

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

[Welcome to the Washington Socialist for March 2013](#)

Environmental concerns and worker health top the agenda this month. The DC Metro DSA local prioritized its activity for 2013 at its February meeting and members chose to focus on the “Sick Leave for All” campaign that several of our [ally groups](#) are also highlighting. Several offerings in this issue expand on that, including one on the effort underway to pass a significant Maryland bill expanding sick leave in private-sector businesses. DCDSA members also participated in the largest US climate-change rally ever, by most accounts – the Feb. 17 protest against the Keystone XL pipeline and for alternative energy. A DSA flyer distributed at that event has been revised as a broad article on socialist perspectives on climate change. In *Socialist Takes*, a roundup of short items, be sure to note that at our March meeting, Saturday, March 9, we’ll be electing a steering (executive) committee for the next year – and all DC Metro DSA members can and should vote.

Here’s the lineup. Click on the links to read individual articles, or scroll down.

[Liberty for whom?](#) *Kurt Stand* discusses the ways in which concepts of freedom can be distorted in the service of inequality and oppression, with the principal example of low-paid workers with no sick leave or health coverage.

[Friedan’s Legacy](#) – Betty Friedan, who galvanized the feminist movement with *The Feminist Mystique*, had to dampen her radicalism and radical history to be the mother of the movement. *Carolyn Byerly* recalls the diversity within the women’s movement at the center of which Friedan’s life and writing stood.

[Bringing Justice to the energy transition](#): *Andy Feeney* and *Woody Woodruff* expand on the local’s message at the KXL pipeline protest, outlining the potential disruption to modes of work and the way to rally labor forces to support the campaign against carbon and climate change.

[Deconstructing Obama](#) – *Andy Feeney* analyzes the administration’s mushy and contradictory stances on climate change as drawn in Obama’s State of the Union speech.

[Culture](#): how *Zero Dark Thirty*’s ambiguity keeps a wide audience confused about national security issues. *Dan Adkins* examines the Oscar-winning War on Terror melodrama, as well as the new release, “NO,” a dramatization of the plebescite that ousted Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet at the ballot box, and the uncomfortably slick ad campaign that fueled the surprise outcome.

[Socialist Takes](#): briefs on the local's upcoming election, the never-ending Fiscal Cliff (*Mosley*), the effort to expand sick leave in Maryland and other Maryland legislative action (*Woodruff*), and national DSA news items.

[Betty Friedan and the building of a feminist political infrastructure](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2013**

By Carolyn M. Byerly

In the mid-1960s one of my peers was reading Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* in one of her university classes. She kept quoting ideas from it that had been in my own head for years, so I thought, what's the big deal? It would be another 15 years before I would open the cover of that book, which by then had run its celebrated course for launching second wave feminism. I found Friedan's work to be an affirmation to women who wanted more than the confinement of a traditional middle class heterosexual life which had come to mean marriage, kids, and defined sex roles within hearth and home.

Friedan had identified the depth of modern bourgeois women's boredom and desire for more engagement with the world, and she helped lead them – us – to a new vision and a renewed political vigor.

There's a backstory here.

In the early '60s, my girlfriends and I would muse about what we would all be doing in a few years, once high school graduation was behind us. They were looking for Mr. Wonderful and the traditional life that I wanted to run far, far away from. Our military families had gravitated to the suburbs in the 1950s and we had grown up in the kind of households that the participants in Friedan's research had been so unhappy with (though our suburbs were lower middle class, not the educated elite ones Friedan knew).

Still, the women's oppression that Friedan described was familiar to me, and I wanted no part of it. What I did not know till much later was that she and I were propelled not just by what we were running *from* but also running *toward* – the lure of radical ideas and dreams for a world they might make possible. In the midst of so many roiling social movements in the years to come, my own feminist consciousness evolved slowly and sometimes painfully as I figured out how to adopt leftist feminist ways of being in a conventional society. This remains a work in progress even today.

I am intrigued by how easily commentators writing the obligatory pieces commemorating the 50th anniversary of the *Feminine Mystique* talk about Betty Friedan's Marxist and communist

connections, her support for laborers, and her work as a writer for the weekly paper for the left-wing United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America.

Friedan tried to minimize her radical past after she gained prominence as the founder of National Organization for Women (NOW) and made her place in mainstream feminism for fear of alienating the very women she wanted to mobilize politically. *Truthout*'s Peter Dreier observes that she, Bella Abzug and many of the other early second wave leaders had distanced themselves from the left-wing affiliations that had nurtured them. The fact that they were also Jewish meant they and their families had already experienced marginalization of more than one kind during the McCarthy years and they didn't want to tarnish their emerging leadership in the 1960s.

We take the work (and I mean this in the true sense as labor) of Betty Friedan and her generation of upstart women for granted today. They were tireless in their need to set things in motion. Friedan's organization NOW remains perhaps the longest-lived women's political action group in the history of the United States. Though often labeled a white middle class organization, NOW has worked for legislation and social issues across five decades that benefit women across socio-economic and racial categories – abortion rights, equal pay, anti-violence legislation, parental leave, and my personal favorite women's media ownership, among others. Today's NOW reaches out to a multicultural audience and young women in universities and other parts of society. NOW's leaders collaborate with those in civil rights and GLBT groups on issues of shared concern.

In her organizing moments, Friedan didn't stop at starting NOW but went on to found or co-found other feminist political action groups, including National Abortion Rights Action League and National Women's Political Caucus. She helped to construct the infrastructure of modern women's politics in the United States that laid nearly all of the legal grounding that women stand on today. She took controversial stands, e.g., supporting Shirley Chisholm's candidacy for president in 1971, along with Gloria Steinem and other white feminists, as a way of encouraging women across racial lines to run for high office.

Friedan was a complex leader. She built so much but she also stirred animosities along the way. Who can forget the "lavender menace" designation she put on lesbians in the early '70s when the emerging anti-feminist backlash was accusing the women's movement of being a bunch of man-hating lesbians? Friedan got her comeuppance at the International Women's Year convention in Houston in 1976 when thousands of women, straight and gay, in the auditorium stood in solidarity by releasing lavender balloons that said "We are everywhere!" And, the lesbian-baiting in mainstream feminism dissipated after that. Friedan herself mellowed in time.

When Betty Friedan was an old woman, she harkened back to her radical socialist vision to write a column for *Newsweek*. In it, she spoke of "transcending all 'identity politics' – women, blacks, gays, the disabled" to envision a new community. Connecting women's lives to the broader political spectrum, she said:

We need to campaign – men and women, whites and blacks – for a shorter work week, a higher minimum wage, an end to the war against social welfare programs. 'Women's issues' are symptoms of problems that affect everyone.

Around 2000, I saw Betty Friedan speak to an auditorium of loving followers, which resembled the collection of humanity she conjured up in this quote, at Cornell University. She was advancing in years and beginning to sound a bit confused in her dialogue; I can't even remember her topic. What sticks in my mind is how difficult it was that day to watch this aging hero falter, something remindful of the process that confronts all of us. I remember sitting in that auditorium not wanting to leave but rather thinking of how she began and what she imparted along the way. Women and leftists are still beholden to her work on our behalf.

On the 50th anniversary of the book that started so many things to roll, I hang onto this knowledge.

[Cinema: "Zero Dark Thirty" and "NO"](#)

Friday, March 1st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2013**

By Daniel Adkins

Zero Dark Thirty is a film about the decade-long hunt for Osama bin Laden. The film has been overshadowed by its coverage of waterboarding by which the CIA may have obtained intelligence about his location. Even the CIA has objected to the waterboarding scene. However, the real focus of the film is the major role that women are playing in intelligence gathering and operations, and for that, it is commendable. In U.S. military and paramilitary forces woman are making major strides and are only treated differently in the draft. Considering that most jobs a hundred years ago were defined by gender, we are now nearing the end of legal job segregation by gender.

The film is based on the real-life struggle of a female CIA intelligence agent facing bureaucratic, political, terror, and intelligence obstacles in the pursuit of Osama. The protagonist of *Zero Dark Thirty* was remarkable in her prolonged determination to find Osama bin Laden while others found bureaucratic or political concerns limiting their involvement in the search. The film depicts intelligence operations as an almost industrial process. When the decade-long work of finding the target has been done, then the national heroes of Seal Team Six appear. It appears killing Osama bin Laden was easier than finding him.

Another observation about the film would be that the search for bin Laden would not have been possible without the extensive involvement of people of color in the CIA and recruited to CIA operations. This is especially true of Pakistan where some locals form armed patrols to keep Europeans out of their communities. These realities were shown but not emphasized. Exploring these diversities would make for a different film, but one that is sorely need in the US as we face globalization.

It will be interesting to see if women have an impact on how and what intelligence is achieved. Will they make a better distinction between what can be done and what should be done than their male counterparts? In 1953 the British MI-6 and the American CIA overturned the democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister to replace him with the dictatorship of the Shah in order to get more profitable control of Iran's oil. This was a doable CIA project, but were private oil profits a worthy goal? Was it worth installing a dictator whose overthrow is still screwing up the Mideast? An important question is why have we allowed US foreign policy to be run for private profit instead of expanding democracy and development?

The example of British banking suggests that the involvement of women can lead to wiser decisions. A UK study of UK banks showed that the more women there were in a bank's leadership the less risky behavior and losses happened in the Great Recession. This might get us better long-term thinking, but we will also need elected officials more focused on peaceful and sustainable world development than on private profit.

***NO* * in Spanish with English subtitles * (R, 110 min.)**

In 1988 Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet calls a plebiscite to determine if the general would rule for another eight years. Opposition leaders persuade a young skate-boarding advertising developer (fictional) to spearhead the campaign to vote NO. The film *NO* is inspired by the history of this plebiscite.

There are many twists and turns in this story. When a campaign of "Chile, happiness is coming – vote NO" is developed, many who have lost friends, family, and comrades to the brutal Pinochet regime leave the campaign, seeing it as disrespectful if not traitorous for not mentioning those lost. Many believe the poll is rigged — including the campaign developer's wife, who was just recently released from prison for her political activism.

The NO vote wins partly because after 15 years of dictatorship, many Chileans yearn for the happiness of a less- controlled society. Not really shown are the indigenous workers, the strong unions, strong political parties, student organizations, human rights groups, and a grass roots effort pushing voter registration to 92% of potential voters. Another factor was that many of the generals went along with the recommendations of their foreign backers and accepted the result of the plebiscite. In the film the long diverse lines at the polls hint at the nature of Chilean society, but the story is focused on just the urban and educated of Chile. Note: Ad agencies do not get 92% of the voters registered; unions and parties do.

Remembering that the film is an art form to convey some sentiment of the time is necessary to understand its limitations. If you need a PR primer on "how to overthrow dictators," this is not the movie.

However, the film brings forth the challenge of advertising, polls, or any modern communication used to sway public opinion. Plato was skeptical of democracy, reasonably so, because he sensed that "the many" are easily misled. If the US election of 2012 was an example, the dearth of real policy discussion and the excess of targeted posturing could lead one to think that Plato

was right. Political operatives toward the end of the 2012 campaign advised against any use of statistics because both sides had completely discredited themselves with regard to numbers.

The manipulative use of psychology, sociology, statistics, and culture in advertising suggest that the knowledge of one's self and one's society is not easily achieved, but is necessary to understand the present and to achieve social change. Until that knowledge spreads more throughout the society, we are likely to see more manipulation and less direct and straightforward communication. However this is a good movie to see and to stimulate discussion of the use of media in campaigns.

[Deconstructing Obama's Climate Message From a Green \(and Socialist\) Perspective](#)

Friday, March 1st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2013**

By Andy Feeney

For democratic socialists who care about the environment – and for countless American environmentalists who probably don't care about democratic socialism – President Obama's approach to climate change in his 2013 State of the Union Address offers a remarkable collection of contradictions.

In a few well-chosen words, Obama on Feb. 12 cited “the overwhelming judgment of science” in declaring that the U.S. “must do more to combat climate change,” for the sake of both ourselves and our posterity, and “before it's too late.” Yet at the same time, he called for climate policy to advance “strong economic growth” that some environmentalists, at least, believe is a driver of both climate change and general environmental destruction.

The speech hailed striking advances in wind energy and solar energy production under Obama's watch, and called for more such advances in the future. Yet it likewise celebrated U.S. growth in the production of oil and gas, both fossil fuels that obviously contribute to destructive climate change. Indeed, the president promised that his administration will “keep cutting red tape and speeding up new oil and gas permits,” which could accelerate the extraction and use of both of these fossil fuels.

In calling for new federally subsidized research on new technologies in order to “shift our cars and trucks off oil for good,” Obama proposed to fund such research through a new Energy Security Trust funded from royalties on oil and gas production on public lands – a plan similar to one floated in the 1980s by then-Senator Bennett Johnson (D-LA), and overwhelmingly opposed by environmental groups at the time. They saw it as potentially hooking the renewable energy movement on addictive infusions of money generated by the oil industry.

Also in the State of the Union address, Obama made a probably obligatory reference to the desirability of Congress enacting a “bipartisan, market-based solution to climate change” such as that championed a few years ago by Joe Lieberman and John McCain.

And yet – maybe very significantly – he said nothing at all in this speech about coal, whether of the “clean coal” variety or otherwise. National environmental groups strongly hope that his EPA will adopt and implement new rules on CO₂ emissions from coal-fired power plants that will reduce national consumption of this especially dirty, especially carbon-intensive fossil fuel.

The speech did not mention by name the proposed Keystone XL pipeline – an item of bitter contention between Obama’s environmentalist supporters and some of the labor unions backing him. The president’s address also said nothing about nuclear power, which the Heritage Foundation is touting as a promising alternative to fossil fuel production and which NASA climate scientist James Hansen has somewhat gingerly endorsed as one of many possible alternatives to continued dependence on coal, oil and natural gas.

And although some observers strongly expect Obama’s new Secretary of State, former Senator John Kerry, to pursue climate-friendly policies internationally, the State of the Union speech made no mention of global climate policy negotiations that China, the U.S., and India – the leading CO₂ emitters of the world – have effectively stalemated by failing to agree on which nations need to cut greenhouse gas emissions, by how much, and by when.

Finally, Obama, except in his brief allusion to the “overwhelming judgment of science,” said nothing about recent climate research that warns of the likely inability of the world to reduce greenhouse gas emissions enough to avoid a 2 degree Celsius rise in average global temperatures by about 2040. Such a 2 degree rise is what many scientists consider a “tipping point” — beyond which melting Arctic sea ice and methane releases from melting permafrost in Arctic latitudes may put greenhouse warming on steroids, sharply accelerating it and perhaps putting its control or its cessation beyond the powers of human civilization.

It is something of a Marxist cliché that history develops through contradictions[C5]. But both in his statements and in his silences, Obama in his State of the Union remarks placed before the voters some crucially important contradictions, and highlighted them in bold relief.

Can the mainstream American environmental movement and more radical Green groups grasp only one pole of those contradictions, and by pushing on them hard enough, achieve real progress in tackling the climate challenge? Arguably, this is the best or perhaps the only thing the environmental groups can do legislatively for now.

Yet at the same time, Obama’s also speech seems to offer the fossil fuel industry – with the possibly significant exception of the coal producers – a chance to grasp the other pole of these contradictions, and to push our civilization in precisely the opposite direction, towards environmental disaster.

What this paradox in Obama’s climate rhetoric signifies, of course, is that American society and the broad Democratic Party coalition that got Obama reelected are both riven by our own, very

powerful contradictions. Obama's dazzlingly paradoxical formulation of energy policy reflects some stunning and possibly fatal contradictions among his supporters and those political and economic interests – including capitalist business interests – that Obama probably needs to work with to accomplish anything.

Are there any smart Marxists in DSA – or any perceptive, socially-minded analysts in the various Green groups – who can unravel the contradictions both in Obama's energy rhetoric and the Democratic coalition at large, so that progressives can decide the best way to move forward on the climate issue? If so, let's hope they show the way forward – and as Obama said it himself, "before it's too late."

[DSA's Green aspect](#)

How Metro DC DSA Participated In the Keystone XL/Climate Rally – and What are the Next Steps?

The Washington Socialist <> **March 2013**

By Andy Feeney and Woody Woodruff

On Feb. 17, the largest political rally on climate change in U.S. history occurred on the National Mall. Climate activists and opponents of natural gas fracking traveled to Washington from across the Eastern US, the South and the Midwest as well as Canada to urge President Obama to decide against completion of the proposed Keystone XL pipeline that would bring oil from the tar sands of Alberta to ports along the U.S. Gulf Coast.

Rally organizers claimed a turnout of at least 35,000 activists, with some sponsors estimating the crowd at nearly 50,000. Members of our Metro DC Washington chapter of DSA constituted a relatively tiny contingent of those bracing the ironically frigid weather and handed out fliers to the assembled climate activists, and we like to think we made a small contribution to voicing a "socialist" and also commonsensical position on the climate challenge. In this article, we'd like to explain to other chapter members what we said and why.

For nearly a century or more within the western social democratic left, to which DSA belongs, and even more so within the global Communist movement that flourished for 70 years following the Bolshevik Revolution, concern for nature and environmental sustainability was distinctly eclipsed by the urgent need to advance the interests of the industrial proletariat – as socialists understood it, of course – and to protect the interests of the poor.

In both the social democratic parties of the West and even more so within the Communist led governments of the Soviet bloc, the pursuit of economic growth and the fight against poverty and injustice took precedence over worries about pollution, much less protection of the environment

for its own sake. Some socialists both within and outside of DSA today may still feel this is the proper focus for the left. Indeed, the subject was debated vigorously at a recent Socialist Salon on the climate issue, and a lively dialogue that began at the Salon is continuing on an informal basis within our chapter today.

For those of us who supported the Feb. 17 rally on Keystone and climate change, however, a new understanding of what Marxist philosophy and Marxist economics say about humanity's relation to nature provides a framework justifying – if not mandating – socialist involvement in environmental sustainability issues, noticeably including that of climate change.

Historically, in the class-based competition for control of nature and the class advantage that control could confer – the “means of production,” after all, are deeply implicated in natural resources – it was easy for all sides to forget that the natural world provides the terrain of that struggle and the essentials of human existence, water, air and soil. There is no winning the industrial or even post-industrial struggle if the terrain is lost – or, in this case, destroyed by the central materials and combatants of the struggle.

With corporate power currently holding unprecedented sway in the globalized economy, the message is to knuckle under to the “inevitability” of market forces in the pursuit of our lives and aspirations. Our socialist stance, on the contrary, is that private market forces are not the inevitable signal-caller of our personal and family lives nor our political lives – in a vigorous, truly democratic polity.

But the conditions of struggle are narrowing, the time horizon shortening. The secondary effects of capitalist behavior – based on extraction and combustion – threaten our lives as individuals, workers and families – and as a community.

DSA's flier for the big Keystone XL protest Feb. 17 stressed the absurdity of seeking to remedy the national jobs deficit with a project that would degrade the climate and cost huge amounts for recovery from the accelerating string of “natural” disasters that will almost certainly follow the destructive example of Superstorm Sandy.

A subtext of our flier (available on our [Meetup page](#) [tab “more/files”]) unmaskes the strategy of fear and anxiety that underlies corporate propaganda on issues like KXL. Only we, the corporations thunder, can provide good jobs, so shut up about this climate stuff if you hope to see the unemployment rate go down.

And we know that every concession of power and control to the corporate power (yes, a deliberate echo of “the slave power”) means a corresponding erosion of labor's opportunity to act in an organized, impactful way, rather than to be scattered in anxious compliance.

These are aspects of the struggle over climate change that we feel must be emphasized in a socialist analysis. To climate activists at the KXL rally, we said:

“Why is this disastrously bad energy project even being considered by the Obama administration and some of its allies? Because the energy companies that hope to profit from it

are proposing to put money into creating the relatively few decent-paying **jobs** that many Americans in the depressed construction trades have seen for years.

“Why is the future course of U.S. energy development largely being dictated by by the same corporations that have brought our nation to its knees, both environmentally and economically? Because our formally democratic government, which is supposed to champion the public interest, is all too often in the hands of the corporate lobbyists who also dominate fundraising for both major political parties.

“The odious Keystone XL project makes obvious the web of global corporate influence that constrains democratically chosen public investments in the public interest, and that has tilted U.S. government policies into favoring and even subsidizing private investments *against* the public interest.

“As climate activists battle to stop the pipeline, we must tackle the wider task of reversing the stranglehold of private capital on the public’s consciousness and the government’s choices.”

That stranglehold is accomplished through what Richard Grossman called “fear at work” – an effective weapon for corporations and banks and their political servants, elected and otherwise, who are fighting to maintain the carbon-based status quo. Through the Tea Party, the Republican Party and rightwing think tanks, the fossil fuel industry is working to block progress on combating climate change not only by spreading mistrust of science and government but by promoting fears of job losses if Americans try to replace our carbon-based economy with a sane and greener one.

But working Americans also fear **potential higher energy costs** that the power companies are claiming would result from actually jettisoning fossil fuels and adopting alternative energy sources.

“While corporations play on our economic fears,” our message said, “the centuries-old, accelerating process of industrial growth under basically capitalist auspices threatens to make catastrophic planetary warming irreversible. As democratic socialists, we say **all progressive forces have to fight back for public control of this dangerous moment.**”

And because economics is critically important to how most voters think, climate activists must counter the economic “Fear at Work” campaign that the fossil fuel advocates are deploying to keep our society captive to their agenda.

Working families in the United States, those that are paying attention, rightly fear the **violent, destructive storms, droughts and wildfires** that already are accompanying climate change, even without the added carbon-intensive tar sands development the Keystone pipeline would facilitate.

As the Labor Network for Sustainability points out, these fears will be more than fulfilled by the effects of KXL and other mega-energy projects planned by the corporate power.

To counter Economic Fear, we said, climate activists must:

- Support not a “carbon tax” that people have been told will cause higher consumer prices, but instead support what climate scientist James Hansen has called a “cap and dividend” plan, one that would tax carbon-based fuels at the source, then use the money to fund generous tax refunds for all Americans on a per capita basis. We must work to insure that the majority will gain income – not lose it — from carbon curbs. Other labels include “fee and dividend.” A just-filed measure sponsored by Sens. Bernie Sanders and Barbara Boxer, the “Climate Protection Act of 2013” would divide the revenue more specifically, diverting about 20 percent to energy research and development, job retraining and residential weatherization. The balance would directly compensate consumers.
- Join with construction unions in fighting for more funding of needed infrastructure repair and construction projects, especially green ones, so that construction workers can have decent-paying jobs that are environmentally sustainable.
- Support pro-union legislation that promotes workplace organizing unconstrained by management threats of termination and makes union democracy essential. The decline of unions has coincided with the decline in all workers’ share of advances in productivity since 1973, and the rise in corporate wealth and hegemony – hence their ability to blackmail labor and working people by withholding jobs funds from the public sector while dangling the climate-wrecking Keystone XL project as the only alternative for jobs.
- Support President Obama and political progressives – and even political conservatives, if they cooperate – in promoting greater federal funding for public transit systems and renewable energy development, again with the objective of promoting “green” jobs.
- Support the existing “Blue Green Alliance” of conservationists and labor unions in its work to promote green jobs, and support the Labor Network for Sustainability (LNS) as well.
- Strenuously oppose any deficit-driven “Sequestration” deal that defunds needed social programs, thus increasing the financial stress on millions of Americans and pushing them towards supporting even dirty and destructive energy projects for economic reasons.

“Climate-friendly alternative development can support the creation of good, skilled jobs when managed by the public in its own interest – not captured by corporations,” our flier said. “A key step towards such development must include support for a **publicly managed jobs program** to transition from carbon-based energy to alternative energy, but without the disruptive job losses that workers rightly fear if alternative energy development is left up to corporate and/or market forces alone.”

Even under current conditions, one study shows job gains from regulations that would phase out fossil-fuel energy sources. The study “by Ceres and the Political Economy Research Institute of the University of Massachusetts ... examines the jobs effects of some of the new regulations [and] far from being “job killers,” the new regulations will create nearly 300,000 new jobs, especially skilled, high-pay jobs for engineers, project managers, electricians, boilermakers, pipefitters, millwrights, and iron workers,” says Jeremy Brecher, in a piece from the Labor Network for Sustainability. “The regulations would lead to net job increases of more than

120,000 job years in Illinois, 123,000 in Virginia, 113,000 in Tennessee, 76,000 in North Carolina, and 76,000 in Ohio,” Brecher continues.

Most such projections, however, have a transition period of four or more years, during which huge disruption to jobs, institutions, families and communities commonly take place.

The disruption to communities, in jobs, income, energy prices and other social costs, can and should be publicly managed, as well. As the Labor Network for Sustainability’s Brecher article points out, an effective model exists. The Base Closing and Realignment program (BRAC) has a comprehensive approach to remedying the impacts of military base closings on dependent communities. That model, ironically enough a Pentagon product, can be applied in the cases of coastal communities needing large-scale housing shifts, for instance, as well as drought recovery in agricultural areas and many other instances of potential disruption coming from the shift away from carbon-based energy and toward alternative sources like wind (including offshore wind) and distributed solar energy. Support programs for workers and their families acquiring new skills for the green technologies that will replace the carbon energy regime – not only educational support, but living support – must be included.

In the short run the struggle is against “sequester” cutbacks in social spending as well as backing public renewable energy jobs and a “fee and dividend” plan as the first step toward freeing American politics from the corporate politics of fear. After the Keystone XL battle is won, there will be much more to do to restore public control of resources and the health of the planet.

Alternative energy will benefit, not burden, consumers, if working people get their say. American democracy should guarantee us a voice in what kind of energy is produced – and with what impacts on employment — and by whom. And energy has become so central to our postmodern society that putting that factor at the center of a social evolution will key the devolution of corporate capitalism into a publicly managed resource, not a top predator.

That is the essence of the socialist demand, and the path to a socialist *society* – one in which public provision is natural and “inevitable” – and unstigmatized – and the contributions of the market publicly managed, rather than uncontrolled and feared.

Be Sociable, Share!

[Socialist Takeaways and Short Takes](#)

Friday, March 1st, 2013

LOCAL ALERTS

DEMOCRACY IN DCDSA –DC Metro DSA will have an election for a new Steering Committee at the March meeting. If you want to run, attend. If you want to have a say in who wins, attend and vote. The meeting is Saturday, March 9 at 2:30 p.m. in the [Cleveland Park library branch](#), 3310 Connecticut Ave. NW. The steering committee will meet at 1 p.m. in the same location.

MARYLAND PROGRESSIVE SUMMIT in Annapolis Monday, March 4 brings together progressives and the progressive legislators they hope to influence in a legislature dominated by pro-business– but often bendable — Democrats. The [event](#) takes place in room 131 of the House office building, 6 Bladen St. in Annapolis from 4:30 to 7.

NATIONAL DSA NOTES

NEW LOOK FOR WEBSITE – [National DSA's website](#) (dsausa.org) is showing off a new appearance and more attractive (but still socialist!) layout. Some new features include an environmental blog space and other blogs for commissions and special projects. Check it out.

“BALANCING ACT” EXPLAINED – national DSA has posted a [briefing paper](#) on the Congressional Progressive Caucus's proposed “Balancing Act” that would raise revenues from the banksters and their cohorts to cover the discretionary domestic cuts in the wacko sequestration scheme – and more. It is at http://www.dsausa.org/support_the_balancing_act

ON THE LEFT...

FISCAL CLIFF LOOMS AGAIN – As the *Washington Socialist* goes to press, it looks likely that the United States will fall off the “fiscal cliff” on March 1, two months after President Obama signed a temporary postponement of the original “cliff” date. The cuts are the result of a law signed in 2011 that was intended to pressure Congress into coming up with a plan to reduce the deficit in order to avoid draconian mandatory cuts – but Congress, true to form, never reached an agreement. The bill was the work of right-wing deficit hawks in Congress, for whom cutting taxes for the wealthy is more important than America's economic health. But President Obama and some congressional Democrats deserve a share of the blame for agreeing to the legislation that set this doomsday machine in motion. If no action is taken, the \$85 billion in automatic cuts will stop the economic recovery in its tracks and shift it into reverse while ravaging vital programs such as Head Start, mental health services, public safety and job training. The [American Federal of Government Employees](#) and [Americans for Tax Fairness](#) are among the progressive organizations pointing out the recklessness and absurdity of elevating deficit-cutting above all other national priorities. DSA members should check [Metro-DC DSA's](#)

[Meetup site](#) for rallies and other actions to protest the cuts that will take place in the absence of an 11th-hour rescue. – *Bill Mosley*

PAID SICK LEAVE BILL GRINDS THROUGH MD LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Advocates for workers and families are getting behind a Maryland bill providing paid sick leave to the 40 percent (or about 700,000) Maryland workers who currently have none.

At legislative hearings before House and Senate committees Feb. 27, members heard testimony about the choice between going to work sick to cover bills and taking an unpaid day off. One low-paid restaurant server said that missing a day amounted to a car payment; missing a weekend was a mortgage payment. Others spoke of the conflict between caring for a sick child and getting a day's pay; one day-care operator said children frequently arrived sick because their mothers couldn't afford to miss a day of work.

The growing cohort of part-time workers, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports, is harder hit still – only 23 percent of part-time workers have paid sick leave.

The bill, crossfiled in House and Senate, provides for workers to earn a hour of sick time for every thirty hours of work, up to a cap of 56 hours per year. Del. John Olszewski, the lead House sponsor, said it was deliberately flexible to reduce the administrative burden on small business.

The House bill ([SB0735](#)) has nearly thirty co-sponsors, including a dozen from the DC suburban counties. The Senate version (SB 0698) is sponsored by three senators from the DC suburbs – two from Montgomery and one from Prince George's.

The House Economic Matters committee, often cited as a venue where progressive bills “go to die,” gave a respectful hearing to the bill Feb. 27 while the gallery was packed with proponents, including many who testified. Expert testimony from Melissa Broome of the [Job Opportunities Task Force](#) led off. She announced the formation of Working Matters, an 84-member coalition of organizations pointed directly at support for paid sick leave.

A Republican House committee member did counter with selected anecdotes from [a Wall Street Journal article](#) Feb. 23 that indicated some businesses in Connecticut, which began requiring sick leave last year, found it a burden. The *Journal* article, however, also noted some in Connecticut who welcomed it, and added that besides Maryland, Washington state and Massachusetts among states and cities including New York were in the process of legislating sick leave. The national average of workers without sick leave is 39 percent. Sen. Tom Harkin will introduce national sick leave coverage this spring, an effort backed by the White House and vociferously by Bill Clinton, the *Journal* article noted.

The public health impact of paid sick leave was stressed by many in a year of worse-than-average flu. Andy Shallal, owner of Busboys and Poets restaurants, testified in favor of the House bill while noting the benefits that he gained from providing it already – less turnover,

higher employee morale and less illness. He pointed out, as does ROC, that giving ill food handlers the option to stay home without losing a day's pay was a critical public health issue.

Republicans on the House committee argued that the costs of paid sick leave would be a disincentive to employers wondering whether to locate in Maryland or Virginia. Proponents point out the public advantages of stable workplaces and workpaths. In the Senate hearing, bill sponsor Sen. Rob Garagiola said mitigating amendments are likely to satisfy employers' complaints, but "there needs to be a balance of the need of the employees compared to the needs of the employers."

The question of whether paid sick days would increase the amount of time taken off is addressed in the fiscal note attached to the bill. It reports that "Data from the 2008 National Health Interview Survey revealed that, when workers are limited to a maximum of 5 days of work loss, workers with paid sick days miss an average of 1.6 days annually for illness and injury, excluding maternity leave, compared with 1.4 days for those without paid sick days."

As the *Washington Socialist* March issue went to press Feb. 28, both bills were still alive and untouched in their respective chambers and advocates were optimistic that Maryland would set a leadership tone on the growing national issue. – *Woody Woodruff*

OFFSHORE WIND GETS STRONGER – the almost sure passage of a (diminished) offshore wind power project undertaken by Maryland and private capital passed not only the full House of Delegates but its bigger hurdle in the Senate Finance Committee. Thanks to a reshuffling of committee members by the senate president, the bill emerged Feb. 25 at the long end of a 7-4 committee vote to go on to the Senate floor. The finance panel had been the graveyard of offshore wind bills in the two years previous.

The bill requires a significant percentage of the state's power to come from offshore wind after the first turbines are to come online offshore from Ocean City in 2017. Costs will be recouped, in part, from a surcharge on utility bills, capped at \$1.50 a month for residential customers and 1.5 percent for business customers.

The amount of offshore "acreage" dedicated to turbines is well less than environmental groups had hoped, and now the goal will be to get future enlargement of the turbine field and hence the production, as well as to seek a public power authority component in the project as it evolves. – *Woody Woodruff*

["With Liberty and Justice for All"](#)

***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2013**

By Kurt Stand

“The shepherd drives the wolf from the sheep’s throat, for which the sheep thanks the shepherd, as a liberator, while the wolf denounces him for the same act as the destroyer of liberty, especially as the sheep was a black one. Plainly the sheep and wolf are not agreed upon a definition of the word liberty; and precisely the same difference prevails today among human creatures. ...”

Too often arguments about the nature of liberty, of freedom, take place in a vacuum, ignoring how the actual relationships between people – who has or does not have power – determines how such “liberty” is experienced. The above passage was spoken by Abraham Lincoln to describe the conflict at the core of the Civil War – and can similarly be used to address divides which still plague our society, though rarely addressed so honestly in public discourse. The right-wing and racist response to Obama’s election, the fear that it means a loss of freedom, was and is driven by the fear of the equality called forth by his Inaugural Address reference to “Seneca Falls, Selma and Stonewall.”

Under the surface, that fear was fueled too by the fact that corporate power itself rests on numerous layers of inequality, inequality which is rationalized on the premise that any structural attempt to guarantee equality would result in a loss of “liberty.” Capture of that word has been the foundation of neo-liberal ideology and contributes to its appeal and seeming legitimacy. Even many who challenge the more extreme version of the neo-liberal outlook as embodied by the practices and policies of right-wing Republicanism accept too much of its underlying premises.

It is an acceptance which ignores the reality that certain forms of injustice are promoted because they benefit some at the expense of others, that those policies flow not from superior reasoning or logic, but from superior power.

It is worth recalling that the Civil War took place at a moment when the meaning of the American Revolution was still a subject to debate; Lincoln’s words spoken at a time when an alternative path of development flowing from the American Revolution still seemed within grasp. Again, addressing a conflict rooted in ways of understanding what those choices were, he said:

“The world has never had a good definition of the word liberty, and the American people, just now are in want of one. We all declare for liberty; but in using the same word we do not mean the same thing. With some the word liberty may mean for each man to do as he pleases with himself, and the product of his labor; while with others the same word may mean for some men to do as they please with other men, and the product of other men’s labor. Here are two, not only different, but incompatible things, called by the same name, liberty. And it follows that each of the things is, by the respective parties, called by two different and incompatible names – liberty and tyranny.”

How far public discourse has moved from such considerations can be seen in a nutshell by four brief items noted without commentary in the Washington Post’s Sunday Feb. 17 business section:

- a) Coca Cola’s 4th quarter profits were up 13%.
- b) Pepsi Cola’s net income rose 17% in that same quarter, with their dividends up 5.6% and

stock shares up 1%.

c) Lemann's 3G Capital – which had previously acquired Burger King and helped create the Anheuser Busch InBev beer empire – joined with Warren Buffet's Berkshire Hathaway in purchasing Heinz. The deal was valued at \$23 billion.

d) A Department of Labor Survey revealed that 40 % of America's workforce isn't covered under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act. Translated into English, that means that 4 out of 10 workers can be fired if they take an unpaid day off from work to deal with a health emergency.

These are facts that speak to a connection unmentioned – the increased profits of some industries and companies is directly tied to the low wages, insecure working conditions and lack of rights for workers who create those profits. Chambers of Commerce ignore that interdependence, as does Tea Party demagoguery, as does mainstream economics. The liberty so often proclaimed is a liberty that denies the common good, for it is a liberty that privileges one group of the population over others. It is masking the reality that it is workers, not corporate presidents, who may lose their job for taking a day off when ill; it is an inequality reflected in the reality that most of those workers who are denied the benefits of the Family and Medical Leave Act are women, are immigrants, are African Americans.

Overcoming those facts goes to the heart of the demands of the Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) – an organization founded in 1991 to fight for better pay and working conditions for low-wage, unorganized restaurant workers – for passage of the Healthy Families Act which would compel employers to grant some paid sick days off to employees, including restaurant workers, 90% of whom currently have no paid off days. Additionally, ROC is leading a campaign to increase the \$2.13 minimum wage for tipped workers, an amount unchanged since 1991. Alongside that, the labor movement locally and nationally is leading a campaign to increase the general minimum wage for all workers. If successful these measures of social justice would allow those workers more freedom by compelling employers to provide what they would rather deny.

By contrast, the attempt to impose austerity as a solution to our economic woes despite the suffering that would result is an attempt to increase the freedom of the wealthy by compelling the majority to work for less. The language of shared sacrifice often used to justify cutting the deficit obscures that relationship; it can only help in the struggle against the imposition of austerity to make visible the difference in interests that has been hidden. That is not a question of language, it is a question of power. President Obama in his State of Union signaled his support for an increased federal minimum wage, for expansive social spending. But as seen in the past, there is a long rocky road between what is projected and what actually takes place – a road that can only be traversed when popular movements develop political strength able to counter the political strength of the already powerful.

To do so those movements need to build on the progressive policies opened up by Obama, but need equally to take a critical approach to the limitations of his compromises. This brings us back to Lincoln. The recent movie about him gives an accurate picture of the struggle for passage of the 13th Amendment, of his ability to combine compromise with principle in order to achieve a critical step toward making US society live up to the promises of the Declaration of Independence.

Yet the film left out the voices of those in the trenches of the social struggles of the day, of those who did the work of abolition, for whom the goal of ending slavery was a step toward full and complete equality. The kind of movement able to support critical even if limited goals at the same time as continuing agitation and organizing for more far-reaching aims provided the basis that made the truly radical victory of ending slavery through the mechanism of legislative compromise possible. A sense of how that was viewed can be glimpsed in the conclusion of a “Negro Suffrage Convention,” held in New York in 1858, which called for support of the then new Republican Party but also resolved “That in so doing, we do not for a moment endorse all the political tenets of that party, we are Radical Abolitionists, and shall ever remain so.”

Today’s particular battles for medical leave and minimum wage increases that might help people move out of poverty, the general battle against economic austerity need to be fully joined for they can extend meaningful rights using the possibilities opened up by the Obama Administration in the here and now.

These will be strengthened, however, if they press deeper and further and call into question a system where a few profit at the expense of many. Just as the Civil War and the struggle to end slavery were about policies and practices that defined opposing notions of liberty, just as the labor movements origins were built on opposing employers’ concept of right, so today movements for necessary measures of justice can achieve gains at the moment while fighting for a more radical vision — a vision rooted in the understanding that a genuine democracy connects freedom and equality; a connection which goes to the heart of socialism.

Be Sociable, Share!