

The Washington Socialist
Articles from June 2015 Issue
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Editor: Woody Woodruff

[Welcome to the June issue of the Washington Socialist](#)

Wednesday, June 3rd, 2015



Welcome to the June issue of the *Washington Socialist*, the monthly email newsletter of [Metro-DC Democratic Socialists of America](#).

Memorial Day has recently come and gone and the summer is officially under way. It is often the season of activism – school’s out and people feel footloose. Demos and other actions will be popping up like solar flares, and often with as much warning, so recipients of this newsletter might expect a few email alerts between issues.

Speaking of issues (of this newsletter), we’ll go to our habitual summer publishing schedule, with the next issue coming out Bastille Day (July 14) and the next one after that our Labor Day issue.

DSA nationally and locally is adjusting to the unusual circumstance of having a self-identified socialist – Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont – running for the Democratic presidential nomination. The local’s preliminary discussions on related activism are detailed in an article in this issue and other discussions are likely to come into play at any or all of the get-togethers for June.

HAPPENING IN JUNE: Metro-DC DSA has a scheduled membership meeting Sunday, June 14 [**Editor’s Note: Date CORRECTED from email newsletter**] at the Watha T. Daniel/Shaw branch of the DC library, 1630 7th St. NW, across the street from the Shaw/Howard Metrorail station on the Green/Yellow lines. Former Tennessee Valley Authority executive and public-power gadfly Dave Freeman is scheduled to speak on “The Past and Future of Public Power in the US” – a previously scheduled talk that was wiped out earlier this year by extreme winter weather. The still-pending decision about Exelon’s takeover of Pepco gives a local edge to this discussion. [Current details](#) are always on our Meetup site. The Steering Committee meets at 1 p.m. and the full membership meeting begins at 2 with presentation and discussion ending at 3, followed by a half-hour member business meeting.

Our [Socialist Salon](#) discussion group meets Thursday, June 18, 6:30 p.m. at Hunan Dynasty, 215 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, close to the Capitol South Metrorail station on the Orange/Blue/Silver lines.

The [Socialist Book Group](#) meets Sunday, June 21 to discuss Terry Eagleton’s 2011 book, *Why*

Marx Was Right. The gathering is 3 p.m. to 5 at the Kogod Courtyard of the National Portrait Gallery, 8th and F Streets NW. The book, a modern classic of explanation, has been [reviewed](#) in this newsletter. [Twice](#).

Finally for June, a [DSA Happy Hour](#) is set for Wednesday, June 24, 6:30 p.m. at the Luna Grille near Dupont Circle Metro, 1301 Connecticut Ave. NW. It's themeless; the name explains everything.

Topics for the June Salon are in formation at press time for the *Washington Socialist*. Current information will be posted on the [Meetup site](#) as soon as they are completed.

Metro-DC DSA elected a new steering committee at its May membership meeting, a roughly annual turnover with continuity. Returning are committee members Jose Gutierrez (co-chair), Andy Feeney, Ingrid Goldstrom, Bryan Kovalick and Kurt Stand. Returning also is former SC member Dr. Carolyn Byerly. New to the SC is Jonathan Phipps, a national member and activist living in suburban Baltimore who said he will spend considerable time getting a covalent Baltimore-area local under way with support from both national DSA and the Metro-DC local.

At the same membership meeting, the members agreed to form several committees/working groups. A revival of a feminist working group on women's issues will be led by Goldstrom, Byerly and Ross Templeton. Another, a new initiative, is on gentrification – the severe effects on neighborhoods and on the affordability of housing that come from rampant, uncontrolled real estate speculation. Communities are ravaged, deformed and displaced by rent increases as landlords upgrade to attract new, affluent and younger tenants, most of whom have little connection to the communities they are joining. The resource-starved DC government has embraced the tax advantages of letting developers have their way in nearly every ward (including not-so-benign neglect of the city's poorest areas, like Ward 8). The results for neighborhoods have been catastrophic. A socialist perspective on gentrification is close to the surface; it is inherent in communities' grasp of the real authors of their misery. Andy Feeney will coordinate the development of the working group on gentrification and housing issues.

In This Issue

Money! It's a hit... etc. Bill Mosley signals that the annual round of local dues solicitation is about to head out for mailboxes and inboxes. Because Metro-DC DSA gets no funds from the national organization, our activity and activism depends on participation – to include the financial. [Read complete article](#)

Neither rain nor... The US Postal Service continues to squeeze its unions and the four postal unions, not always in step with one another, are banding together to fight a longstanding but increasingly severe privatization threat. Andy Feeney provides the details. [Read complete article](#)

First stage Bern... How can Metro-DC DSA support the presidential run of Sen. Bernie Sanders, a self-described socialist, and help build public awareness and understanding of socialism in the process. There are election laws to be mindful of. The local had an early discussion of the careful footing required at the May Socialist Salon. [Read complete article](#)

Climate justice and a diverse movement... A budding coalition that aims to diversify the largely white environmental and climate justice movement met in May to find common ground on strategy and bridge cultural gaps. Andy Feeney recounts the discussion and the players. [Read complete article](#)

Class action... In a supposedly class-free US society, classes actually have distinct roles in innovation and entrepreneurship, with those differences reinforcing inequalities of power and, of course, wealth. Daniel Adkins takes an unusual perspective on this aspect of economic society. [Read complete article](#)

The future according to *Washingtonian*... the slick magazine for the well-off and aspiring well-off lays out a future for the capital city's development that is pretty chilling – unrestrained, sky's-the-limit urban developers, sprawling suburbs and squeezed-out workers. Andy Feeney takes a skeptical view of this real-estate porn and compares it to a more thoughtful perspective coming from the social justice community. [Read complete article](#)

Laborfest's best... the annual worker-interest film festival featured several documentaries on great and small struggles – the farmworkers (great and long) and a trio of shorts dealing with Walmart workers, CETA-style tree planting and federal workers. All instill the consciousness of struggle, Kurt Stand says, in their own way. [Read complete article](#)

Tomorrowland brief... The new George Clooney film from Disney gets a quick, very quick, look from Daniel Adkins. [Read complete article](#) but don't blink...

Good Reads for June... links to articles you may have missed; many are about the topic of the day, the Sanders Campaign, but others carry us back to the 1980 campaign and “Waiting for Teddy,” or about pricing public parks out of the reach of much of the public. [Read complete article](#)

You can read these and other past articles in the *Washington Socialist* on our website where they are archived, dsadc.org

Our readers are our best writers. Join that group and submit an article about activism you are doing or someone else is doing; reviews of important books you have read; think-pieces contributing to the left's perennial search for a better way to explain our crisis to its victims. *You are part of this conversation. Submit contributions to The Washington Socialist at a number of levels — send us nominee for “Good Reads” (they should be available online so send links); send news and notices of activism; submit articles. Send to woodlanham@gmail.com.*

[Climate Activism in a New Shade of Green: DC Conference Aims to Unite Struggles For Sustainable Energy, Full Employment, Racial Justice](#)

Monday, June 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2015**

By Andy Feeney

The politics and science of global climate change were high on the agenda on Saturday, May 9 as about 50 activists from up and down the East Coast met at the University of the District of Columbia's Dave Clarke School of Law to hear environmentalists including Bill McKibben, Lester Brown, Dr. Michael Dorsey of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies and Rev. Lennox Yearwood of the Hip Hop Caucus (which has made climate activism a priority) discuss the growing urgency of the climate issue and ways of addressing it. Representatives of the People's Climate Lobby, the Sierra Club and the Nuclear Information and Resource Service were present in the audience.

Yet climate change was not the only issue under discussion. The conference, organized by the new populist coalition People Demanding Action (PDA), with the sponsorship of the Hip Hop Caucus, Progressive Democrats of America (PDA), Social Security Works and the People's Climate Lobby, was specifically designed to forge new cooperative links between largely white-led climate activism organizations and other groups, largely led by people of color, working on other social and economic issues.

In addition to featuring presentations on climate change, accordingly, the agenda included a speaker on chronic unemployment and the Conyers full employment bill (HR 1000) as one answer to it. Still additional speakers addressed the challenges of black and progressive voter disenfranchisement, environmental racism, mass incarceration, the desperate social conditions still affecting Native Americans on many Indian reservations, and the struggle for statehood for the District of Columbia.

People Demanding Action billed the conference, which extended over May 8-10, as "Building an Inclusive Climate Movement to Create Community Power," and one of the main panel discussions focused specifically on achieving greater diversity in the climate action movement. Panelists included

- Leslie Fields, a black attorney and former international director of Friends of the Earth-US, who currently serves as the National Environmental Justice Director for the Sierra Club;

- Jacqui Patterson, Director of the Climate Justice Initiative of the national NAACP and a cofounder of Women of Color United, which last year partnered with the NAACP to organize a Women of Color for Climate Justice Road Tour;
- Mark Magaña, the President and CEO of Green Latinos and a board member of the League of Conservation Voters; as well as
- Dr. Gabriela Lemus, Executive Director of the Progressive Congress (an independent nonprofit organization allied with the Progressive Caucus in Congress) and a former director of Policy and Legislation at the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC).

Additional prominent speakers at the conference included Mustafa Ali, a founding member of the Office of Environmental Justice at EPA and current Acting Senior Advisor to the Administrator for Environmental Justice; Jay Winter Nighthawk, originator and host of “The American Indian’s Truths, Nightwolf, the Most Dangerous Show on Radio” and a member of the national advisory board of Progressive Democrats of America; and Barbara Arnwine, president and executive director since 1989 of the national Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

Still other speakers of note included Ted Glick, policy director for the Chesapeake Action Network; Vermont state senator Ben Ptashnik, a former chair of the Vermont Public Interest Research Group and a veteran advocate for human rights and environmental protection, as well as a cofounder of Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility; Prof. Joel Rogers, an academic from the University of Wisconsin who has written widely on American politics and public policy and has advised such progressive NGOs as the Apollo Alliance and the Center for a New Democracy; Rev. Glencie Rhedrick, a pastoral minister in Charlotte, NC and a former president of Mecklenburg Ministries, a religious coalition of approximately 100 communities of faith; and Joel Segal, a former senior legislative aide to Michigan’s Rep. John Conyers and a former chair of the Congressional Universal Health Care Task Force.

Perhaps the most dominant voice over the course of the 12-hour organizing session on May 9, however, was Rev. Yearwood of the Hip Hop Caucus. A retired U.S. Air Force Reserve officer and a Baptist minister, Rep. Yearwood is the founder of the Hip Hop Caucus and has been active in involving communities of color in environmental and climate change activism for several years. He also was key to organizing the Gulf Coast Renewal Campaign after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which blocked early rounds of illegal evictions of Katrina survivors from temporary housing and supported United Nations “right of return” policies for former New Orleans residents displaced by the hurricane.

A coauthor with Tom Weis of a 2014 “Zero Emissions Manifesto for the Climate Justice Movement,” Rev. Yearwood has argued that “because the climate crisis threatens all life on Earth, it is first and foremost a moral issue,” and that the moral urgency of the crisis “requires a rainbow coalition of people – reflecting the diversity of our great nation – coming together to solve it.” He has also argued, in a 2015 article in EcoWatch announcing the PDA conference on building a more inclusive climate movement, that “if the climate movement does not become more inclusive, the goal of transitioning from fossil fuels to clean energy will not happen.”

The modern environmental movement, despite having achieved “incredible victories for the public good,” is still largely rooted in predominantly white and rather elite communities and cannot command the massive social and political support needed to push the government and the economy toward the “green industrial revolution” needed to head off climate disaster, Rev. Yearwood also has stated. “The movement needs to expand, and to do so we need to re-frame the issue of climate change to make it an everyday, every person issue.”

A major theme that Rev. Yearwood repeatedly returned to on May 9 was therefore that the largely white-led climate activism movement needs to become increasingly sensitive to communities of color, and along with several other black ministers at the event, Rev. Yearwood seemed to feel that it is therefore essential for climate activists to frame the climate issue in terms of morality, with less focus on scientific detail. Several other speakers also noted that in some cases, to engage ordinary people in the fight, especially in communities of color, climate activists might need to focus on related issues that affect people’s everyday lives, such as high rates of asthma from exposure to pollutants from coal-burning power plants, or the childhood exposure to lead paint, and the mental damage this causes, that contributed to Freddy Gray’s death at the hands of police in Baltimore.

Jay Winter Nighthawk, in introducing his remarks on poverty and social crisis in Native American reservations, stated that he is involved in defending Indian rights because “God put me here to do a job. I’m not leaving here until I’ve done that job.”

Similarly, in commenting on the political struggle to preserve democracy against rightwing billionaires like the Koch brothers, Rev. Yearwood’s associate T.C. Muhammad, also active in the Hip Hop Caucus, cited the Koran in stating the “the coal companies, the Koch brothers, I view them as midgets ... I don’t view the Koch brothers ... as being in control.” The nature of human beings is to seek justice, T.C. Muhammad added, and the nature of human beings also is to seek peace: “That’s why struggle will continue until there is justice along with peace.” He also argued that Mother Earth will defend herself ... “regardless of me, Mother Earth is going to win,” which means climate activists can take up the fight for change “believing that we *can* win,” an essential belief if individuals are going to be serious about the struggle.

Just how much the rhetoric and the political strategies of the white environmental activists attending the conference will change in response to such appeals is obviously unclear at *Washington Socialist* press time. It seems obvious that for some climate activists, appeals to God and the alleged inevitability of victory over the fossil fuel companies may be a little alienating. But the coming together of climate activists and advocates for other urgently important causes at the conference, under the organizing eye of long-time activist PDA executive director Andrea Miller, was intriguing and provocative. Conceivably, it may bring about significant changes in the largely white-based environmental movement and help catalyze the formation of a new multi-issue populist alliance in years to come.

[Creativity by Class](#)

Monday, June 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2015**

By Daniel C. Adkins

If human society is to be sustainable, it is time we evaluated how our various social-economic groups use their creativity to change society or not. Below is a quick view of different social class contributions.

The middle and upper middle classes cover a wide area but have created the crown jewels of our networked society. In addition to maintaining educational systems, small businesses, and much else, I claim that they have created the new corporations of our technological world. The companies – Microsoft, Apple, Google, and others – have been created by middle-class students enthralled by the opportunities of their disciplines, especially the technological ones. Steve Wozniak is the son of a defense electronic engineer who taught his son electronics so well that the Woz was able to build one of the first personal computers. Bill Gates learned coding so well that he was able to start a business. Steve Jobs got enough college under his belt that he was able to build a computer that was important in a cultural way as much as a business way. The Google guys created a company in the process of implementing their search algorithms. The companies that were created eventually grew beyond their initial technologies and often have used business techniques that are monopolistic. These techniques can be seen as part of capitalist market reality and “creativity”. Markets are not stable and a successful company will try to control its market unless regulated not to do so. The values of these corporations often include supporting a sustainable future. Apple aims to be carbon neutral in the near future. The middle classes fulfill the professional and small business needs, often work for a sustainable future, and their creativity has created major corporations.

The blue collar or working class not only fulfills the needs of productions and services, but also has been the focus of the Quality movement. In older production practices workers were seen to be programmable by management instructions. The Quality movement’s goal is to capture the workers’ mental and physical efforts to create more efficient systems. Some firms do utilize their workers’ suggestions and even reward them. In other industrialized countries such as Germany there are workers councils that let management and unions plan together and formally use workers’ creativity. With the roll-back of unions in the US this joint structure is used very little. However much of the U.S. liveability (8 hour day) and welfare state came from the working classes’ union history.

Much of the lower classes’ creativity, however, is spent in just surviving. Sadly the economy is so rough on them that most do not seem able to thrive or rise. The latest news about the police shooting of young black men has noted that some police forces have used the law to raise money for themselves and have so limited mobility of locals that it is difficult for them to keep a job. We had hoped Jim Crow was gone, but it has just been institutionalized.

The 1% is well-educated and well-financed. There are divisions between old money and new members (innovators from the middle class). The 1%'s creativity can be seen as it uses its money to lobby Congress, rewrite laws in its favor, and use politics, statistics, culture, and psychology to manipulate elections to maintain and expand its corporations' profits. Congress has given business interests so much influence that the AFL-CIO and environmental organizations are not even given access to the proposed trade laws affecting Europe and Asia.

The 1%'s creativity has also gone into optimizing its cash flow from production and distribution of goods on a worldwide basis. The Wal-Mart example of this does provide low commodity prices, but at the cost of wiping out local businesses and paying such low wages that many of their employees need public assistance, making Wal-Mart the nation's largest welfare queen. Over the last 40 or so years the top 3% has gobbled up productivity so much that it owns 90% of US wealth. This level of inequality has not been seen since the Great Depression. A new report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation (major industrialized countries) links inequality with slower national economic growth. It states, "In societies experiencing higher inequality, individuals might become less and less able to move outside the earnings class in which they were born." The financial sector has been so influential that it almost created a depression after dismantling laws designed to help prevent that outcome. Much of the climate denying comes from the fossil fuel industry, and it buys politicians who are united in making money the way they have always made it. The 1% is leading us toward a less sustainable and less democratic future.

[DEVELOPERS' DREAM: Our Region's Real Estate Future, as Washingtonian Magazine Envisions It](#)

Monday, June 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2015**

By Andy Feeney

If you think rising rents and gentrification pressures in the DC area are intense now, just wait. That's the unstated subtext of an ambitious April 2015 special report on the Metro region's real estate future in *The Washingtonian*, a local glossy magazine for the economically comfortable. With the cover title *Capital of the FUTURE*, this *Washingtonian* issue bears the subheading "The Stunning Changes Coming to Our Region – And What They Mean for How (and Where) You'll Live, Work, and Play," and for some upscale readers, that is a more or less accurate indication of the report's contents.

But what senior editor Marisa M. Kashino and a half-dozen contributing writers then provide is mostly what the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and a number of prominent local development companies have in mind for this area, without much sense of what the

changes envisioned might mean for low-wage Washington area workers, the homeless, many existing communities of color, and indebted recent college grads now working at relatively low-wage positions with local coffee shops and other retail establishments. What *The Washingtonian's* editorial staff has provided instead is an apparently well-researched glimpse of what the developers' plans and existing trends will look like at the 30,000-foot level, for a species of economic giants. And that's interesting.

The Washingtonian unfortunately doesn't make its content available online except to paid subscribers. Therefore, DSA members and other local progressives who are interested in the magazine's forecasts will need to buy copies of the April issue, at about \$5 each, or consult the magazine in your local libraries. But here are a few highlighted predictions:

- The population of Washington DC itself is projected to grow from about 659,000 people today to nearly 900,000 by the year 2040, according to the Council of Governments. Supposedly, the number of jobs available in the District will grow at a rate of between 6,640 – 10,143 positions per year between now and then. The higher rate of job growth would overtax the local housing supply and cause the District to run out of available land on which to build housing, creating a growth bottleneck.
- To meet growing demand for housing, the city probably will be able to convert some existing office space to residential housing, as local professional workers increasingly engage in telecommuting from offices in their homes in the suburbs and leave office space vacant for this kind of conversion. However, this won't be enough to solve the housing crunch. Therefore, the city will need to alter or eliminate the Height Act, which currently restricts DC buildings to heights of no more than 130 feet. There will be a need to protect the existing views of important monuments, *The Washingtonian* concedes, but when it comes to many other areas in the city, "the Height Act has got to go."
- Senior editor Kashino sees a number of potential blocks to future business development in the District, notably a NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome aggravated by the existence of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions in the city, which help NIMBY groups to frustrate development plans. Add in the potential interference of the National Capital Planning Commission, Kashino writes, and "You get a cumbersome, business-unfriendly building process." To cure this problem, the city needs to move toward a more "commonsense" zoning process that will allow for more mixed-use developments that facilitate greater residential densities.
- Also, Kashino suggests that local developers might emulate a major Long Island developer who has used "crowd-source planning" to win over or defeat the NIMBY groups, by giving pro-development residents a greater chance to comment on proposed projects electronically, without having to sit through long evening meetings where anti-development activists may dominate the proceedings.
- Outside of the District itself, *The Washingtonian* cites projections by local planners that envision extremely rapid population growth through 2040 in distant Stafford County and Spotsylvania County, Va., where a generation of "New Ex-Urbanites" are expected to settle in the future in hopes of finding large building lots and single-family homes. On the other hand, the cities of Arlington and Alexandria, right across the Potomac from the

District, are expected to experience population losses – with Arlington losing about 14 percent of its existing population and Alexandria almost 4 percent of its population in the planning period.

- Next to Stafford County (projected population growth of about 141 percent) and Spotsylvania County (projected growth of 137 percent), Frederick County, Va., is expected to have the fastest population growth over the next two and a half decades, growing by almost 78 percent to some 146,000 people. Those Virginia and Maryland counties closer to the District should see modest population growth, ranging from a low of roughly 9 percent to a high of about 21 percent, and counties in the intermediate zone between the “ex-urban” counties and the inner ring should see intermediate growth rates as well.
- According to an article by *Washingtonian* staffers Michael J. Gaynor and Emma Foehringer Merchant, in distant bedroom communities outside of the District, “bigger footprints that come with more green space” will continue to have an appeal to suburban families, while in the District itself, increasing numbers of residents will live in “micro-units” – compact apartments offering as little as 344 square feet of space for their inhabitants. Some “micro-units” of this sort have been built already, and more are on the way.
- *The Washingtonian* also discusses a number of major real estate projects, both approved and merely proposed, that prominent development companies may build in the region over the next few decades. These include (a) a Southwest waterfront project, the first stages of which could be complete in a few years’ time, that would add three hotels and some 200,000 square feet of retail space to the area; (b) a proposed park to be established along the District’s 11th Street Bridge, providing a pedestrian-friendly link to an area around the old St. Elizabeth’s Hospital grounds in Southeast, where “the District has plans for a technology hub anchored by Microsoft;” (c) a \$66 million plan to redevelop the White Flint area along Rockville Pike in Montgomery County, Md., to include a 1-mile boulevard with pedestrian walkways along with 9,800 new housing units; (d) the proposed addition of a new span to the American Legion Bridge to reduce traffic congestion; and (e) a proposed “Burnham Place” building complex that Amtrak and the Akridge development firm are thinking about constructing over the current Amtrak rail yard behind Union Station. If approved and built, it supposedly would provide 3 million square feet of new commercial and residential space in the area and link to the ongoing redevelopment of the H Street Corridor.

For more details of *The Washingtonian*’s projections, readers of the *Washington Socialist* really should buy or borrow the magazine’s April issue, which also includes a long, thoughtful article on the spectacular rise of Tysons Corner as a major employment hub and an overview of an ambitious plan to convert it into a livable, walkable residential and commercial area with a population of up to 100,000 residents by the year 2050. According to *Washingtonian* writer Luke Mullins, the proposed 40-year development plan for Tysons, by providing extensive access to public transit for area residents, could even convert this traffic-clogged “Edge City” into a carbon-neutral area over time – unless powerful economic forces not wholly under the control of the developers throw the entire transformation into disarray, as they might.

For local socialists and other Metro DC activists concerned about the high human costs of gentrification, a useful and instructive contrast to *The Washingtonian's* rosy futuristic vision is offered by a far less glossy publication, the Spring 2014 Peace Letter of the Washington Peace Center. With the title “Housing is a Human Right: Making Sense of DC’s Housing Crisis,” the Peace Letter makes note of the “mass displacement of life-long residents and a subsequent spike in family homelessness” that have attended the recent influx of high-income residents into the District and the rising rents and gentrification pressures they have caused.

An article in the Peace Letter by Will Merrifield on “The Cost of Gentrification” notes that as of early 2014, a DC resident would need to earn \$27 an hour for a 40-hour week to afford a typical two-bedroom apartment in the city at “Fair Market Rent.” Someone earning the minimum wage, which was \$8.25 an hour in early 2014, would have needed to work more than 130 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, to afford the same apartment.

Between 2000 and 2014, Merrifield’s article adds, the number of low-cost rental units in the District shrank by 50 percent, while there was a tripling in the number of rental units costing more than the median rent. Meanwhile the District’s waiting list for households seeking subsidized housing held some 70,000 names in 2014, and had been closed to new applicants. The result was that in 2014, and continuing through today, large numbers of low-income families and individuals – particularly older residents, people of color, and households headed by single mothers – have been squeezed out of the local housing market.

Promises by local politicians, including DC’s new Mayor Muriel Bowser, to address the problem through the construction or promotion of “affordable housing” also appear to have little chance of solving the housing crisis.

This is because, as the Peace Letter noted last year, the DC government generally defines “affordable housing” as housing that can be afforded by households enjoying between 50 percent and 80 percent of the Area Medium Income, or AMI. Since the Metro DC region includes five of the wealthiest counties in the United States, the AMI here in 2014 was around \$107,000 annually. However, in the 2010 Census, roughly 20 percent of the District’s population was recorded at living below the poverty line, at \$22,314 a year or less.

In early 2014, again according to the Peace Letter, the average household income in Ward 8, the city’s poorest ward, was around \$32,000 a year. It follows that in the District under current housing policies, it is possible for the city or local developers to build “affordable” housing that a fifth of the population can’t afford. The upshot, as Erin Burns noted in a graphic outline of the gentrification crisis in the Peace Letter, is that between 2000 and 2010, the District lost around 40,000 African-American residents to real estate displacement.

Conceivably, the brave new world of real estate development envisioned by *The Washingtonian* could eventually end this region’s gentrification crisis and provide new houses for the growing local population of homeless persons, but it seems more likely that this kind of real estate development will make the crisis worse. As Marxist geographer David Harvey has written in his recent book *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, speculative and not-so-speculative investments in land, rental housing, residential housing construction and other kinds

of fixed assets offer capitalists a seemingly attractive alternative to investments in new industrial manufacturing and other forms of economic production in times of prolonged economic stagnation. As it happens, the US economy and indeed much of the world economy today are caught in what looks like a prolonged period of stagnation and/or slow growth. Meanwhile the U.S. Federal Reserve and other central banks, in an effort to spur economic growth and prevent the stagnation from worsening, are keeping down interest rates and flooding the world economy with relatively cheap money – thus making it apparently cheap and easy for real estate developers to borrow large sums for big development schemes, even speculative ones. Could this be one of the less obvious economic forces driving both gentrification and large-scale commercial development in the Metro DC region, while rising rents are pushing low-income families in Ward 8 and elsewhere toward homelessness?

Additional Resources for This Story: Patrick Madden and Julie Patels, investigative reporters for radio station WAMU, have compiled a report called “Deals for Developers: Cash for Campaigns” that outlines financial connections between local real estate development interests and politicians in the District of Columbia. To access the report, click here: <https://apps.npr.org/deals-for-developers-wamu/>.

WAMU reporter Martin Austermuhle, with the assistance of several other WAMU staffers, has recently produced a three-part investigative report on the “flipping” of houses and rental properties in the District by unscrupulous investors. The series can be accessed here: <http://wamu.org/projects/house-flipping/#/part1?scrollTo=part1#part1r> , <http://wamu.org/projects/house-flipping/#/part2?scrollTo=part2#part2> , and <http://wamu.org/projects/house-flipping/#/part3?scrollTo=part3#part3>

[Documenting Workers’ Lives at DC Labor Fest: Films About Life and Labor](#)

Monday, June 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2015**

By Kurt Stand

The DC Labor Fest – sponsored by the Metro Washington Labor Council and supported by numerous other labor and social justice organizations — provides a forum for numerous forms of cultural productions with a focus on working people that is rare in our corporate-driven culture industry. The films, music, art and walking tours open a window on the experiences, ideas, aspirations of individual workers and of their collective struggles. Two film events shown on successive evenings, May 11 and 12, speak to the larger achievement of the festival as a whole.

Fighting For Our Lives was the first of these – a film re-released after 40 years, it was originally made as a vehicle for the United Farm Workers in the midst of a bitter dispute with growers in 1973. The film made by Glen Percy has the immediacy of a documentary made in the heat of battle. The UFW, formed in 1965, led a strike and national boycott campaign that led to successful grape contracts in California by 1969. This meant enormous real improvements in living and working conditions for those who labored in the fields, meant being treated by employers with the respect and dignity that should be the right of all. Union strength was growing and expanding throughout the fields, a circumstance that agricultural employers – powerful and wealthy – were not willing to accept.

Efforts to organize farm workers had periodically been attempted since the late 19th century; all defeated by a combination of vigilante and police violence, court injunctions, employer-induced division amongst the workers and the ever-present tool of racism. It was just such a combination which meant that farmworkers (alongside domestic workers) were excluded from US labor law. And so it was a playbook that was again brought into use as the film documents — employers used court injunctions, (then) corrupt Teamster union vigilantes, racist local police departments and other measures to break the strike. Although the will of the workers was not broken, one can see the change of mood on the picket lines from an exuberant defiance to a grimmer determination. The film ends with UFW founder and president Cesar Chavez speaking to strikers as they prepare to go across the US and Canada to build support for a boycott (the film itself was made as part of that campaign).

The film gives us a glimpse of a campaign, but it also allows us to see something of the lives of the workers, giving a picture of people who then cease to be faceless. The three brief clips of movies still in production shown as part of the Bread & Roses: Filmmakers' Works in Progress at Busboys and Poets in Takoma Park – **Creative Feds**, **City of Trees**, **Can't Take it No More** – are documentary films which give voice to working people facing vastly different circumstances, yet workers trying to make their voices heard, asserting their dignity and sense of self. As the name implies, **Creative Feds** (directed by Erica Ginsberg and Leon Gerskovic) is about federal workers. Beginning with clips from newsreels and news shows that depict government employees as faceless bureaucrats who waste public money, this movie both reminds viewers of the vast range of works they in fact do, and humanizes them by allowing a glimpse of their pursuits apart from their jobs. The workers (all from different agencies) express their creativity through music, theatre, painting and thus as full human beings contrary to popular stereotype. Stereotypes of a different sort are used to paint an image of the supposed uselessness of people who live in blighted neighborhoods – in those neighborhoods west of the river in DC that gentrification has left behind. Often depicted with thinly veiled contempt or patronizing “sympathy,” they are rarely seen as individuals with stories worth knowing, opinions worth hearing, dreams worth acknowledging. **City of Trees** works to counter this. Directors Lance and Brandon Kramer document what happens when a non-profit makes use of stimulus money at the height of the recession by hiring local unemployed workers to plant trees in a neighborhood park. For the change that is wrought is not only about the acquisition of job skills, or about community engagement to make a nearby park safer, it is also about the affirmation and sense of self-worth those involved gain when given a kind of opportunity otherwise denied.

A different focus comes in **Can't Take it No More**, which is a film about Walmart workers who are taking part in the struggle to force the company to treat employees with fairness, a commodity Walmart does not have on its shelf. Like all union campaigns, the workers' fight is about better pay, conditions, benefits – and is also about the dignity and respect to which all workers are entitled, whether they be professionals, janitors, retail clerks or, as seen before, if they work on farms and vineyards. The focus of this documentary, however, is not on the Walmart workers' campaigns or rallies, but rather on the lives of some of those most active in this social justice movement. Knowing something of the people engaged, who they are, what they experienced, what they believe, allows viewers to understand the human beings behind the Walmart workers fight for economic justice. All three of these films share in common with each other a focus on persons rather than campaigns or overarching issues – but that makes them just as, if not even more, political than films that speak of issues abstracted from human personality. And, indeed, corporate power recognizes that – Michael Bain and Kiley Kraskouskas, directors of **Can't Take it No More**, are involved in a legal fight with Walmart which is seeking to prevent the filmmakers from using the company's name in the picture's title. Making connections between work come around full circle, the screening of works in progress – of films not yet completed – put something of the craft of filmmaking on display and spoke to the growth of documentary film making in the DC Metro area.

At the same time, these films, in their own way, speak to labor struggles. Federal workers will find their livelihoods and conditions under threat if Republican regain the White House in 2016. The stimulus ran out and job programs such as those depicted in **City of Trees** remain the exception not the rule. And Walmart certainly will not give up its anti-union stance, will not stop squeezing its labor force without a bitter and determined fight. Understanding such challenges made viewing **Fighting for Our Harvest** all the more poignant and powerful. The UFW strike/boycott campaign of 1973-75 was only partially successful as the union was losing ground under assaults from all sides.* The political mood in the country had shifted, farmworkers were an early target as business and the right began a counter-offensive from which we all still suffer. But not all was lost. Conditions in the fields are better than they were in 1965. The UFW remains an active force in California, as does the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) in the south and Midwest, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) in Florida and as do other local and regional groupings. And the fight for justice, against racism and exploitation continues to draw strength from the victories and defeats of those who came before.

Perhaps too solidarity is growing. The beauty of the three documentaries shown as part of Filmmakers' Works in Progress – indeed the importance of DC Laborfest as a whole –is that it simultaneously demonstrates the diversity of experience and outlooks of workers across our communities while also pointing to the underlying commonality of all working people. Only out of such shared understanding can the solidarity of labor be made into the force needed to win social justice. An extraordinarily moving sequence in **Fighting for Our Harvest** is in a sequence that moves from funeral to funeral of two workers murdered during the dispute, a sequence that moves from a Muslim funeral for an Arab farmworker to a Catholic funeral for a Mexican farmworker of the prayers and music of the one to the prayers and music of the other. What we see and hear is an expression of shared sacrifice that serves as a shared expression of hope for a better life in the here and now. That is the underlying meaning of

For well-to-do people who kind of like nature, but hate doing without essential electronic devices, the Washington State park system has created a fine new camping opportunity. According to an opinion piece by outdoor writer Christopher Solomon in the May 24 *New York Times*, the state for the last two years has allowed a private concessionaire, “Pampered Wilderness,” to offer high-end camping opportunities in its Millersylvania State Park where, for about \$500 per weekend, visitors can enjoy “amenities like flat-screen TVs or microwaves and fireplaces.” Starting this Memorial Day, Solomon adds, Washington State also is offering “glamping” (for glam-camping) at the enormously popular Moran State Park on Orca Island, “a jewel of Washington’s park system,” where tenting opportunities will run to as much as \$220 a night for a minimum two-night stay on the weekends, with an extra \$9 needed if campers want coffee delivered in the morning. The state park authority is reportedly considering whether to offer Wi-Fi to campers, too.

Offering “glamping” to campers willing to pay more runs the risk of creating a class-divided camping experience for public park visitors, Solomon frets. Nevertheless, Washington State is turning toward it for two reasons. One is a fashion trend in private campgrounds that’s been promoted by chic travel publications, including the travel section of the *Times* itself; the second is that the Washington state park system, which serves some 300 million visitors annually, has lost 79 percent of its public funding in six years, forcing it to lay off one-third of its employees. State promotion of “glamping” and the higher fees it can bring is one way to recover needed revenues.

Nationwide, Solomon reports, allocations for state parks by state legislatures have fallen by \$250 million since 2008, “forcing parks to cut operations or turn to other sources of money.” Unfortunately this defunding process – which promises to make parks unaffordable to low-income Americans who may need them most – is still underway. In Wisconsin, notes Solomon, Republican Gov. Scott Walker “has proposed cutting all state funding for parks,” recommending that they rely instead on higher user fees and other existing revenues.

For more details, see Christopher Solomon, “Our Pampered Wilderness,” at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/24/opinion/sunday/our-pampered-wilderness.html?_r=0 .

–Andy Feeney

The White House released in May a short (11 pages) compendium of findings about the national security implications of climate change. Dispassionately, we hear that “The pressures caused by climate change will influence resource competition while placing additional burdens on economies, societies, and governance institutions around the world. Many governments will face challenges to meet even the basic needs of their people as they confront demographic change, resource constraints, effects of climate change, and risks of global infectious disease outbreaks. These effects are threat multipliers...”

The pdf is at https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/National_Security_Implications_of_Changing_Climate_Final_051915.pdf

Longtime DSA leader and feminist scholar Chris Riddiough spoke to our Socialist Salon a few months ago about the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, one of the root sources of feminist thought and action stemming from the 1960s. The website for that history has recently had significant updates, Chris reports, and invites a visit. It's at <http://www.cwlu.org/>

And another detailed take:

How the Other Half Dies: Infant Mortality Rates in the District. According to a recent report by the advocacy group Save the Children, death rates for infants in Washington DC's poorest ward, Ward 8, are roughly 10 times those in Ward 3, its wealthiest. Writing about the Save the Children report in the May 5 *Washington Post*, reporter Abigail Hauslohner observes that District infant mortality rates on average have fallen significantly over the last decade and a half – dropping from about 15 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1999 to just 7.9 in 2012, the last year for which firm data were available. In 2013, a preliminary report prepared by former Mayor Vincent Gray pegged the infant death rate at 6.6 per 1,000 live births – an “all-time low for the city.” But the figures cited by Save the Children indicate an infant mortality rate in Ward 8 of 14.9 per 1,000 live births in 2012, comparable to rates in San Salvador and Phnom Pehn, Cambodia. In Ward 3, in contrast, the rate for 2012 was 1.2 deaths per 1,000 live births – comparable to rates in Stockholm and Tokyo, and “on par with the lowest infant mortality rates worldwide.”

Save the Children found a likely cause for the discrepancy, Hauslohner reports: about half of Ward 8's children are living in poverty, and the majority of the households in the ward with children are headed by single mothers. The stresses these mothers face during pregnancy in paying their bills and holding down their jobs probably contribute to the higher rates of premature births in the ward associated with greater infant mortality. For more details, see Hauslohner's article in the May 5 *Post* at http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/poor-dc-babies-are-more-than-10-times-as-likely-to-die-as-rich-ones/2015/05/04/27200040-f268-11e4-b2f3-af5479e6bbdd_story.html . The Save the Children report can be found at <https://www.savethechildren.net/state-worlds-mothers-2015> .

–Andy Feeney

[Metro-DC DSA Members Discuss Prospects, Pitfalls in Supporting Sanders Campaign](#)

Monday, June 1st, 2015

A Washington Socialist Report

Metro-DC DSA members enlivened by the presidential candidacy of Sen. Bernie Sanders gathered at May's Socialist Salon to work on the details and constraints involved in individual and group support for the effort.

Sanders, who announced his candidacy April 30, has identified himself as a democratic socialist frequently in his political arc from mayor of Burlington, Vermont to US representative and then senator from that state. DSA members see big advantages in the introduction of the term into presidential politics – advantages for the political discourse itself, up to now capped at a largely neoliberal level and bottomed on the knuckle-dragging rhetoric of Tea Party patriarchy. Socialist organizations will also benefit from the entry of socialist perspectives on perennial issue areas such as inequality, health, income security and education.

The Supreme Court's decision in the *Citizens United* case changed the landscape in which DSA (and other nonprofits) can conduct electoral activity. [\[DD1\]](#) Though DCDSA held a very successful fundraiser for Sanders when he ran for the Senate in 2006, in presidential races a lot more distance is required to protect the organization's status. Our express advocacy, however, no longer has to be done solely through our PAC (but we cannot coordinate with his campaign). Until some legal questions are clarified, for instance, DSA will not do fundraising for Sanders as an organization, though members may do so as individuals. Members should feel free to encourage Democratic primary voters to support Sanders and explain this is a DSA position.

Members at the Salon agreed that activities both promoting the Sanders campaign (and emphasizing his leftmost policy proposals) and simultaneously raising the visibility of DSA as an organization were optimal. The group also discussed the fact that there are issues on which some DSA members might not agree with Sanders. Members agreed to a separate discussion in how to approach other Sanders volunteers on the differences between the Senator and DC-Metro DSA members.

The Metro DC DSA steering committee chose two members to be point persons in this effort. David Duhalde and Ross Templeton are both campaign veterans and will aim to navigate the local through the reefs and shoals of Federal Elections Commission (FEC) regulations.

Members at the Salon discussed the DC political terrain and what long-standing local groups might be allies. One veteran of the 1988 Jesse Jackson primary campaign, Kurt Stand, urged that the spirit of this one, likewise, should be “to win” not just pull a major candidate leftward, because much of Jackson's non-core support was galvanized by that spirit.

The national office has sent some preliminary guidance to locals about what they can legally do to boost both Sanders and DSA.

DSA's support for Sanders has been explicit. The national organization website [announces](#) **“Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) strongly supports Senator Sanders as the strongest candidate for President of the United States.”** As always, the support includes critique: DSA national director Maria Svart, in her guidance to locals, said “Our political goal is to generate support for Bernie through visibility and momentum, and do what we can to influence his campaign to have better perspective and platform around institutional racism. Our organizational goal is to GROW DSA so that after the election, we are significantly stronger and can continue fighting for democratic socialism.”



Metro-DC DSA members at the May Salon. Photo: Nicole Hohler

Svart noted that there are a fair number of things that locals can do as locals, including creating forums or other events with titles like “What is Democratic Socialism and Why Does Bernie Support It?” Other moves include contacting other independent organizations that might be interested in the campaign, including “People for Bernie,” a group led by Occupy veterans.

But, she emphasized, “We are running an UNCOORDINATED campaign. This means we are not communicating with the Bernie Sanders official campaign. If individual DSAers show up to a Bernie campaign event in a DSA T-shirt, that’s OK, but not coordinating with the campaign in any way.”

In particular, the organization will not, for the present, do any official fundraisers. In a May 24 update in response to questions from locals around the country, Svart emphasized “No one should organize a fundraiser as DSA. You should not have DSA literature. You should not introduce yourself as a DSAer if you give remarks. You should not use a DSA list to invite people.”

Future local membership meetings and salons will develop DSA’s range of action in the Sanders campaign as more guidance appears.

[Postal Unions Set “Grand Alliance” Against Ongoing Efforts to Privatize USPS](#)

Monday, June 1st, 2015

The Washington Socialist <> June 2015

By Andy Feeney

The U.S. Postal Service and its unionized workforce have been under attack for more than a decade by rightwing Republicans who apparently hope to shrink or eliminate its operations over time and transfer its functions to private industry. To this end, a Republican Congress in 2002 passed legislation ordering the USPS to prefund its pension fund liabilities some 75 years into the future, thus guaranteeing that the Postal Service, almost regardless of its revenue stream, will run large yearly budget deficits. Then, in the name of reducing the budget deficits, conservatives have called for the closing of rural post offices in many places, the shutting of regional mail-processing centers, the elimination of Saturday mail service and the transfer of postage stamp sales to private retailers, including Wal-Mart and Staples.

This year, under the leadership of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), one of four different unions representing USPS employees, the embattled postal workers and their allies have started to fight back against the privatizers. Earlier this year, APWU president Mark Dimondstein announced the formation of a “Grand Alliance” of labor unions and other national organizations devoted to preserving the Postal Service and even potentially expanding its functions.

And on May 14, APWU members and supporters from the Grand Alliance rallied in 130 locations across 45 states, DC and Puerto Rico in support of a new contract for the APWU that would slow the privatization drive and support the establishment of new USPS operations, notably through “postal banking” services that would give many Americans an alternative to payday loan companies and private check-cashing services.

In the Metro Washington, DC area on May 14, about 25-30 union members and a few allies gathered outside the Brentwood mail processing facility near the Brookland shopping center to support the APWU contract negotiating team. For approximately two hours, demonstrators chanted in favor of a new contract and “union power” in the general sense, at one point marching onto the shopping center’s parking lot to demonstrate outside of Giant (which is unionized) and Home Depot (which is not)*. After a few minutes of chanting, we were told by an annoyed manager of Home Depot that we were allegedly on company property and needed to leave, which inspired some spirited argument by several feisty women in the APWU contingent. However, on the advice of the local union president, we did leave to return to the front of the Brentwood facility for remarks by union officials. We also distributed dozens if not hundreds of postcards to passing motorists and local shoppers addressed to Postmaster General Megan J. Brennan, expressing support for a strong Postal Service and for the APWU’s contract demands. Most people after signing the postcards returned them to the union to convey to Postmaster General Brennan; a few took the cards with them to sign and home and mail in independently.

How effective the May 14 rallies and the postcard campaign will be in persuading USPS management to accept the union’s demands remains to be seen. The APWU’s national contract expired on May 20 with no agreement between the union and the Postal Service. On May 21 APWU president Dimondstein issued a press statement saying the contract talks have been extended as the negotiators seek to resolve differences over “economic issues.” For now, Dimondstein indicated, the old contract terms remain in effect; if the APWU cannot reach

agreement with the Postal Service on a new contract, it will likely resort to mediation and/or arbitration in search of a better deal.

Regardless of the outcome of this year's contract talks, however, the APWU's effort to build a Grand Alliance of supporters for a healthy Postal Service and good USPS jobs seems to be off to a promising start. In March, when the Alliance was first announced, it boasted some 65 member organizations; however, there now are 75 national organizations on the membership list. These include the AFL-CIO, other postal worker unions and a host of other national and international unions, as well as the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, the Black Woman's Roundtable, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Campaign for America's Future, the Catholic Alliance for the Common Good, the Center for Media and Democracy, the Center for Rural Affairs, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Consumer Action, Democracy for America, the Gamaliel Network (a religious justice coalition), Greenpeace USA, the Jewish Labor Committee, the Ms. Foundation for Women, National Action Network, the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, National Consumers League, the National Council of Churches, the National Organization for Women, National People's Action, People Demanding Action, People for the American Way, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., Public Citizen, the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, the Sierra Club, United Students Against Sweatshops, and Vote Vets Action Fund, among other groups.

The support that Alliance members have expressed for a strong Postal Service going forward has had some influence on Postal Service management in the contract talks, Dimondstein indicated in his May 21 statement, and the postcards to Postmaster General Brennan are helpful. APWU members and supporters should keep collecting signatures and sending them in to the USPS as talks continue.

For more information contact the union website at <http://www.apwu.org/>. For more information on the Grand Alliance and how you or your organization can contribute to it, go to its website at <http://agrandalliance.org/> and <http://agrandalliance.org/national-organizations/>.

**Home Depot is an [ESOP](#), an employee stock ownership corporation, though of the type that offers employees little or no say over company management – just stock options.*

[Renew Your Commitment to Socialism in the Nation's Capital](#)

Monday, June 1st, 2015

The Washington Socialist <> June 2015

By Bill Mosley

Later this month you can expect to receive by e-mail and/or regular mail a request that you renew your financial commitment to Metro-DC Democratic Socialists of America.

Even if you pay dues to national DSA, the local chapter still needs your assistance. We receive no financial support from the national organization, and our ability to carry on our work of providing a socialist voice in the “capital city of the capitalist world” depends on you.

Over the next 12 months we plan to continue our ongoing work as well as take up new projects. Among the latter, the Bernie Sanders for President campaign provides an unprecedented opportunity to inject socialist ideas into the mainstream debate. Meanwhile, we will continue to work with our allies for a \$15 minimum wage, to fight against police brutality, and to support progressive candidates for local offices. But to do all of that, we need your financial support.

And we also need your ideas and participation. Our mailing will include a survey with questions about your ideas and priorities for the local and how you might become involved, or more involved, in DSA activism. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey and return it along with as generous a membership donation as you can afford.

So watch your mailbox and your inbox. With your help, Metro-DC DSA can be even more effective over the next year in injecting socialism into the local marketplace of ideas.

[Tomorrowland, a Film Mini Review](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> June 2015**

By Daniel C. Adkins

Tomorrowland starts with a young boy going to the New York World’s Fair to enter a jet pack into an invention competition. Soon you see a young woman getting a glimpse of the future but finding that future in jeopardy. The film is about saving the future.

Tomorrowland is inspired by Disney’s historical views of the future as well as our current political intransigence on issues like climate change. The film veers into conspiracy as well as the reluctance of authorities to accept new ideas. The film demonstrates leadership by women and girls and also shows more diversity than any film that I can remember. Although the plot is convoluted and has fun with animation, a strong point is that if you want a different future than what we are staggering toward, you need to get organizing for that future. The film should be great fun for families with children and a topic for conversation.

The film’s weakness is that it focuses on individuals and not the social movements that transform history. The film’s success of promoting organizing is undercut by wanting to organize only the

elite, the best and brightest. Our success in winning the Civil War and World War II was aided by bright people, but won by ordinary people. There is a role for everyone in changing history.

The film is showing at local AMC theaters in Arlington, Bethesda, DC, Fairfax, Germantown, Hyattsville, Howard County, and Rockville.