central theme is the assassination of President Kennedy, who is depicted as yet another sacrifice to the greed and reactionary politics of the time. One has to look hard to spot Lee Harvey Oswald and his rifle, for in Fasanella's telling the assassin was only a tool of larger forces. The picture includes klansmen in full regalia, civil rights workers attacked by police, Martin Luther King Jr. leading a peaceful demonstration, Barry Goldwater heading a triumphal motorcade, and most prominently a man dressed in a mix of business and KKK attire, riding a black horse that tramples Kennedy's grave.

Fasanella's final painting, "Farewell Comrade/End of the Cold War," was perhaps his most political statement, and the one in which he most clearly aired his socialist ideals. Here Lenin is being laid to rest in a crowded stadium, surrounded by the names of prominent American leftists and socialists (John Reed, Jack London), and news headlines such as "Reagan Triples Deficit with Military." The message is clear: Communism's death took with it a share of the socialist ideals that it tried to embody, however imperfectly.

Yet Fasanella's paintings are not all workers' struggles and political anguish. Many of his works also depict the joy of community, of neighborhood, or workingmen and their families enjoying a respite from difficult lives. In particular, images of baseball run through his works, both organized games – as in "Night Game: Practice Time" — and the impromptu street games of children. But the sport can take on a darker cast, as mere games in the face of tragedy – as in 1979's "Watergate," as a baseball game continues in the midst of images of American corruption and greed.

In the documentary, a student asks Fasanella which famous artist most inspired him. He cites Van Gogh, and his layering of paints and color patterns do bring that painter to mind. But perhaps the "fine" artist Fasanella more closely channeled was Marc Chagall, with whom he shared the allegorical themes, vivid colors and his deliberate use of figures that were out of scale to each other.

But in the end, Fasanella copied no one: not Van Gogh, nor Grandma Moses or Edward Hicks to whom he was often compared. He was *sui generis*, and when his paintings finally came to be appreciated, it was for their uniqueness, not their adherence to any school or formal style. Most

of all, they are celebrated for forcefully conveying the ideals he lived and worked by, as summarized in his motto: “Remember who you are. Remember where you came from. Don’t forget the past. Change the world.”

The Smithsonian exhibit runs through August 3. In addition to the exhibit, a good source on Fasanella’s life and work is Patrick Wilson’s 1973 book *Fasanella’s City: The paintings of Ralph Fasanella with the story of his life and art* (Ballantine Books).

[Fighting Discrimination Using the Long View](#)

Sunday, June 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2014**

By Daniel Adkins

Sometimes we meet biased people but do not always have a deep enough relationship to have a significant discussion – but we might try. Other times we interact with family, co-workers, or comrades and it would be foolish not to use our connections to question about certain beliefs. This is all good, but we still might remember that we all become dated by the times in which we grow up. This is apparent when we see old white men using racist words. They got their world view in their youth and the reality of today’s diversity must be an assault to their mind. A girlfriend who went to Howard University lent me some books to read back in the day. One was a biography of Colonel Robert Shaw, who was popularized in the film *Glory*. Colonel Shaw died fighting to save the Union and end slavery. I am not sure you can ask more of anyone. However, when he was on an expedition with his troops, he did act overly polite with the mistress of a slave plantation, which disgusted his troops. The troops then showed him the implements of discipline (torture) of the plantation. This section made me think that one can intellectually be opposed to something (be an abolitionist), but still not know its full shocking reality. That we can never really walk in someone else’s shoes does not mean we cannot show service and solidarity.

A quirk in how some Americans view the world is that some of us see that all important things happened after they were born and the other stuff is just history and not important. This might be called the “point” view of history or the just “today” approach as opposed to a “vector” approach which might see us moving through time and into a future. The point view, meaning mainly viewing your present, is popular for many, especially those who only judge groups on their current achievements. The “point” approach probably is wired into us going back to all our ancestors, because not paying attention to our immediate situational awareness would have led us to be someone else’s lunch. The “vector” approach or “viewing the movement of history” would see the need for a larger knowledge base to include history and the sciences. The vector approach implies a situational awareness not of today or just the few decades we as individuals have been on Earth, but of the cosmos, human history, and at least a good guess of our future. Admittedly

we cannot know all, but trying to have a grasp of the movement of history and change is necessary in today's society in order to understand societal and climate change.

If we use the longer-view approach, critiquing biases can be based on viewing human reality and history on a more factual basis. For those of us in the West, it should be humbling that China and India have had the highest percent of the world's GDPs and level of science for the longest time of the last two millennia, and that time is returning. Now, in 2014, China has the largest GDP of any country and is reclaiming its old position. A fuller knowledge of history aids our humility and should deflate our ethnic grandiosity.

Some men disparage women's abilities. This may harken back to the days when physical force was a factor in production or war. However, it is long past the day that physical force has not been replaced by mechanical or computer operations. Also the process of sexual selection does not reflect highly on either sex when men walk into lampposts or women act dumb. Although women are not prominent in the physical sciences, times are changing and as the program COSMOS (see article) shows, women have made great contributions. In the last hundred years women have gone from a few college graduates to the majority. If a guy is not impressed by women's achievements, he should look at the trend of society and it should be humbling. Also there are recent studies that show that the more women in bank leadership in the U.K., the less financial losses the banks had in the last recession. It is true that men take more chances but that is not always wise.

Historical claims of racial superiority do not pass today's laugh test, such as claiming slaves were inferior but not allowing them to learn to read or write or be educated. It is true that we can see color easier than understanding that color is controlled by only 10 of 30-40,000 genes. That a Euro-American mother sent her child (Barack Obama) to an elite high school, aided him, and he became president suggest that with the proper education and help the U. S. could have many more highly qualified people and less poverty. That some of us get every educational advantage while other of us struggle getting a job or paying of debt does not mean the accomplished are there just because of their IQs. It does mean that society is not living up to its potential and that may bite us as the world develops and international competition grows.

[Good reads for JUNE – the Washington Socialist](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2014**

Can't get enough Piketty? Sam Pizzigati's newsletter on inequality, "Too Much," has a special Piketty issue... he calls it a "survey of chattering class chatter" on the phenomenal success of a French scholar's long book of empirical economics... <http://www.toomuchonline.org/tmweekly.html>

DSA member Cecily McMillan's conviction and sentencing for assaulting a police officer in the police sweep of Zuccotti Park's Occupy Wall Street encampment in 2012 outraged more than just her allies on the left – it was a clear act of exemplary vengeance by authorities. Veteran chronicler of the left Todd Gitlin's blog post in the New Yorker makes the circumstances and outcome plain: <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2014/05/cecily-mcmillan-from-zuccotti-park-to-rikers.html>

Ta-Nehisi Coates's cage-rattling cover article in *The Atlantic* has rekindled the furor around the word, the concept and the politics of "reparations." If by some chance you missed it, here it is: <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

Climate change activist Bill McKibben rounds up the latest bad news on climate change in an article in the issue of Rolling Stone dated June 5. He is hoping for "tens of thousands" of people to attend a Sept. 20 and Sept. 21 march in New York City to demand action on global climate change coinciding with a global summit on the subject called by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon. The article is at <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/a-call-to-arms-an-invitation-to-demand-action-on-climate-change-20140521>

The NYT's economics writer Eduardo Porter scans the increasingly concentrated and corporatized economic landscape and wonders who is getting hurt by this presumed "growth"... <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/28/business/economy/concentrated-markets-take-big-toll-on-economy.html?rref=business&module=Ribbon&version=origin®ion=Header&action=click&contentCollection=Business%20Day&pgtype=article>

We are quite sure you can help us with more Good Reads. Send them, anytime you see them, to woodlanham@gmail.com

[Is the ISO line showing some wrinkles?](#)

Sunday, June 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2014**

To many democratic socialists, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) seems a sectarian cult with little love for internal democracy, much less political diversity on the left. But in the Summer 2014 edition of the group's journal *International Socialist Review (ISR)*, associate editor Joel Geier appears to argue that democratic debate is in fact crucial to socialism.

In a long article on Grigory Zinoviev, a protégé of Lenin's who in 1920s helped to forge the Communist Third International into a unified and disciplined movement dedicated to the defending the Soviet Union at all costs, Geier contends that Zinoviev – with Stalin behind him – helped to kill the revolutionary character of Communism in the 1920s by banning all organized political factions within it. “Before 1924, factions existed within all Communist parties,” Geier writes, adding: “The right to form factions was and is a basic democratic right in any socialist organization. Without it, the membership is denied the right to think, to dissent, and to come up with alternative policies ... (I)t cannot bring the living experience of the rank and file with their connection to the non-party working class and social movements into creating, developing, extending, and correcting party policy.”

As Geier expresses it, “If workers cannot control their own party, they cannot become fit to rule, to run society ... (and) without workers' democracy there is no revolutionary workers' party, no matter what it calls itself.” Geier admits that Trotsky himself forgot this point in the early 1920s when he “championed the banning of factions and a one-party state.” Yet without demonizing Trotsky or other Bolsheviks for this mistake, Geier argues, “neither should we uncritically accept, because of their authority, the views of our ancestors.”

Just what the article signifies in terms of actual ISO policies is hard to judge. But DSA members who are curious can find it in ISR's issue number 93. At press time the article had not been posted online yet on ISR's web site, at <http://isreview.org/issue/93>.

–Andy Feeney

[Making Private Conscience Public: Uniting Peace with Justice in Maryland](#)

Sunday, June 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2014**

By Kurt Stand

“Peace and Justice through the Generations: Passing the Torch for a Better World,” was the theme of Maryland United for Peace and Justice's 29th annual conference, held at the Unitarian

Universalist church in Annapolis, April 25-26. A coalition of various peace advocacy and social justice organizations, MUPJ's conference provides workshops and forums that allow activists to sharpen their skills, bring on-going issues into focus, and lay the basis for further initiatives to change our world for the better.

That commitment was well-expressed by Paul Chappell, a West Point graduate and Iraq War veteran who spoke of his personal transformation from someone who didn't question our military policies and overseas war, from someone who listened to and accepted Rush Limbaugh's view of the world, into a peace activist who questions what he is told, questions the morality and practicality of US overseas policies — and thus today is engaged in building a movement to “wage peace” not war. Kristi Casteel gave a moving tribute to her son, Joshua, another war veteran turned peace activist who died from a cancer likely caused by his exposure to uranium deposits and burn pits used by the US military in Iraq. In a video recording of one of his speeches, Joshua, who served as an interrogator at Abu Ghraib, states that there is no such thing as a private conscience; conscience must be public to be real. He made that point in reference to himself, noting that he initially believed that being a humane interrogator would be better for prisoners than facing a person filled with hate – but he ultimately concluded that this was an impossible contradiction, that an oppressive system can't be made better by the good intentions of a few people working within it. Rather, he came to believe that our wars, all war, had to be opposed and ended root and branch. Thus he joined Iraq Veterans Against the War, addressed audiences across the world, and wrote plays speaking to what he saw and learned, including *Returns* and *The Interrogation Room*.

Social activism for peace necessarily becomes activism for open democratic governance, as those who profit from militarism inevitably try to shield their actions from the public. That connection was made by J. Kirk Wiebe, who lost his job and suffered from government harassment because of his NSA (National Security Agency) whistle-blowing, and Kathleen McClellan, the National Security and Human Rights Counsel of the Government Accountability Project. Their discussion of government attempts to prevent truth-telling speaks to the broad threat to democratic civil liberties as witnessed by the prosecution of Chelsea Manning and the attempts to extradite Julian Assange and Edward Snowden.

MUPJ's conference, however, was not about sitting and listening. Most of the time was taken by numerous small, participatory workshops that focused on issues ranging from building a movement to end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank to the building of peace initiatives amongst divided populations in Northern Ireland and Cyprus. Closer to home, a workshop discussed the campaign to build support in Maryland for an initiative to amend the Constitution and end the disgrace of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon* decisions allowing unlimited private campaign spending that is turning “public elections into private auctions.” Other workshops addressed various aspects of our criminal-justice system which is itself a model of injustice, robbing countless youth – especially African Americans and Latinos — of their future, providing them little or no meaningful education while they are locked up, little help when they re-enter society. One session focused on the particularly cruel injustice of a Maryland law that automatically sends juveniles accused of felonies to adult jails.

Developing skills to build trust between generations and skills to build a movement for peace that is as humane and open in its organizing as the vision which animates activism was another workshop theme, as were workshops to help older participants navigate retirement and aging while staying engaged and connected to youth. If there was a weakness in the gathering, it was that the average age of attendees was too high. Hope, however, was present with the acknowledgment of high school students who participate in anti-violence and pro-peace activities. Coming from the “Gandhi Brigade” at Montgomery-Blair High School in Silver Spring, from Bladensburg High School in Prince George’s County, and the Key School in Annapolis, these young people provided inspiration as examples that future generations are taking up the challenge to create a better world.

Giving recognition to teens engaged in peace work is part of a process that aims to help them find the path toward a lifetime commitment to peace and justice. That will only be possible if conference participants and other activists across the state find the means to build long-lasting bridges connecting peace activism to a vision of sustainable development that is inclusionary, participatory and environmentally sound. So there is a need to strengthen on all sides the connection of campaigns to end militarism with social justice campaigns such as those to raise the minimum wage, strengthen labor rights and legalize the status of immigrants. The concrete tasks that lay ahead were laid out in State Senator Jamie Raskin’s address to the conference in which he spoke of a Maryland progressive agenda that is building support for the twin goals of peace and justice.

[Rain, Rain, Rain, Rain Is This What Climate Change Looks Like In the Greater Metro Washington Region?](#)

Sunday, June 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2014**

By Andy Feeney

Heavier rains and more destructive floods are two kinds of weather events that atmospheric researchers commonly expect to result from continued greenhouse warming. According to the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), scientists now have “medium confidence” that higher average global temperatures already have begun to generate more intense precipitation events like these across North America. A National Climate Assessment (NCA) report released by the Obama administration on May 6 further concludes that in the northeastern United States in particular, the frequency of extreme rainstorms and snowstorms has risen by more than 70 percent since the late 1950s; the NCA adds that further increases can be expected so long as climate change continues.

Is it possible if not rather likely, therefore, that the heavy and sometimes destructive rains that the Metro Washington DC region has seen since late April may have be largely due to climate change, aka “global warming”?

And pragmatically speaking, should local residents conclude that increasingly severe rainstorms may be becoming the “new normal” for our area, one that local governments should address through more proactive land-use policies and stepped-up investments in water-related infrastructure?

Climate experts nearly always refrain from attributing specific weather events to long-term trends in climate, and no one seems to be publicly linking the earth’s warming average temperatures to the remarkable wet spring our region has recently experienced. But whatever the cause (or causes), the Metro DC area and adjacent parts of Virginia and Maryland have been hit with extremely intense rains over the past few weeks. These singular events, dominating the news short-term, add up to a more ominous trend. Total precipitation for this year, so far, is more than 30 percent above normal.

The most dramatic downpour came on April 30, when the Metro region was visited by a massive but slow-moving storm system that had previously generated a spate of deadly tornadoes in the Midwest and South before deluging Pensacola, Florida with more than 20 inches of rain over a two-day period. When the storm struck the Metro D.C. area, it set new precipitation records in the rain gauges at Reagan, Dulles and Thurgood Marshall airports, and in some parts of the region it delivered more rain in a few days than normally falls in a month.

In Georgetown near the D.C. entrance to the C&O Canal, the heavy rains triggered the rupture of a major sewer interceptor, releasing some five million gallons of mixed storm water and untreated sewage onto the popular Capital Crescent Trail. From there the sewage flowed into the Potomac. The rains that began April 30 also triggered sewage overflows elsewhere; *The Dupont Current* newspaper quoted John Lisle of the D.C. Water agency to the effect that about “215 million gallons of combined sewage” overall flowed into the Potomac, Rock Creek and the Anacostia River during the storm.

Parts of Maryland received up to seven inches of rain in 24 hours from the downpour. In Fort Washington in Prince George’s County, heavy rains that began April 30 were followed by the partial collapse of a 1,500-foot stretch of wooded hillside in the upscale Piscataway Hills neighborhood from May 2 through May 5. The topsoil along a hillside fronting on Piscataway Drive slipped about three feet downwards, damaging six houses and toppling several 200-foot trees, which carried power lines with them. The land slippage also caused breaks in local water and sewer lines which contributed to a big crack opening up in Piscataway Drive. Alarmed for the safety of local residents, Fort Washington officials ordered the evacuation of more than two dozen houses in the neighborhood.

In Baltimore during the same storm, rain flooded part of the Inner Harbor area, more than 1.6 million gallons of combined sewage and storm water were released into local waterways in the wider Baltimore County area, and a one-block stretch of 26th Street in the Charles City area

collapsed along with a sidewalk and an adjacent retaining wall and fell onto the nearby tracks of the CSX Railroad.

Lesser damage occurred in Cockeysville and Bowie, and there were flooded roads in Charles and Harford counties. In Laurel, the discovery of leaks in the nearby Duckett Dam led local officials to open the dam's gates, forcing the evacuation of a nearby senior apartment complex and leading to the flooding of a car dealership and commuter parking lot.

Then the rains abated and the region began to dry out, but a second major downpour occurred over the weekend of May 16. During this storm, there was flooding in downtown Annapolis and along the Alexandria waterfront, a motorist trapped on an inundated road in Loudon County had to climb on top of her car and wait for emergency responders to rescue her, and there were 10 drivers who needed rescuing in Fairfax County, where officials closed 45 roads for fear of flooding. Damage to local businesses and homeowners from the two rainstorms have been heavy in dollar terms.

Intense rains were not the only factor contributing to the Metro region's recent weather woes, it should be noted. As the *Post* and other media have reported, the wooded Piscataway Hills neighborhood that suffered from the slope collapse in early May is sited on a layer of Marlboro clay, which is notoriously slippery when wet; residents also have experienced lesser land slips, the dangers of falling trees and small breaks in local water and sewer lines before. Arguably, it's questionable whether local land use regulations should have permitted upscale residential construction along the slope in the first place.

Long before the rupture of the Georgetown interceptor sewer on April 30, similarly, the District of Columbia experienced a long line repeated of sewage overflows into local waterways from its antiquated system of combined storm and sanitary sewers. To cure the problem, the city recently launched a DC Clean Rivers Project which is supposed to capture excessive rain flows, partly through the construction of a giant underground tunnel to hold some of the flows and partly through other means. But funding for full implementation of the project has been lacking, and it is not scheduled for completion for years to come. In the meantime, as an environmental attorney with Earthjustice, Jennifer Chavez, told *The Dupont Current* in May, the D.C. Water agency and the city government have not kept up with the infrastructure spending the sewer system needs, "and that's just showing up in so many ways ... This is just one of the latest examples."

Yet our region's heavy rains did aggravate whatever flaws already existed in Fort Washington's zoning regulations and the D.C. Government's storm water management, and the physics of climate change indicates the situation will worsen before it improves. Warm water evaporates more readily than cool water; warmer air can hold more moisture before becoming saturated than cooler air. Thus as global average temperatures rise along with the atmosphere's concentrations of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases, causing rising ocean temperatures and a warmer atmosphere above the oceans, it follows that the atmosphere should carry more moisture.

In some arid areas distant from the oceans, the air's greater capacity to absorb water should aggravate desert-like conditions by sucking additional moisture from places where it is already scarce. In much of the American Southwest, for example, continued greenhouse warming is

predicted to create extensive droughts. But given the Metro DC region's location in relation to Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, more water vapor in the air here should mean greater downpours of rain and heavier snowfalls when the triggering conditions are right.

At present, moreover, there is virtually no chance that the U.S. Government and other governments around the world will act to slow CO₂ emissions and global climate change very soon. The fossil fuel industry's remarkable successes at extracting huge volumes of oil and natural gas from deep shale formations in recent years, and the rising levels of U.S. fossil fuel production this permits, now offer the best chance of a rapid revival of the economy, according to a recent cover story in *Politico* magazine.

The May/June 2014 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, similarly, with the cover title "Big Fracking Deal: Shale and the Future of Energy," hails the recent revolution in U.S. oil and gas production from shale as one "that will drive a fundamental change in global energy markets." In devoting a special section of their magazine to this industry, the editors of *Foreign Affairs* caution, "our aim has not been to pick winners or losers; the market is making those decisions already, in real time."

But the magazine leads off its coverage of the shale energy boom not with any mention of the carbon dioxide emissions and added climate change it will inevitably cause, but with a guest article by Edward L. Morse, of Citi's global investment group, which envisions the U.S. soon becoming the world's largest oil producer, as well as the world's largest exporter of natural gas. This development "on balance," Morse argues, will be "a good thing for the world."

A second article in the May/June edition of *Foreign Affairs*, by energy industry entrepreneur Robert A. Hefner III, states that while "the shale revolution has its naysayers," the nation's political leaders "need to recognize that today America has an unprecedented opportunity for long-term economic growth that can generate good middle-class jobs, help it leave the Great Recession behind for good, and grant it geopolitical advantages over its competitors for decades to come."

The Obama administration, through recent campaign-related statements on global climate change, in some ways appears to be countering this kind of optimistic energy rhetoric. Obama's release of the May 6 National Climate Assessment has triggered *Wall Street Journal* editorials attacking him on this issue. But as the *Washington Post*'s Dana Milbank noted on May 7, the White House on May 5, just before releasing the NCA, held a press briefing by counselor John Podesta, who celebrated the fact that thanks in part to the President's "all of the above" energy policies, the United States is now "the largest producer of oil and gas in the world." When questioned about whether this development might aggravate global climate change, Milbank reports, Podesta replied that the Obama White House is now "firing on all cylinders when it comes to producing more energy, cleaner energy and more energy efficiency, as well as combating climate change."

Champions of greater American exports of oil and natural gas also have recently argued that booming U.S. energy exports, at least over time, should give the U.S. an ability to block Vladimir Putin's foreign ambitions by undercutting Russia's leading industry, the energy

industry, through increased U.S. exports of liquified natural gas – thus freeing Western Europe and the Ukraine from dependence on Russian gas exports.

With U.S. politics and economics being what they are, a calculated ignorance about the likely results of enhanced fossil fuel production is likely to persist within the U.S. government for the foreseeable future. The same point applies to many other national governments – such as Russia, Venezuela, Nigeria and Iran, for example – with their own interests in fossil fuel production. For now, then, continuing high levels of greenhouse gas emissions and a continued warming of the global climate all seem inevitable. As the expected warming occurs, the Metro D.C. area will no doubt experience many more “extreme” rainfall events. Isn't it time for municipal and state governments in this region to start preparing for them?

[Tyson brings the universe up to date](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2014**

By Daniel Adkins

Three new series have arrived that are important and useful popular history. They are COSMOS, Your Inner Fish, and Brain Games. All told there are almost 20 hours of public television programming that will connect you to our origins, capabilities, and our personal and cosmic situational awareness.

COSMOS: A Spacetime Odyssey is a creation myth that is unique in being as true as we now know. This documentary, a reprise of Carl Sagan's amazing 1980 series, shows the origins of the cosmos, planetary evolution, life, and also the history of science. The series also shows how women and some of the poor have developed to make major advances in astronomy. This fantastic science documentary series is narrated by Neil deGrasse Tyson, the Director of the Hayden Planetarium of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Check the series on [Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmos:_A_Spacetime_Odyssey_Shown_on_the_National_Geographic_Channel_and_Fox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmos:_A_Spacetime_Odyssey_Shown_on_the_National_Geographic_Channel_and_Fox).

Your Inner Fish is a PBS documentary of the evolution of life and our species. It is well-animated and a great story of how our bodies evolved. The series uses fossils, embryos, and genes to trace our human aspects to primates, reptiles, and fish. The host, Neil Shubin, based this series on his best-selling book *Your Inner Fish: A Journey into the 3.5-Billion-Year History of the Human Body* (2008). This book was named the best book of the year by the National

Academy of Science. For more information see the Inner Fish website at <http://www.pbs.org/your-inner-fish/home/>

Brain Games is a series demonstrating how your brain takes short cuts in viewing and getting answers. This can be useful information in knowing your limits and expanding them. One example is that your brain does not have the capability to process everything you see and requires one to look closely to find details. If you know how the brain does this you can minimize the problem or maybe use the information to your advantage. Shown on the National Geographic Channel.

[Why Do Socialist Groups in the US Disagree So Much? An Historical Overview](#)

Sunday, June 1st, 2014

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2014**

By Andy Feeney

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This history and analysis was presented at the Socialist Salon in April as part of a discussion anatomizing the sometimes-fractured socialist Left in the US. We are publishing the documents from that very fertile session for newer members and old to contextualize as much as possible today's varieties of resistance to US capitalism. See, for instance, "A Guide to the US Socialist Left" [in the May issue](#). This document does not necessarily represent the official position of DSA or the Metro DC DSA chapter).

Socialists are historically divided into the democratic/electoral traditions (including democratic socialists) and Leninists (including Communists). There are logical reasons for this division, which along with other factors (e.g. egotism of individual socialists, police infiltration of leftist groups etc.) often causes conflicts within the US left. However, it takes an excursion into history to better understand why the division exists.

The Non-Anarchist Socialist Movement Before 1895, Both Marxist and Non-Marxist.

Before around 1896, all Marxist socialist parties were in agreement that capitalism is an inherently destructive system that is doomed in the long run due to the operation of certain economic and social laws. In this view, the future must consist either of "socialism, or barbarism," and revolutionary socialists need to work for the first alternative.

There were other socialist tendencies in the 1880s, however, notably the Fabian socialists of England, that rejected Marxist theory on this score. The Fabians argued for a gradual, largely

peaceful approach to transforming capitalism through political and economic reforms along with education.

Socialists vs. Anarchists on the Role of the State. Both Marxist socialists and Fabian socialists differed from the anarchists of the late 19th century regarding the possibilities of working for change through the political state. Anarchists, especially those following Mikhail Bakunin, held that the state was inherently oppressive, just as much as capitalism itself, and that the revolutionary working class needs to avoid entanglement with the state and ultimately abolish it through revolution. Bakunin also pointed to authoritarian tendencies within Marx's personality as an added reason to distrust mainstream socialism.

The Fabians, along with certain "Cathedral socialists" in Germany, held hopes that the state might be used to reform or tame capitalism. Marx came to agree with the anarchists that ultimately, the state was an instrument of class oppression that must "wither away" or even be "smashed" by the workers; however, in the meantime he applauded trade unions working through the state for economic reforms. Following the rise of the Paris Commune in 1871 and its destruction, Marx further concluded along with Blanqui, an earlier French communist, that the workers would need to establish a "dictatorship of the proletariat" following the revolution, if only to protect its victories from violent capitalist counter-revolution.

In actual practice, many Marxist socialist or "social democratic" parties in the 1890s practiced a reformist politics, arguing for the long-term bankruptcy of capitalism and its revolutionary overthrow when the time became ripe, but in the meanwhile pursuing practical reforms to benefit their working class supporters. In the short run, such Social Democratic parties fought for such things as universal suffrage, improved workplace conditions, shorter work weeks, and the creation of social welfare programs and old-age pensions.

Eduard Bernstein and the Socialist Fight Over "Revisionism." Between 1896 and 1900, Eduard Bernstein, a leading member of the world's then-leading socialist party, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), broke with Marxist orthodoxy regarding reforms vs. revolution. Bernstein's ideas helped trigger some divisions still evident in the socialist movement today.

Capitalism was not developing as Marx had originally predicted, Bernstein wrote: it was not impoverishing the mass of workers as Marx had said it would, and it was not simplifying class conflicts by forcing the vast majority of the population into the industrial proletariat – the inevitable "gravediggers of capitalism," in Marx's words. Instead, capitalism in the 1890s was creating new complexities in class relations, and allowing German workers to improve their conditions significantly without revolution. Bernstein, who had met with Fabian socialists during a stay in England, therefore rejected the traditional Marxist idea of working-class revolution and called for an "evolutionary socialism" in its place.

Whatever the long-term goal of socialist politics might be was irrelevant to him; Bernstein declared; what he cared about was the process of getting there. Bernstein also suggested that moral idealism, not the supposedly iron laws of economics formulated by Marx, should provide a framework for socialist politics.

Bernstein's "revisionism" shocked most leaders of the German SPD, although it probably did not come as a shock to many pragmatic trade union leaders belonging to the party. It soon triggered an important response from V.I. Lenin, a rising star in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (SDLP).

Lenin vs. Bernstein's Revisionism: Toward a "Vanguardist" Marxist Politics. Partly to safeguard Marxism against the lure of "revisionism," Lenin in a 1902 pamphlet called *What Is To Be Done* laid out a new model for socialist work in the Russian empire.

Revolutionary Marxists needed to guard against mere "economism," the mere organizing of the workers for short-term economic advantage, Lenin argued. The Russian party instead needed to respond to, and seek to inspire, a "vanguard" of more politically conscious workers who might win their less educated and more complacent fellow-workers away from the hypnotic allure of ruling-class ideas, or "hegemony."

To this end, the Russian SDLP needed to recruit, not a mass following of individuals with varying levels of commitment and understanding, but a small core of hard-core professional revolutionaries, a vanguardist "cadre" that could transmit revolutionary ideas to the mass of Russian workers and prepare them for the overthrow of Czarism.

Critiques of Lenin's Vanguardism from Other Socialists. Lenin's ideas were controversial even with some Russian socialists and with revolution-minded Marxists elsewhere. The revolutionary German socialist Rosa Luxemburg, for example, privately expressed fears that Lenin's model of political organization would lead to authoritarian dictatorship over the working class, not its emancipation; a youthful Leon Trotsky predicted it could lead to "dictatorship over the proletariat."

Yet despite such disagreements, Lenin's party continued to belong to the Second International of Social Democratic parties established in 1889, and he considered himself an ally of Karl Kautsky, the leader of the German SPD. Between roughly 1889 and 1914, the different parties of the Second International agreed to work for peace among their various home countries and to resist any call by their national leaders to engage in an "imperialist" war against one another.

1914: The Second International Fails to Halt the Rush to War. In 1914, however, many European socialist parties voted to support their own governments as these governments entered World War I. Eugene Debs and the members of the Socialist Party in the US as well as many anarcho-syndicalist members of the American IWW held out for peace, at great cost to themselves; the Russian SDLP also rejected the war, and socialist parties in Scandinavia and Italy did as well. But the great socialist parties of France and Germany and the mass of British workers eagerly supported the war; in Germany, Kautsky along with Luxemburg and a few others refused to approve of the government's call for a war budget, but the rest of the German party capitulated to war fever.

The Bolshevik Revolution and the Start of the Third International. When the Russian Revolution of 1917 enabled Lenin and his Bolsheviks to take control of the Russian state, they scorned the Social Democratic parties of the Second International as sell-outs and compromisers

with the capitalist war machine. In 1919 Lenin launched a Third International to replace the Second, urging socialist sympathizers with the Bolshevik Revolution everywhere to form national “Communist” parties and to submit to an iron discipline under the direction of revolutionary Moscow, which alone had succeeded in carrying out the original socialist goal of overthrowing capitalism and inaugurating a new kind of society.

The brutal Russian civil war that followed the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 (or November 1917, depending on which calendar is used to mark the event) soon involved Lenin and his comrades in actions that deepened their differences with many social democrats in the West. So did extensive military interventions by many western capitalist governments – including, to a limited extent, that of the United States – on the side of the counter-revolutionary Whites in the civil war.

The Third International and the Theory of Capitalist Encirclement. A pattern thus developed under Lenin, and was later greatly magnified under Stalin, of the new Soviet Union feeling encircled and menaced by a hostile capitalist world. Soviet leaders, citing the threat to their very existence posed by counter-revolutionaries at home and military attack from abroad, came to argue that it was justifiable and even urgently necessary for the world’s leading revolutionary state to defend itself against attack by taking certain steps – even dictatorial and “terroristic” ones – that idealistic, less embattled social democrats in the West might feel were authoritarian and immoral. The Soviet leaders argued that not just the new Soviet Union’s existence, but the hopes for socialist revolution worldwide, rested on the USSR being able to defend its form of socialism from overthrow or attack. And for decades, the non-Russian Communist parties of the Third International agreed.

Many divisions now visible on the U.S. left can be traced to these historic events.

The American Socialist Party soon split over whether to support the Bolsheviks, with Eugene Debs and some other socialists rejecting Bolshevism as an undemocratic travesty of Marxism, while other Socialist Party members united with some former members of the anarcho-syndicalist IWW to form a new Communist Party. In fact, American socialists formed two new Communist Parties by the early 1920s, with John Reed attempting to launch a more “American” party that he hoped would rely less on the leadership of recent immigrants and might be more appealing to native-born WASP workers.

Conflicts Between Social Democratic Parties and Communists Prior to the Rise of Hitler. Relationships between the old Socialist Party and the new Communist Party were bitter throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. However, in the late 1930s the American Communist Party, mostly in response to Soviet foreign policy concerns, embarked on a “popular front” period in which its members tried to unite with socialists and even American liberals and other non-socialists for the purposes of defeating fascism.

The Communist Party Cooperates with Liberals in the Popular Front Period. During the Popular Front period, when Stalin’s foreign policy called for Communists everywhere to unite with other forces to defeat the threat of Nazi aggression, American Communists worked with other radicals and even with liberal Democrats on common goals, and the party’s popularity

grew as a result. The 1939-1941 Hitler-Stalin Pact greatly disrupted the work of the Popular Front, in part because Communists now had to repudiate anti-Fascist politics they had preached just a year before. However, with Hitler's 1941 invasion of the USSR and the heroic Russian stand against Nazi armies in the Battle of Stalingrad and elsewhere, Communist Party members briefly became "good Americans," with many serving in the armed services, the federal bureaucracy, and even the OSS – the precursor of the CIA.

The Communist Party's General Cooperation with the Democratic Party Today. The American Communist Party today arguably bears some signs of the Popular Front period still. During this period, individual Communists did important work in organizing the CIO federation of industrial labor unions; they also fought for civil rights for African Americans and rallied Americans to support the fight against Hitler. Some Communists made theoretical contributions to feminism as well.

After World War II ended, Communist popularity soon ended, as the Cold War began and Harry Truman launched a "loyalty oath" campaign against Communists in the government. Truman's anti-Communist push was soon followed by the McCarthy era. But while the Popular Front was at its peak from 1935-1945, the Communist Party's membership grew and it benefited from its endorsement of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Today, it is arguable that a much-reduced CPUSA is still practicing Popular Front, Democratic Party-centered politics, much to the displeasure of Trotskyist and Maoist parties to its left.

While the American CP during the Cold War often supported the Democratic Party on domestic issues, however, it did not always do so on foreign policy. At least before the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, the American CP customarily followed the general line that Lenin laid out for the Comintern in 1919 – of resolutely defending the Soviet Union against all external political, intellectual and military attacks. In the 1950s and 1960s, especially, this often led American Communists to split with liberal Democrats on key foreign policy questions.

Trotskyism's Origins as a Dissident "Revolutionary" Movement Among Communists. The Trotskyist movement, both in the US and elsewhere, initially began as a reaction against Stalin's growing power and growing authoritarianism in the late 1920s.

Trotsky on Stalinist Autocracy. Trotsky, who had joined Lenin in leading the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917 and who organized and led the Red Army in the fierce civil war afterwards, was in some ways partly responsible for the authoritarian rules that helped Stalin to gain dictatorial control of the Soviet state in the 1920s. At one point in his career, in fact, Trotsky was seen by some Russian Communists as a potentially more authoritarian leader than Stalin. However, as Stalin's best-known political opponent after 1930, Trotsky came to stand in the eyes of many of his followers for a more responsive, less bureaucratic, and arguably more "democratic" approach to Communist revolution.

Trotsky and the Theory of "Permanent Revolution" and World Revolution. Trotsky, who had helped to formulate a theory of "permanent revolution" to justify the Bolsheviks taking power in Russia, a backward and impoverished society by European standards, also differed strongly with Stalin over the question of whether Russian socialism could be self-sufficient.

Classical Marxist doctrine said it would be impossible to build “socialism in one country,” and the Marxist theory of history proceeding by stages further held that in general, societies must first experience capitalism before they can gain the economic productivity and general prosperity necessary to make a decent form of “socialism” possible.

From an orthodox Marxist perspective, then, “socialist” revolution in Russia was arguably impossible in 1917. But several years earlier, Trotsky had argued that Russian capitalism was the weak link in the chain of global capitalism, and that socialist revolution was likely to break out precisely where the chain was at its weakest, not in the well-established Western capitalist societies where Marx had originally expected revolution to begin. Thus in Trotsky’s eyes, Russia as a weak link in the capitalist chain had a role to play in triggering a larger world revolution.

Russian socialism might survive and create a good society despite the problem of Russian backwardness, Trotsky further argued, if the Bolshevik revolution ignited sympathetic revolutions in more advanced European countries. If socialist revolution triumphed in Europe, then an advanced socialist Europe could come to the rescue of backward Russia, saving it from the disaster that might otherwise occur from Marxists trying to “skip” over needed stages of development.

The problem for Trotsky was that leading capitalist states in Europe experienced no successful socialist revolutions in the 1920s, leaving the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics stranded.

Stalin came to argue that, Marxist dogma notwithstanding, “socialism in one country” – at least temporarily – was both necessary and possible. Trotsky responded that the Bolshevik Revolution needed to expand to new societies to survive, and that Stalin was betraying the Revolution by not doing enough to make this possible.

Some Effects of Trotsky’s Thinking on American Trotskyism Today. In the United States, both the Trotskyist criticism of Stalinism as “undemocratic” and of the Soviet Union as a “deformed workers’ state” AND the Trotskyist insistence on world revolution have played important roles in Trotskyist politics.

For example, criticism of Stalinist dictatorship, and perhaps other personal factors, led a number of leading Trotskyist intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s to become anti-Communist cold warriors by the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, some prominent Trotskyists eventually became neo-conservatives.

Other Trotskyist radicals over the years have created small breakaway sects that have remained committed to revolution and even a Leninist “dictatorship of the proletariat,” yet they still harshly criticize most existing Communist governments – e.g. in China, and to an extent Cuba – as undemocratic and “bureaucratic” and thus a betrayal of “real” Leninism. Such Trotskyist parties may disagree over whether existing “socialist” governments are “bureaucratically deformed workers’ states” or “state capitalist,” but they generally agree that such governments oppress the working class.

However, a concern for world revolution and a fierce opposition to capitalist imperialism – according to Lenin, “the Highest Stage of Capitalism” – have led other Trotskyist groups to support Communist governments in Cuba and even North Korea, as well as the Islamic government of Iran, as fighters against western imperialism. This is at least partly in line with Trotsky’s ideas about imperialism and the imperatives of permanent revolution.

Maoism as a Reaction Against Both Capitalism and the Old Soviet Union’s Acceptance of “Peaceful Coexistence.” American Maoism is of more recent vintage than either the American Communist Party or the various Trotskyist groups. Like Trotskyism, Maoism in many ways reflects disillusionment with the Soviet Union as the leader of global revolution, and with the American CP as a “revisionist” and hence non-revolutionary form of Marxism.

In leading the Chinese Communist Party in the 1920s and 1930s, Mao Zedong broke with Marxist orthodoxy in several striking ways. He based his revolutionary movement on rebellious peasants in the countryside, not (for the most part) industrial workers in the cities. He also insisted that the “Chinese road” to revolution would not necessarily mimic the Russian road. His Chinese Red Army came to power not through a Bolshevik-style coup in the capital, but through prolonged guerrilla warfare in the countryside. And in the 1950s, Mao broke with Nikita Khrushchev’s USSR partly over the question of “peaceful coexistence” with the capitalist West. While Khrushchev pointed to the risk of US-USSR conflicts triggering nuclear war, Mao responded that American imperialism was a “paper tiger” and that even nuclear weapons could not ultimately defeat a revolutionary people. This and certain differences in national interests led Maoist China by the late 1950s to break politically with the USSR, and soon inspired splits between revolutionary-minded Maoists in the West and more orthodox Communists.

American Maoism and the New Left of the 1960s. American Maoist groups in many cases grew out of the New Left of the 1960s, as radical students came to reject American capitalism and an American “imperialism” that seemed all too evident in the war in Vietnam, where a peasant guerrilla army partly inspired by Maoist ideas was courageously defeating the huge and well-equipped U.S. military machine.

The RCP’s Maoism and Support for the Goals of the Cultural Revolution. Another aspect of Mao’s China that appealed to some American Maoists, including Bob Avakian of the Revolutionary Communist Party, was its bloody although ultimately unsuccessful fight against bureaucracy and elitism within the Chinese Communist Party itself.

By the 1960s, it was clear to many critics of Marxism that in societies led by Communist parties, top-ranking Party members and members of the government bureaucracy tended to morph into a new governing class – putting the lie to socialist claims to forge a classless society. Mao is believed by many critics to have had some unsavory motives in launching his “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” in the 1960s, and the Cultural Revolution arguably ended in disaster. But Mao’s stated aim in launching it was to enlist peasants, ordinary workers and students in a fight against elitism and a “capitalist road” mentality within the Communist Party itself.

In the view of the RCP’s Avakian, who wrote a book on the subject, China’s subsequent turn to “market-based” development under Mao’s successors suggests that Mao was not completely

wrong about the existence of pro-capitalist and anti-egalitarian elitism within the Party leadership. Mao's effort to defeat it via the Cultural Revolution – in Avakian's view – was thus heroic, even if it ended in defeat. In the view of many critics, the American RCP under Avakian's leadership has degenerated into a cult, yet it is worth arguing that some American radicals attracted to that cult are in fact inspired by some of the more egalitarian ideals of traditional Marxist socialism, couple with Mao's explicit ruthlessness about achieving egalitarian goals "through the barrel of a gun," if necessary.

“Democratic Centralism” vs. Pluralism on the American Left. In some Leninist organizations, a certain amount of debate – at least in theory — is allowed in formulating political goals and political policies. However, “democratic centralism” dictates that once debate has produced a political decision, generally determined by a formal vote, all group members are obligated to support the decision in word and deed.

Critics of democratic centralism feel that in many cases, this effectively gives rise to censorship, to political purges and to the unquestioned rule of a small circle of activists, or even of a single charismatic leader. Defenders of democratic centralism, however, are likely to argue that it makes small socialist organizations much more effective than, say, DSA tends to be, where the right to debate is virtually unlimited and where no one is politically obligated to carry out decisions that an individual member finds disagreeable.

Partly for this reason, “Leninist” organizations with strongly disciplined cadres can sometimes be far more effective in organizing demonstrations or carrying out political campaigns than democratic socialists are. Contemporary examples are provided by the numerically small Workers World Party and its recent spinoff, the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), which have sometimes achieved remarkable successes in organizing mass demonstrations.

Leninists and U.S. Mass Movements. Some Leninist groups in the US – notably the Communist Party in its Popular Front days, and both the CP and the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party during the antiwar protests of the 1960s – have at times been quite effective in promoting mass movements to achieve reformist or even “radical” ends. However, many smaller Maoist and Trotskyist parties, mostly consisting of radical intellectuals devoted to the theory that a strong vanguard party is needed to wage the class struggle and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, primarily work to build their own revolutionary organizations.

These smaller Leninist groups tend to reject “reformist” activism which, in their opinion, will only make capitalism more palatable. Also many Trotskyists and Maoists, and indeed some democratic socialists within the Socialist Party, see cooperation with mainstream political forces, such as the Democratic Party, as being inherently “revisionist” and anti-revolutionary.

DSA: A Pluralist Organization, Incorporating Idealists and Materialists; Religious and Atheist Socialists; and Reformists, Liberals and Would-Be Revolutionaries. Within DSA and within the Socialist Party, there are some members who see the “reform-revolution” dichotomy as a false one, in part because we are not in a revolutionary moment and the American working class today is fragmented and unorganized, not yet a revolutionary “subject” fit for changing history.

However, there undoubtedly are some DSA members who embrace the “revisionism” of Bernstein, see moral idealism rather than economic crisis and class struggle as the impetus for a better future, and wish to reform capitalism rather than abolishing it.

Thus the Leninist accusation that DSA and other democratic socialists have basically abandoned “socialism” itself – as Leninists define it – has at least some plausibility. Yet at the same time, a significant fraction of DSA members who responded to a recent survey identified themselves as “revolutionary socialists,” a testament to DSA’s sometimes bewildering pluralism as an organization.

In some ways, DSA shares what we feel are the best parts of the Leninist tradition – the Communist belief in mass work and building the social base that could move us towards democratic socialism, and the Trotskyist belief in workplace democracy and a more democratic state structure than that traditionally promoted by Communists. We also, however, soundly reject vanguardist politics and democratic centralism.

The Spartacus League and the Anti-Authoritarian Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg. No discussion of the US left would be complete without some mention of the Spartacus League, a small and extremely militant Trotskyist group that many leftists find obnoxious and generally disruptive of attempts to forge progressive unity on key political issues.

The Spartacus League can indeed be disruptive of coalition work on the left, but in their name, at least, the Sparts harken back to the legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, the great German revolutionary who argued against Bernstein, who opposed the German SDP supporting World War I, and who later supported the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 while criticizing Lenin and Trotsky for their lack of democracy.

Luxemburg not long before her assassination became involved with a group of militant German workers calling itself the Spartacus League. In 1919 they attempted an ill-fated uprising against the new Social Democratic government in Germany, and were quickly defeated and jailed – or, like Luxemburg herself, killed for their revolutionary efforts. Whether the Spartacus League of the US today is any more helpful to the wider left, or any more effective, than the German Spartacists were in Luxemburg’s day is debatable. However, their name evokes a leftwing opposition to bureaucracy and undemocratic rule that is somewhat honorable, regardless of its practicality.

Background Readings, for the Curious, to this Mini History of Socialism.

I happen to own the used books below and consulted them in preparing this overview of socialist history. However, there are many other accounts of how socialist ideas have developed, many of them published more recently, that can provide DSA members with roughly the same information.

Sidney Hook, *Marx and the Marxists*, Van Nostrand, Doubleday, 1955.

Leopold Labedz, editor, *Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas*, Vol. I, Prager University Series, 1962.

Albert Fried and Ronald Sanders, editors, *Socialist Thought: A Documentary History*, Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1964.

Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, The New Press, distributed by W.H. Norton, 1996.

Mary-Alice Waters, editor, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, Pathfinder Press, 1970.

[Why Marx Was Right– and how to say so](#)

The Washington Socialist <> June 2014

**A review of Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right*
Yale University Press 2011 258 pp.**

By Woody Woodruff

A reader who was really well versed in the writings and thought of Karl Marx would be able to tell whether Terry Eagleton's *Why Marx Was Right* was altogether accurate about Karl Marx. I am not that reviewer.

But I like this short, tidy explication of Marx and Marxism because, like socialists who are good at Marx and those of us who are not so, I want some short, tidy responses to those who attack Marx and the Left. Eagleton's reference to Marx ranges widely, from *Capital* to *The German Ideology* to *Comments on Wagner*, but he wears his learning lightly and with wit.

For a self-styled socialist with a limited grounding in the weedier provinces of Marxism like this writer, Eagleton's proves a good addition to the list of those books that provide incremental education without a blizzard of numbers.

[Andy Feeney's review](#) of this book in an earlier *Washington Socialist* metaphorically compared it to a radical activist's halting progress through the confusion of ideologies on offer. That is, in fact, how many of those of us not "brought up radical" got to where we are. And I am among many in DSA who think we have a role in highlighting a tenable path through this confusion,

rebutting as we do so the arguments of opponents. Eagleton's book, in its formal structure, provides responses to ten of the most common objections to Marx and Marxism. It's a handy but challenging work-around for us socialists – who want to perfect and extend that “elevator pitch” – to look at the pattern created by those objections.

Eagleton's strategy is to head each chapter with one of today's critiques of Marx as presented by the opponents, then take it on. These critics, as he characterizes them, are sophisticates of what they see as “the increasingly classless, socially mobile, postindustrial Western societies of the present.” (1) By their account, whatever utility Marx's analysis might have had at the onset of real industrial capitalism, it now lacks when applied to that “classless... postindustrial” environment we inhabit now. That's the first objection, and Eagleton's response is threaded throughout his book.

The second, and perhaps most familiar, objection is that wherever socialism has been put into practice it has been authoritarian, corrupt and a cause of misery to the working women and men it was supposed to rescue and empower. An explanatory coda to that objection is the oppositional meme that abolition of markets means a shortage of material goods, apparently the biggest contributor to misery. Certainly, the trailing clouds of mythology surrounding the Soviet Union feature views of empty shelves in the state department store GUM. Still, Eagleton points out, the cornucopia of material goods available to Westerners has if anything sharpened the misery of those who can't afford to participate. Instead, “For Marx,” Eagleton says in a later chapter, “communism means an end to scarcity.” (91)

Objection three is to what is seen as the teleological determinism of Marx's “iron laws of history” – the inevitable succession of feudalism, capitalism and socialism, crisis to crisis. As such it is “offensive to freedom and dignity” and resembles predestination's elimination of free will. Eagleton's response is deft: Marx's unique contribution was to link class struggle to the successive modes of production, each changing the other. With that reciprocal formulation he is able to embrace many other critical insights of thinkers who came before him and engage them in the analysis, making it fluid rather than wholly deterministic. In Marx's words historical materialism is “a guiding principle of investigation” rather than “a ready-made pattern.” (51)

Eagleton acknowledges, though, that Marx's analysis of capitalist society in his time failed to envision “the many ways (much more sophisticated in our own day than in Marx's) in which even a capitalism in crisis can continue to secure the consent of its citizens.” (48) This concession is a crucial one, and may be the biggest challenge we face. It is, we can guess, why the book is titled *Why Marx Was Right*, past tense. The task of today's radicals, we should understand here, is to make those “many ways” transparent to the victims of that consent machine and to show that they are not random psychological bomblets but the coherent strategy of modern capitalism. In that respect, Marx's insights are anything but dated. Most of all, we must demonstrate to a wider public that this mosaic of capitalist constraints is not unbeatable, but can be contested by informed democratic resistance inside and outside the electoral sphere.

Objection four, again a familiar one, is that human nature is too opportunistic, greedy and acquisitive to be compatible with a “utopian,” cooperative society. Eagleton's counterargument is a well-balanced version of the standard left riposte: getting there from here requires very non-

utopian steps that march through reformist strategies, dodging (he quotes Lenin) the “infantile disorder” of being too pure for the slow pace of reform. When talking about tomorrow, “a future which broke radically from the present would have us straining at the limits of our language.” And he quotes Raymond Williams: “...a culture, essentially, is unplannable.” (74) Still, Marx “treats the future... as a feasible extrapolation from the present,” Eagleton observes. (102) There’s a useful strand of critique that Eagleton doesn’t directly follow up, here – the degree to which human nature per se gets confused with the behavior of humans in capitalist society. The economic basis of that society is designed to exacerbate, not ease, the acquisitive qualities in human behavior, by piling up fears – fear of job loss, fear of marginalization, even fear that the presentation of self is inadequate. If, as we see below, the coercive factor of scarcity (or threat of scarcity) is reduced or eliminated, “human nature” may be more adaptive than many can imagine now.

Objection five: Marxism reduces everything to the economic, without allowance for “the true complexity of human affairs.” Objection six is Marxism’s materialism, which “drains humanity of all that is most precious about it.” Eagleton’s deft response to both these objections is worth dwelling on because we socialists don’t always have a ready comeback here. Eagleton tackles the base-superstructure conundrum inventively by first pointing out the degree to which *capitalist* thought and behavior are themselves dominated by economics. He then argues that where capitalism values production for its own sake, socialism values it as human self-realization, and that production devoted to wage labor is an alienated version of that self-realization. “Marx’s work is all about human enjoyment” (126) whereas we know that in the land of the free, our most unfree existence is in the workplace. In his beautifully compressed conclusion, Eagleton asserts that if Marx “paid such unflinching attention to the economy, it was in order to diminish its power over humanity.” (239)

Objection seven, slightly harkening back to objection one, is Marxism’s “tedious obsession with class” when, as Eagleton’s anonymous Objector says, “class matters less and less... there is more and more social mobility...” Here, at least for the wretched first decades of the 21st century, Eagleton’s Objector is a true straw person out of touch with the present. Eagleton argues that US notions of class, as the Objector frames it, equate class with style or attitude, not “a form of alienation” as Marx conceived it. (167) And of all the manifest differences between the economic society of Marx’s day and ours of today, “none of this has altered the fundamental nature of capitalist property relations.” (171) If anything, the blurring of some class lines today has brought “an increasing proletarianisation of professionals.” (173-74) As the working class, broadly conceived, has swollen under the rule of an administrative-CEO class with the willing support of inherited capital, more than ever “Capitalism cannot survive without a working class, while the working class can flourish a lot more freely without capitalism.” (177)

Objection eight is the inherent violence in Marxism’s perspective on revolution and a claim that “Marxists are not especially troubled by the mayhem their politics would unleash on the population.” Eagleton points out the violence that revolution frequently sidesteps, paraphrasing Walter Benjamin that “revolution is not a runaway train, it is the application of the emergency brake. It is capitalism that is out of control, driven as it is by the anarchy of market forces, and socialism which attempts to reassert some collective mastery over this rampaging beast.” (187)

Struggle beyond the limits of reform is a last resort, too – “Reform is vital, but sooner or later you will hit a point where the system refuses to give way...”

Objection nine extends the argument of objection two: from a broad indictment of socialism’s past as consistently authoritarian and oppressive of workers, the objection theorizes that outcome as inevitable. “Marxism believes in an all-powerful state... socialist revolutionaries will rule by means of a despotic power...” is the Objector’s case. Eagleton argues that Marx was an enemy of the state as constituted in his day: “The state as an administrative body would live on [under socialism]. It is the state as an instrument of violence that Marx hopes to see the back of.” (197) In our day as in Marx’s “politics is in hock to economics... [the state’s] machinery already has a built-in bias to the status quo. Its anemic, woefully impoverished version of democracy suits the anti-democratic interests that currently hold sway.”(203) Blanqui’s feared phrase “dictatorship of the proletariat” that Marx adopts and posits as a successor regime means nothing more authoritarian than popular democracy. (204-205) Eagleton concedes, though, that “What Marx overlooks about power is... there is an element within it which luxuriates in dominion for its own sake...” – an assertion that Eagleton supports from Shakespeare, good critic that he is, but that may explain why so-called Marxist regimes have turned the model awry. (209)

Objection ten finds Marxism an outmoded, overbroad early liberation movement that has now been supplanted by feminism, antiracism, anti-colonialism, anti-globalism and antiwar movements as well as other more articulated progressive movements like environmentalism that have no connection to socialism. Eagleton spends a good deal of space in this chapter on Marx’s ambiguous relation to colonialism, which he sometimes saw as a variant of capitalist exploitation accelerating development of a working class in remote areas. But he argues that Marx’s overall thrust was against nationalism, a mapmaking strategy that divides the global working class, though Marxism’s modern exponents have also provided a mixed message on this issue. (222-223) Most modern liberation movements, Eagleton points out, recognize the role of the capitalist economy in maintaining the status quo and damping personal, social and identity emancipation. As for the critical relationship between socialism and environmental concerns, above all climate change, Eagleton quotes Engels’ *Dialectics of Nature*:

... we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature – but we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other beings of being able to know and correctly apply its laws.”
(228)

The notion of socialism as a brake on runaway capitalism recurs as Eagleton observes: “It is capitalism that sees production as potentially infinite, and socialism that sets it in the context of moral and aesthetic values.” (235)

Taken as a whole, the objections against which Eagleton sets himself comprise the familiar mix of misinformation and memetic certainty with which today’s socialist left has to contend. Marxism, the critique says, is of its time only; whatever analytic value it had vanished with nineteenth-century industrial capitalism and doesn’t apply to today’s fluid, mobile capitalist society. Marxism’s premise, that society will be governed by all workers, inevitably leads –

always has led – to an oligarchy of a few and a corrupt and entrenched governing class lording it over a deprived and impoverished working class. The liberation Marx forecast through revolution has been accomplished with less strife by identity-based group action within democratic capitalism. That same democratic capitalism restrains (as socialism would not) the aggressive and selfish qualities embedded in human nature and affords individuals a chance to excel while bettering society through economic growth.

These are potent oppositional memes. Writing in 2010, however, Eagleton is able to counter with a certain amount of “Nyah, nyah – how you like your capitalism now, buddy?” And he does it superbly. But he takes the opportunity, as we should, to confirm Marx’s notion that capitalism will never be immune from crisis because of its nature – it “is incapable of inventing a future which does not ritually reproduce its present.” (10) The “creative destruction” that most pro-capitalists acclaim creates mass misery today and created mass deaths in the past on a scale that surpasses Stalin and Mao, Eagleton asserts.

Eagleton’s ten major critiques of Marx (and his successors, including ourselves) weave that difficult web of conventional wisdom that our elevator speeches often seem to bounce off. Those misreadings of Marx, accidental or deliberate, that find him rigid, antihumanist and uncaring about suffering and violence get a good roughing-up in this short book.

Eagleton provides, as we often do, some examples of “actually existing socialism” in northern Europe to belie the supposedly inevitable path to authoritarianism. In fact, we can note, the increasing authoritarian overlay of the US national security state on our happy little republic of material goods and covert inequality resembles Stalin’s permanent-emergency “war communism” far more than it does either today’s Sweden or the aspirational slave superpower of John C. Calhoun.

Eagleton’s point-by-point argument against the major critiques of Marx’s economic radicalism and radical humanism contain solid arguments we socialists can deploy against the conventional wisdom of capitalism’s inevitability and consensual oligarchy. As Andy Feeney pointed out, he is also an Anglo-Irish professor of literature and can damn well turn a phrase. We don’t want to overlook the effects of the poetry of radical emancipation when we make our elevator pitch.

Eagleton’s arguments, or the ones we can formulate from this and other books, are no real substitute for exemplary socialism, even on a local or regional scale. Until we can take a hand in creating more survivable Mondragons, we’ll need the poetry along with the materialist conception of history. One task for socialists, facing the latest and most complex crisis of capitalism as it literally eats the earth out from under its victims, is to enrich the argument that only democratic socialism can nonviolently unwind capitalism’s convoluted doom trip and give us a soft landing in the next iteration of human society.

