

*The Washington Socialist*  
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[DC Metro DSA's March Newsletter: If/When the Ice Melts, Action Picks Up](#)

Monday, March 2nd, 2015



**Welcome to the March 2015 issue of the *Washington Socialist*, the online newsletter of Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America.**

The hope would be that things on the radical front will pick up in March – they have to – if only because of the number of events that were postponed in February due to the unusual weather. As noted in the articles below, the local’s events came off as scheduled despite the frigid weather. But one hopes it will be easier (and safer) to get around if/when the ice melts. The number of issues to work on and wrongs to right tends to fade a little from the consciousness as the assault of the weather dominates. But as evidenced below, that array of tasks doesn’t get smaller.

#### **HERE’S WHAT METRO DC DSA HAS ON FOR MARCH:**

**Membership Meeting:** The recent positive vote by the Federal Communications Commission to regulate big Internet providers as common carriers – utilities – is just the beginning of a longer fight to hold on to Net Neutrality. That sometimes ambiguous term will take center stage at the local’s regular membership meeting Sunday, March 8 at the Watha T. Daniel/Shaw branch library, 1630 7<sup>th</sup> St. NW and just a few steps from the Shaw/Howard Metrorail station. Matt Wood, a Policy Director of the Internet activist organization Free Press, will outline his and other groups’ efforts to protect the open Internet, prevent media concentration, promote affordable broadband deployment and safeguard press freedoms. He was formerly employed by the Media Access Project, has worked for PBS, and is a former editor-in-chief for the Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Review. A remarkable effort by media reform advocates to persuade FCC chairman Tom Wheeler to safeguard Internet neutrality appears to reject corporate pressure for a pay-for-access policy, and instead cements regulation of the Internet as a public utility instead.

**Socialist Salon:** at our March 19 salon Christine Riddiough will discuss “Second Wave Feminism: A History and Evaluation” from the perspective of one who has lived it. Riddiough is an honorary Vice Chair of the Democratic Socialists of America and has been an activist in the women’s and LGBT movements since 1970. She moved to Washington, DC in 1983 to work for the National Organization for Women. She was president of D.C.’s legendary Gertrude Stein Democratic Club, and writes occasional blog posts on feminism and LGBT issues for DSA’s

Democratic Left blog. The Socialist Salon is 6:30 p.m. at Hunan Dynasty restaurant, 215 Pennsylvania Ave. SE on Capitol Hill, two blocks from the Capitol South Metrorail station. Get last-minute information on these and other DSA events at our [Meetup page](#).

**Other promising events:** We noted this last month even though it didn't happen till March because it looked so good. DSA comrade Nelson Lichtenstein is one of the many scholars at UM College Park March 5. [“Organizing for Power and Workers’ Rights in the 21st Century”](#) is being offered by the Center for the Study of the New America at UMCP Thursday, March 5. It's a day-long session with the morning devoted to today's labor conditions and prospects (with UFCW's Dan Schlademan, the leader of the Walmart organizing campaign, on a panel and a keynote by AFL-CIO Treasurer Elizabeth Shuler) and the afternoon focused on labor aspects of globalization and immigration, including a panel with Lichtenstein. It's all in the Juan Ramon Jimenez Room at Stamp Student Union. [The Southern Labor Studies Association](#), a co-sponsor on this event, continues its conference down at GW for the rest of the weekend. And speaking of postponements, DSA remains a cosponsor of the [Peace Action forum on Syria](#) originally scheduled for Feb. 21 but a victim of particularly unpleasant weather conditions and rescheduled for Saturday, April 11. More details in the April issue.

#### ***IN THIS ISSUE:***

**The Department of Institutional Memory:** Mike Harrington's birthday has come around and the number of folks in DSA who directly remember him has diminished and the number who ask “What kind of person was he; what did he do, again?” has risen. His biographer *Maurice Isserman* answers the question aptly and invites us all to engage with how “America's oldest Young Socialist” fits our history and our present – and our future. Some of us heard him say, as he did so many times, that the future was of necessity going to hold “socialism” of some sort and it was up to us to determine what sort that would be – more humane or more authoritarian. The piece is [from the Democratic Left blog](#).

**One persistent debate** among socialists is how to deal with the actually existing electoral landscape. Being democratic socialists means – among other things – participating in elections. When there are no socialists on the ballot, other measures are necessary, and the debate on how to manage that activity took unusually well-defined form at the recent Young Democratic Socialists conference in New York. *Bryan Kovalick* was among several of our comrades who attended and [he presents a “reportback”](#) on the event.

**The radical Syriza party** in Greece assembled a governing coalition after its victory in the most recent elections and began campaigning to ease the grip of severe austerity imposed by the powers of the Eurozone. Does their fight have a future; indeed, what is the future of the Eurozone and its currency? Several European economists have forecast a difficult and gloomy future for the whole enterprise because of structural inequalities. *Andy Feeney* [reviews the book](#) and the perspective.

**Metro DC DSA's February Socialist Salon** was devoted to the immediacy of Greece's agony under the austerity regime. [Guided by discussion leader Simon Davis](#), who grew up in Greece, the salon attendees discussed the topic on the eve of the new government's engagement with its creditors in search of relief.

**A convenience everyone uses** – the Internet – is (according to the FCC as of Feb. 26) so important that it should be classed and regulated as a public utility. According to the mega-corporate powers like Comcast and Verizon, that's too much regulation. [Carolyn Byerly examines the issues involved](#) and the fights that probably still remain ahead on the subject of Net Neutrality (see the listing for the March membership meeting, above).

**Regulation – or lack of it** – of another critical public service was on the agenda at Metro DC DSA's February membership meeting. Local electric power provider Pepco hopes to merge with Exelon, the *really* large power company from Illinois. [Voices against the "takeover" are heard](#) before the Public Service Commission and in the DSA meeting, *Andy Feeney* relates.

**Business as usual** seems to be the theme for the newish administration of Mayor Muriel Bowser. And the by-elections that will fill her Council seat and that of recently deceased Councilmember (and former Mayor) Marion Barry appear to be proceeding "as usual" as well, with candidates anointed by the powerful winning in the attention and money stakes, *Bill Mosley* includes in [a roundup of recent DC political news](#).

**Two recent, acclaimed motion pictures** have traced the struggles for justice of separate but quite related movements. *Kurt Stand* reviews "[Selma](#)" and "[She's Beautiful When She's Angry](#)."

**In Maryland, the hijacking of a progressive idea** by the pro-business neoliberal agenda is not that unusual, but rarely does so clear a case study of the process emerge as a commission on the state's business climate put in place by the powerful leaders of the two General Assembly houses, quashing a bid to turn war money toward human needs. *Woody Woodruff* narrates [the tale of the Augustine Commission](#).

[Good Reads for Socialists](#) has a goodly chunk of works to recommend on the Greek crisis, but there are also the ambiguities of meritocracy, the latest from the American Legislative Exchange Council and more about movies.

**You can read these and other past articles in the *Washington Socialist* on our website where they are archived, [dsadc.org](http://dsadc.org)**

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**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](mailto:woodlanham@gmail.com).***

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All newsletter articles in full are available on the local's website at [dsadc.org](http://dsadc.org)

You can get the latest, including any changes, on Metro DC DSA events by checking our [Meetup Page](#).

**DCDSA's *The Washington Socialist* can be in your inbox the first of every month. Ask for it at [dsadcexchange@gmail.com](mailto:dsadcexchange@gmail.com) or [woodlanham@gmail.com](mailto:woodlanham@gmail.com)**

Metro DC DSA is the Washington local of Democratic Socialists of America, the nation's largest socialist organization. Information on where we stand and how to join us is at [DSAUSA.org](http://DSAUSA.org).

### [2015 Young Democratic Socialists Winter Conference: Toward an Intersectional Left: A Reportback](#)

Sunday, March 1st, 2015

#### ***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2015**

*By Bryan Kovalick*

Over Valentine's Day Weekend I, along with four other members of the Metro DC DSA, rode a bus bound for New York City. We headed to this year's Young Democratic Socialist Winter Conference. And though we arrived far too late on Friday night to attend the conference's opening plenary on police violence, our trip north was not without its own discussions on politics, labor, and socialist news.

The Saturday morning plenary included two speeches on the importance of being a socialist and roles that socialists can have in shaping a more just, free, and egalitarian society. Speaking immediately after DSA Vice-Chair Joe Schwartz was our comrade Jose Gutierrez. Together, Jose and Joe began the day of the conference on a high note speaking of the necessity of raising the minimum wage into a living wage, the need for fully-funded public services and goods, and the need to organize working class [\[DD1\]](#) power to build a mass movement for socialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Following their morning talk, I attended a workshop on the 7 habits of highly effective chapters. To my actual dismay, there were not 7 habits that Philly DSA member Dustin Guastella could

impart to me. But Dustin had plenty of useful tips for improving the growing and improving of one's chapter. This workshop gave me a moment to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of our own chapter. [\[DD2\]](#)

When I assess our chapter I see that we do organize great salons and talks on interesting and very topical matters. However we do not do the best job advertising our events and ourselves as socialists to the interested public. And although we do have several ways for prospective members to become involved with our chapter, we do not do the best job at retaining their long-term interest and commitment. Furthermore we also seem to fail at times to develop prospective socialists into fully-fledged socialists. But I think both of these issues would be improved by committing more of our chapter to the Fight for \$15 campaign. I think there's a lot of truth to the saying that we grow as socialists by doing socialist work. And committing ourselves to this work would not only help build working class power by reducing the power of the 1%, but it will also help us to grow as a chapter and as seasoned socialist organizers.

After Dustin's workshop concluded, I attended another one given by Boston DSA member Jared Abbott that delved more deeply into meaning of socialism. Jared's presentation asked us to define socialism in our terms, before he then challenged our notions by posing a series of thought-provoking hypothetical questions to us. This presentation gave us some much needed time to unpack our conceptions of socialism by asking us to critically ponder our own understanding of the term. From this I gained a little more insight into my own assumptions, and learned a little more about how I could defend my belief in socialism from valuable criticism. For that reason, I really enjoyed Jared's presentation.

Saturday concluded with a reportback section where each individual chapter and regional organizer had the opportunity before the entire conference to present their members, talk about their campaigns and issues they're working to address, and a little about the struggles and success they've had as a chapter. Some of the newer chapters like the students from Case Western University talked about the struggles they're having as they move from an organizing committee to an established chapter, particularly with membership recruitment and choosing a campaign focus. Likewise some older and more established chapters like Sewanee University discussed their continuing success in developing their chapter and their work in solidarity with the local Nashville, Tenn. Black Lives Matter movement.

Though I was happy to see so many older chapters in attendance, I was especially thrilled to learn that New York City colleges were so well represented at the conference. Just within the last year or so, many young socialists, who were almost all of working class backgrounds from around NYC, helped organize and start four new campus chapters at different city colleges. All of these are in addition to the New York DSA local, which has been revitalized with several new members.

After the reportback period, we left the conference's CUNY grounds and made our way to Brooklyn for our socialist party that night. The party gave us a nice way to socialize together in a very stress-less and unstructured setting, which the very scheduled nature of the conference often doesn't allow.

Sunday's opening plenary was given by a representative of the A. Philip Randolph Caucus and one from the Left Caucus. The representative of the former was our chapter's own David Duhalde, while the latter was NYC DSA member Neal Meyer. David and Neal presented their vision of DSA's electoral strategy and the goals DSA should position itself to achieve in the near and immediate term. Both speakers felt the old DSA electoral strategy of realignment was dead. Duhalde and Meyer differed over what that should mean for DSA and YDS. Duhalde embraced deprioritizing electoral politics, while Meyer embraced supporting explicitly socialist candidates. One longtime YDS member I spoke with described the plenary as one of the best he's ever seen.

To echo their sentiment, I will add that altogether the conference was one of the best that I have ever attended. It was not only well attended in terms of numbers, but also in that so many of the attendees were passionate, committed, and dedicated socialists. I was even pleased at the demographic makeup of the conference attendees. Truth be told the conference did not achieve gender and sexual equality of representation. But it did come closer to that goal than any other conference I've attended. I was also astounded at the presence of so many nonwhite attendees. Again, racial and ethnic representation at the conference was not proportionately equal to society at large. But it was yet again closer to achieving that goal than any other YDS conference I've been to.

For these reasons, the issues and topics discussed, and the feeling of optimism amongst us, I'm very glad that I chose to attend. And I am very glad that for all the attendees who came to their first YDS conference, they had this moment to help mold their socialist identities.

*David Duhalde contributed to this article*

[Activism Pushed FCC Ruling on Net Neutrality](#)

Sunday, March 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist <> March 2015***

*By Carolyn M. Byerly*

The historic adoption of a policy of Net Neutrality by the Federal Communications Commission passed by a 3-2 vote (along party lines) on February 26, and activists across American can take a bow for a victory that is theirs to claim.

The policy is the product of several years' careful strategizing, letter writing, picketing (outside FCC offices), and other hallmarks of progressive activism by an eclectic coalition across the country. The call for Internet Neutrality has been actively championed by public interest groups for several years, but this hot potato issue pitting citizens (and their advocacy groups) against the



giant corporations controlling Internet and other media services heated up after a January 2014 federal court ruling ([Verizon v. the FCC](#)) that told the FCC it had overreached its authority in its policy barring broadband providers from slowing or blocking Web traffic.

The 2010 [FCC policy that Verizon challenged had](#) required Internet providers to treat all customers equally and to disclose their network practices. The US Circuit Court ruling said before the FCC could regulate companies' operations, it would have to decide whether the Internet was a telecommunications industry (under Title II of the Communications Act of 1934, regulating common carriers of information), or a content provider. This legal distinction is one that, in the first instance, enables the FCC to regulate the Internet like a utility and prescribe how service shall be provided, but in the second does not. With the new February 26 policy, FCC is now able to prevent the creation of a tiered pricing structure (and the differentials in speed and capacity based on what a client pays that would come with it) as lobbied for by the telecom giants.

Plans to roll out a strikingly progressive policy were first announced by FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler in January, and the details were revealed in a February 19 posting to the [FCC website](#). But the back story is one that brings the role of [leftist](#), [feminist](#), and [civil rights](#) activism clearly into view – including the positions that our own local [Metro DC DSA](#) has taken. After the *Verizon v. FCC* ruling, activist groups coordinated their letter writing and visits to FCC commissioners to [make a case](#) for classifying the Internet as a telecommunications industry in order to assure Net Neutrality.

An unprecedented 4 million-plus letters were filed with the FCC after January 2014, most of those taking the public interest position. By November 2014, [President Obama](#) called the Internet “one of the most significant democratizing influences the world has ever known,” and advocated protecting the Internet from monopoly control. Although an independent agency, FCC is presently under Democratic control with three commissioners, including the chairman. All FCC commissioners are by presidential appointment, with the party in the White House holding the majority.

But the story does not end with the February 26 policy adoption. Conservative forces in Congress are now plotting to thwart the FCC with [a strategy](#) that includes investigations into alleged White House interference in FCC process, launching public criticism of the FCC, and crafting legislation to reverse the present policy of Net Neutrality. The telecom giants are also threatening lawsuits saying that the FCC has over-reached its authority and essentially put regulation of the Internet into the hands of government. There is logic to their claims in the second of these contentions, but government (remember that representative of citizens?) is the only entity with the power to speak and act for the great majority of US residents who rely on digital communications.

Activists' work is not over if Net Neutrality is to be maintained. Ironically, because the mainstream news (owned by some of those same giant parent companies that control the Internet) covered this David and Goliath contest so avidly, there is a strong likelihood that the number of media activists has swollen these last months.

*The author has been part of the public-interest lobbying for Net Neutrality through her role in [Howard Media Group](#), an activist academic organization at Howard University*

[DC Politics Roundup: Democracy Takes a Back Seat in DC Special Elections](#)

Sunday, March 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist <> March 2015***

*By Bill Mosley*

We in Washington DC are often told we live in a democracy, but reality often seems to indicate otherwise. The most obvious democratic shortcoming is the ability of Congress to intervene at will in the District's governance, something it cannot do to, or in, any of the 50 states. But sometimes elements within DC itself conspire to undermine what little democracy we have.

Take the April 28 special elections to fill D.C. Council vacancies in Wards 4 and 8, for example. The ascension of former Ward 4 Councilmember Muriel Bowser to the office of mayor, and the death of Ward 8 Councilmember and former Mayor Marion Barry, could have provided an opening for fresh ideas and a vigorous debate about issues facing the wards and the city. And indeed, there have been no shortage of candidates for the seats, with 14 on the ballot in Ward 4 and 16 in Ward 8. However, in both wards there are attempts to turn both elections into coronations and to short-circuit any debate on the issues.[\[Cc1\]](#)

In Ward 4, Mayor Bowser has cranked up the Green Machine, the ward's formidable Democratic organization, in support of her hand-picked successor Brandon Todd, whose principal qualification is his service to Bowser as a campaign and Council aide. Ward 4 has slipped into something resembling monarchy, starting in 2007 when Adrian Fenty, leaving his Ward 4 seat to take office as Mayor, tapped Bowser as his successor and put his electoral machine at her service. During Fenty's four-year battle with DC unions, especially those representing teachers, he had in Bowser a reliable ally on the Council. Now Bowser is seeking to give Todd a leg-up, regardless of what voters of the ward might think, and [Todd's 10-to-one fundraising advantage over his closest rival](#) is thanks to his patron's influence.

Bowser is also hoping to extend her influence to Ward 8, where she has thrown her weight behind former Barry aide [LaRuby May, who also enjoys a huge fundraising edge](#) over her gaggle of rivals. But other ward activists are looking for a more old-fashioned kind of coronation – the elevation of Barry's son, Marion C. Barry (who was known as Christopher Barry before his father's death when his political ambition kicked in). Those pinning their hopes on the younger Barry do so despite his seeming to possess none of his father's political skills or vision but all of his penchant for generating bad headlines, and then some: [Earlier this year, Marion C. was](#)



[arrested for threatening a bank clerk, and, like his father, he has a history with illegal drugs – having pleaded guilty a few years ago to possessing marijuana and PCP.](#) His political resume is largely a blank slate.

If one looks beyond the mayoral endorsements and familiar names, the huge fields of candidates offer numerous hopefuls with promising backgrounds if not prospects to match. In Ward 8, Nate Bennett-Fleming is making a second run for the Council, having lost the Democratic at-large primary last year to Anita Bonds. Fleming was an able advocate for DC statehood in his single term as statehood (or “shadow”) representative to the House of Representatives. Also in Ward 8, Eugene D. Kinlow runs on his record of advocating DC voting representation in Congress as a staff [\[Cc2\]](#) member for DC Vote. Sheila Bunn is running on a thick resume that includes stints as aides to former Mayor Vince Gray and Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton.

In Ward 4, Renee L. Bowser (no relation to the mayor) is making a second run for Council, having lost to the other Bowser in the 2007 special election. Bowser, an advisory neighborhood commissioner and a former attorney for the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, is championing strengthened workers’ rights and affordable housing programs. Pedro Rubio Jr., a past council candidate, is hoping to become DC’s first Latino councilmember by taking up former Councilmember Tommy Wells’ “livable, walkable city” crusade.

These are not the only “outsider” candidates worth considering; many of them are still shaping their platforms and priorities. But will these voices get a fair shot in a campaign that is shaping up to be dominated by machine politics, money and name recognition? Although the pols have been picking their favorites, progressive organizations that plan to make endorsements – including the Metropolitan Washington Council AFL-CIO – are still scrutinizing the choices.

### **Bowser Pulls Plug on Franklin School Arts Center**

Mayor Bowser’s decision to scuttle the planned arts center in the Franklin School, the landmark 1869 building at 13<sup>th</sup> and K St. NW, may be a troubling portent of the priorities of her two-month-old administration. The old school, which has been unoccupied since Mayor Fenty closed the homeless shelter there in 2008, has been eyed hungrily by developers due to the commercial potential of the structure and its central location. However, Mayor Gray’s administration backed proposals put forward by nonprofit arts groups, which would include using the site for arts education for children. [As Philip Kennicott reported in the \*Washington Post\*,](#) developers interested in the site contributed heavily to Bowser’s election campaign and inauguration. One could argue that an arts center may not be the best use of a downtown space – the former homeless shelter addressed a more pressing need – but at least it preserved the building for public use, unlike those who would turn it into a hotel or a high-end retail center. If this is an early indication of how Bowser will treat public properties, it will be a happy one for deep-pocketed developers but for no one else.

### **Marijuana Legalization Moves Ahead, then Backward**

In the wake of attempts by Congress to undo last November’s voter initiative to fully legalize marijuana in the District, the DC Council fell into its time-honored pattern of mild defiance

followed by hasty retreat. In the face of a rider in the DC appropriations bill stating that the District could not use local funds to “enact” the measure, DC officials said they would nevertheless move ahead with legalization, since voters had already “enacted” the measure at the ballot box. But last month, at the urging of newly elected DC Attorney General Karl Racine, the Council cancelled a planned hearing on how to regulate legal marijuana over concerns that this would violate the congressional restriction. As a result, as legalization took effect on Feb. 26, uncertainty reigned as to exactly when and where one could possess or use marijuana, and there were no guidelines for commercial cultivation or sale. Meanwhile, congressional Republicans who opposed legalization threatened Mayor Bowser with legal action for allowing the initiative to move forward. This battle has a long future, and if nothing else it may convince more District residents of the urgency of getting DC out from under the thumb of Congress.

### **DC More United on Budget Autonomy**

On a happier note, it seems that the [mayor and Council may now be on the same page when it comes to challenging Congress on the need to free the District’s budget from the congressional appropriations process](#). In 2013, DC voters approved a referendum declaring that DC would henceforth spend its own locally raised funds free of congressional interference, as the governments of all 50 states do. Whether the vote would pass constitutional muster was in grave doubt – the Constitution gives Congress authority over all DC legislation – but as a political matter, it at showed that patience of DC voters with federal meddling in its affairs (such as the marijuana referendum) was at an end. Yet Mayor Gray sided with ever-cautious DC Attorney General Irving Nathan and challenged the city’s own referendum in court, choosing to support legalistic reasoning over the fight for democracy. However, Mayor Bowser has publicly indicated that she is rethinking Gray and Nathan’s position, a strong hint that her office may drop the challenge and present a united front with the Council in demanding budget autonomy. If so, this would be a welcome development; instead of meekly asking for its rights, DC government and its citizens need to demand them.

[February Salon Examines the State of Greek Politics on the Threshold of Crisis](#)

Sunday, March 1st, 2015

### **The Washington Socialist<>March 2015**

Simon Davis, a DSA ally who grew up in and got his bachelor’s degree in economics in Greece, led the DSA Salon discussion on the financial crisis and the rise of the radical Syriza party in the midst of wide public discontent with the crushing effect of austerity measures dictated by the country’s (mostly Northern European) creditors. Just a few days after the Salon discussion, Syriza’s coalition gained a four-month breather on their required loan repayments – an outcome variously characterized as a defeat or a partial victory for the beleaguered nation.

Davis provided *WS* with the notes with which he led off the conversation:

### **How do you pronounce Syriza?**

Per [Paul Mason](#) on twitter: “Like Syria but with a Z”

### **What is Syriza and where did it come from?** (from Dimitris Bounias [writing for \*The Nation\*](#))

“Syriza, or the Coalition of the Radical Left, is the product of a turbulent series of realignments on the Greek left outside the ranks of the KKE, the veteran Moscow-oriented Communist Party. Its origins can be traced to the coalition that was formed in 1989 between the Communists and the reformed left wing, which (after the Communists’ departure) joined with other Marxist, Trotskyist, Green, feminist and independent groups. Popular in intellectual and cultural circles, it had little success at the polls (SD note: typically around 4-5%) until the crisis propelled it to second place in the elections of 2012.

Syriza still has many Marxist voices among its active members (including the party’s head of economic policy), and the red flag and five-pointed star in its logo will forever scare away the anticommunists. But its internal debate about whether to stay in the eurozone was largely settled by 2012; since then, its rhetoric has been both softened and streamlined. The party that once vowed to tear up the bailout agreement and nationalize the banks now speaks in a more unified and conciliatory voice, affirming its commitment to Europe while promising to open tough new negotiations with the lenders.”

### **Does this win mean Greeks turned radical leftist within the space of a few years?**

No. A comparison of the [2009](#) and the [2015](#) election results shows that Syriza largely took over old PASOK center-left strongholds.

Here is how party leader Alexis Tsipras himself discussed the issue at [Brookings on Jan 2013](#):

Greece is a country with the uniqueness of having two large parties in its political scene — what we call the Democratic and the Conservative party. In years past, this was the difference between the Venizelists and the Royalists

During the National Resistance, which was a great moment in Greek history, the democratic side fought on the side of freedom and progress and identified itself with the National Liberation Front. After the civil war — as you know, history is usually written by the victors — there was a continuation of this tradition. Historical analysts say that the Democratic Party in our country always was the majority. And following the dictatorship, this group was won over by Andreas Papandreou. And many say that he copied slogans from the radical left.

Today, following the unfortunate choices of George Papandreou and the tragic path taken by our country, this political area is now being represented by SYRIZA, a party that does not abandon its traditions, its values, and all its beliefs from the left; however, it meets together with other parties from the socialist side and wants to express a younger generation and the social strata that

are the middle class but especially, the poor class, that is being disparaged by this economic crisis, who are on the fringes of society. And unfortunately, it's a large part of the population."

Fun fact also from that Brookings talk: The precursor to the current center right New Democracy was called the [National Radical Union](#).

### **So what will Syriza try to do, and what are the odds it might happen?**

First and foremost achieve a favorable renegotiation of the current troika programme. Per FinMin Varoufakis and other analysts, same principal on bonds, lower interest, extended maturity, lower primary surplus targets, rollback on required reforms, and some kind of commitment to growth strategies for the economy. This is a far cry from his [Modest Proposal](#) which is an EU-wide plan that is quite sensible indeed, but Greece needs immediate relief.

As of right now, Greece applied for a 6 month loan extension broadly under those terms and ECB+European Commission seemed OK with it, but Germany seems unconvinced and wants more concessions. It's anyone's guess what it will take to sway the Germans right now, but Greece has committed to an EU/Euro course and shown good faith. Next days are crucial.

On the other domestic policies, expect less police state, improved human rights policies, but no strong butting heads with the powerful Orthodox Church. Likewise oligarchs will probably not be fought, at least not right away. Syriza leaders have cited Latin America as their model for Left reform, so expect that—as well as pragmatism about EU, NATO, and long term strategic interests to guide decision making.

### **Additional reading:**

*NY Times* op-ed by Kostas Vaxevanis: "[Greece's Rotten Oligarchy](#)"

*Washington Post* Wonkblog: "[Greece Really Might Leave the Euro](#)"

Yanis Varoufakis: "[A Modest Proposal for Resolving the Eurozone Crisis – Version 4.0](#)"

(Long read) Michael Pettis: "[Syriza and the French indemnity of 1871-73](#)"

*Simon Davis, a DC resident, writes for VICE USA and is active with the Center for Inquiry.*

[Good Reads for Socialists](#)

Sunday, March 1st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist***<>**March 2015**

**We devoted our February Salon to the Greek finance crisis**, just days before the newly elected Syriza-led coalition got a four-month extension on loan payments. Simon Davis, who led the discussion, suggested these further readings.

*NY Times* op-ed by Kostas Vaxevanis: "[Greece's Rotten Oligarchy](#)"

*Washington Post* Wonkblog: "[Greece Really Might Leave the Euro](#)"

Yanis Varoufakis: "[A Modest Proposal for Resolving the Eurozone Crisis – Version 4.0](#)"

And a long read, Michael Pettis: "[Syriza and the French indemnity of 1871-73](#)"

Andy Feeney adds: "*Jacobin* has been posting a number of pieces about the state of the Syriza government. Reading all of them is probably a good idea. This particular piece by Leo Panitch has relevance beyond Greece and the immediate moment":

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/02/syriza-interview-leo-panitch-solidarity/> A key paragraph: "The tragedy of this, of course, is that, apart from the [demonstration](#) in London in support of Syriza I read about last week, where is the European left? I don't just mean that as the broader or more radical left, which should be demonstrating in great numbers, but also the social democrats. The left-wing social democrats and the unions should be sitting [in] on their leaders. After all, the German social democrats are in the German government for heaven's sake!"

Another specific nugget from *Jacobin's* Greek crisis articles is this one by Mark Blyth, which also takes on the rather reprehensible German role in all this ("disturbingly American, if not Thatcherite") and has been widely discussed on the DSA-Activist listserv:

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/02/germany-austerity-blyth-speech-spd/>

James K. Galbraith writes in *Social Europe* that Greece did not suffer the setback in its negotiations with the "Troika" that many commentators are asserting. Galbraith is a former academic colleague of the Greek finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, for what that's worth. We get this one by way of *Portside*: <http://portside.org/2015-02-27/reading-greek-deal-correctly>

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A review in *Jacobin* of a recent film some in our local have enjoyed – "Inherent Vice," Paul Thomas Anderson's movie based on the 2009 Thomas Pynchon novel of that name. The analysis is occasionally strained but there are some real insights.

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/02/inherent-vice-review-counterculture/>

Larry Mishel and Will Kimball at the Economic Policy Institute report on and update the work of economist Colin Gordon, who has pegged a recent trend linking declines in union membership

with increases in the share of income going to the top 10 percent. Links to Gordon's work are there as well. <http://www.epi.org/publication/unions-decline-and-the-rise-of-the-top-10-percents-share-of-income/>

As sometimes reluctant participants in an alleged meritocracy – and often as knowledge-work strivers – we find ourselves struggling to deal with that concept: what is deserved, what is earned, how is merit allocated, what are the metrics? Lani Guinier is interviewed by a *Salon* writer in this piece carried by *Portside*. <http://portside.org/2015-02-10/meritocracy-and-testocracy-interview-lani-guinier>

The “tech solutions” to climate change are a booming idea market. One of the most long-standing efforts has been CCS, or “carbon capture and sequestration.” Among other things, it's a way to keep burning fossil fuels, especially coal. The costs of this process – let alone its effectiveness – are always up for debate. This article from the indispensable enviro publication *Grist* sums up the latest: [http://exp.grist.org/clean-coal?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=Weekly%2520Feb%252017&utm\\_campaign=weekly](http://exp.grist.org/clean-coal?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_term=Weekly%2520Feb%252017&utm_campaign=weekly)

The latest on our friends at the American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC – the right-wing outfit that uses Koch Bros. money to fuel anti-worker legislation at the state level. The plan appears to be to accelerate their attempt to slow municipal and local-government minimum wage increases by setting ceilings on them in state law. From the Guardian: [http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/feb/20/alec-rightwing-lobby-group-minimum-wage?CMP=ema\\_565](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/feb/20/alec-rightwing-lobby-group-minimum-wage?CMP=ema_565)

[Greek Tragedy: The Economies of the European Periphery In a Labyrinth of Austerity, With No Visible Exit](#)

Sunday, March 1st, 2015

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2015**

*By Andy Feeney*

Book Review of *Crisis in the Eurozone*, by Costas Lapavistas et. al., Verso Books (London and New York), 2012, 243 pp., \$19.95

The pagan myths of ancient Greece include stirring adventure sagas along with remarkably striking images of humans and even gods undergoing terrible, seemingly unending degradation. Even the great hero Hercules eventually suffers a tortured death after he dons the poisoned shirt of the Centaur Nessus; the Titan Prometheus, the benefactor of all humankind, is chained to a mountain in the Caucasus where a giant eagle tears repeatedly at his liver, for eons. The bloody robber Procrustes straps victims to a cramped bed and lops off protruding



limbs to make them fit. And the Athenian warrior king Theseus, hoping to rescue his city from paying an annual tribute of young men and maidens to King Minos of Crete, faces a flesh-eating monster, the Minotaur, in a huge underground labyrinth where escape initially seems unimaginable.

What even the most terrible old Greek tales generally lack, though, is an appreciation for the kinds of torture that can be inflicted by modern capitalist financial relationships and government institutions enforcing them. In *Crisis in the Eurozone*, the Greek Marxist political economist Costas Lapavistas and several colleagues at the University of London help correct this deficiency. In this book, they describe the institutions and the social and economic results of the Eurozone project in dry, unemotional prose that might be lifted from a bank auditor's report; yet the picture that emerges evokes much of the "pity and terror" that the bloody, tragic ancient myths inspire.

Since the global financial crisis began unfolding in 2007, initially as a result of speculative trading in mortgage-backed securities in the United States, the Eurozone as a totality has experienced severe economic shocks. The weaker, smaller economies at the periphery of the European Monetary Union or EMU – those of Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, and Italy – have experienced a long season in hell, which continues today with barely a pause. As Lapavistas writes in the preface to this volume, the rules and structure of the Eurozone have "grossly magnified the recessionary forces present in the European economy," and the burden of paying for the crisis has been passed to the European working class in the form of "reduced wages and pensions, higher unemployment, unraveling of the welfare state, deregulation and privatization."

The so-called troika consisting of the Eurozone countries, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Central Bank (ECB), have imposed drastic austerity in the name of supposedly helping the indebted periphery governments recover economically, and the austerity hasn't worked. Greece, perhaps the hardest hit economy, has now suffered from five years of depression with unemployment exceeding 25 percent and youth unemployment reaching 50 percent. A large fraction of the population is in poverty. That's why the new leftwing political coalition Syriza, to the dismay of the Troika, won the recent Greek elections, and why Syriza leader Alex Tsipras has recently been demanding a renegotiation of Greece's financial program with the country's creditors – although with how much success seems unclear at this writing. At press time Syriza's late-February deal with the "troika" to forestall loan payments four months is being declared a victory for austerity by some and a tactical advance for Syriza's anti-austerity drive by others, with opinion ranging widely in both the financial and mainstream press

Why have things unraveled so badly for Greece and other weak economies in the EMU?

Beginning in around 2009, when the ripple effects of the "subprime" mortgage crisis in the United States began to threaten the European banks, the weaker European economies suffered their own financial crisis, and to keep their private banks from collapsing and triggering further catastrophe, the governments of Greece, Spain and other peripheral economies went deeply into debt themselves to bail out their banks. Yet their rescue efforts, like the labors of Sisyphus, may have been futile, for their creditors – chiefly large banks in Germany and France – quickly became alarmed by their rising public debts, and international speculators began making bets

against Greek government bonds, hoping to make a killing. Meanwhile the Eurozone's rules, although they have not always been strictly enforced for stronger economies at the European core, mandate strict limits on government deficits. Greece and several governments in the periphery were quickly deemed in violation of these rules.

The upshot is that since 2010, when a major rescue package was put in place for Greece, the Greek government, to placate its creditors, has been required to impose sweeping austerity measures on its citizens, as have the governments of Portugal and Spain, among others. In fact, governments across the Eurozone, including in the stronger economies of the core, have adopted austerity programs of varying severity. Rather than fighting the recession with deficit spending, they have restricted public social expenditures and public employment, adopted more "flexible" labor regulations and the like, to reduce deficits or increase surpluses.

Yet because such austerity measures have reduced total spending, the EU in the last year has come dangerously close to falling into a condition of persistent "deflation," which to some economists is mostly a polite word for serious recession. And in Greece, the recession has turned into the Greek Depression, which in turn has increased rather than reduced the debt in proportion to the size of the economy.

For years, economists such as Nobel laureate Paul Krugman and Dean Baker, along with some European politicians and leftists, have been calling for a redesign of the Eurozone to deal with these problems, and especially to reduce the cost to labor in general and the working people of the periphery in particular. As noted, Syriza won control of the Greek government by vowing to fight for a relaxation of the harsh austerity agreements now governing their nation's relations with its creditors, whose financial help Athens needs to avoid bankruptcy.

Yet the German government, as this goes to press, so far refuses to cut Syriza much slack, and to Lapavistas and other members of the Research on Money and Finance (RMF) group who collectively composed *Crisis in the Eurozone*, persistent hopes within the European left for a kinder, gentler Eurozone are likely an illusion. The Eurozone as it exists is "unsustainable," this book argues, and it is unsustainable primarily because of the class interests of the European financial elites who constructed it.

As Lapavistas puts it in his preface, the Eurozone exists because "The ruling strata of Europe have been determined to create a form of money capable of competing against the dollar in the world market, and thereby furthering the interests of large European banks and enterprises." To allow the euro to serve as such a global reserve currency, the elites designed the Eurozone to be resistant to inflation as well as high government debts, and this goal has generally militated against European governments employing Keynesian monetary and fiscal measures to control the business cycle, leading to intractable recessions.

In particular, by mandating the use of a single currency in 19 very different economies with differing levels of development, the Eurozone has taken away a traditional tool that governments could otherwise use to restore their global competitiveness: currency devaluation, which makes their exports cheaper and imports more expensive. With Greece and other Eurozone members unable to devalue national currencies to address problems with competitiveness, and with

Keynesian stimulus ruled out, the primary way Eurozone members can boost their international competitiveness is through reducing both their imports and their labor costs. Given the lack of any alternative short of leaving the euro, many have done so – at a severe cost both to labor and the general population.

Ironically, though, financially the strongest economy in the Eurozone at the moment, Germany, has been more successful than the weaker members, such as Greece, at reducing labor costs over the years. This is partly because Germany was more technically developed to begin with and partly because its workers enjoy higher average incomes, making reductions in them easier. For this and other reasons, including some biases built into the way value of the euro was initially established against those of various national currencies, German exports have been far more competitive within a Eurozone context than Greek, Portuguese or Spanish exports.

In an effort to maintain adequate consumer demand and national economic growth, therefore, the weaker economies of the Eurozone before 2007 mostly stimulated economies by running up debts – in some cases, to their own banks, but in many cases to the banks of Germany and other core EU countries. In the case of Spain, the debts mostly propped up a real estate investment bubble comparable to the one that prevailed before 2007 in the US. In the case of Greece, individual households stopped saving and racked up debts in order to support enhanced consumer spending, while the government also increased its debts while, with the help of Goldman Sachs, hiding this from its foreign creditors.

Before 2007, the German bankers didn't mind the rising indebtedness of the Eurozone periphery, for they were profiting from it. The low inflation rate in the EU made it cheap for them to obtain capital to lend, while the rules of the Eurozone seemed to protect them against the risks of default. The money the German and other banks lent to the economies of the periphery also mostly returned to the core European economies to pay for German (and other) exports. This made the EU initially seem like a “win-win” proposition for Greek households and Spanish real estate developers, as well as German and Dutch bankers.

The U.S. financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 and the Eurozone financial crisis that followed from it, however, have destroyed this arrangement, in part because the German banks that lent heavily to Greece and other peripheral Eurozone economies also were heavily involved in speculating on subprime mortgage-backed securities in the US. When the American bubble in mortgage-backed securities popped, the German bankers suddenly were looking at red ink on their balance sheets. Along with their interest in fighting European inflation to maintain the euro as a viable competitor with the dollar, their own dire straits contributed to their taking a hard line against concessions to their borrowers, including Greece and other peripheral Eurozone members.

The result, according to Lapavitsas and his collaborators, is that the weaker members of the Eurozone as well as European labor in general face a future of endless depression. And yet they argue that like Theseus in his battle with the Minotaur, the weaker countries of the Euro periphery might escape from the terrible and deadly maze in which they are trapped. Unfortunately, though, their most likely escape route is itself painful and dangerous.

Only through a breaking out of the Eurozone, the authors submit, can the Greeks in particular and the European working class in general hope for a more positive future. The indebted Greek government could help to trigger such a breakup either by defaulting on its debts and quitting the Eurozone, or through being forced into default by its creditors. Since there are no set provisions for any member economy leaving the Eurozone, a Greek departure could cause the whole thing to break apart – which to Lapavistas and his collaborators, would ultimately be a good thing.

The question then becomes how to do it. To the authors of this book, a Greek exit from the Eurozone could be “chaotic, undertaken at the last moment ... with minimal preparation,” which would impose substantial additional costs on Greek society and its economy. It also could be conservative,” in the sense of being led by private interests “keen to protect the existing balance of social forces,” who would continue to enforce economic austerity. Or there might be a “progressive” exit that favors labor over capital, with Greece voluntarily and deliberately defaulting and leaving the Eurozone while taking a number of radical steps to lessen the pain of the inevitable aftermath.

For a “progressive” exit to work well, the authors state, Greece would have to adopt “a broad programme including, at the very least, public ownership and control over financial institutions, control over capital flows, income and wealth redistribution, sustained industrial policy to protect employment and ensure growth, and total restructuring of the state in a democratic direction.” Such a progressive and indeed radical exit strategy, if it could be carried out successfully, “could put profound social change on the agenda for the first time in decades,” and help a battered European labor movement move into a position of ascendancy over European capital.

There is much else in this rather complicated account of the Eurozone and its economic woes that is impossible to summarize here, and it might be useful if local DSA members with professional economics training would examine this book in some detail to investigate the many nuances in the argument that I may have missed.

But even for a reviewer of limited economic background such as myself, it’s clear that Lapavistas and his RMF colleagues are charting a possible course for Greece that is far more radical than anything that Syriza and its supporters among the Greek people are proposing at this point in their confrontation with their creditors. It seems unlikely at this moment that the Greek government is going to follow anything like this book’s suggested course of action in the foreseeable future.

Unfortunately, if Lapavistas and his colleagues are correct, the more moderate attempts at reforming the Eurozone that Syriza and most of the Social Democratic parties of Europe are currently willing to pursue are doomed to failure. For the sake of the European working class and for the sake of Americans, too, perhaps DSA members should hope that Lapavistas and his colleagues are wrong, since their way forward — precisely because it would be more radical than merely asking Greece’s creditors for a little mercy — seems so difficult to for Greece to achieve and for its creditors to accept.

## [Maryland: A Pro-worker Vision of the Future Hijacked by the Neoliberal Agenda](#)

Sunday, March 1st, 2015

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2015**

*By Woody Woodruff*

Austerity is, of course, a constant refrain at the state level as well as federal. As we see below, austerity to protect power and preserve inequality is solemnized at many different levels and official, expert-authority is invoked every time: Simpson-Bowles, for an egregious example. Maryland offers another example of the ways that the neoliberal agenda gets reproduced in apparently neutral government operations – as well as the ways it can sometimes get subverted.

Maryland's economy has not kept up with even the feeble recovery that is flickering throughout the US, largely because of its dependence on federal government employment and ancillary federal contracting by the well-known "Beltway Bandits," the private-sector companies that batten off the activities of often-overburdened government agencies.

A particularly tough hit for Maryland was the sequestration of Defense Department spending of the past several fiscal years – a sector on which the state has particularly depended for jobs and taxable cash flow. Even Montgomery County, with the least conservative political culture in the state, found itself approving a craven tax break to keep Lockheed from moving some economic activities out of the county.

Then a Republican snuck away with the governorship in November 2014 with a metronomic claim that taxes were too high, and that the state wasn't business-friendly – coupled with a collapse of turnout in Democratic strongholds.

About a week after the election, a commission tasked with shaping up the state's economic climate and business development approach held its eighth and last meeting; [its report was eventually submitted in February](#). Attendees at that final meeting heard from the reliable and evenhanded legislative services budgetmeister Warren Descheneaux about the state's structural deficit and shortfall for the coming budget year. So in a potent climate of austerity and tax-cutting fever, the commissioners (and, thankfully, legislative services staffers) began to prepare their report. What's kind of amazing is how much worse it could have been. The story of how the commission first came about did not give cause for optimism – at least from the progressive point of view.

It starts in last year's legislative session, when a [fairly visionary and populist proposal](#) entered the scrum. It would have created a Maryland Futures Commission with a goal to survey alternative, non-defense sources of jobs, economic activity and delivery of public goods for the state. The proposed bill actually contained the dread phrase "industrial policy" in the mission

“...to develop plans and policies to ensure a competitive advantage for Maryland as Federal military spending declines.” The initiative for the bill came from Fund Our Communities, a Peace Action offshoot that was explicitly dedicating to shifting military funding to human needs. The goal was to use Maryland’s forced weaning from the defense-industry teat to bring a different set of economic priorities. The hope was to empanel a diverse commission, including labor, nonprofits and activists as well as the inevitable usual suspects from business and politics.

The bill in the 2014 session had [solid support](#) from progressive legislators and held its own in hearings, aided by testimony from defense scholar Miriam Pemberton of the Institute for Policy Studies and backed by a resolution from the state AFL-CIO citing “growing need for programs of economic conversion.”

But the effort was [hijacked, denatured and derailed](#) by the fiat of the two Mikes, the leaders of the House (Speaker Mike Busch) and Senate (President Mike Miller). Where the Maryland’s Future commission would have been a diverse group including unions, peace and justice organizations and other pro-worker and antimilitarist groups, Busch and Miller unilaterally announced the creation of a “Maryland Economic Development and Business Climate Commission” populated entirely by representatives of the power structure in the state and chaired by none other than the retired chairman of Lockheed Corp., Norman Augustine. Both leaders called it the “Augustine Commission.” The Futures Commission bill was withdrawn to clear the way for the leadership’s stacked-deck commission.

The Assembly, despite muted howls of outrage from progressive members, followed the leaders as well last year in dialing back the impact of the state’s estate tax on the grounds that it would drive millionaires to set their residence in some other, lower-tax haven and vanish from the Free State’s tax rolls. That episode seemed a good indicator of the direction of the new commission: protect power.

The commission was supposed to report in December 2014 but filed only an interim report in February of this year, apparently because the two Assembly leaders were so impressed with their work that they gave them till September 2015 and – ominously – expanded their mandate to a complete review of tax structure with “a comprehensive review of Maryland’s State and local business-related taxes and tax incentives.”

The classic neoliberal trickle-down theory was in full play. In a cover letter to the interim report, Augustine carefully noted that “The prosperity of Maryland businesses will *in most instances* lead to the creation of jobs for the State’s citizens.” (emphasis added). As a leader of the entrenched culture of the development-first community, he whined that it was the “entrenched culture” of the state’s executive agencies that was upholding the state’s rep as unfriendly to business, presumably because those state government workers were conscious of having other constituents than just businessmen.

The interim report has enough in it to chill the blood and confirm that the fix was in when this commission was first composed. As noted in the *Washington Socialist* last year, [the commission’s membership was entirely conventional, largely elite and business-friendly](#). The one labor representative was a national AFL-CIO rep with expertise in apprenticeship programs.



The testimony the commission heard in eight public hearings around the state came from a homogeneous business crowd.

There is a permanent war between organized business interests and the state agency bureaucrats who regulate them that is very well represented in the findings and recommendations of the commission. Most of those who testified at the public hearings were business persons of various sorts; there were few representatives of workers or consumers.

Still, the Augustine Commission's report has tolerable recommendations, in particular some that will be distinctly uncomfortable for Larry Hogan, the new Republican governor. For one thing, it offers a ringing call for not only restoration of the cuts Hogan has proposed for both higher ed and K-12 schools but for increased funding. For another, the proposals in aggregate all but specifically endorse industrial policy – picking and supporting winners among the state's existing and nascent businesses and industries. The proposals for aligning the state's workforce with the needs of business and industry also show a strong bias toward planning for future markets rather than just bending over backwards for existing corporate powers – the section on apprenticeships references the successful German model.

The several voices – likely those of members and of professional staff – that emerge in the report show savvy staff work from the Legislative Services division, which provides fact-based analysis that has always kept the legislators as honest as they can be kept. The commission members were essentially stacked in favor of the business community, and Augustine's cover letter to the interim (February) report and the preamble to the report itself distill the complaints of the businessmen interviewed: Those state bureaucrats just don't have the right attitude toward promoting economic development; they are slow, they are too cautious, they won't allow "common-sense exceptions" to the regulations, and they give Maryland its reputation as unfriendly to business. As the introduction states, "Maryland's primary economic vulnerability was characterized by almost all of the executives who appeared before MEDBCC to be an unfriendly, or at best indifferent, business environment." But what else might one expect from a stacked deck of testimony?

This complaint comes, incongruously, in the midst of a quite progressive account of the nature of competition that leads off the report. It suggests that attracting existing businesses into the state – head-hunting at the corporate scale – is the "least attractive option" and generally benefits the business being solicited rather than the states engaged in the race to the bottom. The report also notes the new economy's "disconcerting" tendency to generate e-commerce capitalization but not jobs, citing but not naming Instagram's billion-dollar IPO valuation with a mere 13 employees.

The competitiveness discussion shows other signs of staff input that subverts the market-fundamentalist neoliberal overlay of the commission's charge: "The state must prioritize which industries it must pursue to be competitive" and the crucial factor of research, which "often will not be pursued without government intervention." State funding of technological development is recommended to rise significantly as the state works its way out of its current budget hole.

There are, however, plenty of neoliberal ambushes embedded in the overall report and its recommendations. For instance, a joint committee of the legislature is proposed to gain authority to forestall any state agency ruling that could have “meaningful” negative impact on small businesses, throwing the decision to the governor. That could be a barrier to future minimum wage increases, or to the earned sick leave bill that is having its third hopeful incarnation during this session after two failures. This year’s sick leave bill, HB 385, is said in the fiscal note attached to have a “meaningful” small business impact. One of the five bills filed for this session that are acknowledged to have come directly from the recommendations of the Augustine Commission establishes that tougher standard for regulations that have small business impact via a commission “led by an advisory commission that includes private sector stakeholders.” ([SB 775/HB 939](#))

Several other unpromising recommendations-turned-bills include customer-training service for the allegedly rude and unsympathetic regulatory employees of the state and the creation of a Secretary of Commerce to oversee combined economic development agencies that, the commission found, are disjointed and stovepiped. Among the potentially helpful recommendations, a bill to pilot a German-style apprenticeship program has skimpy House support ([HB 942](#)) but a massive set of cosponsors in the Senate ([SB 772](#)), including many progressive stalwarts like Madaleno, Ramirez and Pinsky (but not Manno or Raskin). A bill that might enhance the role of university research (or become an intellectual-property Hoover) is called a “task force to improve technology transfer from higher education into the marketplace.” SB 941 and [HB 773](#) would investigate the possibility of explicitly bypassing ethics requirements to speed up this process.

What’s missing in the report? The recommendations for boosting science and technology research and business development are rife in the commission’s plan for the future, but there is zero mention of the value of alternative energy R&D or the “green jobs” that could be grown through that – a remarkable omission since Maryland has during the previous administration fused government action, private business activity and sustained environmental activism toward those goals.

As for the commission’s extended mission – “examine the business tax and incentive structure in Maryland,” as described by the two legislative honchos in a Feb. 12 press release – working people and consumers will always be on the losing end when only those aspects of the tax system are under inspection.

The “Augustine Commission” report shows an uneven fealty to the kind of market-fundamentalist view that the GOP governor, Hogan, appears to be bringing to the fray (along with a distressing number of holdover hard-liners from the Ehrlich administration). A good deal of the story yet to be written will be framed by which among its recommendations make it into law in this and future legislative sessions. The episodes so far have a depressing familiarity: the trappings of deliberation are used to make a *fait accompli* seem like a reason-based process. Progressives can be happy, at least, that the Hogan-proposed education cuts that have outraged both House and Senate get a clear repudiation from this report, and that an activist approach to job generation and industrial policy is cautiously endorsed. But overall, it’s another example of how the capitalist agenda has a way of colonizing governance.

## [PEPCO-Exelon Deal Provides Focus to Feb. 15 General Meeting](#)

Sunday, March 1st, 2015

### ***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2015**

*By Andy Feeney*

Thanks to unexpectedly cold weather, the scheduled general meeting of the Metro DC chapter of DSA almost didn't happen. Our scheduled speaker was Dave Freeman, aka the "Green Cowboy," a former chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and former manager of several large, publicly owned electric utilities. Freeman had expressed some eagerness to talk to local democratic socialists about the history and the potential future of publicly owned power systems in the United States, but on the morning of Sunday, Feb. 15 he called us to say that he would speak as scheduled if we preferred, but he thought attendance would be sparse due to the single-digit weather, and he really thought we should cancel the meeting. He also confessed that at age 89, he was rather reluctant to brave the cold weather himself.

After a somewhat frenzied consultation by phone, several members of the local Steering Committee agreed we should cancel Freeman's presentation, but hold the meeting anyway to avoid disappointing any DSA members and supporters who turned up for it. At the last minute, we also persuaded Marchant Wentworth, a green energy consultant and a former campaign manager for the Union of Concerned Scientists, to speak on the proposed merger of PEPCO into the Chicago-based utility generating utility Exelon, as a substitute for Freeman's presentation.

Despite a last-minute room shift upstairs in the Shaw library, 13 people found their way to the Feb. 15 meeting, including Wentworth, a curious libertarian conservative and a representative of the climate activist group 350.org in Loudoun County. Attendees had a good discussion of the proposed PEPCO-Exelon deal. With DSA members Andy Feeney and Woody Woodruff providing some backup, Wentworth led the discussion of what the deal would mean for local utility ratepayers as well as advocates for green and renewable energy.

Major points that emerged from the discussion mostly reflect those that the *Washington Socialist* explored in two articles on the proposed merger in our last issue, concerning recent hearings on the proposal before [the D.C.](#) and [Maryland](#) public service commissions. In addition, Wentworth made the point that "takeover" really is a better description of the proposed deal than "merger."

If it gains local regulatory approval for the deal, Wentworth pointed out, Exelon would acquire PEPCO by paying its stockholders a significantly above-market price for its outstanding stock. The stockholders would obviously benefit, but to make a reasonable profit on the deal, Exelon would then need to get additional revenue from operating PEPCO's existing distribution

system. The most logical way in which it could get that added revenue would be through passing on the relatively high costs of Exelon's existing fleet of 23 nuclear power plants to local ratepayers, at a significant premium above what the average D.C. or suburban Maryland ratepayer is now paying for electricity.

A fairly lively discussion of the takeover ensued, as well as of which local ratepayers are likely to be most affected by it, as well as its implications for local providers of what is called "distributed" power – electricity generated by small businesses and homeowners from their own solar panel or wind energy installations, which they can sell to PEPCO's existing distribution network when the sun is shining and the wind is blowing, so as to reduce their overall power bills while contributing renewable energy to the grid.

Exelon likes to boast that it operates some solar electric generation of its own, but it is on record as opposing "distributed" power in a number of states where it operates. Its motivation for doing so is obvious, since locally-produced distributed power competes with the power generated from its large nuclear fleet, costing its stockholders money.

*Washington Socialist* readers interested in learning more about the proposed takeover of PEPCO are encouraged to refer to our stories from last issue for more details. In Maryland, the deadline for public comments on the proposed deal has passed, but the D.C. Public Service Commission will continue accepting public comments to its docket on the proposal up to March 26. Written statements by D.C. residents may be submitted by mail or in person to Brinda Westbrook-Sedgwick, Commission Secretary, Public Service Commission of the District of Columbia, 1333 H Street, N.W., Suite 200, West Tower, Washington DC 20005, or they can be emailed to [PSC-CommissionSecretary@dc.gov](mailto:PSC-CommissionSecretary@dc.gov), or submitted through the Commission's eDocket system at <http://www.depsc.org/edocket.asp>.

The D.C. Office of People's Counsel, which is charged with representing utility customers in proposed rate cases, has issued an analysis stating that the proposed PEPCO/Exelon merger is not in the public interest. For a look at the OPC's statement, click here: <http://www.opc-dc.gov/index.php/consumer-topics-a-z/whats-hot/1090-opc-s-position-on-the-seven-public-interest-factors>.

For a menu of different OPC documents concerning the propose merger, click here: <http://www.opc-dc.gov/index.php/consumer-topics-a-z/whats-hot/1043-learn-more-about-the-pepco-exelon-merger-proposal?highlight=WyJleGVsb24iLCJwZXBjbyIsImV4ZWxvbiBwZXBjbyJd>.

A national environmentalist perspective on this Exelon proposal is at <http://grist.org/climate-energy/the-exelon-pepco-merger-big-nuke-heavy-utility-looking-for-new-ratepayers-to-fleece/>

[Remembering Michael Harrington](#)

Sunday, March 1st, 2015

Maurice Isserman's blog post on the Democratic Left blog site is at [http://www.dsausa.org/michael\\_harrington\\_remembered\\_dl](http://www.dsausa.org/michael_harrington_remembered_dl)

### [Two Streams Striving for Justice: Black Freedom, Women's Liberation](#)

Sunday, March 1st, 2015

A Review of *Selma* and *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*

#### ***The Washington Socialist* <> March 2015**

By Kurt Stand

Apparent coincidences often speak to the spirit of the times — although produced and screened based upon wholly disparate origins and schedules, the current showings of *Selma* and *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* each address a need of the moment to recapture a sense of the recent past. Much as activists within the civil rights and women's movement in the 1960s initially had little access to their rich histories, so today many activists — let alone the broader public — have little concrete knowledge or understanding of what the world looked and felt like to those confronting oppressive conditions before today's rights were won. And it is that lack of history that is so telling now, as what was gained is being taken away. Public discussion and understanding of how social struggles developed, how activists were formed, how decisions on strategy and tactics were made is critical to our ability not only to defend existing rights but to expand and extend them.

Even though they are very different movies, each of these two films meaningfully contributes to the possibility of such discussion. *Selma* follows a traditional story-telling arc; Martin Luther King Jr.'s political and interpersonal struggles while organizing the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery March become the lens through which the drive to pass the Voting Rights Act is told. The strength of the movie is that the intersection of personality and movement makes history accessible in a manner often lost; King is portrayed as heroic (which indeed he was), but also as a part of a much wider movement with other heroic individual leaders and grassroots militants — and therefore part of a movement filled with many different and sometimes conflicting views and voices which nonetheless acted in concert. As in any such narrative, the imperative of story-telling makes the picture of history neater, more unilinear, than it was in reality; nonetheless, by showing meetings, arguments, debates through which decisions were made, audiences are given a more accurate picture of the past than works of history or fiction that focus on an individual or leader in isolation (or in opposition) to the social movements of their times. That is even more true of *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*, which documents the emergence, growth and diversity

of Second Wave feminism — roughly from the early-1960s to the mid-1970s — through contemporary news footage and present-day interviews with key participants in Boston, New York, the Bay Area, Chicago, DC and elsewhere. Both of the nature of the documentary and the nature of the movement made any simple coherence hard to achieve, except in the profound sense that the multiplicity of leaders and locations and concerns was essential to the power and meaning of the struggle by women for women's rights. The narrative arc is the story as a whole and while it makes the film less immediately graspable than what could be achieved through a plot-driven tale, it provides a framework that allows a better sense of the inter-connection between individual voices and collective action.

The focus of each film on the relationship between people within social movements touches on a truth of how political change occurs — a truth often ignored by Hollywood. That lack makes highly ironic the criticisms of *Selma* by some over the depiction of Lyndon Johnson's role in the voter registration movement. Ironic given the almost complete lack of historical validity of the vast majority of historical films (such as in *Mississippi Burning*, turning truth upside down by pretending that the FBI wanted to discover and prosecute those who murdered civil rights workers, to cite but one of countless other examples) which are not attacked in the press. This it is not a question of documentary accuracy — it is a fictional account and does not pretend to be a footnoted work striving to get every detail right in the correct chronological order. Rather it is a film that strives to speak to the underlying truth of King and of the civil rights movement, of the poverty and violence, of the hope and vision, which inspired it. And thereby, *Selma* recaptures the anger at oppression and racism, anger often lost in “feel good” depictions of the era. So too, the superficial picture of a struggle that moved from victory to victory (Brown v. Bd. of Education, the March on Washington, the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act), often ignores the sense of frustration as each gain was met by a violent intransigence that still left African Americans second-class citizens in their own country. As to the relationship between government and social movements, one need only note that Johnson, when Senate Majority leader in the 1950s, blocked meaningful civil rights legislation, legislation that he subsequently signed into law. It is to his credit that he did sign, but the change was not solely a personal one; rather it was the work of leaders, activists and organizations rooted in the black community that made the difference. If *Selma*, again because of the conventions of mainstream movie-making, can't completely bring the full dynamic of those relationships on the ground to the surface, it nonetheless comes far closer than most Hollywood movies, presenting a truer, more nuanced, more relevant version of our collective past than what viewers are ordinarily able to see on screen.

As noted, *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* presents multiple voices in order to present a history of a movement that brought such enormous sweeping changes that it is difficult for people today to grasp how ingrained, pervasive and accepted blatant, overt sexism had been. Rather than focusing on one issue, group or leader, the film depicts various layers of challenges to existing structures and relationships manifested in all aspects of life. The essence of the impact the movement struck amongst women is shown in telling how a collective in Boston wrote *Our Bodies, Our Selves* — seeking self-knowledge they touched a chord amongst women across the country who, denied such knowledge in school and by society, made that work their own (and, in an inspiring segment of the movie, shows the influence it continues to have as



women around the world have made the book their own, in numerous translations and rewritings).

The personal as political is shown not as a cliché but a necessity to challenge an overt sexual double standard that pervaded family relationships, job opportunities, university life, and political activism (even of the left). Help wanted ads, to cite but one example, were not only gender-specific — employers could all but ask for sexual favors; therefore the political demand for the end of such discrimination was a personal demand to have choice in life. And, as to choice, the film's recounting of the massive underground network providing safe places for women to have abortions in an era when such a referral system — let alone the practice — was itself illegal connected the intimate to collective action to demands for legal change. That connection was reinforced as the demand amongst Black and Puerto Rican women for the right to birth control was equally a demand against what was a widespread practice of forced sterilization. The film thereby depicts the distinctiveness within the women's movement of movements built by women also challenging the pervasive impact of racism and colonialism in their lives. Coming full circle to the challenge posed earlier by women against sexism in the civil rights and anti-war movements, within the New Left, *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* depicts the demand by lesbians that their insights, experiences and struggle against repression be brought out into the open not only within society but also within the activist community. Throughout, the enormous creativity of individuals who found a voice within themselves that otherwise would have been suppressed is shown, unique voices that would have been silenced unless nurtured by collectives of mutual support.

It was a creativity fueled too by an anger at the existence of such a double standard and inequality that faced — and still faces — such deep resistance when confronted. And this ties back to *Selma*, the anger, the near despair that made the determination to press forward all the more remarkable. Music (and poetry) within these two movies register in equal measure pain and aspiration that were and are as much a part of the journey as are meetings and demonstrations. Victories were won despite resistance from established power, although that power was able to limit the scope of social gains, thus laying the groundwork for the corporate and right-wing pushbacks against liberatory and egalitarian social justice.

That returns us to Johnson's legacy, for the inadequacy of LBJ's liberalism was demonstrated already in 1964 when he sought to maintain Democratic Party unity by trying to force an unsatisfactory compromise between civil rights activists and segregationists. The "compromise" prevented activists from building an interracial coalition of the poor within the Democratic Party, while concessions to racism did not keep the southern white establishment from moving en masse to the Republican Party. At the same time, his commitment to the war in Vietnam undermined his commitment for civil rights and to the war on poverty; a contradiction brought out in *Selma*. Unable to contain the strains of society brought about by demands for genuine equality, Johnson's presidency collapsed only a few years subsequent to the massive victory he won in 1964, a failure which set the stage for the subsequent drift toward a Democratic Party polity that has put anti-poverty and collective working-class social measures on the backburner. This was to have a corrosive impact on the black freedom movement — social equality was not only a value in itself, it was also understood as a means to the power that could address economic inequality that trapped millions of African Americans in lives of

want. Therefore, the need to join the Voting Rights Act to the Civil Rights Act (as noted in the film), and the continued need to find an adequate framework through which to exercise political power (beyond the scope of this film).

Nixon's attempt to co-opt or placate social justice movements while simultaneously acting to reinforce existing hierarchies and inequalities was similarly unable to contain social activism but could forestall the goals of equality. The National Strike for Women's Equality in 1970, although not a centerpiece the way the Selma-to-Montgomery march is in *Selma*, nonetheless forms a highwater moment in *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*. The successful march was followed by a number of victories — perhaps the most significant of which was passage of a national system of child care. Nixon's veto of that legislation marked the beginning of the end of that progress (foreshadowing the subsequent defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment). The attempts to give lip service to reform without allowing substantive change to go forward was a contradiction, which, when combined with his attempt to “win” in Vietnam, led to the collapse on Nixon's presidency shortly after his massive victory in 1972. Nixon's policies, however, came to redefine the shape of Republican Party practices that took full form under Ronald Reagan; the onset of a reaction in all phases of US life. The political system stabilized by squeezing out hope of change through political action, though in the process we have been led from one social and economic crisis after another. The systemic attack on abortion rights — on the right to choice — in subsequent years was part of a general suppression of rights, of a general rise of insecurity, that have once again placed greater burdens on women. Gender inequality has been on the rise as both economic and social justice recede.

And so the struggle continues — when *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* makes that explicit through references to women today fighting back against attacks on abortion rights, organizing for workplace rights amongst the most exploited, demonstrating against sexual violence through “slut walks,” fighting for equal rights in every meaning of the term. *Selma*, in turn, is being shown at a time when the Supreme Court's gutting of key provisions of the Voting Rights Act has opened the door to new and ever-more cynical forms of voter suppression. A song about Ferguson in the background as the film closes ties back to the devaluation of black lives remembered on screen in the opening, showing the death of four girls in a Birmingham, Alabama church bombing. “Black Lives Matter” has added meaning when thought is given to the murder of black and white civil rights activists during the Selma organizing, to the assassination of black leaders from Malcolm X to Martin Luther King.

The present is not the past, of course; changes made were genuine and meaningful even if limited. The partial gains registered then and under attack now sometimes cloud issues in the present which are often not as clearcut as in the years portrayed by these two movies. Reversing the content of the personal as political, social and economic suffering is now often seen and felt as a result of individual failure rather than as a consequence of structures designed to maintain hierarchies of inequality. Thus, as one younger woman put the matter, oppression has become more insidious. A new way forward will have to be found, a search that can only be helped by paying attention to what came before. Demands for equality in every phase of life are part and parcel of demands for economic justice — and if these are pulled asunder, then all suffer. Freedom, liberation, dignity, self-determination, define the dreams behind the struggles of the 1960s and 70s, in the striving for rights as individuals that could — and can — only be

gained through structural change in our political and economic system. Organizing therefore ought to accommodate a multitude of concerns while also seeking the common interest embodied in universal programs. Contrary to the neo-liberal zeitgeist, social and individual rights, social and economic equality, are intertwined (an intertwining that is at the heart of the socialist project, as it is at the heart of all social justice activism). The legacy of the past that speaks most forcefully to our needs for the present is the need to coalesce multiple voices and struggles that push that connection in every sphere of life – and is the reason *Selma* and *She's Beautiful When She is Angry* should be seen and discussed.