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Editor: Woody Woodruff

[Double Standards: The Imprisonment of the Cuban Five](#)

Thursday, October 31st, 2013

The Washington Socialist <> November 2013

By Kurt Stand

Different truths

War in Syria was narrowly avoided when the lies that have led us, time and time again, into war were recognized as such by larger than expected numbers of people. Less criticized was the double standard behind those lies, the double standard by which we sit in judgment over others without allowing ourselves to be judged. Thus the horror of chemical and nuclear arms, the horror of indiscriminate bombing, of the killing of non-combatants, is only condemned as horrible by government and most media when engaged in by those we label enemy. They are not judged so horrible, so random, so worthy of sanction when conducted by those our government labels friend, or when a consequence of our own official actions. It is a double standard we can see domestically when the protection given to prosecutorial misconduct, to police and – as seen in George Zimmerman’s murder of Trayvon Martin – vigilante violence, is contrasted with the relentless US criminal justice machine that continues to put unending numbers of individuals behind lock and key, often for non-violent charges. And it is a double standard in evidence when the fig leaf of national security and safety from terrorism is used to justify military action abroad joined to domestic civil liberties restrictions.

An example of the hypocrisy this entails is evident in the case of the Cuban Five. The FBI’s accusation: they threatened US national security. Their actions: trying to protect Cuba from terrorist bombings planned and financed by anti-Castro exiles in Miami. The consequence: Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez and Rene Gonzalez were arrested in Florida in 1998 on espionage charges and handed prison terms ranging from 15 years (Rene Gonzalez with that “short” sentence has been released) to the life sentence imposed on Gerardo Hernandez.

Indeed they were Cuban intelligence officers, but the goal they sought was not to prepare an attack on another country but rather to defend their own society. The sentences were so long because prosecutors were not content to charge them with the relatively minor counts of being unregistered agents of a foreign government and use of false identities – charges of which they were guilty but would not have resulted in the desired harsh sentences. So prosecutors added the charge of “conspiracy to gather and transmit national defense information” – a convenient charge making conviction relatively easy, as it does not require the US government to even pretend that they actually did gather or transmit such information.

The practice of criminal charges becoming more draconian once defendants use the courts to defend themselves is a common practice as anyone familiar with how our legal system actually works can attest. And it is the reason Hernandez was given two life sentences. More than a year after his arrest he faced the additional charge of murder for the deaths of two anti-Castro pilots shot down over Cuban territory, based on political calculation not on any new evidence. However one judges the Cuban action, Hernandez neither shot them down, was part of the decision to do so nor gave the order, but such facts are irrelevant when the goal is punishment not justice. And the amorphous nature of conspiracy charges made proving unprovable facts completely unnecessary.

An Anniversary

Marking the 15th anniversary of their incarceration, Stephen Kimber, the Canadian author of *What Lies Across the Water: The Real Story of the Cuban Five*, recently spoke about the case in Washington, DC and Columbia, Maryland. The tour, sponsored by the International Committee to Defend the Cuban Five, was part of an effort to bring about greater public awareness of the human costs of this particular “defense” of our nation’s “national security.” Kimber documents the activities of Cuban intelligence apparatus, of the five who were condemned by our courts as guilty, against threats that were anything but abstract. In the early 1990s there was a wave of hotel bombings in Cuba, bombings designed to terrorize people visiting the country. This was “strategic” terror, directed at upending Cuba’s attempt to build a tourist industry as a step toward reviving its economy — then at a low ebb, having lost its key trading partners after the collapse of the Soviet Union while still suffering from the tightening grip of the US blockade. It was a time too when those exile groups were stepping up their activities, ignoring questions of national sovereignty, in the expectation that the Cuban government would soon fall. Thus private planes flew from Florida over Cuban territory without authorization, an action illegal under US law, but a law unenforced for two linked reasons. First, because the target was a Cuban government that survived when other socialist governments failed. Second, because the exile community in Miami, though still a vehicle of US foreign policy, had also acquired power of its own. Cold War anti-Communism did not end with the end of the Cold War.

The fact that the US government was neither investigating nor prosecuting those who engaged in illegal acts against Cuba from our own soil was the reason for the dispatch of Cuban agents to Florida. They were in no way an attempt to attack or subvert the US, an absurdity on its face given the relative sizes, economic and military strength of the two countries, and an absurdity given US global predominance and Cuban isolation in the 1990s. It is also contrary to what the Cuban government did. As details of planned violent actions against Cuba were uncovered based on evidence furnished by infiltration into exile groups, Cuban authorities attempted to get the US government to intercede.

Kimber describes how Fidel Castro reached out to President Bill Clinton through their mutual friend, novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez, offering to provide information on violent activities emanating from within the US. The Clinton Administration responded positively. A team of FBI agents came to Havana where they were provided with extensive documentation of past and planned attacks. Follow-up action was promised by the FBI. But the action taken was not what was expected for the violent exile groups were left untouched. Instead, several months later, the Cuban agents were arrested. In a sense the victim of terrorist attacks was made to pay the price –

another example of the agencies of the powerful holding themselves to different standards than those applied to all others. It was a betrayal of trust that speaks to complicity in anti-Cuban violence, and a betrayal that came at a terrible human cost to the Cuban Five and their families. And, not incidentally, the arrests also prevented the realization of any potential thawing of relations between the two countries represented by anti-terrorist cooperation.

Further underlining the hypocrisy, the US government has given safe haven to two of the most notorious of the anti-Cuban terrorists — Orlando Bosch (who passed away, never prosecuted let alone confined, in 2011) and Luis Posada Carriles, (living still as a free man in Miami). Posada was implicated in the hotel bombings in the 1990s, and the two of them were implicated in the bombing of a Cuban civilian airliner in 1976, killing all 73 aboard. But when such actions are taken against an “enemy,” they become acceptable or, at least, accepted. Approximately 3,000 Cubans have lost their lives in bombing attacks over the past decades, attacks our official double standard refuses to acknowledge.

As might be expected of a case such as this, numerous jurists and bodies ranging from the UN Commission on Human Rights to Amnesty International have condemned the trial of the Cuban Five as unfair, the sentences vindictive. Appeals continue, however – appeals strengthened by ever new revelations of just how unfair. It’s been discovered that federal government funds were used to pay reporters in Miami during the trial to further inflame public opinion and influence the unsequestered jury members — payments which neither the Five, their attorneys nor the judge were informed of at the time. Legal actions on their behalf are joined to attempts to build a broad-based international campaign to win their release from prison and quicken their return to their homes and families in Cuba. From May 30-June 4, numerous public events were held in Washington DC as part of “Five Days for the Five” with speakers including Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farm Workers Union and an Honorary Chair of DSA, former US Attorney General Ramsay Clark, Angela Davis, Danny Glover, Rev. Graylan Hagler, the late Saul Landau and many others in events to strengthen the public movement on their behalf. Solidarity actions have been especially strong in Latin America where most governments have called for freedom for the Five, and in Africa where memory of Cuba’s role in opposing apartheid is well-remembered. In Europe too there has been much action – 116 Members of Parliament in Britain signed a statement earlier this year demanding that the imprisoned Cubans be allowed family visits, a right frequently denied.

And actions continue. On the fifth of each month, some public figure writes an open letter calling for freedom for the Five; this October 5th that initiative was expanded through an organized campaign to get as many individuals as possible to e-mail, call, or write the White House, demanding that President Obama free the four remaining Cuban prisoners.

What is to be done

Yet after five years of imprisonment the case is still too little known in the United States, and support for the Five still not strong enough to gain their release. Part of the difficulty lies in the success of anti-Cuban policies that have made a neighbor 90 miles from our shore an unknown to most. On June 3, as part of the “Five Days for the Five,” a labor solidarity event took place at the Local 140 American Postal Workers union hall in Northeast DC. Canadian and British unionists talked about the success they have had in bringing their respective labor movements

around to support demands to free the unjustly imprisoned Cubans. It wasn't easy and the task is far from complete, but more progress has been made in those and other countries' labor movements than in the US for one significant reason: Other countries have diplomatic relations with Cuba, allowing for visits, allowing – for example – family members of the imprisoned five to talk about the case giving a human dimension. Here such talks are impossible. Some of those family members not granted visas to come to the US to visit loved ones (the ban British parliamentarians criticized); those who are allowed can only visit, unable to speak to the press or the public. So too, delegations of Cuban unionists can travel to other countries but are banned from our shores – and approval for US citizens to go to Cuba is difficult and potentially liable to sanction. Local 140 President Dena Brisco talked of her trip to Cuba and how it gave her new insights. But the nature of the ban makes such visits themselves too infrequent, possible on too small a scale.

Thus the question of why persists – why government policy has been so consistently hostile to Cuba since the 1959 revolution, why the need for Cuba to send agents here to monitor the acts of its violent opponents, why those agents when arrested were given such draconian sentences, why those culpable of violence were left free. Cuban socialism in its strengths and weaknesses, in its changes and developments is simply an unknown reality to the vast majority of people in Florida or Washington, DC or anywhere else in our country. Kimber in his presentation noted that when he began writing his book; he expected others to have already written about the case – then discovered to his surprise that no detailed book on the subject had appeared in the US. No longer surprised, he then discovered how difficult it has been to get the book reviewed and sold here.

For all our claims to be an “Open Society,” we can be pretty closed when it comes to allowing the voices to be heard of those who are designated as enemy. It is the same logic that allows US intelligence agencies to monitor private conversations around the world – and act aggrieved when that monitoring is publicly revealed. Not just aggrieved, as indicated by the sentence imposed on Chelsea Manning and the attempted prosecutions of Julian Assange and Edward Snowden. The lack of information about Cuba, about the Cuban Five is part and parcel of the way in which the American public is kept uniformed about the purposes and consequences of US foreign policy as a whole.

That consequence is evident on Guantanamo, a piece of Cuban territory leased indefinitely to the US when the country was a virtual colony and now a land of legal limbo where human beings are held indefinitely. There too human beings are caught in a vise that is all too often ignored because cardboard images replace the fuller understanding of the persons, of the families, impacted by incarceration. British journalist Victoria Brittain puts in her book *Shadow Lives* personalities and lives that our hypocritical war on terror refuses to recognize, providing “a glimpse into the world of a number of women who have had their lives shattered by the myths and fable generated by the war on terror ...” Giving human dimension to those otherwise seen as cardboard figures is itself a challenge to the way official policies of war and repression are justified and rationalized.

The Cubans who were fighting terrorist attacks against their own countries and those imprisoned in Guantanamo – many, though not all, who certainly viewed terror as an appropriate means of struggle – represent different world views, different concepts of how to change the world. But

what they share is suffering the fate of a double standard that justifies the politics of empire and civil liberties abuse in the name of a democracy that is itself ever more restricted. And we just survived an attempt to have our rights, and indeed our freedom, even more restricted, as seen by the recent attempt by a minority of a minority to impose its will on the whole country by shutting down the federal government.

There is a connection to be made there – a connection between repressive global politics, the use of courts as vehicles of political and social repression and attacks on popular government. During the labor meeting on Cuba, one of the speakers from the floor made the point – not recognized nearly enough — that civil liberties is a working class issue which needs to be defended as such. The fate of Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez and Rene Gonzalez may appear distant from the needs of people who are struggling with housing costs, trying to find or hold onto jobs, figuring out how to meet health care needs or address pension worries. But the expansion of laws that criminalize nonviolent behavior, that make prosecutions easier, sentences longer and appeals more difficult contribute to the climate that has weakened labor organization, weakened movements of public protest, and weakened the left. It is not a step removed, it is the other side of the same struggle.

Conspiracy laws, in particular, are laws that criminalize by association and have been used to both repress individual rights and to marginalize groups and organizations deemed objectionable by those in power. The criminal justice system has devastated African-American and Latino communities, has created a climate of fear in immigrant communities, and has served as tool of political repression as seen with the fate of the Occupy movement. Meanwhile that system has ignored the practices that have shipped jobs overseas, created financial havoc, taken families' homes, jobs, futures – all practices akin to the use/misuse of law that enables employers to violate labor protections with impunity while making workers' rights ever less likely to be enforced.

Solidarity

“They [the Cuban Five] have already had to endure the most difficult conditions: solitary confinement, restrictions on communication and family visits, loneliness, and psychological torture. It is cruel when there is a family loss and one cannot be present – and [when one] must also not show sorrow, because in all spheres [of life] caution must be exercised.

“The US authorities have denied me a visa to travel in the US to visit my husband. The argument is always that I am a security risk. ... So long as there is no definitive solution to the case, we demand at least the right to have regular visits. But more important than the visa question is that they finally be allowed to return home.”

Andriana Perez – Gerardo Hernandez' wife – has become a global leader in the solidarity campaign. She made those remarks while in Germany and they serve as a reminder of the hurts inherent to the lives of those imprisoned, a reminder that while the campaign to free the Cuban Five should be seen as part of the broader fight to retake and remake our society, it should also be seen as a profoundly human movement calling for justice for victims of injustice. Their story, after all is a story also of families, of children growing up without their fathers, of loved ones separated by miles and bars, of celebrations and funerals and daily events missed – of people

working to keep hope alive, to remain engaged with the world and with life and with each other. It is a struggle that deserves respect and support on those terms alone.

The fate of Howard Wallace, a Black Panther activist arrested in 1972, and allowed three days of freedom before his death from cancer at age 72 after having spent 40 years in solitary confinement based on unproven charges is a fate that should never be repeated. And so the importance of solidarity efforts on behalf of Leonard Peltier, on behalf of Mumia Abu Jamal, on behalf of lesser known victims of official injustice – and on behalf of the Cuban Five. Such campaigns can be long and seem hopeless, but hope departs only when people turn their eyes away instead of acting on what they see. Perhaps it is best to end with word of the late Leonard Weinglass, an attorney for Daniel Ellsberg and many others, his last work being working to win freedom for the Five:

“The worst thing that can happen to anyone in the American system of justice is to be alone. Solidarity is necessary, not to intimidate the Court. But to indicate that the world is watching and the law should be followed.”

Solidarity is the means by which we can create a single standard of justice, can build a just society, a just world.

Sources:

Stephen Kimber, *What Lies Across the Water: The Real Story of the Cuban Five*, Fernwood Publishing, 2013. This book provides a history of what happened, a biography of those involved in detail and with honesty that allows all to make up their own minds about what took place and why.

Arthur Heitzer, “Open Letter to President Obama asking to ‘make things right’ and Free the Five,” on-line posting in September by the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five, provides the best short breakdown of the case. Heitzer, a civil rights and labor lawyer in Milwaukee, is chair of the National Lawyers Guild subcommittee on Cuba. His statement can be accessed at: www.thecubanfive.org (this website is regularly updated with information about the Five, and about on-going legal developments and solidarity campaigns).

The Leonard Weinglass quote is from a brochure put out by the International Committee (and echoes words he said to me).

The Andria Perez quote is from an interview, “Sie soled nach Hause kommen,” (They must come home,”), *Junge Welt*, October 4, 2013.

Victoria Brittain, *Shadow Lives: The Forgotten Women of the War On Terror*, Pluto Press 2013 – a moving and unflinching look at the reality of Guantanamo, the reality that injustice and brutality is always wrong no matter to whom applied. The quote is from the first page of her book.

Dan Smith, “Fifteen years of cruel separation,” *Morning Star* (a British newspaper), January 21, 2013 – Smith is the Cuba Solidarity campaigns officer in Britain and wrote about the parliamentary campaign there. Other information came from the Five Days for Five events and the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five website.

[GOOD READS: selected articles, radical and otherwise](#)

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Selected articles from other publications.

Amy Dean, posted by national DSA in October, on why the revival of US labor may come from nonunion workers...

http://www.dsausa.org/revival_of_us_labor?fb_action_ids=184625861725581&fb_action_types=og.likes

Some comments on the DSA Activist listserve lately raise the question: Why don't we in DSA spend more time describing and extolling the best side of the Nordic social democracies, giving them as examples of what we would imagine for at least transitional socialist *societies*—not just governments, which can come and go, but *societies* where social, public expectations are positive, not reflexively mistrustful or fearful. Oddly or maybe not so oddly, a mid-October column by the literary critic Stanley Fish in the *New York Times* – riffing on an interesting-sounding book – rings some of these same changes.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/15/opinion/fish-love-and-politics.html?ref=opinion>

The great shutdown is finally over (at least, as of mid-October) – but Joe Schwartz, writing in *Talking Union*, reminds us of what critical human needs programs are still on the chopping block and how ready some of those energized-by-victory Democrats still are to go along with cutting them. Danger remains. <https://talkingunion.wordpress.com/2013/10/18/the-government-is-open-now-fight-for-a-just-economy/>

As always, Sam Pizzigati's *Too Much* blog exposes excess and details remedies (the more of the first there is, the more of the second are needed... whatta surprise...) The US is number one in inequality, also no surprise, but the fresh numbers bring new amazement.

<http://www.toomuchonline.org/tmweekly.html>

For policy wonks (aren't we all?) a discussion via Kurt and Lisa Stand* of how the argument over the role of government v. a private sector gets complicated by the way social solutions get put together – often they are adaptations of existing failures, rather than new inventions from scratch. The healthcare.gov website might immediately come to mind. The idea of a

“kludgeocracy” may be new to you but you’ll recognize it easily...

<http://digbysblog.blogspot.com/2013/10/yes-new-democrat-dogma-is-to-blame.html>

And then there’s the role of ideas... Chris Hedges inverts Marx; when the ruling ideas of the corporate class have become totally discredited, revolution (maybe peaceful, maybe not) is inevitable even if the surface looks undisturbed. We’re approaching that point now, he suggests, as the vast middle has lost faith in capitalist tenets. From the interesting “Nation of Change” site via Carl Davidson and Andy Feeney: <http://www.nationofchange.org/our-invisible-revolution-1383056375>

And still more on the AFL-CIO convention from *Labor Notes* by Bill Fletcher Jr. and Jeff Crosby; a generally positive view: <http://www.labornotes.org/2013/10/viewpoint-afl-cio-convention-repositions-unions-speak-all-workers>

What if we look at the climate prospects and decide, or realize, that we really are fucked – not centuries from now, but decades? What are the implications for the Left? Not a joke question. A *Jacobin* essay by Alyssa Battistoni poses the question and offers a few answers. Specific enough? Take a look. <http://jacobinmag.com/2013/06/back-to-no-future/>

The Brit standup comedian Russell Brand is a frequent brawling voice on politics, and he used his invite as a guest editor at the *New Statesman* to lay out a manifesto that’s attracted a lot of comment: <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/10/russell-brand-on-revolution>

Naomi Klein, whose big eco-rad manifesto attracted a great deal of attention in *The Nation* several years ago, had a piece Oct. 29 in the *New Statesman* (maybe the one Russell Brand guest-edited!) about the inability of a capitalist system to adapt to the political needs of a climate change solution. The proximate protagonist is another young scientist-writer (see Alyssa Battistoni, above) who asks the musical question: is the earth fucked? Are we fucked?

<http://www.newstatesman.com/2013/10/science-says-revolt>

We mention in the opening email that national DSA has selected some strategy documents to be reviewed and updated in the light of the latest conformations of capitalism’s crisis. Jose Gutierrez wrote about “Toward Freedom” and Andy Feeney wrote about “Toward Freedom” and the latest (1998) version of “Where We Stand.” Here is one more link to that whole collection, on the national DSA site. http://www.dsausa.org/socialist_strategy The Metro DC DSA local will also email the documents to you on request as a single PDF. Contact jagfeb2002@yahoo.com or woodlanham@gmail.com

**Post updated Nov. 3 2013: a discussion via Kurt and Lisa Stand*

[Government Shutdown Shows Need for DC Statehood](#)

Thursday, October 31st, 2013

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By Bill Mosley

Much of the media's coverage of the 16-day October government shutdown focused on the closure of national parks, monuments and museums, whether House Speaker John Boehner could induce the far-right members of his caucus to follow him, and whether President Obama would compromise and accept modifications to the new federal health-care program. As the standoff dragged on into a second and third week, the parallel story of whether Congress would bring financial ruin on the country by refusing to extend the federal debt ceiling came to the fore. Much was made of the closure of federal museums and monuments and their impact on the tourist trade. There was, however, another local angle to this tale of federal Washington's dysfunction: the impact of the shutdown on the District of Columbia, the real city of 630,000 people often overshadowed by the often-unreal antics of the national government within its boundaries.

Due to the Constitution's specifying that "Congress shall have power ... [t]o exercise exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatsoever" over the federal district housing the seat of government, Congress must approve the District's budget every year before DC can spend any funds, as if it were a federal agency. This is despite the fact that, like nearly all states and cities, the vast majority of the District government's funding – about three-fourths – comes from taxes raised by the District government itself – income taxes, sales and excise taxes, and the other levies. Nevertheless, because Congress controls the District's legislation, DC requires congressional approval to spend even its own locally raised tax money. In effect, Congress is the schoolyard bully who steals a child's lunch money and says that maybe he'll give it back if the victim asks for it nicely enough.

When Oct. 1 arrived and there was no approved budget – for federal agencies or the DC government – DC Mayor Vincent C. Gray, rather than bow to Congress and close shop, scrambled to keep the District government running. Because heads of federal agencies have discretion to declare certain employees "essential," Gray decided that all DC government employees fit this description and kept them all on the job. To pay their salaries and the operational costs of the local government, he dipped into a "rainy-day fund" that could keep the District operating for perhaps two or three weeks.

Gray also went public with his frustration over the District's entanglement in a dispute to which it should not have been party, and on Oct. 9 held a press conference outside the U.S. Capitol to demand that Congress free DC's budget from the impasse. By that time the Republican-controlled House, as part of its strategy to gain public favor by selectively approving funding for a few popular programs – and holding the rest hostage in exchange for concessions on Obamacare – had passed a budget for the District. But the Democratic-controlled Senate insisted that the entire government be funded at once and without conditions, and refused to vote on a DC-only bill. By coincidence, at the time Gray was holding his press conference, Senate

Majority Leader Harry Reid was holding his own media powwow nearby. Gray, spotting Reid, walked over to him and, according to the *Washington Post*, said in the presence of the reporters, “Sir, we are not a department of the government. We’re simply trying to be able to spend our own money.” To which Reid replied, “I’m on your side, don’t screw it up, okay?”

Gray continued his offensive the following evening with a public meeting at Friendship Public Charter School in Southeast DC. With several hundred DC residents in attendance, he discussed the difficulties the District would face if Congress did not approve its funding promptly. He said the District had already missed a \$90 million payment to Medicaid providers due to lack of money, and more cutbacks would be necessary within days as the reserve fund emptied.

Fortunately, the Tea Party faction caved on Oct. 16, and DC once again had full access to its own funds. And Congress, which took no pains to prevent disruption of the District’s government in October, threw the capital city a bone: DC could spend its funds through next September, although the federal government may face another budget crisis in January. That DC should consider itself “fortunate” to be able to spend its own money for another 11 months before once again throwing itself on the mercy of Congress aptly illustrates the absurdity of the District’s colonial status.

Almost since DC gained limited home rule in 1974, District citizens have fought, lobbied and pleaded for the two essential features of American democracy that all other US citizens enjoy but DC residents are denied: voting representation in Congress, and what can be called “states’ rights:” local control over local legislation and spending. The voting representation struggle has absorbed the most energy and produced the most ink, from the failed attempt to amend the Constitution in the 1970s and 1980s to the more recent, and equally frustrated, attempt to gain voting representation by simple legislation.

The push for legislative and budget autonomy, while lower-burning than the voting representation fight, has nevertheless been regarded as of equal importance by many DC residents and activists. The lack of autonomy was especially deeply felt in 1997 when Congress, largely to punish the District for re-electing Marion Barry as mayor, stripped the elected government of nearly all its rights and vested authority in the congressionally appointed Control Board. Citizen anger over this insult to democracy led to a surge of activism in support of defending and expanding home rule. One product of this new activism was a bus caravan to the North Carolina district of Sen. Lauch Faircloth, the architect of the 1997 measure. The riders’ work in educating Faircloth’s mostly working-class constituents was certainly a factor in the senator’s defeat for re-election the following year. Another product of the 1997 uprising was the founding of the Stand Up! for Democracy in DC Coalition (also known as Free DC) which became the standard-bearer for the most comprehensive solution to DC’s disenfranchisement: statehood. (The local chapter of Democratic Socialists of America was one of the founding organizations of the coalition).

As advocates have argued, only statehood will confer full citizenship equal to that of all other US citizens – since, as even a cursory reading of the Constitution makes clear, the United States is a federation of states, and full citizenship flows from being the resident of a state. Any

law or constitutional amendment to remedy DC's disenfranchisement, short of full statehood, would confer only citizenship with an asterisk.

This points out a flaw in the DC referendum, approved last April by DC voters, that essentially declares budget autonomy unilaterally and while daring Congress to shoot it down. While the vote represents a feisty middle finger thrust at Capitol Hill, even DC's own attorney general has declared it of dubious legality, and Congress could overturn it at any time.

In the end, only statehood will grant the full voting rights, full legislative autonomy and full respect that the District deserves and needs. While procedurally easy to attain – it requires only a majority vote in both houses of Congress and the signature of the President – it has been a struggle politically. It has come to a floor vote only once, in the House of Representatives in 1993, and lost by a wide margin. Clearly, the statehood movement has more work to do to educate the public about why DC needs and deserves statehood – not only the residents of the states with voting representatives, but those living in DC as well. Only a stronger, more visible and more aggressive movement will capture the attention of the nation – and prevent an inevitable replay of the outrageous events of October 2013.

For more information on the DC statehood movement, visit www.freedc.org.

[Maryland looks at formal state body on defense transition](#)

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By Woody Woodruff

Progressive groups and some like-minded legislators in Maryland are pushing a bill for the January 2014 session to create an economic futures commission to retain and expand the state's high-pay manufacturing base and jobs – especially as military outlays are projected to decline.

The state would attempt, through this group, systematic planning to not only ride out but benefit from the decline in defense spending likely in the next decade. Preparing the state's workers and their skills for alternative production – including specific green energy manufacture and creation – tops the agenda.

At a meeting in Columbia Oct. 30, activists from around the state, officials from unions and progressive NGOs and a legislative sponsor heard more.

Jean Athey, chair of [Fund Our Communities Maryland](#), outlined the state's dependency on military spending and the higher economic stimulus resulting from federal dollars devoted to non-military projects such as infrastructure, health care and education.

The draft bill's preamble cites a study suggesting that in 2013 alone the "sequestration" budget cuts will cost the state nearly 30,000 jobs and \$2.5 billion-plus in Gross State Product.

A panel discussion followed, including bill co-sponsor Sen. Roger Manno of Montgomery County's 19th Dist. and state AFL-CIO president Fred Mason. Mason said that Maryland, through lack of planning, was unable to benefit from the 60,000 new jobs resulting from the last round of base closings, and wound up having to recruit workers from New Jersey, original loser of many of the jobs.

The legislative effort for the bill would be "an uphill fight" but a "fight worth having," Mason said, because it would "get citizens to look at their future more strategically." Planning would help the state "escape the whims of corporations that put profits over people."

The stated goal: "...to develop plans and policies to ensure a competitive advantage for Maryland as Federal military spending declines." The draft bill actually contains the phrase "industrial policy," a term nearly eradicated by the Reagan-era elevation of laissez-faire capitalism as policy.

Fund Our Communities Maryland's main mission is to reduce Pentagon spending and divert that money to human needs, at state and local as well as national levels.

However, Manno, who will co-sponsor the bill in the Senate along with fellow Montgomery Sens. Richard Madaleno and Jamie Raskin, said as written the bill would "not be a heavy lift" in the legislature because it avoids direct confrontation with defense industry interests, instead focusing on job creation and countering job loss. He appealed for early and wide support from activists.

"We need a caucus," Manno said, "to be strategic how we roll out a new economy" so that progressive and union interests are not "pitted against each other."

Mason reported that the state AFL-CIO had passed a resolution in favor of examining economic conversion Oct. 26. The resolution noted "growing need for programs of economic conversion" and said "appropriate planning and foresight is needed" for worker transition as the state's job sources change.

An earlier draft of the AFL-CIO resolution had explicitly endorsed, and promised support for, legislation for the Commission for Maryland's Future by name because "there is no state planning body" to take on the task. The draft also promised an internal AFL-CIO working group to encourage and educate on the matter at the county and community level. That language did not survive; instead the operative phrase was that the Maryland AFL-CIO "recognizes the seriousness of these issues," and that labor representatives on existing state and local area Workforce Investment Boards are "encourage[d] ... to use their voice to ensure that these issues are addressed."

The dozens of members of the "Commission for Maryland's Future" would, in the draft bill, include representatives from labor, peace, environmental and economic policy organizations.

Administrative support would come from the committee's inclusion of top officials from major state agencies and task forces overseeing economic and workforce development, climate change and sustainable growth, STEM education and manufacturing competitiveness. Nonprofit NGOs and advocacy groups are also well represented, at least in the draft.

The strategies to be sought by the commission include “the coordination of economic development policy with capital investment in both public and private sectors” and “the diversification or conversion of defense-related jobs with an emphasis on encouraging environmentally sustainable and civilian-product manufacturing jobs.”

And on the to-do list: “the diversification or conversion of defense-related jobs; ... planning for and development of the state's manufacturing base; ... creation and implementation of an *industrial policy* [emphasis added] for the state that is environmentally friendly; and ... the creation of a business climate in the state conducive to long-term planning and capital investment.”

A [study](#) at the Political Economic Research Institute at U-Mass Amherst by defense scholar William Hartung demonstrated that military manufacturing jobs contribute less to economic prosperity than do job in manufacturing for civilian consumption – because the civilian products cycle through the civilian economy rather than being shunted off into the sealed-off world of military use.

Hartung notes that “spending on clean energy production produces one and one-half times more jobs [than military manufacturing] and spending on education creates more than two and one-half times more jobs.”

As important, Hartung says, is who benefits from military contracting. It's not the workers. “... more of the military dollar goes to capital, as opposed to labor, than do the expenditures in the other job categories. For example, only 1.5% of the price of each F-35 Joint Strike Fighter pays for the labor costs involved in “manufacturing, fabrication, and assembly” work at the plane's main production facility in Fort Worth, Texas.² A full 85% of the F-35s costs go for overhead, not for jobs actually fabricating and assembling the aircraft.”

A similar transition commission was established by law in Connecticut earlier this year, but Maryland would be a pioneer in this project, said Miriam Pemberton, a defense scholar at the [Institute for Policy Studies](#) who is advising Fund Our Communities Maryland on the issue, and who was on the Oct. 30 meeting's panel.

She suggested that activists and legislators avoid some pitfalls by taking testimony from industry representatives, examine the history of conversion efforts – which show some successes – and focus on the most promising alternatives, such as clean energy to combat climate change.

Connecticut's bill reads like a more traditional industrial-policy bill, with a focus on state intervention to stimulate high-paying manufacturing employment. An acknowledgment that defense industry declines should be countered by creation of green jobs comes only as an amendment to the original text.

One potential resource, Pemberton said, is actually in the Pentagon – the Office of Economic Adjustment, which is shifting its focus from base closings to the disruptions that cuts in military spending can bring to local communities. Noncompetitive grants are available to communities, such as counties, that can demonstrate dependence on defense jobs and spending at levels as low as 3% of the total local economy.

Pemberton noted with resignation that federal legislative action on conversion was probably unlikely given congressional gridlock, and said in discussion after the meeting that similar state action is under consideration in Ohio, Michigan and Missouri, but that Maryland looked like the next state after Connecticut to get a bill in the process.

[NATIONAL CONVENTION NOTES: Setting Socialist Strategy in an Age of Austerity](#)

Thursday, October 31st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> November 2013**

By Andy Feeney

How should DSA position itself to pursue democratic socialist goals in an era of deepening economic austerity?

What should our organization's key priorities be as we go about rebuilding a democratic left over the next two years?

Who should we attempt to ally ourselves with as we go about trying to form – or many would say, re-establish – a democratic and progressive coalition for change?

How do we do all that at a time when the Tea Party right apparently still controls the House of Representatives, Republican governors and gerrymandered legislatures in many states are curtailing labor rights and imposing new voting restrictions on minority Americans, and chronic budget gridlock threatens the future of federal spending programs to help the poor, the unemployed and the disabled — not to mention Social Security and Medicare?

These were some of the major issues that democratic socialists from around the country grappled with as we met at a unionized Hilton hotel in Emeryville, California on Oct. 24-Oct. 27 for DSA's biennial national convention.

As one of three delegates from the Metro DC chapter of DSA to attend the convention, I confess to having been too jet-lagged to attend many of the many workshops at the event. However, I was very impressed – far more than I'd expected to be, in fact – by Joe

Schwartz's presentation at the Saturday morning plenary session on Oct. 26 on "The Role of a Socialist Organization in an Era of Austerity." I think Joe's presentation and the breakout discussion panels that followed it did a good job of summarizing many of the challenges facing democratic socialists and the U.S. left as a whole in the coming years.

One central theme of Joe's vision, as he indicated at a Socialist Salon here in Washington some months ago, is the challenge to traditional New Deal liberalism in the US by what leftwing analysts generally called "neo-liberalism," which is basically equivalent to libertarian-style, free-market fundamentalism.

As most DSA members are doubtless aware, but as some newer recruits to democratic socialism may not understand (given the way that words are employed in American public schools and on the mass media), "liberal" as neo-liberal thinkers define the word is essentially equivalent to favoring "liberty" – the two words are from the same Latin root.

But the so-called Classical Liberals of the 19th century were most determined to extend "liberty" to capitalist enterprises, and modern neo-liberals and the libertarian economists they follow are the same. Their "liberal" vision of a totally free capitalist marketplace therefore would sound the death knell for the "liberal" New Deal programs established in the 1930s and for the civil rights laws and environmental protection laws that many liberal Democrats in the US supported in the 1960s and 1970s.

As Joe noted in his plenary session talk on the challenges facing socialists in the current age of austerity, "Neo-liberalism is a class project to redistribute power and wealth in America – upwards." And it has enjoyed remarkable political success over the past several decades, to the point where 20% of this country's households are doing very well financially, but perhaps 80% of the working people in the US are struggling to make ends meet.

Neo-liberal politics as it has been pursued mostly by Republican presidents and members of Congress, but with ample help from so-called moderate Democrats, has helped ensure that since the late 1970s, the pre-tax income of the richest 1% of Americans has risen from about 8.7% of the total GDP to some 23%.

Meanwhile, as Joe noted in his plenary address, inflation-adjusted wages of men without school degrees have plunged by 12%, and only through a massive influx of women into the workforce has the median household income been able to increase by about 17%, at a time when total economic output in the country more than doubled.

Largely as a result of neo-liberal and anti-regulatory politics, coupled with unequal cuts in income tax rates and state and federal budget cuts aimed at the least fortunate, unemployment and under-employment in the US have been rising, and at the same time many Baby Boomers have lost the protection that they once enjoyed of guaranteed pension payments in their retirement years.

Meanwhile the deindustrialization of the American economy has pushed many older white workers out of factory jobs into much lower-paying jobs in the service sector, or into

surviving on disability payments. And despite some very impressive gains by the black middle class since the 1970s, many lower-income African American men have been hurt even worse by deindustrialization than their white counterparts, and have been pushed into surviving on welfare benefits, working in the underground economy, or spending years on end in prison.

Under these circumstances, Joe argued in his talk on socialist strategy, American leftists need to be fighting not only to preserve the public sector in the U.S. economy, but to expand it. We need to fight against the divisions that neo-liberal politicians are trying to create between the middle class and the poor and among Americans of different racial backgrounds and national origins.

We further need to fight against the ongoing de-unionizing of the American workplace and the deregulation of industry, while understanding and strongly contesting the right-wing idea that somehow, the richest capitalist nation on earth can't afford a strong and humane public sector.

Socialists and our progressive allies should “go beyond saving Social Security to expanding Social Security,” Joe urged delegates at the convention, and given the high and rising productivity of US capitalist workplaces, we should demand and win paid parental and maternity leave for all workers.

Over the next few years democratic socialists also should be pushing hard for the creation of new jobs, especially government-provided jobs, through federal and state programs to promote green industry, build and improve mass transit systems, and address a huge crisis in decaying public infrastructure systems around the country.

Two other major crises Joe mentioned in his plenary presentation were the burgeoning burden of student loan debt, on the one hand, and a huge shortfall in the public sector budgets for funding the pension and retirement benefits of existing public sector workers.

To address national problems like these on a scale where actual victories are possible, Joe further argued, “We have to build a new rainbow coalition” in the U.S., one that will “build solidarity without neglecting differences” among the many different communities that are currently suffering from neo-liberal austerity.

Joe is on record, along with a majority of the National Political Committee and the DSA national office, as calling for DSA at a national level to make the campaign to reform the student debt our only “supported” priority over the next two years.

That is, they hope for the DSA national office to devote its limited staff resources and financial resources to the student debt campaign alone, partly on the grounds that focusing on student debt will enable DSA to recruit younger members who can stave off the collapse of this organization when older DSA members – at present, more than half of the total DSA membership is near or past retirement age – are forced to abandon politics in years ahead due to old age, disability and death.

Advocates for this focus on student debt hope that by devoting major organizational resources to recruiting young people without explicitly socialist politics to DSA, and by educating them and their often financially beleaguered parents about the total extent of U.S. student loan debt and how it is feeding the profits of the private financial system, democratic socialists can build a greater public awareness of the capitalist contradictions in the banking system, as well as the need for the education of young Americans to be removed from the auspices of private, profit-seeking corporations and recognized as a necessary social program of a humane and democratic society.

Another critical focus of Joe's vision in his plenary address on socialist strategy, and a key point of a national DSA priorities document that delegates debated and approved on the last day of the convention, is greater DSA involvement in the immigrant rights and immigration reform movement.

The recruitment of younger college-age and post-college age people through the student debt campaign, and the recruitment of young and older immigrants through progressive involvement in the immigrant rights struggle, will together help DSA to establish the foundations for the next American left, as Joe and many others on the National Political Committee see it.

However, it became clear in Joe's plenary talk and in the panel discussions that followed it that at a local level, DSA members are expected to remain engaged in many other local and national struggles against austerity and neo-liberalism. Not only students and immigrants, but low-wage workers generally, aging folk facing cutbacks, women and minorities, and union or union-recruitable white men could be parts of a possible anti-austerity coalition of the left

A final point that Joe's plenary address mentioned, and that also is included in the priorities resolution that convention delegates approved on Sunday, Oct. 27, was that as we fight against the austerity politics of the right, democratic socialists also should be engaging in strong public education efforts both about the flaws in neo-liberalism and in capitalism as it exists today, and concerning possible socialist alternatives to the system.

For the past several months, there has been something of a national debate among some long-time DSA activists over the relative strengths of (1) an "organize, organize" strategy to fight the neo-liberal fights – a strategy that will necessitate DSA, with its relatively small numbers, entering into practical alliances with many activists who do not have an explicitly socialist understanding of the problems, and who are working for liberal reforms and not wholesale economic transformation to fix those problems, and (2) a rather different possible strategy that would involve DSA attempting to leverage its relatively small membership to publicize radical critiques of the system – critiques calling for non-capitalist solutions to our society's woes.

In Joe's plenary address on socialist strategy and again in the priorities resolution approved on Oct. 27, a dual approach to strategy was essentially endorsed. That is, it was decided that DSA should join with various activist organizations fighting against neo-liberal austerity, including liberal organizations and labor and community groups lacking any kind of socialist ideology. But at the same time, we should work to educate our coalition partners and

the public at large about a deeper socialist analysis of the current economic slump and long-term alternatives to it. In this way, the final priorities resolution that the delegates approved on Oct. 27, the last day of the convention, partly transcended the clashing priorities of the “organize, organize” school and the “educate, educate” school in DSA by calling on members and DSA local chapters to do both, and to do so in coordinated fashion.

An important amendment to the priorities document that was proposed by DSA’s former national director Frank Llewellyn and approved on Oct. 27 calls on DSA members and chapters, at least at the local level, to address the crisis in political democracy symbolized by ongoing efforts to restrict minority and low-income voting participation, to free wealthy corporations from any social controls over their campaign contributions, as the Supreme Court largely accomplished under its notorious Citizens United decision, and to restrict popular political participation in other ways while privileging that of the wealthy and the corporations.

DSA is hardly an authoritarian organization that has any ability, or for that matter any intent, of imposing a “party line” on individual chapters or individual members who dissent from the choices made by the national office, the NPC, or for that matter the decisions of the national convention. What was stated in the plenary sessions and voted on by the delegates in Emeryville in late October need not be binding on those of us in the Metro DC chapter. But in my opinion, the vision that Joe laid out in his socialist strategy address and that was embedded in the priorities statement that delegates approved on the last day of the convention offers some very promising guidelines on how DSAers and other progressives can go about battling against right-wing austerity politics in the months and years to come.

Andy Feeney is a Metro DC DSA steering committee member and was a local delegate to the DSA national convention in Oakland, Calif. Oct. 24-27

[Sustainable Truths in DSA’s “Toward Freedom” statement](#)

Thursday, October 31st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> November 2013**

By Jose Gutierrez

Even though [“Toward Freedom”](#) is from the mid-1990’s, many passages from the document are relevant to the United States of 2013 and should be studied by DSA members.

I’ll mention some of the parts that I think we should discuss in the future

“Democratic Socialism does not rest upon one sole tradition: it draws upon Marxism, religious and ethical socialism, feminism, theories that critique human domination. Socialism is a choice, its vision never permanently secured.”

“Toward Freedom” argued in favor of the continued relevance of Marxism at a time when many thought it was not and instead celebrated “The End of History”.

The document also argued that even under worker self-management, there would be a need for political pluralism.

“Toward Freedom” argued that there would be areas of expertise and job specialization under socialism, but these matters should be decided democratically. The rotation of menial tasks, frequent sabbaticals, job retraining, a shorter work week, more leisure is also proposed.

The importance of a coalition strategy is emphasized.

The document argues that Marx was overly optimistic about the development of class consciousness.

It also argues that in no country has there been a mobilized, conscious majority for socialism and asks why.

The reasons for this lack of support are the association of socialism with authoritarian communism, the post World War II prosperity and welfare state and finally the possibility of a capital strike where new investment is withheld or flees countries. Chile under Salvador Allende and France under Francois Mitterrand are often mentioned as examples of a capital strike.

It is interesting to note that two of these factors are but a memory. The Soviet Union ceased to exist over twenty years ago, and the wage of the average American has stagnated since 1973. Perhaps this one of the reasons why opinion polls show increased support for socialism in the United States, in particular among young people.

A left coalition would need to bring together the working class, the middle strata, and unorganized clerical workers and service sector workers and would need to stress democratic control over consumption and social provision.

It is truer now than then that the middle class can't afford health care, housing, education or child care.

Decommodification of these basic needs would be supported by progressive taxes and a reduction of military spending.

The importance of mass mobilization and democratic legitimacy is mentioned and that, as Rosa Luxembourgh argued, after a revolution there should be a rapid restoration of civil liberties.

It is recognized by the writers of the document that capitalist democracy is not entirely bourgeois but not entirely democratic.

In the section of class consciousness and civil society the concept of counter hegemony which was developed by Antonio Gramsci, the Italian communist, is mentioned and analyzed.

There is a need for organizing the workplace, the neighborhood, the church, the synagogue, the mosque, the PTA.

There is a need for organizing in civil society, for cultural, educational, ideological work.

The writers propose a socialist globalization to replace neoliberal globalization.

The transition to socialism is likely to happen not at once but during a whole historical period, an era where there is a gradual displacement of capitalism and through worker buy outs, democratic control over pension funds and mandated worker and consumer representation on corporate boards.

As I wrote at the beginning much of it is relevant and thought provoking but it is up to us in the year 2013 to determine how the document can inform our actions and worldview.

[Thoughts About Building the Next Left: DSA's National Strategy Document from 1998](#)

Thursday, October 31st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> November 2013**

By Andy Feeney

Over the next few years, DSA's national office and the members of our National Political Committee (NPC) would like members of the organization to study, debate and amend our organizational strategy, which was last significantly altered in 1998.

The need for such a rethinking of DSA strategy seem obvious, although the task of bringing our strategic and organizational ideas up to date with current realities is obviously a challenging one.

This article deals mainly with two documents considered for updating: "[Building the Next Left: The Political Perspective of the Democratic Socialists of America,](#)" and "[Toward Freedom: Democratic Socialist Theory and Practice.](#)"

A Few Minor Changes That Have Occurred to the World Since Bill Clinton Held Office Back in 1998

A. Wars and Rumors of War

In the political economy of the United States and the world, as we all know, the last 15 years have featured some dramatic and often upsetting changes. These include – just for starters — the launching of two major US wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan; the traumatic events of 9/11/01 and the “war on terror” that flowed from them; the further flowering of the U.S. national security state under Bush as well as Obama, the massive expansion of government spying on the American public and the people of the world by the NSA, and the well-publicized rise of Al Qaeda as the supposed face of radical Islamic jihad across much of Africa and Asia.

B. Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution in Latin America

Since the late 1990s the world has also witnessed the establishment of a “Bolivarian” revolution in South America championed by the late Cesar Chavez of Venezuela and kindred leftwing radicals in Bolivia and Ecuador.

C. “Re-Orienting” the Global Economy: China, Inc. and the Asian Tigers

The global capitalist marketplace meanwhile has been partly transformed by the continued economic expansion of China and its emergence as the second-largest economy in the world. The ongoing industrialization of India is promising to alter world market realities still further, as these two prominent Asian economies – accompanied to some degree by the smaller “Asian Tiger” economies of East and South Asia — shake off the memory of western imperial domination and resume what some historians believe was their status before 1750 – as the world’s leading export economies.

D. The Bush Revolution on the Supreme Court, and the Election of Obama

Just within the borders of the United States, meanwhile, politics since the 1990s have been radically changed by the appointment of two new conservative justices to the U.S. Supreme Court by George W. Bush, by the court’s subsequent overturning of legal restrictions on corporate political advocacy coupled with its recent weakening of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and by the election of the nation’s first non-white president — Barack Obama – along with a white backlash that has followed.

E. The Real Estate Speculation Bubble and the Onset of Global Economic Crisis

Over this same fairly brief span of time, both the U.S. and other western capitalist societies have been wracked by the puncturing of a huge global real estate investment bubble and collapse or near-collapse of major financial institutions – a shocking and potentially catastrophic economic event in 2007 and 2008 that then gave rise to a massive growth in government indebtedness, both in the US and in many leading market economies of Europe.

F. Government Debts and Financial Crisis in the Eurozone

As they have scrambled to take on corporate debt to prevent the further destabilizing of national economies, therefore, western governments in such places as Greece, Ireland, Iceland, and Spain have essentially collapsed or been replaced by the European authorities as the price of having their loan payment deadlines delayed by the bankers.

Many European nations and the U.S., to a lesser extent, have fallen into economic recession as this process has taken place.

G. The LGBT Revolution and Its Discontents, and the Immigration Question.

Meanwhile the US and several other western countries have experienced a cultural and legal revolution as the gay rights movement has increasingly won victories in the legal arena, even to the extent of advancing gay marriage in some states of the Union. The victories of the gay rights movement arguably have helped to feed the emergence of a homophobic and politically conservative religious right, although some observers think this anti-gay backlash is now diminishing a bit.

The US and most of the capitalist societies of Europe have meanwhile experienced a huge increase in immigration, both legal and undocumented, as well as the emergence of angry nativist movements aimed at combatting further immigration. The building of a huge anti-immigration wall along the Texas/ Mexican border and the recent acceleration of deportations of undocumented workers under the auspices of the Obama White House are partial testaments to the vehemence of that backlash.

Feeding both undocumented and document legal immigration to the US, meanwhile, has been an awkward side effect of NAFTA and other “free trade” treaties adopted with bipartisan support in the 1990s. As poor peasants in Mexico and Central America, in particular, have been displaced through the invasion of their national economies by large transnational corporations given new access to Latin markets by NAFTA and the World Trade Organization (WTO), millions have been forced northward to look for work in the agricultural fields, meatpacking plants and many other industrial enterprises of the United States, putting the immigration controversy on the front pages.

H. Electronic Media and the Arab Spring Revolutions

The spread of “social” electronic media – Facebook, Twitter and the World Wide Web, plus the seemingly relentless ownership of cell phones – has significantly transformed common forms of human communication over this same period. Arguably the latest developments in electronic media, especially Twitter and Facebook, helped to foster the Arab Spring revolutions of a few years ago and the overthrow of repressive and dictatorial governments in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, among other places.

I. The Politics and Economics of Climate Catastrophe

Finally, as all of these social and political transformations, and others besides, have been changing the face of the United States and the world, the continued inability or unwillingness of

most governments and large corporations to curb industrial emissions of CO2 and other “greenhouse” gases has pushed the planet further along the road to catastrophic climate change.

The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released last month, makes this clear. Many environmentalists and climate activists would point to last summer’s catastrophic floods in Colorado and equally disastrous wildfires in California as evidence that the IPCC’s conclusions are correct, and that they bode ill for human beings in many climate-sensitive parts of the world.

So What Needs to Change in DSA’s Strategic Vision?

Under these radically changing circumstances, how adequate is DSA’s basic strategy document that members debated and finally endorsed in the late 1990s?

After briefly reviewing two 1998 strategy documents, “Building the Next Left: The Political Perspective of the Democratic Socialists of America,” and “Toward Freedom: Democratic Socialist Theory and Practice,” as part of a project by members of the Metro DC Dsa Steering Committee, I would argue that many key passages in these document are surprisingly contemporary in tone. However, many the more catastrophic events of the past 15 years have discouraged many DSA chapters from following them.

I think other findings of these documents either are less accurate than DSA members thought in the late 1990s, or that most DSA members have simply forgotten about them because they seemed too difficult to put into practice, leaving our organization in the embarrassing pickle of failing to practice what we preach.

I would also suggest that DSA’s relatively loose administrative structure and the freedom of individuals and chapters to depart at will from the national organization’s stated principles have made the more impressive and most controversial aspects of “Building the Next Left,” especially, much less important in practice than they undoubtedly seemed to many DSA activists at the time.

Even European Social Democracy Was “Obsolete,” DSA Activists Argued in 1998: Do Most DSA Members Today Still Agree?

One bold statement in “Building the Next Left” that some DSA members strongly agree with, for example, is that thanks in part to “the unbridled power of transnational corporations ... Traditional left prescriptions [for political and economic change] have failed on both sides of the Communist / socialist divide.”

Or as the authors of “Building the Next Left” put it, “Global economic integration has rendered obsolete both the social democratic solution of independent national economies sustaining a

strong social welfare state and the Communist solution of state-owned national economies fostering social development.”

Within the Metro DC chapter and around DSA, however, it is clear that many members still have considerable hope in the “social democratic solution of independent national economies sustaining a strong social welfare state.” We may have to admit that this solution seems to be failing miserably in Spain, for example, even when Spain is formally led by democratic socialist politicians, but many of us are not willing to concede that this “social democratic” answer has failed in – say, Germany or Scandinavia.

How do democratic socialists feel – and how should we feel – about using Scandinavian social democracy as our model for progressive politics in the U.S.? This is an issue that current DSA members need to debate and rethink, I would argue.

How Much Did DSA in the 1990s Still Believe in the Democrats? How Do Most DSAers Feel About This Today?

A second major theme of the 1998 strategy documents that leaps out – to me, anyway – is the decreased faith that the authors of “Building the Next Left” felt about working for change within the theoretical limits of New Deal liberalism or the political confines of the Democratic Party.

“Today,” the 1998 document states, “the mildly redistributive welfare state liberalism of the 1960s, which accepted the corporate dominance of economic decision-making, can no longer be the programmatic basis for a majoritarian progressive politics.

“New Deal and Great Society liberalism depended upon redistribution at the margins of an ever-expanding economic pie. But today corporations no longer aspire to expand production and consumption by raising global living standard; rather, global capital engages in a race to increase profits by “downsizing’ and lowering wages.”

Rather than calling for the reassembling of a Democratic majority politics characterized by “strong trade unions, social movements and urban, Democratic political machines,” the 1998 document argues, “a next left must be built from the bottom up.”

Has DSA since 1998 found any strategic success in rebuilding the left “from the bottom up,” I wonder?

How many newer members have joined DSA over the last two years mostly because they are still committed to the New Deal liberalism of the 1930s and the “mildly redistributive” politics of the 1960s Great Society (along with the expansion of civil rights for African Americans, women and gay people that has occurred since the 1960s), and hope that somehow, DSA can basically goad the Obama administration and the national Democratic Party to pursue a basically liberal and basically traditional agenda?

How many older DSA members still harbor hopes for the Democrats, if only out of horror at the damage that the victorious Republicans accomplished following George Bush’s dubious victory

over Al Gore in 2001, and the onset of Republican war-mongering, Republican tax cuts for the wealthy and Republican attempts to privatize Social Security after 2001?

How many current DSA members still agree with the authors of the 1998 “Rebuilding the Left” document that democratic socialists can work either for third parties or for reform within the Democratic Party? For that matter, how many current DSA members, especially younger ones influenced by the Occupy movement, have given up hoping for reform through electoral politics at all?

A Road Not Taken: Global Solidarity to Combat the Might of Global Corporations

A striking theme of the 1998 strategy document is that thanks to the growth of transnational corporations, purely national approaches to social and economic progress are obsolete, that “today’s social movements must be as global as the corporate power they confront; they must cooperate across national boundaries and promote democratic regulation of transnational capital.”

Historically, the U.S. left seemed to be taking a major step in that direction with the 1999 “Battle of Seattle” protests and civil disobedience against the G-20 summit. Huge demonstrations here in Washington DC against the annual meeting of the IMF soon followed.

But in the wake of the World Trade Center bombings of Sept. 11, 2001 and the “war on terror” that followed, the international movement against corporate globalism seems to have faltered; at least, participation in it has become riskier for anti-corporate demonstrators, and the tactics employed by the Black Bloc anarchists at some of the latest anti-globalization protests have been controversial with liberals and probably with some democratic socialists.

How do most DSA activists feel today about international anti-global solidarity? Equally to the point, how much has DSA, either nationally or at the level of individual chapters, actually engaged in global solidarity work? If we chose to start acting on this principle from the 1998 strategy document, how should we do so?

Is a Global “Leveling” Up of Living Standards — And Also Resource Use — Still Feasible?

DSA in 1998, in condemning the overseas outsourcing strategies of major corporations and the decreased U.S. living standards that resulted from them, called for socialists to fight for a “leveling up” of wages and living standards around the world. Fighting for rising standards for all was seen as the left’s only moral alternative to the global “leveling down” that the corporations were pursuing at the expense of American workers.

The political and moral logic of “leveling up” seems intuitively impeccable at first glance. But in a world of limited natural resources where the richest capitalist societies contribute disproportionately to problems like global climate change, most environmentalists agree that it would be catastrophic if all of the world’s peoples somehow, through whatever miracle, achieved

the same levels of resource use and engaged in same kinds of consumerism that now characterize American society as a whole.

Obviously income distribution within any given capitalist society is important, and there are extremely poor people here in the US who still need to see their living standards and their wages improve. There are even more desperately poor people in many formerly colonized societies who need sharply increased living standards to achieve even minimal levels of human decency, and socialists need to fight for this.

But on a finite, if resource-rich, planet with finite reserves of non-renewable fossil fuels and metallic ores, and with finitely bounded natural systems that are essential to human civilization (examples include ocean fisheries, tropical and temperate forests, and productive soils that supply humanity with food), most environmental analysts argue that it is simply impossible for all 7 billion people on Earth to enjoy the same levels of resource use that the average American now enjoys.

If everyone on Earth could be “leveled up” to current U.S. levels of consumerism, the scientists warn, a single Planet Earth would be insufficient to support all of us; indeed, we would need to exploit two or three Earth-like planets to sustain the global population at current U.S. levels.

How should democratic socialists, both in the Metro DC area and nationwide, grapple with this dilemma imposed by the physical constraints of resource availability, while still supporting socialist and egalitarian values?

On “Economic Democracy” and the Solidarity Economy

For many of us familiar with the writings of the old Left, with the economic ideas of Marx, Lenin and even many of the European democratic socialists, a striking feature of the 1998 “Rebuilding the Left” document is its focus on “economic democracy” – on the idea of building the next left partly by supporting the idea of a mixed market and government economy coupled with the development of a strong sector of worker-owned businesses and cooperatives that could conceivably struggle to compete in such an economy and – over time – provide an alternative to large-scale corporate businesses that employ alienated labor.

A Metro DC “Socialist Salon” on David Schweickart’s notions of how such a system of “Economic Democracy” might be built provoked some sharp arguments within our chapter early in 2013, and it seems clear that some DSA members feel it would be a betrayal of “real socialism,” although other members support it.

How far should DSA go in promoting “Economic Democracy” in the future, and how should it be integrated – if it is integrated at all – into our other work for incremental economic reform on behalf of the unemployed, low-wage retail workers, labor organizing rights, and government spending on the poor and dispossessed under capitalism?

Also, what sense should DSA make – if any – of Chavez’s Bolivarian revolution, or the street fighting that has occurred in Spain and Greece against austerity policies dictated by stronger European economies and the financial industry?

How should democratic socialists incorporate into our thinking the perils and the political possibilities raised by the near collapse of the capitalist global banking system in 2007 and 2008, accompanied by what left economist David McNally says was a \$20 trillion loss in paper economic value?

These are some of many questions that I argue for all DSAers, or at any rate, for the most committed among us, to be keeping in mind as we review DSA’s old strategy documents and engage in the long process of revising them. I hope that the *Washington Socialist*’s coverage of the strategy reassessment project will help people in the chapter to begin on that difficult but important task.

[Virginia Progressives: “You Need A Raise!”](#)

Thursday, October 31st, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> November 2013**

By *Daniel Adkins*

The Democratic Party Committees of Fairfax and Arlington County recently organized two meetings that two or three hundred people have attended.

The first, held by the Arlington County Democratic Committee, was on the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which meets secretly in areas of controlled access. Its goal seems to be limiting government while privatizing local and state governments to maximize business profits. Other well-known ALEC efforts include “stand your ground” laws like Florida’s and voter suppression through voter ID and other laws at the state level. The information on ALEC was similar to many strategies Northern Virginia senators and delegates have run into in Richmond.

The second meeting was organized by the Fairfax County Democratic Committee. The meeting was called “**You Need A Raise!**” and dealt with the growing income inequality in the US and the policies that foster it. The panel was impressive and listed below:

Hedrick Smith, Author of *Who Stole the American Dream*

Thea Lee, Deputy Chief of Staff, AFL-CIO President’s Office

Dean Baker, Co-Director, Center for Economic and Policy Research

Lori Wallach, Director, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch

Lawrence Mishel, President, Economic Policy Institute

Moderator: Solon Simmons, Interim Dean, GMU School for Conflict Analysis & Resolution

Sandra Klassen, National Affairs committee chair, for the Fairfax County Democratic Committee, chaired the meeting.

Cosponsors included the Virginia AFL-CIO, Economic Policy Institute Policy Center, Northern Virginia Labor Federation, Virginia Progressive Caucus, NAAPC, Unitarians, and many others.

The discussion was not different from Bill Moyers' or Robert Reich's points on inequality. One difference was a push for a financial transaction tax, which is supported by DSA. Another significant point was the need to stop any more "free trade" agreements which have moved many viable jobs overseas. These trade agreements do nothing to expand labor or environmental rights or stem abuses.

In the inequality meeting there was only one person who voiced skepticism about the topic.

Virginia politics can look bleak when you see Tea Party candidates for state government, but the state is purple and with efforts like this, change is looking like a better prospect.