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[Environmental Movement's "Ultimate Insider" Denounces Bankruptcy of U.S. Capitalism](#)

Friday, November 2nd, 2012

By Andy Feeney

One of the most respected political insiders in the American environmental movement has declared the bankruptcy of “America’s ruthless brand of capitalism.” At a book signing at AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington on Sept. 19, James Augustus or “Gus” Speth urged environmentalists to join with other progressive groups to form a unified national movement to replace the system over the next four decades, adding that while a better America is possible, “we don’t have much time left.”

Speth, an environmental attorney, is the founder of the environmental think tank the World Resources Institute (WRI) and a cofounder of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), as well as a former director of the United Nations Development Programme and an environmental advisor to the Carter White House. Now teaching environmental law at the University of Vermont Law School, he has recently served as dean of the prestigious Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, and has also served as a trustee of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund — presumably a somewhat capitalist enterprise.

Yet in his new book “America the Possible: Manifesto for a New Economy,” Speth states that the U.S. today faces an “overwhelming, colliding collection of problems” that stems from “fundamental flaws in our economic and political system.” And while Speth’s book lays emphasis on the environmental dimension of those problems, and particularly our political system’s apparent inability to address the problem of climate change, he also stresses the dangers of high and increasing levels of economic inequality, extensive child poverty, and a practice of mass incarceration — particularly of black men — that has given the US the world’s largest prison population, both absolutely and as a percentage of the population.

In addition, “America the Possible” notes that the U.S. currently suffers from the highest infant mortality rate in the developed industrial world, the second highest school dropout rate, the highest rate of homicide, and the world’s highest rate of spending on wars and the military.

To cure this daunting list of national maladies, Speth in “America the Possible” indicates that environmental groups as well as other progressive forces need to put together a compelling vision of an alternative political and economic future that will break decisively with our “virulent, fast-growing strain of corporate-consumerist capitalism.”

The alternate vision will initially seem politically unrealistic to most Americans, Speth acknowledges. Yet as a corporate-dominated American economy and political system suffer from a series of crises in coming decades, the existing system will lose political legitimacy in the eyes of millions of people, and “progressives of all stripes” will have a chance to force through systemic change by joining in a unified movement for national transformation, despite “fierce and determined resistance” by supporters of the corporate status quo.

Although praising the civil disobedience practiced by the Occupy movement, Speth in his book and in his talk at the AFL-CIO building in September has not focused on change coming through some kind of insurrection, but through a strategy of interlocking and mutually reinforcing transformations in key features of the existing system, beginning with a coordinated mass effort to democratize the nation’s corporate-dominated politics. Transformation also will rest heavily on an ongoing “bottom-up” effort to establish new economic institutions at the local level, both as alternatives to corporate economic rule and as models of what a future democratic society might look like.

According to “America the Possible,” the transformed economy of the future will not be “classic socialism,” but at the same time it will not be our existing capitalism, either. From his remarks at the AFL-CIO building and in the pages of the book, Speth seems to favor a highly modified market society combining some features of Swedish social democracy with a “no growth” or “post growth” economics such as that advocated by Dr. Herman Daly of the University of Maryland and the “small is beautiful” economic theories of the late E.F. Schumacher.

“America the Possible” also cites Gar Alperovitz, whose book “America Beyond Capitalism” envisions corporate capitalism gradually being displaced and supplanted by a spreading market network of cooperatives, worker-owned enterprises, nonprofit businesses, community development programs and “hybrid” businesses combining social objectives with the pursuit of profit.

To combat corporate power at the national and international levels, Speth also recommends a system of “stakeholder representation” somewhat resembling the labor co-determination system in Germany that places labor representatives on corporate boards. Another recommendation is that progressives fight to replace the state chartering of large corporations with federal corporate chartering, as recommended by Teddy Roosevelt during the Progressive Era and as recently endorsed by Ralph Nader.

To address the chronic economic insecurities, widespread poverty and high unemployment rates affecting millions of Americans today, Speth’s book calls for a “new war on poverty,” although he offers few details on how it might be fought. He also argues for the federal government’s serving as “employer of the last resort” for the unemployed, possibly through tax incentives to corporations for new hiring but possibly through direct federal employment. Along with radical economist Juliet Schor, he also calls for a less growth-addicted economy in the future to address unemployment through a mixed program of shorter work weeks, increasing government expenditures on unmet social needs and the building of a new culture less devoted to consumerism, less influenced by advertising, and more devoted to leisure time, community, and the quality of life.

For some democratic socialists, both inside and outside of DSA, particular elements of Speth's economic vision will likely seem problematic. For example, "America the Possible" points with alarm to large federal deficits and the growing U.S. national debt. Unlike the Tea Party, Speth clearly wants to reduce the deficits and shrink the debt through cuts in bloated military programs and higher taxes on the rich, and his book advocates an increase in social spending on the poor and economically insecure, not Republican-style austerity.

On the other hand, despite short and favorable quotations from Keynes and the liberal Keynesian economists Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz, "America the Possible" seems to rule out Krugman's vision of curing the current business slump through a massive increase in deficit spending. Perhaps equally importantly, Speth's vision of long-term economic transformation through the evolutionary growth of co-ops, worker-owned enterprises and small green businesses — while compatible with Gar Alperovitz's radical vision in "American Beyond Capitalism" — is likely to be economic anathema to some pragmatic and business-minded leaders of the labor movement.

What democratic socialists should find striking and important in Speth's book and economic vision, however, is the emphasis he puts on mainstream environmental groups moving beyond their focus on "environmental" issues alone, and his call — whether or not his ideas can be achieved — for all liberal and progressive movements to join together in supporting one another's issues as they work for system-transforming change.

Cosponsoring Speth's speech in September was a coalition of some 15 organizations, not only including the NRDC and some other leading environmental organizations, but also the AFL-CIO itself, Jobs with Justice, and the Labor Network for Sustainability.

Other cosponsors of the event included the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), whose president John Cavanagh introduced Speth; climate activist Bill McKibben's 350.org; Friends of the Earth – U.S.; the Worldwatch Institute; Yes Magazine; Teaching for Change bookstore; the Center for a New American Dream, the Communitarian Network; and a coalition called the New Economy Working Group, which currently works out of IPS.

Other partial endorsers of Speth's vision, judging from the favorable blurbs on the dust cover of "America the Possible," include Alperovitz, environmental writer David Orr, William Greider of The Nation magazine and radical journalist Naomi Klein, author of "The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism."

Whether this range of endorsers indicates that Speth's unified progressive movement is already beginning to take shape on a small scale is probably impossible to tell at this stage in American history.

Yet for democratic socialists and other progressives who have deep reservations about the viability of capitalism, and have long advocated the formation of a multi-issue leftwing movement to replace it, the publication of "America the Possible" is a surprisingly hopeful sign.

“America the Possible: Manifesto for a New Economy” was published this year by Yale University Press. The list price excluding sales tax is \$30, and the book is available from Teach for Change at Busboys and Poets, as well as from commercial bookstores such as Kramerbooks at Dupont Circle.

[Michael Harrington and “The Other America” subject of documentary showing Nov. 8](#)

Friday, November 2nd, 2012

DC DSA joins in the Nov. 8 presentation of a remarkable documentary film, “Michael Harrington and Today’s Other America: Corporate Power and Inequality.” The film will be shown at **Georgetown University’s McNeir Auditorium at 7 p.m.**, with discussion by *Washington Post* columnist and *American Prospect* editor-at-large Harold Meyerson (who is a DSA vice chair) and socialist feminist scholar Heidi Hartmann.

The course of the debate on poverty and inequality since Harrington’s 1962 book *The Other America* caught the attention of Kennedy administration has been rocky. Meyerson, in an *American Prospect* article earlier in 2012, said the “war on poverty” was as often in retreat as advancing under a capitalist counterattack, “a relentlessly destabilizing system that, if not sufficiently checked by democratic popular power, would seek to diminish workers’ earnings and influence in its continual quest for profits and control. The New Deal, Harrington believed, could be repealed.”

The event is jointly sponsored by Metro DC DSA and Georgetown’s Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, headed by Prof. Joseph McCartin, and by Dissent magazine.

“It is fitting,” McCartin told *The Washington Socialist*, “that we remember Harrington’s challenge to America’s moral complacency about poverty at this moment, when inequality is soaring. It is appropriate that we recommit ourselves to alleviating the poverty that still afflicts far too many in this nation and around the world.” The film showing is the first of two programs on poverty planned by the Kalmanovitz Initiative. Longtime antipoverty advocate Peter Edelman will talk November 15, at 5:30 p.m., in Georgetown’s Riggs Library (for more information see the Kalmanovitz Initiative [website](#))

[A New Hope for the Left in Puerto Rico](#)

Wednesday, November 14th, 2012

By Jose Gutierrez
Washington Socialist election extra

The island of Puerto Rico has been under the control of the United States since the Spanish-American War of 1898. The island has more than 3.7 million inhabitants. The capital, San Juan, has more than 395,000 residents. Although Puerto Ricans are US citizens they are also, in cultural and sociological terms a distinct nationality, much like Scots within the United Kingdom or the Basque and Catalans within Spain.

Elections were held on Nov. 6 for the the local governor, the island legislature and the municipal governments of Puerto Rico. The incumbent governor, Luis Fortuno, the first Republican to be elected to that position since 1972, lost his re-election campaign. The governor had imposed a neoliberal agenda that was resisted by the people of Puerto Rico and his party will be replaced in office by the more moderate Popular Democratic Party (PDP).

The PDP is similar to the Democratic Party of the mainland US but not identical. Like the mainland Democratic Party it has a moderate to conservative wing and a liberal wing. The new governor comes from the moderate wing but the person who is the hope of progressives in Puerto Rico is the woman who will be the mayor of the capital city, Carmen Yulin.

Carmen Yulin, a single mother who was given the best score on civil liberties by the ACLU of any politician in the island, was a member of the Puerto Rico House of Representatives before running for mayor. She is an advocate of LGBT rights. As a legislator and candidate for mayor she also raised the issue of violence against women.

With a policy of building alliances with progressives, community activists, unions and politicians from smaller third parties, the Popular Democratic Party candidate, Carmen Yulin, defeated the incumbent mayor and shocked the island establishment.

Yulin had to face a strong mayor with a well-established political machine who had been in office for 12 years.

Tito Otero, an experienced community organizer and social activist, was in charge of coordinating collaborative agreements with the LGBT community and with community organizers from marginalized, low-income communities and leaders from public housing projects.

Yulin also made agreements with the Puerto Rican Workers Union (SPT) and General Union of Workers (UGT). She has stated that she supports the right of city employees to unionize.

Yulin also supports the proposals by the Cruz Foundation for a Better Country, an organization that includes social and trade union sectors and advocates environmental causes, education and health.

The unions had to go to the federal Court of Appeals in Boston to have the right of unions to financially support political candidates in Puerto Rico recognized. The Republican island

government had passed two bills, Law 45 and the Campaign Finance Act of 2011, which prohibited union donations to candidates.

Many activists think that Yulin's campaign could have implications beyond San Juan and can project this new way of governing beyond the capitol.

[Cinema for Socialists](#)

Wednesday, November 14th, 2012

By Daniel Adkins

Life over disability: The Sessions (R, 95 min.)

Generally a movie about a 38-year old virgin (Mark O'Brian) trying to lose his virginity would more likely be a weak comedy than a drama. Since the script is an autobiography by a UC Berkeley journalist/poet one might think it would be at least well written. You would be right. Finding out that the man involved has a body ravaged by polio so that he can only move his head and can only breath outside his iron lung for a few hours at a time, one wonders how this could possibly be based on actual events. It is. The icing on the cake is that Mark's priest counseled him in this effort. The priest believed Jesus would forgive him for this sin. The film is obviously a drama but Mark O'Brien's sense of humor is so magnificent that you may remember it as a comedy.

This film should be out shortly. It was bought for distribution at the Sundance Film Festival for \$6 million and I have already seen the adverts on TV. For more information Google Mark O'Brian.

A Royal Affair (R, 137 min.)

A Royal Affair (Danish: *En kongelig affære*) is a dramatization of a period of Danish history of the last half of the 18th century. The film roughly parallels the impact of the Enlightenment on the Danish court as a young English princess is wed to become the Danish Queen. Her king is insane or pretends to be insane to deal with a powerful court that has among other things banned all books of the Enlightenment. Into this mix comes a doctor who is secretly a pamphleteer for enlightenment. The king chooses him to be the court's physician since the doctor sees nothing wrong with the king's habit of visiting the red light district. Given this beginning, political intrigue and romance soon follow, but the full story is not always pretty.

Progressive views of history often focus on the role of popular movements. This film shows no such movement but does document how Denmark was held back by a system of serfdom which let the landowners be judge, jury, and executioner of their own serfs. The film also shows the court oblivious to the needs of anything but their own wealth. This 1% relied on the ignorance and powerlessness of the people and a weak king.

The film was produced with the aid of Denmark, Sweden, and the Czech Republic. The film is beautifully shot and well acted. It has been selected as the Danish entry for the Best Foreign Language Oscar at the 85th Academy Awards. Do check out Danish history and the film in Wikipedia for more information.

For more info see Wikipedia and <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1276419/>

DC Voters Put Ethics First

Wednesday, November 14th, 2012

By Bill Mosley
Washington Socialist election extra

DC voters turned out heavily to vote on Nov. 6, many waiting in long lines to cast their ballots, undoubtedly eager to help President Obama win re-election by nailing down the District's critical three electoral votes. It was a good thing they did; otherwise the 91.4 percent of the District's vote that Obama secured could have slipped embarrassingly into the upper 80s.

But when it came to local races, the ethics of DC officeholders were on the minds of voters as much as more traditional concerns such as public safety, the economy or the effort to win greater independence from congressional oversight. This was not surprising, given that within just the past year two members of the DC Council were convicted of felonies, and other elected officials, including Mayor Vince Gray, have come under investigation for alleged misdeeds.

On election day, voters overwhelmingly approved three amendments to the DC Charter intended to punish future misbehavior by elected officials, and turned out of office one incumbent – At-Large Councilmember Michael A. Brown – who, while as yet charged with no crime, has been the subject of a spate of negative news reports indicating possible ethical lapses or, at best, a lack of competence. The appeal of David Grosso, who ousted Brown, was less his platform than his newcomer's lack of baggage.

One of the ballot items would enable a five-sixths vote of the Council to expel a member for "gross misconduct." Today, the only way to remove a sitting councilmember is through a recall election, which in the District's 38-year history of home rule has never happened. The other

measures would result in the removal of a mayor or councilmember from office if they committed a felony and bar them from holding the office again. Voters supported the ban-a-felon amendments even though there was confusion – even among the DC councilmembers who proposed them – over whether members would be banned for life or only for the duration of their term, or whether the laws would even hold up in court if challenged.

Nevertheless, with the recent convictions of former Council Chair Kwame Brown and former Ward 5 Councilmember Harry Thomas Jr. (Brown on charges related to campaign finance and falsified loan applications, Thomas for stealing DC funds intended for charity), Mayor Gray being investigated for an off-the-books “shadow” campaign, and questionable behavior by other officeholders, voters were more than ready to punish what they saw as bad behavior. Michael A. Brown, in particular – who was one of the Council’s more progressive members and the most outspoken in support of DC statehood – saw his reputation tarnished by the mysterious disappearance of \$113,000 in campaign funds, late payment of taxes and rents, and his role in pushing through a bill to allow online gambling in the District. The gambling bill, which was adopted without a hearing and virtually no public scrutiny, was later repealed.

The District’s enemies in Congress have been quick to pounce on DC officials’ ethical lapses, charging – as they have often done in the past – that this proves the District isn’t worthy of even the current limited home rule, much less expanded autonomy. Of course, they ignore the more than two decades (following former Mayor Marion Barry’s drug arrest in 1990) of virtually scandal-free government in the District – a period when, for instance, it was standard practice for governors of Illinois to head directly to prison after leaving office. Clearly, the desire of some members of Congress to retain firm control over DC is independent of the behavior of the District government – and to deny full democratic rights to 600,000 U.S. citizens because of the misbehavior of a handful of elected officials is un-American in the extreme. Nevertheless, if Congress was waiting for DC voters to express their willingness to ride herd on their officeholders’ behavior as a precondition of granting greater autonomy to the District, this election sent that message loudly and clearly.

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On a happier note, DSA members can be pleased that Phil Mendelson, one of the Council’s most progressive and pro-labor members since taking office in 1998, was overwhelmingly elected council chair. Mendelson inherited Kwame Brown’s chairmanship on a temporary basis when the latter resigned, and now holds the seat in his own right. The rest of the local races in deep-blue DC involved incumbent Democrats facing no serious opposition.

[Horst Brand, 1919–2012](#)

Friday, November 2nd, 2012

By Bill Mosley

Horst Brand, a longtime local DSA member who was a co-founder and editor of *Dissent* and a frequent contributor to the magazine, died last August 25 at the age of 92.

As recently as the 1990s, Brand, a resident of Silver Spring, was an active member of the Metro DC DSA local. He was involved in helping plan the local's public events and organized a reading group on topics relevant to socialism.

Brand fled Frankfurt, Germany and Nazism in 1938 to come to the United States. He served in the U.S. army in World War II and married his wife, Ruth, in 1944. After the war he studied at City College of New York and then New York University, after which he worked for the Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington while also becoming involved in socialist politics. According to Michael Walzer, writing in *Dissent*, Brand became allied with the "ideologically creative" strand of socialism associated with Max Shachtman and wrote for the Shachtmanite magazine *Labor Action*, which was edited by Irving Howe. After "many ideological arguments" Brand worked with Howe to found *Dissent*. Both Brand and Howe later became DSA members.

Horst Brand brought to DSA an intimate knowledge of labor issues and a deep appreciation for socialism's intellectual and internationalist heritage. He will be missed.

[Marylanders go for same-sex marriage, "Dream Act," gambling and gerrymandering](#)

Wednesday, November 14th, 2012

by Carolyn Byerly
Washington Socialist election extra

Same-sex marriage legalized

Maryland voters approved the same-sex marriage law on Nov. 6, joining the states of Maine, Washington and Minnesota in passing similar measures that same day. It was a long-awaited moment here in Maryland, where members of the state assembly had considered bills on same-sex marriage for several consecutive years. The bill only passed last year because sponsors accepted a provision requiring a citizens' referendum. Governor Martin O'Malley had made same-sex marriage one of several issues he championed this election season. He helped to raise the millions of dollars equality advocates needed by bringing actor Josh Charles and other celebrities on board as donors and spokespeople.

The advertising that this fundraising supported enabled, for example, that wonderful TV spot by Julian Bond talking about the same-sex marriage issue as one of civil rights. By contrast, the anti-equality forces' publicity looked thin and outdated. I am reminded of walking from my car to the polling place on the morning of Nov. 6 and being accosted by a middle aged woman

offering me a flyer and saying “Please consider voting no on Question 6” I looked at her and said, “I’m a lesbian in a 28-year relationship – why should I?” She was startled and didn’t have an answer. In the end, I think those who opposed the law had no real grounds and, like the woman who accosted me, no real answers to offset the logical reasons that equality advocates had so carefully advanced.

In passing the same-sex marriage referendum, Maryland answers democratic socialists’ call for sexual and gender equality. The law provides a structural intervention in a legal system that has long had barriers to gay and lesbian citizens’ enjoying as full benefits as heterosexuals under the law. As states systematically pass same-sex marriage laws – there are 10 now, with Minnesota expected to follow with a prohibition lifted on Nov. 6 – it becomes a real possibility that something could be done at the national level in the coming years.

“Dream Act” approved

Marylanders also passed this state’s version of the “Dream Act,” giving many children of undocumented workers the right to in-state tuition rates at the state’s higher-education institutions. As the *Baltimore Sun* reports, it “goes into effect Dec. 6 [and] enables students who were brought to this country as children to pay in-state tuition rates if they have attended at least three years of high school in state and can show that they or their parents have paid state taxes during that time. Students must complete 60 credits at a state community college before they can apply to pay in-state tuition at a four-year institution.” A cohort of mostly working-class strivers now has lower-cost access to education and skills. Public and private entities should be under more pressure than ever to come up with the jobs to match. These young people are not the only ones who will benefit from this new law. The larger communities and nation benefit by having an educated population.

Gambling measure wins

Meanwhile, democratic socialists have less to cheer about on some of the other Maryland referendums. In spite of an excellent “Anti Question 7” campaign, voters approved the expansion of gambling in Maryland. Among the provisions in this measure is an extension of the number of gambling venues from six to seven, expanded hours of operation for casinos to 24/7, and huge tax breaks for casino owners for years to come. This measure was championed by Governor O’Malley and Prince George’s County Executive Rushern Baker as a way to fund public education. In fact, there is nothing in the law that requires proceeds to go to schools. Instead, in all likelihood, the casino business will rake in billions for the billionaires. With a “pro-local development” argument, Baker had worked hard since his election to office two years ago to interest out-of-state casino owners who are expected to place a major Las Vegas style casino complex at National Harbor in Prince George’s County. These casino magnates are also expected to use out-of-state contractors to construct the facilities. This point was one often lost in the debates prior to the election, with the focus more often on the school revenues issues. The fact that construction unions strongly backed the gambling plan while the county’s contractors’ association opposed it illustrates the bewildering mix of interests in this elaborate scenario. Also lost was the fact that some of the same casino magnates planning to locate at National Harbor were cited by the New Jersey Gaming Enforcement Commission as having ties to organized crime in Macau, a “special administrative district” (along with Hong Kong) of the

People's Republic of China. A May 2009 special report authored by Assistant Attorney General Josh Lichtblau noted that MGM had made Pansy Ho a partner in a proposed venture in New Jersey when, in fact, Pansy Ho was under the influence of her father Stanley Ho, who permitted "organized crime to operate and thrive within his casinos." The Attorney General's office recommended that "MGM be directed to disengage itself from direct or indirect business or financial associations with Pansy Ho, or her related entities." All this is to say that organized crime is likely to follow the expanded casino business soon to become a feature of National Harbor.

Gerrymandered districts left intact

Another downside in the election returns was approval of a Maryland redistricting map that had been redrawn last year by an O'Malley-appointed commission. States are required to revise their federal legislative districts every 10 years in light of changing population and demographics. The newly drawn map truly boggles even the dullest imagination, with legislative districts snaking in and around (and across) county lines all over the state.

A Nov. 9 *Baltimore Sun* editorial called the Question 5 referendum's results on congressional redistricting in Maryland "a disgrace" and a "badge of shame for the state." The *Sun* noted that "It would be hard to imagine a clearer case of politicians choosing their voters, rather than the other way around" and said it undermines the fundamental purpose of the election process. The wording of the referendum question "seemed intended to mislead," it said, since the language indicated the measure was meant to endorse bona fide boundaries of the state's congressional districts rather than the product of a gerrymandering process (which it actually was). Editorial writers concluded: "If John Sarbanes' 3rd District map were superimposed on a 20-year-old map of South Africa, a reasonable observer would take for granted that such a political alignment was intended to undermine the political rights of the unfortunates collected there."

The underlying racial tensions underlying the federal (congressional) redistricting process are also at work at the legislative level in Maryland. Last year, a similar gerrymandering process took place when legislative districts were redrawn by a commission appointed by Governor O'Malley. The state-level redistricting has been targeted as a civil rights issue by the Fannie Lou Hamer Political Action Committee, composed of civil rights attorneys and activists. On Nov. 9, a Maryland Court of Appeals heard arguments in the case in which the FLH-PAC is arguing that although the reapportionment falls within the required 10 per cent population deviation between the largest and smallest district, the map violates the "one person, one vote" provision in the U.S. Constitution. Opponents say that the map overpopulates districts in rural areas of the state, while urban and suburban districts are underpopulated, with the effect of giving undue advantage to white elected officials trying to retain their seats and preventing minority candidates from fairly challenging them.

[Notes on a near-death experience: the Democrats and Obama in 2012](#)

Wednesday, November 14th, 2012

By Andy Feeney
Washington Socialist election extra

For U.S. progressives, the 2012 presidential election results offer some wonderfully positive and some truly terrible news, all at the same time. The very good news is that on Nov. 6, a little more than half the country's voters rejected a vaguely worded and essentially elitist Republican plan to revive a stagnant American economy through a mix of deregulation and massive tax cuts that inevitably would have been targeted at the very rich.

Along with repudiating the Romney-Ryan tax plan, a thin majority of the electorate proved resistant to both implicit and some highly explicit conservative appeals to racist, misogynist, anti-gay, anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments that have recently won a lamentably large fraction of white working class men to a Republican vision that does not serve their economic interests.

Despite covert and overt conservative appeals to racist fantasies about Obama's alleged birth in Kenya, his alleged belief in radical Islam, and his alleged ties to Communism and terrorism, a majority of Americans who participated in the election made history by reelecting Barack Hussein Obama, the nation's first nonwhite President. And in doing so, the winning majority for Obama proved that whatever deeply conflicted feelings Americans still have about race and religion, the nation appears to be at least moving (glacially?) in the direction of a more tolerant and inclusive society.

That's the good news. One piece of really awful news, of course, is that nearly 50 percent of U.S. voters chose on Nov. 6 to vote just the opposite way — in favor of the Romney/Ryan tax plan and perhaps in favor of racism, homophobia, religious bigotry, misogyny and rightwing conspiracy fantasies to some degree.

For many members of the Metro DC chapter of DSA, Obama's narrow election victory and Romney's narrow election defeat undoubtedly brought a surge of emotional relief — in my case, anyway, I was surprised to find that the relief bordered on elation, once all the election results were in. But — why was the victory so narrow?

Democratic socialists, at least in DSA, are a fractious lot, and I doubt any analysis of the elections will win agreement from everyone in the chapter or in DSA nationwide. But it seems clear to me that Obama won such a small majority because Romney's team, both in the presidential debates and on the campaign trail, was basically right about the painful and

disgraceful shape of the U.S. economy, some four years after the catastrophic financial failures of 2008.

Obviously, the Republican leadership in Congress since the start of Obama's first term has done almost everything it could to sabotage efforts by the White House and the congressional Democrats to promote economic recovery. Obviously, Mitt Romney's GOP colleagues in the House and the Senate share a huge amount of blame for the extensive poverty and high unemployment that Romney complained about on the campaign trail, a fact that made Romney's sanctimonious promises of a "bipartisan" governing style so morally repellent when he made them in the debates.

Yet however malevolent the congressional Republicans have been in trying to block economic recovery under Obama, the harsh truth is that the White House and the Congressional Democrats have not done anything resembling an adequate job of trying to promote job growth, or effective government regulation of the financial industry, or relief for millions of Americans who have either lost their homes to foreclosure or face the risk of losing their homes to foreclosure because of the unresolved mortgage crisis.

In other words, Obama and the mainstream of the Democratic Party also deserve some of the blame for the high unemployment rates and extensive poverty that plague the United States in 2012, as some democratic socialists and other progressive economists have been saying for months now. It's an irony of history that during the 2012 election campaign, it took a millionaire Republican culture capitalist with a Cayman Islands bank account to persuade many voters of this "socialist" truth, but it is a socialist truth.

Even given the level of GOP bad faith that they've faced, why have Obama and the Democrats been so inadequate since 2008 in fighting poverty, reducing unemployment and rescuing embattled homeowners from an unfair foreclosure crisis?

As TIME magazine reporter Michael Grunwald observes in his book *The New New Deal*, a generally laudatory account of the Obama economic stimulus program of 2009, the Obama economic team in late 2008 and early 2009 deliberately chose to propose a stimulus plan that their own analysis suggested was only about half as big as needed to offset the steep reductions in consumer demand associated with the 2008 financial crash.

Against the advice of liberal Keynesian economists like Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz, Grunwald reports, the Obama economic advisors — Larry Summers, Rahm Emanuel and others — decided to propose an economic stimulus of no more than \$1 trillion, partly on the grounds that it was politically unrealistic to expect Congress to approve anything bigger.

DSA founder Michael Harrington, in one of his books, once called this kind of thinking "crackpot realism," representing "realism" about perceived political attitudes of the day along with a crackpot, utterly unrealistic sense of what may be needed to solve actual social and economic problems. And the Obama team promoted exactly such a "crackpot realism" approach to economic stimulus in 2009, partly in hopes that it could be amended later, given enough Republican good will — but that good will, of course, never materialized.

In addition to designing an inadequately sized stimulus, Grunwald reports in “The New New Deal,” the Obama economic team also decided against focusing the stimulus on economic assistance to financially embattled state and local governments.

This turns out to have been a near-fatal mistake, for much of the high unemployment of the past two years has been driven by massive layoffs of public employees by state and local governments. However, Grunwald characterizes the Obama team as reasoning that even many congressional Democrats would have little interest in helping the states and cities financially, for in many cases these units of government were led by Republican governors and mayors who had won office by demonizing Democrats and by promising wholly unrealistic tax breaks to the voters.

The Obama team evidently felt that the Democrats on Capitol Hill would be content to let the responsible Republican leaders suffer from their own folly — but unfortunately, a side effect of this neglect was that thousands of teachers, police officers, fire fighters, social workers and the like lost their jobs as the states and localities spiraled into fiscal crisis. Moreover, the Obama team made the pain worse by making additional cuts in the 2009 stimulus plan to get the votes of Maine Republican Sens. Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe.

So was Mitt Romney, whatever his other faults, partly correct in blaming the Democrats and Obama for high unemployment in 2009? Yes, he was, for the Obama team’s punting on the size of the stimulus and its inability or unwillingness to provide adequate financial help to the states and cities made high job losses inevitable.

The bad news about the economic failures of the Obama team and the mainstream Democratic Party leadership don’t stop there, however.

The respected financial journalist Charles Ferguson, director of the award-winning film “Inside Job,” reports in his new book *Predator Nation* that just like George W. Bush and Bill Clinton before him, President Obama has named to high economic posts in his administration certain financial industry officials who by rights should be in prison by now for financial fraud.

And as long-time DSA activist Bill Barclay, a member of the Chicago Political Economy Group (CPEG), pointed out in a recent “GET UP” training on economics for political activists here in the D.C. area, there have been literally trillions of dollars in financial help that the federal government has provided to troubled banks, under both the Bush and the Obama administrations, while pitifully small sums of money have gone to rescuing millions of American homeowners with “underwater” mortgages.

Finally there is the question of “free trade” and corporate governance. As Roger Bybee points out in the latest issue of the leftist economic journal *Dollars & Sense*, the Obama campaign in 2012 appealed to embattled US workers partly by portraying Romney as a heartless vulture capitalist whose leadership of Bain Capital resulted in the outsourcing of American jobs to low-wage Asian countries such as China.

Yet as Bybee notes in “Obama’s Double Game on Outsourcing: Ripping Romney While Pushing Free Trade,” the Obama White House has successfully pushed through three new free trade treaties — with South Korea, Panama and Columbia, respectively — that “foster the shift of production from the United States to low-wage offshore sites—often in authoritarian nations denying basic labor rights.”

Robert Scott of the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) has predicted that “the South Korea deal alone will cost 159,000 U.S. workers their jobs,” Bybee reports in *Dollars & Sense*.

Worse still may be to come, for the Obama White House appears to be working behind closed doors with representatives of corporate America to enact an even more far-reaching, more anti-labor and anti-consumer treaty, the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership or TPP, that would give unelected tribunals of corporate representatives new powers to kill “protective regulations on finance, the environment, workplace safety, and other vital measures enacted by democratically elected governments.”

How should democratic socialists and other US progressives respond to the pattern of Democratic Party pandering to popular Republican prejudices and elite corporate interests that the above facts suggest?

In recent internet exchanges by DSA activists at the national level, many leading progressives have argued that our first priority must be to head off new “bipartisan” attacks on Social Security, Medicare and other social spending programs as President Obama and the House Republicans engaged in new talks about how to avert the “fiscal cliff” now under discussion in the mainstream press. Progressive activists from many different constituencies have a common interest in blocking joint Republican and Democratic efforts to avoid the “fiscal cliff” by slashing spending on the poor, the near poor and the mainstream middle class, leading DSA thinkers are suggesting.

Efforts to meet the immediate crisis posed by the “fiscal cliff” issue should not distract democratic socialists and other progressives from a larger problem, though.

As Charles Ferguson argues in *Predator Nation*, and as political scientists Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson have documented in *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer — and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class*, the reality is that the Democratic Party has partly been captured by the same wealthy campaign donors and the same set of powerful corporations that today virtually monopolize economic thinking in GOP circles.

In the ongoing campaign by the wealthiest “1 percent” to keep control over the US government, Hacker and Pierson have noted, the Republican Party today is playing the role of a classic Hollywood villain — but the Democratic Party, for all its pretenses to the contrary, is far from being a champion of the people. The “near-death” experience of the Obama campaign and the Democratic mainstream in 2012 should be a reminder to all serious progressives that the US left needs to devise some effective way of capturing control over the Democratic Party for the benefit of the working class — or, alternatively, finding some other way of battling against both Republican economic elitism and its Democratic shadow.

If this analysis seems like treason to Democratic Party loyalists, let's remember just how close the President and the party came to losing everything in this year's election — at least partly over economic reasons.

If the Democrats and the Obama White House don't improve their economic performance, and if the Republicans next time choose a candidate who is not a flip-flopping millionaire vulture capitalist with a bank account in the Cayman Islands, who's to say that the GOP won't take the White House next time?

Senate Outcome Boosts Progressive Prospects

By Jose Gutierrez

Washington Socialist election extra

Democrats have maintained control of the Senate. A few months ago, people would have found this to be a surprising result. In many ways the results of the Senate election are more impressive than those of the Presidential race.

More surprising and more significant to us on the left, the new Senate will be more progressive than the former one.

Chris Murphy in Connecticut is replacing Joe Lieberman — the same Lieberman who was a cheerleader for the Iraq war, and who endorsed John McCain in 2008. Jim Webb is being replaced by the more progressive Tim Kaine in Virginia. Also, the conservative states of Indiana and Missouri have both elected moderates that are substantially to the left of their rivals. Perversely, we can thank the Tea Party sensibility and its over-the-top social issues rhetoric for this turn of events.

There will be 20 women in the next Senate, a record. One of the biggest upsets came in North Dakota where Democrat Heidi Heitkamp defeated Rick Berg. In Hawaii, Daniel Akaka is being replaced by Mazie Hirono, one of the most liberal members of the House. She will be the first Asian-American woman in the Senate. Tammy Baldwin in Wisconsin, the first openly gay Senator, will replace Herb Kohl. Elizabeth Warren, a staunch progressive will be the next senator from Massachusetts, replacing Republican Scott Brown.

Many of the new Senators are committed to reforming the filibuster, which has been used by Republicans to stop progressive reform. The significance of real filibuster reform can't be underestimated. If it weren't for the filibuster, a cap and trade scheme would have been approved in the previous Senate. It is also possible that a jobs program could have been passed soon after

the health care reform bill was approved by the Senate in 2010. The likelihood of reform of existing labor law would have been much greater.

If any of the justices of the Supreme Court step down, the composition of the new Senate could be decisive. More liberal justices in the Supreme Court might lead to the reversal of decisions such as Citizens United.

The left will also have a better shot at stopping any “grand bargain” that makes regressive cuts to Social Security and Medicare. Only through the pressure of social movements can democratic socialists expect a result that preserves these social gains from the past, but we have a better chance of success because of the results of the Nov. 6th Senate election.

[Socialist FAQ: Living like a Socialist](#)

Friday, November 2nd, 2012

Phil Barber asks: What is DSA’s core philosophy and how it can be lived in daily life and practiced in our conduct and relations with others?

Great Question Phil! That’s a pretty broad question so let’s tackle the question of the DSA’s core philosophy first. The best source document for DSA’s core philosophy is [Where we Stand](#) although as noted in that document “Since DSA is a pluralist organization, no single document can adequately and equally reflect our diverse perspectives.” However the document goes on to establish some universal values that match my personal experience in talking to members. Probably the most concise description is:

We are socialists because we share a vision of a humane international social order based both on democratic planning and market mechanisms to achieve equitable distribution of resources, meaningful work, a healthy environment, sustainable growth, gender and racial equality, and non-oppressive relationships.

That is probably the most concise description of the DSA’s core philosophy. We know that every person deserves the dignity of a good job, safe housing, quality education, decent healthcare and, most importantly, the right to a say in how these things are distributed.

Our vision of socialism is a profoundly democratic one, rooted in the belief that individuals can only reach their full potential in a society that embodies the values of liberty, equality, and

solidarity. Only through creating material and cultural bonds of solidarity across racial, gender, age, national, and class lines can true equality of opportunity be achieved.

So how do we apply these principles to our everyday lives? As they say, the devil is in the details. There appears to be a significant difference of opinion on this from person to person even within the DSA and it is perhaps something that we need to discuss more. I'm not familiar with any practical guide to living like a socialist, so I'm going to draw heavily from my personal experience and thoughts on the matter. I will start with one of the least controversial – how we interact daily with the people around us.

In terms of our relationships with other people, it's important to think about that most important socialist concept: solidarity. What is solidarity? There is a sociological, technical definition, but for socialists, it's the idea that all of humanity is a family, so we have similar responsibilities to someone in Asia or Africa as we would to someone in our personal circle of friends and family. Another way of stating this is that we are all in this together, an injury to one is an injury to all or that actions taken on one side of the world have tangible repercussions for those living on the other. This is perhaps more true now than it has ever been in human history.

Now does this mean we should go up to strangers in the streets and hug them? Most people probably are not ready for that. But it does mean that we should treat those around us with the same respect and dignity we all crave, regardless of truly trivial and arbitrarily determined things such as race, gender and class. This is not to say that differences do not exist, for they surely do, but if we want to reconcile those differences or work together towards goals critical to us all we need to think about what we have in common, which is a great deal.

In practical terms this may be as simple as being polite to the other sufferers of the morning commute, realizing that they are going through the same struggle as you. It may mean talking to the janitor(s) at work and learning about their struggles, maybe even offering your assistance or being honest with your coworkers about how much you make. Small steps such as these may seem trivial at first, but they can lead to big changes. If you can, talk to your coworkers about their grievances and consider forming a union. This is a big and somewhat risky step, but the rewards are tremendous. When we refuse to conform to a system, even in a small way, we are fighting that system which relies on our compliance. Capitalist society often discourages this sort of behavior, because a divided family cannot work together. It pits us against each other when we should be working together.

This is no less true in the household. This is of course a deeply personal matter, but it's important to remember that ties – blood, religious, hormonal or otherwise – do not negate human rights. The historical family unit has not been one of mutual respect and although it predates capitalism, it is a division that capitalists have exploited. However, you don't have to arrange your family in the traditional patriarchal way. If partners work together for common goals and seek to ensure each other's success while respecting each other's rights to self determination the outcome is more likely to be positive (of course nothing is assured).

Children are not something I have experience with so I would not presume to be an expert on raising a child as a socialist, but, here are some thoughts. The most important skill you can teach

your children is how to think for themselves and question everything around them. Not only is this important to having a good, healthy social discourse and allowing them to participate in a democratic society, but it is also a critical survival skill in a deregulated marketplace. The other thing I would say is that it's essential to be engaged as a parent, particularly when your children are young i.e. Preschool-Kindergarten. There is a wealth of science to back this up, but it appears that this is when a great deal of essential soft skills are learned that are very difficult to learn later in life.

Your finances are a place where it is easy to be a socialist. One of the most important things you can do is move your money to a credit union. A credit union is a great example of democratic socialist organization. A credit union is a member-owned financial cooperative, democratically controlled by its members, and operated for the purpose of promoting thrift, providing credit at competitive rates, and providing other financial services to its members. Many credit unions also provide services intended to support community development or sustainable international development on a local level, and could be considered community development financial institutions. This takes your money out of the hands of international banks and back into your community. While there are restrictions in the US that limit the ability of credit unions to completely take the place of private banks, if enough people took their money out of banks and put it into credit unions this could change. As an added bonus, depositors usually get higher interest rates than they do at banks.

I could go on a great deal about what to do as a socialist in your everyday life. I have not even touched on subjects such as consumption and the environment, and I could go into much more depth on any of the subjects covered, like finance. I have tried to touch on some practical things that anyone can work on. Before I finish, I want to say two more things. First, one of the most important things you can do as a socialist is be an advocate for change. Volunteer your time and/or resources to protect others and yourself from social injustices. Second, nobody is perfect and you're going to make mistakes; that is OK, just make sure you learn from them. I hope this is a beginning to the answer of how to live like a socialist.

[That Emerging Majority](#)

Wednesday, November 14th, 2012

By Jose Gutierrez
Washington Socialist election extra

Ten years ago John Judis and Ruy Teixeira wrote a book called *The Emerging Democratic Majority* in which they argued that demographic changes would lead to a Democratic electoral

majority. The timing of their book couldn't have been worse. Months after the book, came out Republicans made gains in the 2002 midterm elections and then in 2004 Bush was reelected.

The election of November 6th seems to have proved, 10 years later, some of the points made in the book.

The writers argued that even though the George McGovern campaign had been defeated by a huge margin in the 1972 election it had over-performed among certain groups: minorities, working and single women, the college educated and skilled professionals — and that those groups would represent a majority of the electorate in the future.

Minority voters went from being 26% in 2008 to 28% in 2012. This proved to be an unpleasant surprise to the Romney campaign. They had expected the minority vote to remain at the same level and had hoped to mobilize enough white voters through subtle and sometimes not so subtle cues appealing to racial resentment to win the election.

In both 2008 and 2012, 80% of minority voters voted for Obama. Obama actually did better among Hispanics in 2012 (71-27) than he did in 2008 (67-31).

In Florida he won 60% of the Hispanic vote, partly due to an increase in the Puerto Rican population of the state, which traditionally votes Democratic. According to some polls he might have won as much as 50% of the Cuban vote in Florida. If true, this would be the highest percentage won by a Democrat among an ethnic group that has voted Republican in the past.

Obama's support among Asian-Americans went from 62-35 to 73-26.

Obama won a substantial majority among women, in particular single women, among those with a postgraduate education, and among young voters. In fact, the number of younger voters went up from 2008.

Obama won more than 70% of the LGBT vote.

However, democratic socialists can't count on the inexorable march of demographics to make the country more progressive for two reasons. One is a long-term reason, the other is more immediate.

Racial identity is a very flexible and shifting concept and groups that are marginalized today will not be tomorrow. Hispanics and Asian-Americans have high rates of intermarriage. It is very likely that the ethnic identity of today's minorities will weaken and that they will move from supporting the Democrats to supporting Republicans much as did Italian Americans and Irish Americans.

Today's Republican Party is exclusionary and xenophobic but tomorrow's conservatives will have to adapt to the new America.

The other much more immediate reason and more obvious to us democratic socialists and to other left activists is that much of the Democratic Party is committed to neoliberalism. We could end up with a country that is more racially tolerant, with more symbolic if not real gender equality – but one assimilated to the neoliberal consensus that persistent structural inequality is just the economic facts of life.

Part of the broad project of the left has to be to rally as much support among the elements of this potential majority as possible to push the country towards social democracy before this opportunity slips from our fingers.