

*The Washington Socialist*  
Articles from Midsummer 2013 Issue  
Archived November 2016  
Editor: Woody Woodruff

[DC Metro DSA's Midsummer Newsletter: Nuts and Bolts for Backing a Socialist Candidate](#)



**Welcome to the midsummer edition of the *Washington Socialist***, the monthly email newsletter of the Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America.

As has become traditional (for at least two years!) our midsummer issue, covering July and August, is published on Bastille Day. Though [historians have tagged](#) many of the myths that Bastille Day embodies as just that – myths – it is still a day honoring a singular event in modern history. In fact, by the account of many historians, modernity began in 1789. The enthusiasts who seized power in Europe's largest nation intuited a need for broad, consultative re-definition of the terms of life, exchange and work if this new thing were to be more than just another transfer of power from the old powerful to the new powerful.

The level of industrialization and alienation of labor that would animate Marx, Engels and the First International were decades in the future and already more advanced across the Channel, but the French people's response to the need for change in 1789 was a singularity, premature or not.

**BELLWETHER:** Sometimes the “threat of a good example” (Chomsky) can bring progress instead of pushback. A statewide bill for paid sick leave in Maryland has foundered in the General Assembly for three straight years. But the actions of Montgomery County's council June 23 in [passing a strong county measure](#) on paid sick leave might push the legislators to bring the state bill out of the death panels – er, committees – in next spring's session. Recognizing how Montgomery can be a bellwether for the state, a robust coalition of county and state organizations and unions led by the Baltimore-based [Jobs Opportunity Task Force/Working Matters](#) coalition worked the issue hard and coordinated closely, meeting with council members both friendly and hostile and defusing potential problems as the bill proceeded through committee consideration to a full vote with remarkable speed. Your correspondent, a volunteer peripheral observer to this operation, was stunned and thrilled to watch the pros at work. The good example of Montgomery, which may be replicated later this summer in Prince George's (though it may be a heavier lift) could set a tone for statewide success in the 2016 session.

**ON DC DSA'S PLATE in July and August:** In a summer galvanized by Senator Bernie Sanders' challenge to the Democratic establishment, the Metro DC local is mobilizing with National DSA to support the avowed democratic socialist candidate via an independent expenditure, [We Need Bernie](#). (What's an independent expenditure? A political action for or against a candidate done without coordination with any candidate's committee)

A training session for those wanting to be involved in *We Need Bernie* is scheduled for the local's **August special two-part membership meeting** Sunday, August 9, 2015, 1:30 p.m. to 4 at the [Watha T. Daniel/Shaw Neighborhood Library \(WTD Meeting Room\)](#) 1630 7th St NW, Washington, DC across the street from the Shaw-Howard Metrorail station on the Green Line. A visiting discussant (TBA) on the "Evolving Politics of Climate Change" (1:30 – 2:30), will be followed by a 1-Hour Training Session on "How Local DSAers Can Canvass for Bernie Sanders" (2:30 – 3:30). Check the Meetup site for updates as the date approaches.

The training session is recommended because DSA's enthusiasm for a socialist's campaign within one of the capitalist parties has to be tempered by election law. But trained DSA members can act as organized individuals on behalf of Bernie Sanders' candidacy at public events and the local will actively seek locations where that can happen – tabling, canvassing or leafleting. Watch the [Meetup site](#) for opportunities to engage in these activities, many of them on weekends at farmers' markets and the like.

The **Socialist Salon** in July (July 30) examines the white racist right that is the quasi-organized force behind individual instance of outrage like the mass murder in Charleston's venerable black church. It's 6:30 p.m. at Hunan Dynasty, 215 Pennsylvania Ave SE but (as always) check the [Meetup site](#) for fresh information; note that it is the fifth Thursday this month, not the third Thursday as it typically is.

The **Socialist Happy Hour** at Luna Grill in Dupont Circle takes place the day before the Salon, July 29. Relax and talk about socialism – or not – starting at 6:30 p.m., 1301 Connecticut Ave. NW.

The **Socialist Book Group** meets Sunday, Aug. 16 at 3 p.m. to discuss Steve Fraser's book, [The Age of Acquiescence](#). The group meets at the Kogod Courtyard of the National Portrait Gallery, 8<sup>th</sup> and F. Streets NW right next to Gallery Place Metrorail station on the Yellow/Green and Red lines.

The **August Socialist Salon**, still in formation, will examine the sovereign debt crises of Greece and Puerto Rico, at whatever stage they are at on August 20, when the Salon will take place (likely 6:30 p.m. at Hunan Dynasty, 215 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, but check the Meetup site closer to the date).

Updated information on all these events are found at the Metro DC DSA [Meetup site](#).

### **OTHER UPCOMING EVENTS OF NOTE:**

**IMMEDIATE:** On our publication day, our comrades at DC Jobs with Justice [hold a public hearing](#) on “just hours” – giving more control over work hours and lives to workers who are currently at the mercy of arbitrary scheduling and unilateral management reduction of hours. It’s **today, July 14**, 6 p.m. at Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church, 3000 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, Washington, DC 20020

**THIS WEEKEND:** A group of DCDSA members recently got a briefing from staffers at the Venezuelan Embassy about conditions in that country (under considerable economic and rhetorical attack by the US). Those briefed recommend an upcoming public event at the Embassy, a panel discussion on *The Latin American Alternative: 16 Years of Progressive Transformations in Venezuela and Latin America* **Saturday, July 18th**, 3:00, at the Bolivarian Hall at the Venezuelan Embassy (2445 Massachusetts Ave. NW.). Confirmed discussants are George Ciccariello-Maher, an assistant professor of political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia and author of *We Created Chávez: A People’s History of the Venezuelan Revolution*, and Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, in Washington, DC.

**AUGUST:** [Progressive Maryland](#), long a solid coalition group in Maryland but known mostly as being based in Montgomery County until recently, is working to set up a companion chapter in Prince George’s County. An organizing committee has met several times in the past month and a date for an interest meeting has just been set: **Thursday, August 13**, 6:30-8:30 p.m. The location is TBA; check the site (above) for updates. South county Pastor Delman Coates, Heather Mizeur’s running mate in last year’s gubernatorial primary, is confirmed as keynoter.

**RESOURCE RECOVERY:** Here’s a link to where to donate to rebuild those black churches in the South that have burned: <https://cccathedralstl.dntly.com/campaign/2571#/donate>

### **IN THIS ISSUE:**

Then there’s the other debt problem – the singular situation of **Puerto Rico**, also staggered by overhanging debt but unable to seek bankruptcy like US cities and counties because it’s considered a state. Not in the important ways, but in the ways that Congress decreed to help big banks lavish loans on the quasi-colony without risk of loss. The DSA National Political Committee, on the initiative of our co-chair and NPC member Jose Gutierrez, issued a statement calling for the US government (and a reluctant GOP Congressional majority) to restructure the commonwealth’s public debt. [Read complete article](#)

DSA’s July general meeting heard the veteran public power manager Dave Freeman upbraid his fellow managers in public power for forgetting their mandate and choosing safe, legacy fossil fuels over the clear necessity for renewables. The cowboy-hatted octogenarian set a clear vision

of **the public-ness of public power** and its future. Andy Feeny and Woody Woodruff provide this account with a flavor of Freeman’s witty, acerbic perspective. [Read complete article.](#)

There is a clear path for Sen. Bernie Sanders to win not only the Democratic nomination but the presidency, says Bill Mosley – because his agenda is that of the country’s hard-pressed voters. Mosley traces the admittedly difficult threading of obstacles that could result in a **President Sanders**, and urges socialists and other progressives to act resolutely, with analogies to the storied California gubernatorial campaign of Upton Sinclair. [Read complete article](#)

Left orthodoxy holds that reducing taxes to free the invisible hand of growth and innovation is a blind alley, a mask for accumulation by elites. Kameron Burt argues a contrarian position, suggesting that **accumulation can help enable “the innovative potential of the working class.”** He invokes Piketty and others to suggest that the suffocating debt that can result stifles working-class opportunities to create, for instance, worker co-ops. Public action to fuel these worker-based enterprises is needed, he argues. [Read complete article](#)

Every new revelation about the **Trans Pacific Partnership** points to incipient corporate victories and worker oppression, Andy Feeny observes in this account of how the trade deal could cripple the US Postal Service’s ability to broaden its revenue streams to stay alive in the age of the mature Internet. Innovative plans such as banking services, backed by the postal unions if not by Congress or USPS leadership, would be stifled under the TPP. [Read complete article](#)

Nobody knows right now what the endgame will be at next year’s Democratic National Convention – or if there will be one. Undeterred, Woody Woodruff unveils a dream vision about **Bernie Sanders’ news conference** as the convention opens and where he might stand at that point in the campaign. [Read complete article](#)

There are plenty of ways to help the children of poverty avoid marginalization as they grow to youth and then adulthood. A panel at the Economic Policy Institute made it clear that **early childhood education**, in its broadest sense, is a key strategy. Andy Feeny presents the arguments of the expert panel, including some who would be considered conservative in other respects. [Read complete article](#)

**Good Reads** – This rather extensive edition of Good Reads probably should be called the Bernie Edition because the socialist candidate has been so much in the news and left commentary. But there are takes on the Greek crisis, the passivity of the oppressed, an historical contextualization of the Charleston church massacre, and the role of violence in maintaining global order as well. [Read complete article](#)

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**You can read past articles in the *Washington Socialist* on this 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).***

[Dublin keynoters offer Marxist explanations for economic collapse but leave women out](#)

Sunday, July 14th, 2013

### ***The Washington Socialist*<>Midsummer 2013**

*By Carolyn M. Byerly*

Marx and Engels' ideas framed a world gathering of leftist communication scholars in Dublin in late June where 1,400 of us came to explore the theme “Crises, ‘Creative Destruction’ and the Global Power and Communication Orders.” Held at Dublin City University, the meeting of International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) had a number of notable headline speakers worthy of sharing with our socialist readers.

Ireland's President Michael D. Higgins, a former college professor and political leader, [electrified the audience](#) in an opening address by critiquing neoliberalism and decrying the rise of communication conglomerates and the concentrated ownership that they have produced. As he recounted the litany of problems this process has spawned, I mused at his [complex understanding](#) of the situation and his forthrightness in talking about it in what can only be called radical terms. What a refreshing turn to hear this from the president of a nation!

On June 27, John Bellamy Foster, sociologist on the University of Oregon faculty and editor of the *Monthly Review* journal, responded to the conference theme in a keynote that focused on the intersection of the communications revolution in relation to darker processes. Foster called the phenomenon a “crossing of planetary boundaries.” Economic and environmental crises, he said, have intersected to bring us to a point never before known in human history.

With regard to economics, he said, the financialization process has made an unprecedented shift over three decades such that the financial sector has become dominant. This has occurred in such a way that money produces more money without the intervention of commodities, whose use value has become displaced by raw speculation. Foster observed that large corporations now control so much surplus profit they don't know what to do with it. It is estimated to be in the trillions, and it is not trickling back into the broader economy.

With regard to the environment, he said, we are seeing the destruction of nature's real value to promote exchange value of its resources. Half of all species are expected to become extinct by the end of this century. Carbon emissions are reaching the point of no return as we see an accelerated melting of polar icecaps and other dramatic changes with ever-increasing rises in earth's temperatures.

High technologies were supposed to generate prosperity. In fact, economies continue to stagnate. "Go green" with expanded use of digital technology was the mantra to convince us that technology would reduce consumption of natural resources. In fact, we are consuming more. Communication is today little more than an appendage of capital markets, seen, for example, in the Internet's commercialization. Communication companies are giant monopolies.

Foster turned to Shumpeter's explication of Marx and Engel's notion of "creative destruction" (originally put forth in the *Communist Manifesto*, 1848), a term that refers to the way that capitalist economic development emerges from the destruction of whatever economic order came before it. Today, monopolies undermine the institutional framework of capitalism with their surplus profits that do not flow back into the economy. This is seen most profoundly in the cheapening of labor, which is suffering. People are revolting against these realities on a "scale not seen since 1968," Foster said, as he referred to Occupy Wall Street, and recent revolts in Turkey and Brazil. As for the role of intellectuals, Foster believes that "we must not just describe the destruction of the world but enter into the posing of new possibilities." He ended without so much as a glimmer of what those might include – we are thus challenged to pursue them in his articles and books.

On June 28, political theorist Jodi Dean, from the Hobart and William Smith Colleges, explored what she called "communicative capitalism," which offered a scathing critique of social networking, hailed by many as providing a new public sphere. Dean's central thesis is that this new digital phenomenon is no more than "communicative capitalism", which is characterized by three key features.

The first is a change in the form of utterance, i.e., an exploitation of communication by promoting the belief that "messages are contributions" that matter, and that all messages have value (be they jokes or brilliant opinions). The second is a decline in symbolic efficiency, i.e., a lessening of the meaning of symbols that we have held in common. Communities are held together by systems of shared symbols, whether they be flags, artwork, or other familiar icons. By contrast, social networking supports the notion that circulating a photo or another image carries the same level of shared meaning with it that as those emerging from more traditional histories, sufferings, or other experiences. In addition, social networkers also assume that the image represents an actual message, i.e., an articulated explanation. She rejects this assumption, which she believes is promulgated by a materialist society shaped by advertising, public relations and other communication forms empty of real meaning. The third characteristic of communicative capitalism, according to Dean, is reflexivity, i.e., the constant reconsideration of what and who we are and what we believe. "Nothing is ever settled, we don't really make a decision or take a stand," she said. As a result, people are unengaged in their social and political milieux.

One of the more interesting aspects of Dean's analysis was her foray into the capitalist dimensions of her topic. Google, Amazon, Facebook, Twitter and other popular websites are not only hugely wealthy from our participation in their offerings but they also commodify our communication with them by accumulating metadata on us that they market to others. Dean emphasized that the profit and power dimensions of social networking (or eCommerce) are not always obvious to those who think they are engaging in social change by using them.

In a spirited exchange with the audience during Q & A, Dean added that so-called political activism on the Internet has not brought about any real (structural) changes. She gave some compelling examples. The celebrated Arab Spring that emerged in 2010 wasn't brought about by Facebook, as many have claimed, she said, but rather the less visible building up of analyses among popular leaders and intellectuals, the forming of organizations and setting of agendas in more traditional ways among discontented people in North African nations. We have known about the US military's torture in war since the Abu Ghraib photos were posted online nearly 10 years ago, she said, but there is no evidence torture has in any way stopped or lessened. Wikileaks' massive online disclosures of top security documents have produced no changes in government policies, she said. All of these examples illustrate people's participation in democratic communication, of course, but they do not reduce real problems which caused them in the first place nor do they lead to more equality and fairness. What is needed to produce such structural changes, she said, is a vision of communism, something she sets forth in depth in her most recent book, the *Communist Horizon* (Verso, 2012).

I was provoked by these speakers, whose ideas were fresh and consciousness-expanding, but my feminist sensibilities also found me frustrated. Broad macro-level analyses matter, but I believe their abstract landscapes need to be populated by real people at some point. There is an assumption among many Leftists that offering a class analysis is enough because class relations represent the central problem we are meant to grapple with. In truth political and economic equality fall along the fault lines of gender and race.

To take John Bellamy Foster's reference to the "cheapening of labor", for instance, requires a recognition that women's labor is compensated at lower rates than men's all over the world. Women are not only poorer than men but they also work the "double-day" of domestic chores in addition to work outside the home (a point also missed by Marx). Jodi Dean's omission of women from her critique was perhaps the most surprising since her work has incorporated feminist analyses. While I am in complete agreement with her on most of her points, I would have liked some recognition from her that digital technology (for all of its commercialized realities) has allowed women the means to mobilize small-scale campaigns that have produced real outcomes that mattered to us women.

It was, for example, feminists (particularly feminists of color) who used Facebook and other social networking to mobilize public opinion against Don Imus's racist and sexist comments about the University of Connecticut women basketball players a couple of years ago that got him fired from radio. In addition, African American leaders generated a campaign against the news media a few years ago for failing to report on missing Black women like LaToyia Figueroa (as they do on missing White women like Natalee Holloway). Figueroa's case then emerged in the news, prompting police investigations and an arrest. As someone who studies political (and

other) communication, I believe these smaller-scale events can be instructive as to the potential value of new technologies in political formation. Popular movements among marginalized peoples begin on the margins and may build over time, with structural change coming later. In addition, social networks are still relatively new and their cumulative impacts in the broader social structure cannot really be assessed for some time to come. My call for Foster and Dean's greater attention to gender dimensions in capitalism does not obviate the need for class analysis. With specific regard to the ownership of social networking sites by the oligarchs who also control the broader political economy, I am one democratic socialist who would like to see DSA take a more active role in addressing communication structures and policies that enable them to exist as monopolies.

UPDATE July 24... [video of plenary sessions of this conference](#) are now available.

[GOOD READS! — The 1963 March and other items deserving of attention](#)

Sunday, July 14th, 2013

### ***The Washington Socialist*<>Midsummer 2013**

Good Reads! These are articles, some obscure and some not so, that you might have missed...

EPI's newsletter analyzes the unfinished business of the 1963 March:

<http://www.epi.org/publication/unfinished-march-overview/>

William P. Jones in DISSENT discusses the labor- and jobs-focused aspects of the 1963 march

<http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-forgotten-radical-history-of-the-march-on-washington>

[note: on July 14 the *Dissent* website appeared to be unavailable. Updates on this will follow]

Member Kurt Stand notes a review of Jones's book on the March, by Moshe Marvits: "Jones thoroughly recovers the radical reality of the events leading up to the march, as well as the march itself, and exposes the important question of how such a radical event was so quickly remembered as a model of moderation." via Portside, originally appeared in *Washington Monthly* <http://portside.org/2013-07-11/what-dr-king-didnt-say-misremembering-march-washington#sthash.zjdteZ2Y.dpuf>

Another March-related piece from the invaluable site "Portside," a response by Mark S. Mishler to the recent Supreme Court decision gutting a crucial element of the Voting Rights Act: "The



Court's decision in Shelby represents, perhaps, the last dying gasp of a white power structure determined to block progress by any means necessary." <http://portside.org/2013-07-11/ruth-bader-ginsburg-john-lewis-jimmie-lee-jackson-fannie-lou-hamer-rosa-parks-coretta>

Talking Union reposts a netroots piece on alt-labor, like our DC-ROC...

<http://talkingunion.wordpress.com/2013/06/22/netroots-nation-why-alt-labor-is-important/>

About what we're all learning to call alt-labor:

[http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/15198/joe\\_burns\\_on\\_fast\\_food\\_strikes/](http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/15198/joe_burns_on_fast_food_strikes/)

About the automation of labor crisis; one from Gavin Mueller in Jacobin:

<http://jacobinmag.com/2013/04/the-rise-of-the-machines/>

And a surprisingly valuable take, with reference to some very interesting studies, by Jim Tankersley in the WaPo: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/have-the-robots-come-for-the-middle-class/2013/07/12/bac3b3c8-eaef-11e2-a301-ea5a8116d211\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/have-the-robots-come-for-the-middle-class/2013/07/12/bac3b3c8-eaef-11e2-a301-ea5a8116d211_story.html)

Still another consideration of Gar Alperovitz's localist radicalism by Matt Bruenig in the excellent Demos blogsite: <http://www.demos.org/blog/making-equality-local>

Some of us have had experience with the International Socialist Organization (ISO); others not so much. Here is an interesting take by a longtime member, now ex-member, from The North Star. BTW this was posted by national DSA's Facebook page; that page is showing more and more productive activity and may be worth a "like" if you are a political Facebook user...

<http://www.thenorthstar.info/?p=9055>

An edition of the journal *The Good Society* on the theme "Alternatives to Capitalism" with a lead article co-authored by Gar Alperovitz and a colleague from the Democracy Collaborative, called [The Possibility of a Pluralist Commonwealth and a Community-Sustaining Economy](#) The journal is open access: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/goodsociety.22.1.issue-1>

Ross Templeton sends this hopeful Canadian podcast:

<http://www.cbc.ca/thesundayedition/shows/2013/02/24/is-marxism-facing-a-rebirth/>

[Neoliberal Austerity – European Style](#)

Sunday, July 14th, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> Midsummer 2013**

*By Kurt Stand*

“... the rulers of the transcontinental corporations ... are the new feudal lords, answerable to neither national governments nor the United Nations. The World Trade Organization, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund are sufficient for them; these are the principal instruments of their strategy. [National] governments are still needed, as in the past, to maintain rights, but in the framework of globalization, sovereign authority melts like snow in the sun.” – *Jean Zeigler, Special Advisor to the United Nations for Human Rights.*

“The creation of the Euro has functioned, from the outset, as a neo-liberal vehicle. From the Maastricht Treaty [which created the European Union (EU)] to the current fiscal packages, all agreements behind the common currency have obligated governments to enforce the ever more brutal policies that today we call austerity. ... With the economic crisis each new pact has forced cabinets to take measures the exact opposite of what has been needed. Therefore the crisis has led to a severe recession. The Europe of the Euro is politically, socially and culturally a failure.”—*Giorgio Cremaschi, former president of the Italian metal workers union, FIOM-CGIL.*

Introduced in 1999, the Euro is now the currency of 17 countries. Despite the promises of many advocates, it has not led to a more just or peaceful continent. Yet many critics of neoliberalism in the US look toward Europe as providing a more humane model of capitalism than our own – a reversal of a past in which many in Europe looked to the US. It is worth recalling that in the quarter century after World War II, the United States economy seemed to show a path through which the capitalist system could meet the needs of the majority of the working population. Fueled by the enormous wealth accumulated and productive capacity generated while other nations were being devastated by combat, the social contract developed in the late 1940's was built around economic growth. Strong unions negotiated pension and health benefits with large corporations, providing a model non-union firms felt compelled to emulate. A heterogeneous federal/state/municipal system emerged in which public infrastructure spending — financed by high taxation on the wealthy – constituted a de facto jobs program.

The continued existence of various New Deal programs to help the needy, the increase of agricultural subsidies to keep food prices low, and the expansion of public universities enabled many workers to build a middle-class lifestyle for themselves or their children, and provide a safety net for those without work during cyclical downturns. Racial, gender and other forms of discrimination remained legal and systemic, wide circles of the population were still condemned to lives of poverty, speed-up and harsh factory conditions were on-going sources of conflict; the whole system depended on war and environmental destruction. Nonetheless working-class standards of living were higher than ever before in history. The possibility of class mobility and continued prospects for social reform within the existing framework provided an argument that progress for working people was possible well short of socialism, well short of the universal social programs that characterized western European social democracy or the social market policies of their conservative Christian counterparts.

Another quarter century and a different picture appeared. In looking at the consequences of neoliberal economics and politics that have dominated social policy under both Republican and Democratic administrations the European model is attractive. Many EU countries provide a

stronger safety net, greater social equality and social mobility than we do, along with greater access to food security and better – universal – health care. Mandated paid vacations, paid maternity or paternity leave stand in direct contrast to the countless exclusions from our unpaid family leave law and points to one of the many gaps between the two sides of the North Atlantic. Unions in Europe remain stronger than in the US, as do social democratic and other labor-based, alternative and left-wing parties. And the multi-class celebrations in most European nations of Obama's victory over Bush in 2008 reflected a clear preference for diplomacy over a "war at any price" foreign policy, just as the more inclusive European Union spoke to the acceptance of social policies completely absent in NAFTA.

Yet all that glitters is not gold. Just as the US system in the 1950s had lacks and vulnerabilities that led to its demise, so too current austerity measures reveal cracks and fissures in a Europe in which neoliberal corporate imperatives dictate public policy. Examples are easy to find. Portugal, for example, is facing bankruptcy, its economy having shrunk over 2% after a decade of stagnation. Unemployment now stands at 17.5%, while for youth the jobless rate is nearly 39%. Those figures are comparable to Italy's larger economy (which also shrank in 2012) and much worse in Greece and Spain, each with more than a quarter of their respective workforces without work – and each with a youth unemployment rate of over 55%. Overall in the European Union, 12% are without work – and with such numbers come budget cuts. Everywhere education spending, mass transit and infrastructure repair, social welfare and pensions are being reduced, while new health care fees and exclusions are being introduced. Moreover, shifting corporate investment has undermined numerous industries and intensified a decades-long process of union membership loss. Many social democratic, green and other left parties have – like the Democratic Party – trimmed their sails, prioritizing market satisfaction over social needs and losing strength in the process. Racial tensions – more accurately, racism— are also on the rise due to mounting insecurity and job competition. Capital can move everywhere in Europe with equal rights, whereas labor moves without equal rights or wages. Immigrants arriving from non-EU African or Middle-Eastern countries live life in a shadow world of shadow jobs with omnipresent police shadowing them.

And everywhere parliaments are finding their powers cut; the so-called "troika" – the European Union, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund – is able to override elected governments and force cutbacks in social spending and social services based on powers granted by a European Constitution ratified with little popular input or approval. Greece and Italy have both been forced to bow to the dictates of unelected bankers in order to receive any outside aid or investment.

Even more powerful nations suffer. Unemployment in France has reached a record high of 3.2 million, 10.8% of the workforce. On May 5, more than 100,000 marched in a protest called by the Left Front. Led by former Socialist leader Jean-Luc Melanchon, demonstrators demanded that Socialist President Françoise Hollande stay true to his election promises, instead of pursuing austerity and "labor-flexibility" in order to comply with EU rules. Budgetary pressures at home that hurt workers, students and pensioners has not, however, meant military cutbacks. France's imperial dispatch of troops to Mali is one of many armed actions in its former colonial empire. Spain too, despite an economy in freefall, had the money to join NATO's imperial adventure in Mali.

With unemployment at “only” 5.8%, Germany is supposedly the exception to the rule. But Europe’s woes don’t stop at any particular border. April saw 300 BMW jobs go east from a factory in Leipzig to one in the Czech Republic. In consequence, a nearby factory – dependent on BMW – with 170 employees will shut down completely. The union and works council, seeing little hope, offered little resistance. More labor resistance was offered in Bavaria, but with the same result; an auto plant closed shop to set up production further east. These instances can be multiplied many times over as tens of thousands of jobs are shifted from western to eastern Europe.

Nonetheless, Germany, with a trade surplus, not a deficit, seems to have escaped the worst aspects of the crisis. Although German labor claims the government undercounts the jobless, no one will deny that its employment picture is far better than in most other European countries. In fact, the German economy’s growth at a time when other countries are contracting has given it increased strength within the EU – strength enough to demand austerity abroad that is not fully practiced at home. But beneath the surface, all is not well – poverty is increasing within Germany, exacerbating a growing inequality. This has been made worse by cuts in the powerful social security network that underwrote the nation’s economic growth in previous decades – witness an increase in the retirement age, in university fees, in “exceptions” to universal social welfare provisions. Employment levels have been maintained only by increasing the amount of part-time and sub-contracted work. The resulting drop in full-time employment has been matched by a decrease in union membership in absolute terms as well as a percentage of the workforce. A growing number of strikes reflect the harsher new climate.

As in the US, this doesn’t make economic “sense” – but only if the economy is judged from what will benefit the majority of the population, rather than a small number at the top of society. As an editorial in *Neues Deutschland* (a newspaper close to the German Left Party) explained: “The current miserable situation and bad outlook are only to a small degree due to financial policies. Much more responsible is the austerity imposed on failing economies by German leadership. It is not only anti-social as it sinks a broad part of the population into deep poverty. It will also throttle economic recovery of the countries that remain still in a recession.” Force is required to put such a program in place – not only the force of economic power but also the force exercised through increased domestic police budgets, increased repression of immigrants and the force of war. Germany, the world’s third largest arms exporter, also sent troops to Mali, sent soldiers to Afghanistan and takes part in other armed “peace-keeping” missions in subject parts of the globe.

To note all the above is not to pretend that the destruction of social insurance or the level of militarism in Germany or Europe as a whole has reached the levels found in the US. In organizing for health care benefits and pension rights, for humane welfare policies or meaningful leave policies, the more advanced measures in place in many European countries should be cited as a reminder that policies deemed impossible here are, in fact, very possible indeed. At the same time, we need to keep in mind that capitalism in Europe cannot, any more than in the US during the 1950s, hold the solution to our social decline. Austerity, neo-liberal corporatism, is not simply the result of particularly malevolent Republican politicians, or particularly opportunist Democratic ones; rather, it is the systemic direction of corporate capitalism

today. In neither the US nor Europe can there be genuine freedom without a broad participatory democracy and that there is no democracy without genuine equality – and without peace.

That is the direction proposed by Sahra Wagenknecht, the German Left Party's deputy chair and parliamentary speaker on economic affairs. She has proposed alternatives to neo-liberal Europe's austerity that include a European-wide capital tax, direct financing of national budgets through a publicly controlled European central bank, the right of individual nations to regulate their own currencies (not now possible in Euro countries) and programs to foster real wage increases, higher pensions, and improved social services – proposals aimed at overcoming existing disparities between and within countries. Beyond that, she has put forth more fundamental goals:

“If the 500 largest European business concerns were broken up and their production and sales facilities, their buildings and infrastructure given over to each country where located, then Europe would have a new vision, within and without. Then finally changes would be possible that fail today because of the resistance of the core lobby of capital: A European unity that stands for unified living conditions and not for a unity utilized to optimize corporate profits. A European tax union that reforms national tax systems in order to strengthen social equality instead of intensifying inequality. A European foreign and security policy that is not developed to prepare for imperial war, but rather sees itself as responsible for disarmament, [global] parity and development. A European constitution that is more than ... a lever for disempowerment. A European social union that is fixed on high living standards and binding social rights for all ... Then finally, not only in proclamations and Sunday speeches, but rather in reality, we could change the old armed and war-ridden continent into a new, social and peaceful continent, valuing friendship, life and love.”

**Note:** *Neo-liberalism* as used here is the economic theory that upholds the primacy of property rights, free markets and free trade and is characterized by deregulation, privatization and withdrawal of the state from public provision. It stands in opposition to Keynesian full employment and social welfare programs. It was first implemented by the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, then by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in Britain and Ronald Reagan's Republican Administration in the US. Since the 1980s neoliberalism has dominated both Republican and Democratic public policy. President Obama's stimulus was an example of traditional Keynesian liberalism, his bank bailout an example of neoliberal conservatism.

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[SOCIALIST TAKEAWAYS: Bastille Day, the anniversary march, DSA convention, local support](#)

## **Bastille Day’s Lessons for Socialists**

*By Bill Mosley*

As national holidays go, Bastille Day – the July 14 celebration of all things France – may seem to us Americans as lacking in substance. Unlike our own Independence Day, the date the United States came into being, Bastille Day marks nothing nearly as momentous as a new country being born. Rather, the French holiday marks the 1789 storming of a notorious Paris prison and the freeing of seven – yes, seven – prisoners. It would be four years before the guillotine claimed Louis XVI and the First French Republic would rise on the ashes of monarchy.

Even the ouster of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette didn’t exactly usher in a happily-ever-after era of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Within a decade of Louis’ demise, republicanism had given way to Bonapartist empire. Then came more kings, another brief era of republicanism, and one more fling with Bonapartism before representative government settled in for good – eight

decades after the fall of the Bastille. France's road from monarchy to democracy was very much a two-steps-forward, one-step-back, one-step-sideways journey.

We think of America's struggle against monarchy as a much cleaner affair. England's American colonists awakened on July 4, 1776 as subjects of King George III and went to sleep as citizens of a new democracy, endowed with the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Right?

Well, not really. The promises of the Declaration of Independence were not fulfilled overnight – and some remain unfulfilled today. Thomas Jefferson's famous dictum that "all men are created equal" rang hollow when hundreds of thousands of African Americans were enslaved, including several hundred held by Jefferson himself. The word "men" was well-chosen; equal rights for women were not on the Framers' agenda. And not only slaves were deemed less than "equal:" free nonwhites as well as white men who did not own property were largely excluded from the franchise in our early days.

It took a struggle of nearly two centuries – through abolition of slavery, winning of women's suffrage and elimination of legal Jim Crow – before the United States could be truly said to enfranchise all of its citizens (except, of course, colonial subjects such as those in the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico). But even with the right to vote, the promised "pursuit of happiness" proved out of reach for many absent another set of rights – economic rights.

The notion that humans have a right to resources sufficient to ensure a decent quality of life is a relatively new one. This idea began to take shape during the labor struggles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was given greater voice by the growing socialist movement, which saw itself as the political expression of workplace struggles. For many decades, socialists were at the forefront in championing such then-radical notions as universal healthcare, a minimum wage, old-age pensions and other economic rights. With Franklin Roosevelt's inclusion of "freedom from want" as part of his Four Freedoms, a central tenet of socialism had entered the mainstream political debate. However, the continuing dominance of corporate priorities prevented true "freedom from want" from becoming anything but a distant dream.

Of course, the struggle for economic rights is only part of the continuing battle for full equality under our Constitution. Immigrants who come to the United States seeking a better life continue to be scapegoated and driven to the shadows. The recent revelations about the extent of the government's surveillance of ordinary Americans show that the Fourth Amendment – our protection against unreasonable government searches and seizures – has been rendered toothless. True gender equality remains a work in progress. The Supreme Court's recent gutting of the Voting Rights Act will make it harder to prevent racial discrimination at the polls. On the other hand, with the Court's striking down of the discriminatory Defense of Marriage Act, equality for gay and lesbian Americans has taken a giant step forward, if not necessarily over the finish line.

So what does Bastille Day have to do with American socialists? In celebrating the fall of the Bastille, the French celebrate not the end of a struggle, but its beginning. July 14, 1789 can be said to mark the date the common people of France began to take responsibility for their destiny. Yet a long struggle lay ahead before the promises of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* truly

began to be realized. Likewise, socialists – in the United States and across the world – are facing a struggle for economic justice that is really just beginning.

So let's join our French brethren on July 14 in a chorus of "La Marseillaise" with the understanding that the greatest part of our battle lies ahead, not behind.

**Join DSA for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March on Washington.** Join local and national DSA members for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The commemorative march is expected to take place Saturday, August 24 on the Mall. While the 1963 march is today largely associated with Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, the event was as much an appeal for economic equality and justice and it was for civil rights, as articles in this issue of the *Washington Socialist* and in the current edition of DSA's magazine [Democratic Left](#) point out. Check out [Metro DC DSA's Meetup site](#) for more details as the event draws near. There'll be a **National Organizing Conference Call scheduled for Tuesday, July 23rd** at 9pm Eastern, 8pm Central, 7pm Mountain, 6pm Pacific.

Get on the call to hear what you can do locally to bring the message of the radical March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom home, and what DSA is doing in Washington DC on the anniversary of the original march, this August.

**To RSVP and for CALL-IN INFORMATION:**

[http://www.dsausa.org/50th\\_anniversary\\_project\\_call](http://www.dsausa.org/50th_anniversary_project_call)

**DSA National Convention to be held Oct. 25-27 in Oakland, Calif.**

– Democratic Socialists of America's biennial national convention – the gathering that sets the organization's priorities for the coming two years – will be held Oct. 25-27 in Oakland, Calif.

In addition to decision-making sessions, the convention will feature discussions of democratic socialist perspectives on the issues of the day, talks by prominent DSA members and workshops on how to be a more effective activist. Confirmed speakers for the convention include John Nichols, Jose La Luz and David Bacon.

Metro-DC DSA will send a delegation to the convention. National DSA will provide delegates with a partial reimbursement of their travel costs, and the local chapter also will offer additional financial assistance so that cost doesn't prevent anyone from attending. Local members who are interested in serving as delegates should contact Jose Gutierrez at [jagfeb2002@yahoo.com](mailto:jagfeb2002@yahoo.com). – Bill Mosley

**Put your money where your mouth is — Support Metro-DC DSA.**

If you are a member of Democratic Socialists of America in the greater Washington area you've probably already received our letter or e-mail asking for financial support for Metro-DC DSA. Those who responded have earned our deepest gratitude. For those who have not, there's no time like the present. We receive no funding from National DSA and rely on our local



members to help us carry out our work of injecting socialist ideas and ideals into the local political discussion.

So don't hesitate – become a full-fledged member of Metro-DC DSA by paying your local dues today! We also offer some attractive socialist gifts for local dues-payers. For a minimum contribution of \$15 we offer the DSA red sticker reading “Change Comes from the People, Not the Politicians.” Those joining at the \$75 sustaining level or above have a choice of either the 1981 edition of *The Other America* with a new introduction by Michael Harrington; or the rare original program from the 1988 “Tribute to Michael Harrington” in New York containing articles on Mike’s life and work by Irving Howe, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Todd Gitlin, Harold Meyerson, William Julius Wilson and others. Make your check out to Greater Washington DC DSA and send it to 1742 Hobart St. NW, Washington, DC 20009.

Remember: it takes socialist cash to defeat capitalist trash!

– *Bill Mosley*

### [The Unfinished Business of 1963 Requires Some New, Alt-political Skills on the Left](#)

#### ***The Washington Socialist* <> Midsummer 2013**

*By Woody Woodruff*

In 1963, amid the overflow of soaring rhetoric at the original March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, then-SNCC organizer John Lewis tersely asked “Where is the political party that will make it unnecessary to march on Washington?” The response has been a long, empty echo.

Fifty years later, the recognition that the 1963 march still has unfinished business is widespread. Progressive partners at the [Economic Policy Institute](#), [The Nation](#) and other think tanks and analytical media are anatomizing the sorry state of the jobs and freedom landscape. The half-century anniversary of the 1963 march appears to be generating a big-time *hommage* event, and progressives are working to be sure it is more than a re-enactment. Startlingly, the changing distribution of power in the last half-century has put working people, the poor and their progressive allies in some ways farther behind the curve now than then. And racial inequality persists in meaningful ways: housing, education, employment.

Democratic socialists’ structural linkage of racial inequality to parallel inequalities of social and economic class and their roots in unchecked corporate hegemony have made, and will make, our take on these matters awkward for our alliances. The unfinished business of the 1963 march is, in part, a result of that signal event’s focus on the far starker inequalities of the day. But as the EPI report observes, organizers A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin saw some of those linkages very well: “[Randolph and Rustin] understood that improving the socioeconomic position of

African Americans required an end to both race- and class-based injustices in America.” Still, the observation this year of the anniversary of that foundational gathering can skew the view of today’s conditions.

It is worth discussing whether the lessons learned in the intervening half-century are applicable to today’s conditions. As socialists, we have always looked skeptically at solutions based in party politics. Even so, perhaps not skeptically enough. The political system indisputably has failed to address many issues of the 1963 March’s platform. Such allies as we have in today’s formal electoral politics are embattled and isolated in ways that would have seemed near-impossible in 1963. Despite the undeniable advances on some fronts since then, many gates to a good society, let alone “Great,” are closed, or guarded by the minions of corporate hegemony.

EPI’s anatomy of the shortfalls since 1963’s hope and promise is a good starting point. But a socialist take, acknowledging the failure of electoral political strategy, looks deeper. EPI economist Algernon Austin identifies:

**Housing:** Neighborhoods remain segregated by race and resources; “today, nearly half of poor black children live in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty; however, only a little more than a tenth of poor white children live in similar neighborhoods.” We socialists would add that housing for the many has been degraded or denied by a corporate and policy focus on housing as fungible wealth, seldom matched to or responsive to community or family needs, profligate by its sprawling nature with energy and other resources, blatantly designed to separate social and economic classes on the bogus claim of personal security, and deliberately made vulnerable to bubble finance by corporate fiat. Regulation of this vital resource is distributed over power centers at federal, state and local levels – and hardly by accident — that work at cross-purposes and are easily corrupted by the major money involved.

**Education:** Austin observes that “In the late 1960s, 76.6 percent of black children attended majority black schools. In 2010, 74.1 percent of black children attended majority nonwhite schools.” As he notes, inequality of community resources condemns most of those schools to a kind of subsistence learning. Socialists link the impoverishment of communities (see housing, above) and their schools at the deepest level. Education’s continued inequality and failure reflects, at the K-12 level, the debased, segregated housing stock that serves as its tax/resource base; higher education is crippled by the corporate free ride now in place in most states’ fiscal policies, ratcheting up public university tuition as tax resources flag. Within the education sphere, a well-funded bright line identifies the path of ruling class reproduction through private, branded institutions priced out of the reach of most. A reasonable, detached perspective on the arcane and tradition-bound sphere of education, skills development and personal growth would recommend not tinkering but wholesale replacement of the features and conditions of this essential public activity.

**Work:** Austin notes that the disparity in unemployment between black and white workers remains roughly double in the Lesser Depression, as in 1963, though it improved considerable in boom times in the interval. He notes that the UAW’s Walter Reuther spoke at the 1963 march, and “Reuther and other march organizers believed that the United States had the wealth to provide a job to everyone who wanted to work, but lacked sufficient political will to do so. They

launched the march in part to build that political will. It is shocking how relevant their complaint is today.”

As socialists, we concur with that halcyon view. But we lament that the terms of employment are far more firmly in the hands of corporate power today than they were in 1963, despite the fair-employment legislation that has intervened. The ruinous long-range effects of Taft-Hartley were only beginning to be felt then, and union strength stood at around 29-30 percent of the total workforce, compared to today’s 12 percent. Worker control over their conditions of employment are checkmated by corporate power. Corporate frames constrain the options of workers and limit their freedom to be compensated for their actual skills. The frames extend, as the EPI overview separately observes, to a management grip on compensation anchored by the appallingly low, certainly non-“living”, minimum wage. No political activity, even in the Great Society years, has come close to penetrating the armor of economic control that drives all those factors and appears to have nearly peaked in the present era.

The sphere of labor and consumption, an area where US working families need to, and should, exercise collective political will, is instead wholly owned by the corporate hegemony, and administered to their benefit with the collusion of the failed, co-opted political system.

This, a reader might justly say, is an unpleasant and perhaps exaggerated view of the current situation, the unfinished business of the march. It emphasizes, purposely, what I see as the democratic socialist view of the interlocking coercive factors that tie down both US working families and the broader society in which they increasingly are becoming the helots. The web is more securely woven than ever, and the US political system is co-opted into it just as securely. Rough and scary as the racial conflict of 1963 was, progressive forces across the board carried more weight.

Many DSA members are lucky enough to have knowledge-work kinds of jobs that provide a little more reward, a little more agency and autonomy. But we recognize we are equally locked into a wage-and-hour system that organizes almost fetishistically the total routines of our lives. A job is full-time, or part-time, or even more contingent than that, and often provided or withheld at will by the employer. There is in effect no appeal from that system for individual workers, and less and less respite via the unions, increasingly shackled by labor regulations that tip more and more toward management with every slight, opportunistic shift.

The fruits of innovation are not applied to redesign of work in society but to the amplification of hegemonic control. As A. Philip Randolph said with his usual startling prescience at the 1963 March, “Yes, we want a Fair Employment Practice Act, but what good will it do if profit-geared automation destroys the jobs of millions of workers black and white?”

Part of our work as democratic socialists, we feel, is to keep the totalist nature of this system visible to, under the noses of, the folk being ground down by it. They must be our allies, or we fail. We know that this complex of constraints is designed to be “normalized,” to make itself invisible behind the curtain of the everyday. And we know our other duty is to mobilize – in part through that educational, that communicative work – the people under the system’s thumb to shake that off and seek to break up the complex of constraints that blights all of our lives.

The appeal of 1963 was to the political system – so much so, we remember, that the young John Lewis’s acerbic attacks on the Kennedy Administration’s lackadaisical response to injustice were trimmed out by the “cooler heads” in charge of the march. But Lewis’s question – where are the politics that will address the injustices of our everyday lives? – is perhaps more unanswered now than it was in 1963. The role of DSA and other organizations and allies on the progressive left is to recognize how limited the political remedies have become as financialization of the 2013 economy has drained the balance from the manufacturing economy in place in 1963, when the head of the UAW was still a national figure. Corporate hegemony is no airy phrase of theory but a representation of today’s systemic ruling-class grip on nearly every facet of most lives. Undoing it will require alt-politics to match our alt-labor formations and our Occupy strategies.

The regional, bottom-up strategies emerging from [work by Richard Wolff and Gar Alperovitz](#), among many others, probably offer more return on expenditure of our current resources than pushing at the diminishing part of the electoral sector that has the will or power to effect change. Locating those pressure points – where workers and communities still have the option under law to recover and exercise power in the workplace and in their everyday lives – is not necessarily at the top of our skill set. But it seems to me that we need to get good at that.

The mobilizing energy of attempts to re-take control of work lives appears more and more a critical piece of the puzzle, a shaking up of local and regional encrustations of power and control that will come to lead the political formations of those regions by the nose. Other alt-methods will be required. Some of them may engender alt-politicians that have the impact on the left that we have seen on the right. There is still room for such anomalies, and DSA and its allies must foster them. But we must not count on them to accomplish our work, at least not by themselves. Continuing to pull the shrouds off the moving parts of hegemony for all to see, and pushing to encourage and fashion new, popular alternatives to replace them is more necessary than ever. Where the March on Washington pulled the cover off the severest inequalities of race – to much good effect – the effort in 2013 and beyond has to unmask the mechanics of structural class inequalities and show how our society can be different.

**The EPI report:** <http://www.epi.org/publication/unfinished-march-overview/>

**EPI co-sponsors a symposium, “Unfinished March,” July 22 at the AFL-CIO headquarters:** <http://www.epi.org/event/unfinished-march-symposium/>

**Links to more articles about the 1963 March and its resonances today are in the [Good Reads compilation](#) in this issue.**