

The Washington Socialist
Articles from November 2015 Issue
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Editor: Woody Woodruff

[DC Jobs with Justice Celebrates 15 Years with 'Roast' of a Founder](#)

Saturday, October 31st, 2015

The Washington Socialist <> **October 2015**

By Woody Woodruff

[DC Jobs with Justice](#), a highly effective alt-labor organization of which DSA is a member, celebrated its 15th year of helping workers assert and improve their rights with its annual “I’ll Be There” awards gala on Oct. 2. Three local DSA members, including Dave Richardson, a member of the executive committee of DC Jobs with Justice, attended the event, which honored Josyln (Jos) Williams, the retiring president of the Metropolitan Washington Central Labor Council and one of the founders of DC-JwJ.

All Souls UU Church hosted the event, which parlayed good food and a dynamite band around awards to Williams and three other awardees.

The other awardees were:

- Courtney Stewart, head of the Re-Entry Network for Returning Citizens, a group whose “mission is to connect previously incarcerated individuals to jobs, housing, training, mental health, substance abuse treatment, and recovery programs upon their return to the community.”
- Reverend Kendrick Curry, pastor of Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church, a University of DC trustee and member of JwJ’s Workers’ Rights Board that most recently held hearings on a Just Hours initiative.
- Jean-Louis Peta Ikambana, Director of the American Friends Service Committee-DC Peace and Economic Justice Program who runs the D.C. Human Rights Learning Program.

Before the award to Williams, a musical interlude genuinely rocked the house, courtesy of the reggae-rock band Nappy Riddem.

Then Jos Williams, who will retire next year after decades as head of the Central Labor Council, received a light “roasting” from a select group of friends and associates including DC Council Chair Phil Mendelson; DC Council member Vincent Orange; Central Labor Council Political Director Rick Powell; former Central Labor Council lobbyist Alya Solomon, now a DC Office of the People’s Council liaison (and a former “I’ll Be There” award winner); and the Labor Council’s Mobilization Director Chris Garlock, editor of *Union City*, the MWCLC newsletter, and Mackenzie Barris, former (and first) executive director of DC-JwJ now at national JwJ. The

speakers also recalled the origins of DC-JwJ in a struggle for the rights of parking lot attendants that Jos Williams strongly supported.

Williams came in for gentle ribbing about his deliberate speech and effective deployment of the accents of his native Jamaica. One roaster claimed Williams took immersion classes during his visits back to Jamaica to refresh his accent. Another of William's long-time associates recalled visiting Jos one time and hearing him express amazement that Zimbabwe's controversial president Robert Mugabe could manage to remain in office for 30 years, and that he might have the effrontery to do so. But Jos Williams, the speaker noted, has himself served more than 30 years as the president of the Labor Council. Barris, who gained her position at DC-JwJ following a screening by a hiring committee of which Williams was a prominent member, recalled how intimidating he had seemed at her initial interview. But the roasters, despite their claims, came up with few zingers and many affectionate memories of Williams, with more toasts than roasts.

The evening was kept on schedule by MCs Eugene Puryear and Tiffany Flowers of the Stop Police Terror Project DC and #BlackLivesMatter, with observations and interventions from Nikki Lewis, JwJ's executive director.

David Richardson and Andy Feeney contributed to this article.

[GOOD READS FOR SOCIALISTS](#) November 2015

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The Campaign for America's Future's Robert Borosage analyzes the movement-building qualities in the Democratic primary campaigns in a compilation done during and after the first debate. <http://portside.org/2015-10-16/sanders-and-clinton-how-change-comes>

A *Monthly Review* article about Puerto Rico's stepchild status, via *Portside*, that complements our writer Jose Gutierrez's piece from *Democratic Left* that we reproduced in last month's *Washington Socialist*.

<http://portside.org/2015-10-18/puerto-rico-crisis-about-colonialism-not-debt>

Turkey votes Nov. 1 (today, if you're reading this on release of the newsletter) in a desperate attempt by the near-oligarch Recep Erdogan to undo his losses in an election earlier this year. In the interim he is waging war – real, shooting war — on his political opponents, as Conn Hallinan reports (*Foreign Policy in Focus*, via *Portside*). <http://portside.org/2015-10-20/turkey%E2%80%99s-election-plague-upon-house-erdogan>

As DSA plans to discuss adding the “Solidarity Economy” concept to its strategy statement, Colorado DSA's Dave Anderson wrote this about a big component, worker-owned enterprises, in

the *Boulder Weekly*. <http://www.boulderweekly.com/article-15157-the-worker-owned-model.html>

Here's a long and seriously wonky MIT examination of "who will own the robots?" analyzing how the inevitably more automated future might play out in terms of jobs and leisure. Blandly, what appears to be an editor's consortium opines "... the machines are tools, and if their ownership is more widely shared, the majority of people could use them to boost their productivity and increase both their earnings and their leisure. If that happens, an increasingly wealthy society could restore the middle-class dream that has long driven technological ambition and economic growth." A lot of techno-optimism, but a highly informative read pegged to a review of three books. Posted first on the CCDS Facebook

page. <http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/538401/who-will-own-the-robots/>

In a history-based discussion of what we (well, some of us) are learning to call the "intersectionality" of race and class in economic oppression, a *Jacobin* writer, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, says "Black people were not freed into an American Dream, but into what Malcolm X described as an "American nightmare" of economic inequality and unchecked injustice. The full extent of this inequality was masked by racial terrorism."

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/10/black-lives-matter-freddie-gray-civil-war/>

A post from the Labor Network for Sustainability about the environment-vs.-jobs conflict and how business plays that card to coerce unions in support of nonsustainable work in the energy sector. A complement to our article in this issue on how that's playing out in Maryland.

<http://www.labor4sustainability.org/articles/a-superfund-for-workers/>

The analytical approaches to the Sanders campaign are now coming thick and fast from a good many relatively sympathetic quarters. Here is one from Gar Alperovitz (*Al Jazeera America*) stressing the "solidarity economics" piece of the

puzzle. http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/10/socialism-with-an-american-face.html?mc_cid=e2f19f5f29&mc_eid=78e0988b1b

Harold Meyerson's important column from the *WaPo* in late October on how the Sanders campaign, win or lose, must yield a reorganized and re-empowered US Left or finally be considered an historical footnote. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/you-say-you-want-a-revolution/2015/10/28/7ed69cfa-7da4-11e5-beba-927fd8634498_story.html

Kurt Stand recommends this *Talking Union* piece on labor support for the Sanders campaign:

<https://talkingunion.wordpress.com/2015/10/29/labor-for-bernie-network-building-new-approach-to-union-politics/#more-25760>

And also recommends this article by Eric Foner, focusing (like Alparovitz) on America's history of socialism underpinning the Sanders campaign: <http://portside.org/2015-10-24/%EF%BB%BFhow-bernie-sanders-should-talk-about-democratic-socialism>

[More Teams Drop Racist Nicknames – Will Washington Be Next](#)

Saturday, October 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> November 2015**

By *Bill Mosley*

A local panel discussion in late October offered hope that Washington professional football team soon will join thousands of college and high school teams in dropping its nickname and logo, which constitute a dictionary-defined racial slur against Native Americans.

Tribal rights attorney Tara Houska and sports columnist Michael Wise said that mounting pressure on Daniel Snyder, owner of the Washington “Redskins” (the nickname is used here for informational purposes and will not be repeated), faces pressures that might force him to change the name, despite his constant avowal that the name is here to stay.

“I don’t think it [the name change] will be in his hands,” Wise, formerly a writer for the *Washington Post* and now with ESPN, said. “This is turning into a headache for him. He wants it to go away. We don’t need a new owner.” He raised the specter of a future Super Bowl parade (remote as that may seem for the near future) being “tarnished by protestors along Pennsylvania Ave.”

Houska, a member of the Couchiching First Nation and a founding board member of the organization [Not Your Mascots](#), added that Snyder faces a Supreme Court decision next year that could strip him of the exclusive right to the team’s name and logo. If that happens, anyone could sell “R-word” apparel and other merchandise, which could result in a big financial loss for Snyder and the team.

Houska, who grew up in International Falls, Minn., said she was surprised by the “ubiquity of the logo” when she moved to Washington to work as a tribal lobbyist. Seeing hordes of fans on Metro wearing the Indian-head symbol, the nickname and other stereotyped images of Native Americans opened her eyes to how little most white Americans understand this country’s original nations.

“Eighty-seven percent of references to Native Americans in schoolbooks are pre-1900s,” she said, leading school children to regarding Natives as “savage characters. They don’t understand that we’re attorneys, doctors, curators at museums.

“Once we know better, we can do better,” she added.

Wise said he became educated on the issue after he met determined Native American activists who showed him how the use of stereotypes by sports teams undermined the self-esteem of Native children. He used his platform at the *Post* to raise the issue, even while meeting resistance from editors and other writers.

While much of the forum dwelt on the Washington football team, both Houska and Wise pointed to progress in other areas. Some two-thirds of U.S. high schools that once used Indian nicknames and logos, a total of about 5,000 schools, have changed their team names, as have many colleges, Wise said. Houska's organization also is keeping the heat on other professional teams that use Native logos and imagery.

"The lens has been focused on the Washington team because the name is a racial slur," she said. "But other teams know it's an issue," she said, noting that baseball's Atlanta Braves and Cleveland Indians and football's Kansas City Chiefs insult Natives through their careless stereotyping.

Progress has been made in the media as well, with *Washington City Paper* refusing to use the official team name, unilaterally renaming the team the "Pigskins" in its pages. The *Post's* editorial page also refuses to use the name, although its sports and other pages have not followed suit. Also, Wise noted that former Washington running back John Riggins – perhaps the franchise's most beloved player and now a radio and TV commentator – never uses the name, but refers to the team as simply "Washington."

The Oct. 27 forum, which was held at Temple Shalom in Chevy Chase, was organized by the temple and [Rebrand Washington Football \(RWF\)](#), a grassroots organization that is conducting a petition drive to change the Washington team's name. Rabbi Michael Feshbach of Temple Shalom introduced the event, noting that many of his fellow Jews see the name issue as part of the struggle that also condemns anti-Semitism, violence against African Americans and displays of the Confederate battle flag. He noted that as far back as 1992, a conference of rabbis condemned stereotypical team names, and two years ago he was co-signer of a letter to Snyder urging a name change – the reply to which "must have gotten lost in the mail," he joked.

A third chair on the stage next to Houska and Wise remained empty – a chair reserved for a representative of the Washington football team. The team did not respond to the invitation to participate.

People interested in getting involved in the campaign to change the name of Washington's team can join RWF at its petition-gathering sessions. The group can be reached at RebrandWF@gmail.com.

[REORGANIZING WORK AT THE INTERSECTION OF ENVIRONMENT AND LABOR](#)

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By Woody Woodruff

That “better world in birth” depends on a reorganization of work. That’s at the heart of our socialist strategy and the appeal that we have to many non-radicals who are nevertheless recognizing the cold fact that the workplace is the most unfree zone in the land of the free.

The steps immediately in front of us to get to that place where workers are taking power and defining their own work are complex but we know they include one big component – aligning workers’ skill packages with the work that’s available.

This demand does not, of course, involve the victim-blaming strategy of the Right that asserts today’s workers are failures because they haven’t upgraded their skills to match the new jobs on offer (from the corporate sector). This realignment involves not only retraining – because it will have to be included – but also an aggressive program to change the nature of the jobs on offer, including a concerted infrastructure program and transitioning vigorously into a post-carbon energy economy.

There is no better place to witness the clash of corporate agendas with the needs of the future workplace than in the struggle to get Maryland’s coal-fired electric power generating plants moved offline and replaced with renewable power sources. The classic elements – corporate sunk costs in old technology, union workers threatened with job loss and plant closings, a resolute environmental community raising serious health concerns about nitrous oxide (NOx) emissions as well as carbon, and a state government that even at its best is too entangled with corporate priorities – have been on display over the past few months.

The compounding, confounding new factor was the succession of Republican Larry Hogan’s administration after the comparatively pro-environment Martin O’Malley administration. O’Malley’s regulations on the coal plants, settled and inked in the last days of his tenure, were promptly withdrawn by Hogan days after he was inaugurated. [The Wall Street favorite NRG Corp.](#), owner of six of the most-polluting coal-fired units, never acceded to the O’Malley regulations and apparently got to the Hogan folks. Unlike Raven, which owns three similar plants in or supplying Maryland, NRG fought to avoid installing widely available technology that would bring the plants into compliance for the time being. As with coal throughout the US power-generating array, these plants will eventually have to close as clean-air and CO2 standards stiffen in future years.

What became clear in two hearings this fall is that workers and their unions recognize that the state of Maryland, despite much lovely rhetoric from O’Malley and legislative leaders, has not done squat to ensure a smooth transition to renewable energy. Workers catch on that where companies and state governments see transitions as taking place slowly, over years, the transition for workers lasts only as long as their unemployment insurance lasts. There is nobody there for them. Executive orders from the Obama administration promising retraining and bridge programs to keep workers’ families solvent are future dreams. ENG Corp. threatens plant closures right now unless the company is relieved from meeting the new standards.

The winners in this, of course, are ENG’s stockholders – not electric ratepayers and emphatically not the IBEW workers in their plants. So much for the alleged benefits of separation of powers in Power – that is, Maryland’s ill-fated decision to turn its power grid over to corporate

management under the loving hand of the corporate-captured Public Service Commission, with power generation and power distribution divided among the corporate behemoths, invasive species in a system that is a natural monopoly for public ownership and management.

The consequences of this cascade of bad decisions were on view in early August when the citizen Air Quality Control Advisory Council had a hearing for recommendations on the new Hogan proposals – which he had promised would be as good as or better at cleaning up emissions than the O’Malley proposals. It was a flat lie.

As Seth Bush outlined in a subsequent Sierra Club blog, the scientists at the Maryland Department of the Environment (with a new boss appointed by Hogan) were suddenly happy to tout the virtues of a plan that gave NRG an escape hatch from upgrading their plants via a new way of calculating the ozone resulting from plant emissions of NOx. The gas is the almost certain cause of the devastating asthma plagues in the state’s worst air quality zones (also, no accident, areas where poor and minority residents lived and where some of the plants are situated).

As the hearings began, a theatrical and unfortunate scenario developed. Sierra Club members and their allies walked in together, as planned, to show the strength of their numbers, and took seats together on one side of the hearing room. On the other side filed in nearly 100 blue-shirted members of the IBEW local that has organized most of the workers at NRG’s plants. They had arrived on buses. NRG was playing, [as the company had all along](#), the “job loss” and “plant closure” card, and the optics of the situation allowed NRG to conceptually pit environmentalists against hard-pressed workers threatened by elite clean-air concerns. For every environmental testimony about asthma and climate change, and blue-shirted IBEW member related his or her long service with the company and concern that if the coal-fired plant closed they would have to move out of the state to find work that fit their experience.

The AQCAC, snowed by an interminable MDE slide show and left very little time to deliberate, [gave its OK to the Hogan plan](#), setting in motion a sequence that could let the NRG bosses get away without any upgrades to their plants – not only halting state progress toward limiting climate-change factors but prolonging the respiratory diseases, including asthma, that affect the children of plant workers and their “opponents” in the environmental movement alike.

Sierra Club members acknowledged to themselves at a state jamboree in mid-October that they had done a poor job of showing the areas of solidarity between them and workers in the traditional energy industries, and it has been costly, allowing corporate agendas to separate natural allies. Larry Williams Jr., a former Teamsters organizer recently added to the Sierra Club roster as a labor liaison, noted that collaboration had to take place well in advance of such confrontational situations. Bridge groups like the Blue-Green Alliance, as well as the health and safety departments of individual unions, were suggested as pathways to a better permanent relationship.

But at a final MDE hearing Oct. 23, one “environmentalist” for NRG and a shop steward from IBEW Local 1900 may have outweighed the nearly thirty who testified in favor of the original O’Malley regulations. They again played the job loss and plant closure cards, and in the

contrarian context of a Republican governor's administration, it is perhaps too optimistic to expect that common sense will prevail. **UPDATE Nov. 6... a key legislative committee has put the Hogan amended regulations on hold as insufficient to meet clean air standards.**

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/features/green/blog/bs-md-air-regulation-hold-20151103-story.html>

Environmentalists, including the strong coterie of us among socialist organizations like DSA, have to recognize the argument-stopping quality of the jobs debate among workers who might be affected by efforts to fight climate change. Union and non-union workers have become accustomed to broken promises of job transition programs and will require evidence of actual help available immediately, not after years of unemployment or Walmart jobs.

The struggle, as suggested earlier, involves creating good jobs for better-organized workers who can transition to the next economy without being the victims under the bridge. The Sierra Club's labor liaison Williams said they would (or should) take a "high road" on labor rights, pushing for card check as well as for clean air.

The imperative for an alliance between workers and environmental activists is made clear by such engineered confrontations as occurred at the AQCAC hearing between tree-huggers and gritty blue-collar workers, with all the stereotypical power of that narrative. The corporations walk away from those stagey events with their privileges intact and the lives of their stockholders and high-paid executives undisturbed.

Visionary labor leaders like the late Tony Mazzochi of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union (OCAW) as early as the 1980s saw the need for a "just transition" plan for workers affected by the inevitable end of fossil fuel dependency.

Climate-change activists are putting some hope into the administration's "[Power+](#)" program, which provides strategic planning grants for communities impacted by restrictions on coal mining and coal-fired power generation, followed by implementation grants that can come more quickly if the planning process is already well under way. The cost of transition to workers could be cut – but not by much. Without congressional funding the program offers amounts in the low millions (Brecher, below, puts it at \$55 million); little progress on a serious transition to renewable energy sources can take place under those circumstances at the rate that is required. The dominant energy corporations will continue to call the tune and play the plant-closing and job loss card in a way that members of both capitalist parties will have trouble resisting.

In an [important new article](#) on the Labor Network for Sustainability site by Jeremy Brecher, the outline of a comprehensive climate-change job transition plan is laid out:

“The recent study *Green Growth* by the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts and the Center for American Progress estimated the cost of a “Superfund for workers” based on a climate action plan that would reduce U.S. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 40% over 20 years. The PERI-CAP plan would create 4.2 million new direct, indirect, and induced jobs.”

Because such a program would be keyed to a specific carbon reduction plan it would cost 1.5 million existing jobs in the fossil fuel energy sectors, and a reasonable cost for a “just transition” for both workers and their communities would be more like \$800 million a year for 10 years. These are the realistic costs of the denial, corporate duplicity and supine governance that has been the rule up to now. Brecher likens the scale of such a “Superfund for Workers” program to the post-WW2 G.I. Bill, the military’s Base Relocation and Closing allowances for impacted communities and the tobacco settlement payments to states.

Without the energy and flexibility of a major infrastructure reconstruction program of the sort that Sen. Bernie Sanders is proposing, the struggle to ensure that workers will not be the victims of efforts to move to renewable energy sources will be a heavy lift. Efforts at both state and federal level will be needed. Socialists and environmentalists will have to re-fashion the narrative to include a reorganization of work across the board, both in jobs and skills, that is quite different from the capitalism we experience today.

[The View from “Blockadia”](#)

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By Woody Woodruff

Review of: “This Changes Everything”: a film by Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein

The film based on Naomi Klein’s *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus the Planet* is a tidy ninety-minute overview of the massive book’s account. Viewers at the showing at Greenbelt’s Old Greenbelt theater – on the evening of the film’s premier worldwide – said the movie left them much more optimistic than did the book.

The film checked off all the points made in the book:

- energy exploitation, driven by profit-seeking corporations and abetted by willing governments at all levels that are hungry for growth, is also the engine of climate change
- in the frequent absence of official support, the embattled peoples of the “sacrifice zones,” usually the poorest and least politically powerful, have to defend their homes and way of life with street-protest tactics. Klein has referred to the mental geography of these worldwide sacrifice zones as “Blockadia,” a scattered movement that is coalescing and growing as more and more working- and middle-class communities and classes find themselves sacrifice zones as well.
- Implicitly, the planet and its ecosystems are a global “sacrifice zone” in the name of growth. And the climate crisis, Klein says in both book and film, has emerged to command our consciousness with supremely bad timing in an era when the ideology of

the free market has smothered social-provision tendencies in many areas, including the US and Klein's native Canada.

Klein states, but does not elaborate on, the notion that austerity is the desperate resort of a capitalism that is seeing its own mechanisms founder on their contradictions – a bit of a refinement from *This Changes Everything* (the book) but familiar territory in her earlier *The Shock Doctrine*.

The Alberta (Canada) tar sands extraction project, the world's largest industrial activity, is the lead-in horror story for the film, contrasting the efforts of native peoples who actually have treaty rights to the land against the corporate behemoth stripping the once-wilderness area to a moonscape the size of some US states.

Viewers at the Greenbelt showing expressed satisfaction that the Tory PM Stephen Harper, after four terms spent promoting this devastation in his political base, Alberta, had been defeated the day before the showing by a Liberal sweep in Parliament.

In fact, the film's effectiveness (and comparative optimism) rested largely on its canny use of interviews with and portraits of the fighting forces of Blockadia, particularly women leaders of native North American groups in Canada and the US as well as Greece (a thwarted gold mining operation) and India (coal-fired plants in low-caste neighborhoods). Klein narrates and is frequently on-camera but always in subdued, background status, giving the limelight to those fighting back in these frontline communities.

The detailed account of capitalist hegemony and its control of governments and economies that made *This Changes Everything* a significant analysis of the climate challenge is somewhat muted in the film – all the salient points are name-checked but the numbing and, yes, depressing details are largely underdeveloped. Still, the frustration of affected peoples as they try to follow standard bureaucratic procedures for relief only to be blocked at every turn illustrates the hegemonic status quo well and makes their turn to street heat and physical resistance both inevitable and thrilling.

As in the book, Klein does not present much in the way of conventional strategy for reversing capitalist growth trends and reclaiming public control of the economy, though she is clear that that is the sole path to both saving the planet and recovering real democracy. Brief vignettes – such as Germany's slow, city-by-city reclamation of power grids from corporate to popular control, fueled by public political action in favor of renewable energy sources – show promise as incremental approaches, complementing the outright, sometimes desperate resistance found in Blockadia.

In short but punchy segments Klein repeats her potshots at climate deniers at the Heartland Institute, and at Royal Society climate scientists in a conference on risky high-tech remedies for effects of climate change. Both illustrate well a contention that comes through more strongly in the movie than the book – that capitalism's rape of the environment is ideologically rooted in an Enlightenment credo that nature was a beast to be tamed and exploited by man.

“This Changes Everything,” the movie, is not *This Changes Everything*, the book, and the pair stand as a good model of why these genres have different purposes and functions. The movie works well qua movie to make a compressed case about the relationship between recovering popular sovereignty from capitalism, and slowing or reversing climate change. If it leads viewers to read the book, that’s good too.

[Time to Act: Metro DC DSA Organizes “We Need Bernie” Rally](#)

Saturday, October 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> November 2015**

By Kurt Stand

Over 100 people attended Metro DC DSA’s “We Need Bernie” rally on Thursday, October 24 in support of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders’s campaign for president. Held at Busboys and Poets 5th and K street location, the event provided an example on the depth of support for Sanders and for a genuinely progressive agenda rooted in civic activism. The rally also highlighted the relevance of democratic socialism to building a political alternative for our country.

The first speaker, Andy Shallal – owner of Busboys and Poets, peace activist and former DC mayoral candidate – raised the need to do more than just build support for Sanders, arguing that we ought to use his campaign to build a movement of direct action and public engagement that challenges the injustices everywhere visible in our society. Shallal also noted the need to address and overcome one of the critical weaknesses of Sanders’s campaign – the fact that it still has not developed sufficient support in communities of color, a fact emphasized by the overwhelmingly white composition of the crowd (which stood in contrast to most of the progressive forums held at Busboys). He stressed that this should not serve as an excuse to withdraw from supporting Sanders, but rather should serve as a reminder to incorporate the message of Black Lives Matter in all work on behalf of his campaign, to address the issue of racism in its specificity – that (as he put it during the Q & A) it is understanding black and white as political categories. By beginning the program in this fashion, Shallal underlined the seriousness of the rally, this event being more than a cheering session for Sanders (though indeed it was that too) but also a discussion of what is to be done, how to continue the organizing.

Barbara Ehrenreich, founding national co-chair (and current honorary chair) of DSA, followed with a talk that emphasized a theme that has long been at the heart of many of her books, including *Nickel and Dimed*: inequality. Ehrenreich talked about the one-sided class war waged by corporations against working people and the importance of Sanders highlighting the disparities which have seen wages stagnate while profits rise, a reality that translates into millions struggling to get by while those who already live in luxury want more for themselves and less for everyone else. This inequality, Ehrenreich noted, hurts all working people, but especially impacts on women, on blacks, on immigrants, on the already poor; Sanders’s

insistence on that reality having already shifted the debate within the Democratic Party to the left. She added, however, that Hillary Clinton disqualified herself from any pretense of being a progressive or a feminist by her support (a support never disavowed) of Bill Clinton's 1996 Welfare Reform Act, which was racist and misogynist, blaming poor women for their poverty. Nonetheless, Ehrenreich's message was consistent with that of Sanders's campaign, focusing not on attacking others but on the importance of his policy reform proposals: taxing corporations and the wealthy to pay for universal social insurance programs, educational benefits and infrastructure plans, all of which will help the vast majority of Americans. Certainly, she concluded, Sanders is not perfect – noting, for example, his inconsistent policy on the Middle East – but the question is not perfection but of recognizing how principled Sanders has been through the years in most arenas, and of using the opportunity his presidential run provides to further organizing on behalf of social justice for all.

This was a theme taken up by Larry Cohen, recently retired president of the Communications Workers of America, as he called upon the crowd to seize the moment Sanders campaign represents, a moment of hope that many in the room have long been working to create. Currently chair of Labor for Bernie – the national initiative to build support for Sanders within the trade union movement – Cohen reminded those at the rally that Sanders was talking directly to working-class people about the issues that affect them: massive student debt for their children, fear of running out of money when they retire, the danger of job loss, the difficulty of asserting union rights at work when employed. The resulting insecurity alongside the too many defeats unions have suffered in recent decades have led many in labor to become defensive, which only leads to more defeats. Sanders's campaign, however, provides an opportunity for workers to go on the offensive, which is the reason his message resonates so strongly with many of them – and the reason why union support for him is growing, especially on the local level. Moreover, Sanders is speaking to a wider working class social agenda – Cohen noted his consistent opposition to “free” trade pacts, his support for labor law reform and campaign finance reform, his opposition to the Iraq War and his statement that climate change is the greatest danger to US national security. Sanders's campaign, in all these aspects, is a campaign against corporations undermining US democracy, and in all respects represents a challenge to the system by bringing people back into the process. Therein lay what was perhaps Cohen's most important point, that Sanders is creating a decentralized movement that enables people to act to bring about change – action that is key not only to the possibility of a Sanders victory, but also key to any possibility of carrying out his agenda.

Restoring American democracy was at the center of keynote speaker Jim Hightower's presentation. Former Texas State Agricultural Commissioner and publisher of the *Hightower Lowdown*, the progressive populist has long scored the corrosive impact of big businesses on US politics and economy and has long been a fierce advocate of the needs of American working families – and of the need for people to take collective action to regain power from our country's elite. He reminisced about buying a Bernie button when Sanders was running for local office as an independent socialist in Burlington, Vermont many years ago, and thinking then as now that buying a button (or attending a rally) is a good first step only if followed by other steps, by organizing. Hightower's support for Sanders in this presidential run stems from his support for Sanders's call for a political revolution to put our country back in the hands of the people rather

than allow it to remain in the hands of the wealthy, of the unelected small minority, who have bought control of the political process.

Following the speakers was a lively Q & A session on a host of issues relevant to our collective engagement, ranging from differences over foreign policy to concern over how a focus on the national election might impact local campaigns, from more discussion of Black Lives Matter to questions of how to sustain the work now being done. And the question of democratic socialism came too, with Cohen mentioning that Sanders will be making a major presentation defining his views, but noting that in short form it means building a system rooted in universal social justice and political participation. DSA Deputy Director (and local Metro DC DSA member) David Duhalde came to the front and added that DSA strongly supports Sanders's calls for labor and political rights, for national health insurance and an end to college debt, but that we see these as first steps to a socialism which will make the US more fully democratic and egalitarian.

The event was organized by a committee of Metro DC DSA members and is itself projected as a step in the process. More actions will be taken in the future, hopefully involving many of the 100 + who came, listened and took part in the local "We Need Bernie" rally.

[Veterans Day, Personal Loss, and Political Insight](#)

Saturday, October 31st, 2015

***The Washington Socialist* <> November 2015**

By Daniel Casey Adkins

Veterans Day and Memorial Day are reminders of family history and personal loss. My father died leading a Marine platoon in attack on Iwo Jima. In the attack, half of his men were either killed or wounded. When hit, he refused medical aid by the corpsman (medic) and ordered him to take care of the platoon's Marines first. He was shot again and died.

My father took responsibility for confronting totalitarianism and for the care of his Marines. My belief in democratic socialism is an extrapolation of my father's action against fascism and his care for those around him. If you can die for your platoon and country, why not live for humanity and our home the Earth?

When my mother remarried I got a live father who was also a veteran. In my efforts to know my fathers, I became an amateur military historian, followed international news, and served a brief time in the Army. My experience has led me to consider questions and points of view not always considered.

One humbling insight is that for every WW2 American war orphan there are 40 to 60 Russian war orphans. That has to take a toll on the Russian mind and might partly explain Putin's

domestic support. Russia's current recession is nothing compared to what Russians have faced before.

Understanding US production and civil mobilization is key understanding our victory and knowing the US capacities. WW2 films or books show the individual valor but not the systems and national involvement that organized the victory. As individuals and socialists we need to be aware how our systems work, be they schools, factories, the social relations of work, and production. WW2 Fact: Did you know that the Allies produced 20 times the petroleum that the Axis did?

We have not seen the US united to solve a problem, but that happened in WW2. What would that unity look like to solve climate change? We have an increasingly growing climate movement, but it is being undercut by fossil-fuel billionaires.

The Pentagon builds one conventional Army, but uses it in a counter-insurgency mode. How does that mesh with our national goals other than making money for corporations?

Can you stop an insurgency without nation building? If the US wants to limit Islamic extremism, are bullets the only way? Even the military does not believe bullets are the only way but the US and our allies have not started a serious discussion or tried to offer meaningful help to states in harm's way. The defense against extremism needs to be about more than spending money on weapons; it needs to be about training on many levels so extremism can be defeated on the many levels where it exists.

One topic the world faces is: How do you help a failing state? The world is not likely to have an answer without a strong United Nations. How might that happen and what would it look like?

How do we use time in seeing and solving problems? Capitalism is famous for not seeing beyond its next quarter. What would political and economic research or intelligence look like that had a long-term view?

These and other insights and questions have been provoked by my studying my veteran fathers and the world.