

The Washington Socialist
Articles from October 2013 Issue
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[Washington Socialist for October 2013: "Shutdown Edition" maybe; more Congressional misbehavior certain...](#)

Tuesday, October 1st, 2013



Welcome to the October issue of *The Washington Socialist*.

It's a little risky, perhaps, to call this October issue the "Shutdown Edition." But as we go to "press" the evening of Sept. 30, the Senate has rejected the House continuing resolution for government funding with the poison pill that would delay the Affordable Care Act for a year. The House looks adamant, or comatose. Looks like it might happen. *[In the cold light of day Oct. 1 a.m., when this message was posted on the site, it is a done deal...]*

All of us, pretty much, are creatures of the Beltway ambiance and react like scalded protozoa to each new turn of these events. Whether the shutdown of the US government takes place on its latest schedule or no, our psychic environment quivers with the allabout of government and its attendant politics.

The present writer very recently rode an Amtrak train (both ways) through what is often and rudely called "flyover country." Many people in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona also depend on some attention from the federal government, and many could clearly use more. It is clear that those folks do not spend as much time obsessing about the latest news, and keep their heads down and shoulders hunched for the worst when the narcissists of every stripe posture their way through the routines of misgovernance here in the capital.

Every town or small city passed by the train showed the signs of decline— some cities holding on to a local industry and looking less distressed while others had clearly lost theirs and showed signs of giving up.

At the apogee of our trip, Grand Canyon National Park – hosting five million visitors annually – was preparing to close to the public, and employees (one a family member) are preparing resignedly for furlough. We may have been among the last people to enjoy the park and its stupendous views for some time if the non-adult behavior that horrifies us back in the capital persists.

A stayover in Kansas City, Mo. showed a lovely mini-metropolis, once the queen of the frontier, trying to hang on to some industrial remnants that allow a decent living. But areas like what the city calls “Jazz Hill,” industrial and largely African-American, are treading water only. The city’s well-managed Main Street Express bus, with 10-minute headways all day, showcases excellent parks and museums but Jazz Hill is a food desert served only by an Aldi’s.

The tragedy of the shutdown – and it will be a tragedy – will be muted in parts of the desert Southwest where scattered ranches show one brick rambler with attendant shed-like residences, or on Jazz Hill in KC where many adult men are already unemployed. This new tragedy has to compete with so many existing ones. The nation’s most vulnerable places and people have already been abandoned for years by their federal government and leaders; the shutdown in the distant capital will only be a faint echo.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Bill Mosley outlines how the triple threat of sequester, shutdown and debt ceiling debacle is not only hurting people immediately but works to destroy trust in government more generally – the core purpose of what often seems like random behavior by the Right. [Read complete article](#)

Andy Feeney recounts the sorry path of the Large Retailer Accountability Act to its veto by Mayor Vincent Gray and a failure to override by the City Council, and wonders what it will take to convince the general public that the power wielded by corporations the size of Walmart needs neutralizing. Is the dismantlement of the “too big to fight” corporate behemoths a possibility? [Read complete article](#)

Daniel Adkins outlines the dismal prospects for progress in Virginia’s off-year gubernatorial election, with a gerrymandered legislative lineup in both houses awaiting whomever wins. [Read complete article](#)

Andy Feeney contributes a book review on Giles Slade’s *Made to Break, Technology and Obsolescence in America*, which focuses on consumer electronics and their persistence in our lives and our landfills. [Read complete article](#)

This month’s “Good Reads” includes a special batch of reports on the AFL-CIO convention and its turn toward stronger ties with non-labor organizations. [Read complete article](#)

The recent activities of the DSA local are recounted in a roundup by Andy Feeney, including our work on student debt issues, peace activism, the Conyers jobs bill, the LRAA and our participation in the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington. [Read complete article](#)

DSA Short Takes includes notes by Bill Mosley on the Navy Yard shootings, Andy Feeney on fossil fuel wars and Dan Adkins on the Snowden affair. [Read complete article](#)

Metro DC DSA's next regular meeting is Saturday, October 12, beginning 1:30 pm at the Martin Luther King Memorial Library. Our next Socialist Salon is scheduled for Thursday, Oct. 17, usually 6:15 p.m. at Hunan Dynasty, 215 Pennsylvania Ave. SE on the Hill. You can, of course, find updates to all these meetings and more on our [Meetup site](#).

[Fifty Shades of Vincent Gray: Or, Sleeping With Wal-Mart for Pleasure and Profit](#)

Monday, September 30th, 2013

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By Andy Feeney

Somewhere in my cluttered clothes closet is a rather good-looking T-shirt I was given in 2010, for canvassing in support of Vincent Gray's campaign to be mayor of Washington. I knew virtually nothing about Gray when I campaigned for him, I confess. But as a DSA member I heeded the advice of local labor activists who were furious with then-Mayor Fenty, whose administration had badly undercut the Washington teachers' union and imposed huge losses on local cab drivers.

At the behest of a long-time labor activist on the local DSA Steering Committee, several members of the Metro DC chapter volunteered to support Gray as Fenty's leading challenger. And for my personal stint going door to door, the Gray campaign people gave me a handsome white shirt with bright blue lettering, proclaiming their candidate's superior

CHARACTER

INTEGRITY

LEADERSHIP.

I haven't worn the shirt in public much since the Sulaimon Brown controversy of early 2011, actually, but now I face a small personal quandary.

Following Mayor Gray's Sept. 12 veto of the Large Retailer Accountability Act (LRAA) passed by a majority of the DC Council, and backed by such groups as the Central Labor Council, DC Jobs with Justice (JwJ) and the community and labor coalition RESPECT DC, what should I do with this used garment advertising a used-up politician?

At least from the perspective of labor activists and RESPECT DC organizers, Vincent Gray as mayor has abandoned all pretenses he may once have had to showing "Character, Integrity, and Leadership." At least to outward appearances, Gray has shafted many of his best labor supporters from 2010 for the benefit of the world's largest corporation, Wal-Mart, which

numerous critics have accused of discriminating against women, paying poverty-level wages in other U.S. communities and underwriting brutal sweatshop conditions at its suppliers' factories in China.

If Gray has such "character" and "leadership" that he's willing to betray the hopes of D.C. labor activists at the behest of a company like Wal-Mart Stores, what other political atrocities is he also capable of?

Under the LRAA as supporters proposed it, and as a majority of the DC Council approved it in a courageous vote taken in July, large retailers enjoying sales revenues of \$1 billion annually or more, and operating stores in the District with at least 75,000 square feet of retail space, would have been required by 2017 to pay their employees a "living wage" of at least \$12.50 per hour in combined wages and benefits.

[[See Mike DeBonis, The Washington Post,](#)]

The LRAA would have included a potential exemption for large retailers who engage in collective bargaining with their workers – an important selling point for organized labor, and one that might have enabled some of Wal-Mart's box competitors, such as Target and Home Depot, some wiggle room from having to meet the \$12.50 wage requirement immediately.

But Wal-Mart Stores is notorious nationwide for fighting against unionization, and this alone made its pursuit of collective bargaining as an alternative to paying a living wage unlikely, to say the least. Nor was Wal-Mart management interested in raising the average wages of associates it planned to hire in the District, although rival retail giant COSTCO reportedly pays its workers an average wage of some \$21 an hour – far more than what the LRAA demanded.

In an [op-ed published by the Washington Post](#) shortly before the Council vote, Wal-Mart U.S. official Alex Barron wrote that the LRAA would "would clearly inject unforeseen costs into the equation" of whether the company would choose to enter the highly lucrative DC retail market. In fact Wal-Mart threatened to cancel plans for construction that it had yet to begin on three of the District stores it had previously planned to open, while possibly pulling out of three other sites where construction has already begun.

A majority of the Council led by Chairman Phil Mendelsohn passed the LRAA anyway, momentarily putting Washington DC in the national headlines for its courage in standing up to one of the world's most notorious corporate bullies. But Wal-Mart's threat clearly resonated with Gray, and on Thursday, Sept. 12, he announced his veto of the LRAA, writing to Mendelsohn that "If I were to sign this bill into law, it would do nothing but hinder our ability to create jobs, drive away retailers, and set us back on the path to prosperity for all."

Presumably the Council might have taken more time to decide on whether to overturn the mayor's veto, but it chose to consider an override decision at its next scheduled meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 17. Frantic LRAA supporters worked over the intervening five days to persuade former "no" voters on the Council to change their positions in order to have a 9-vote majority to override Gray.

But despite a vigorous e-mail and call-in campaign and a Sept. 17 rally outside the Wilson Building, LRAA backers lost the override veto, and Wal-Mart won a significant victory with possibly national implications — thanks in large part to Gray's actions.

At the Sept. 17 rally, activists from several labor, religious and community groups supporting the LRAA proclaimed that even a defeat on the measure would be a larger political victory for living wage legislation in the District.

Because of public support for the LRAA and widespread controversy over Gray's veto, they argued, Gray himself is now promising to propose some kind of living wage legislation, as are some Council members who killed the LRAA out of either fear or love for Wal-Mart. Without the LRAA fight, the activists said, many of these same politicians would have done nothing on living wage legislation at all; now advocates for low-wage retail workers at least have a hope of getting a real bill enacted.

Yet regardless of how the future fight for local living wage legislation unfolds, many of Gray's labor allies from 2010 are undoubtedly going to think of him henceforth as a Benedict Arnold — as a tired, scandal-tinged politician who out of weakness, cynicism or corruption, or possibly all three, has chosen to betray low-wage retail workers in the nation's capital for the enhanced profits of the largest private corporation in the world.

Gray himself has reportedly floated the idea of retiring from politics in the wake of the LRAA controversy, and some Washington observers say his political career is effectively finished.

For *Washington Socialist* readers, however, how much shock and surprise should we feel when Vincent Gray — or for that matter, any Washington mayor — abandons the public trust when threatened by the world's largest retail corporation?

Giving continued high unemployment in the US, given the fact that African American unemployment overall is now running at 13 percent, while the jobless rate for young black people between the ages of 18 and 20 is an estimated 41 percent, how much choice did Mayor Gray really feel that he had when the world's biggest corporation threatened to pull out of several major construction projects in this city, thus eliminating a number of construction industry jobs?

Since Wal-Mart, like Ayn Rand's fictional hero John Galt and his corporate followers in *Atlas Shrugged*, really does have a great deal of power to drive local and even national unemployment higher through investment decisions about where to build stores and where to close them, how much freedom would even a DC mayor with real "integrity" and "leadership" have to defy Wal-Mart's demands?

Decades ago, in books like *Socialism* and *The Twilight of Capitalism*, democratic socialist Michael Harrington, one of the intellectual founders of DSA, concluded that even powerful socialist leaders can face nearly tragic dilemmas when they win high government office in a vigorously capitalist society.

When a politically successful progressive party – like Britain’s Labour Party before the Tony Blair years, for example – wins governmental power in a society where much of industry is nationalized, Harrington noted, the progressive party may well find that it has to run that industry in a “capitalist” manner, and impose austerity on the workers nearly as harsh as that prevailing in the private sector.

But if a strongly progressive or even socialist party takes governmental power in a capitalist country where most production and distribution is still in private hands, Harrington concluded that it’s likely to face an even grimmer choice. Either the socialist governing party will need to placate the biggest capitalist investors in the society, for fear of their sabotaging the economy through an investment strike or production slowdown, or it must run the risk of the capitalists triggering a recession to punish it for standing by its principles.

In either case, whether the socialist government knuckles under to capitalist demands or resists them, it is all too likely to end up betraying its own working-class supporters. Harrington thought this potentially tragic choice was likely to plague even smart, courageous and principled progressives in high office.

Whether Mayor Gray is especially smart, courageous or principled, of course, is a question that angry local activists may answer in the negative. But Harrington’s analysis suggests that even if Gray were a reincarnation of Eugene V. Debs, Dr. King, and Karl Marx combined, it is questionable how likely he’d be win any major or lasting victory in a bare-knuckles contest against the moneyed power of Wal-Mart.

If Harrington’s logic and our own recent experience with DC and national politics both suggest that even a strong and principled leader is likely to lose against Wal-Mart – as I think may be the case – this should not necessarily deter local labor activists from electorally punishing Gray and those DC Council members who voted against the LRAA.

A betrayal of labor is a betrayal of labor, even when the Benedict Arnold who joins the enemy has done so under fire, and any one-time labor ally who turns on his supporters once can probably be counted on to do so again.

But regardless of Mayor Gray’s role in the LRAA’s defeat, regardless of whether he turned tail out of corruption or simply out of weakness, the Sept. 12 veto and the Sept. 17 failure to overturn it should lead everyone in Washington to question whether the continued existence of giant companies like Wal-Mart is compatible with the existence of political democracy – either here, or across the United States.

Given Wal-Mart’s victory in the LRAA fight, it is arguable that supporters of democracy should not simply hope for this giant company to be unionized, possibly through magical means, in future years – although that’s undoubtedly desirable. Nor should Americans who believe in democracy merely hope for Wal-Mart to be regulated better by the government, or for Wal-Mart’s environmental practices to improve – although these things are clearly important, too.

What seems obvious from the political experience in the District and around the US as a whole is that for political democracy to flourish in our society, giant capitalist corporations like Wal-Mart need to be dismantled – to disappear, to die as private storehouses of massed investment capital. At a minimum, companies like Wal-Mart, if they are not broken up into smaller pieces, need to be nationalized and operated as public utilities, for only then will their destructive power over elected governments everywhere be effectively curbed.

This is an unacceptably “radical” conclusion to draw in US politics today, of course. It probably does not enjoy universal support even within DSA, and there is no practical way to act on it in the short term. But it’s difficult to draw any other logical conclusion in the District of Columbia, where one ethically compromised mayor seems to succeed another, without local voters ever seeing political relief, and where even a law supported by a majority of District residents and passed by a majority on the Council can be overturned easily by the lobbying power and economic threats of the biggest corporation in the world.

So long as corporations like Wal-Mart can effectively veto the will of a majority of elected officials in this city, formal political democracy in the District is nearly worthless, and the city’s residents need to deal with that fact. How we eventually choose to respond is unclear, but when Wal-Mart shows that it can make a mockery of local elected government, we owe this great company the courtesy of learning the lesson it’s teaching.

[GOOD READS for October: selected articles and links in a radical vein](#)

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Via Andy Feeney, from Carl Davidson’s CCDS blog, a link to a complete movie:” ‘Debtocracy’ seeks the causes of the debt crisis across Europe and proposes solutions, hidden by the government and the dominant media. Unlike other entries to the nascent credit-crunch movie genre, the film-makers do not go looking for guilty men and women. No ‘Inside Job,’ this. Instead what you get is a polemic against the European system; an explanation of how Greece was always doomed to struggle against the likes of Germany. [Debtocracy](#) makes a compelling case that the entire euro system was rotten from the start, with bankers in Frankfurt and Paris left with piles of surplus cash, and southern Europeans getting by on cheap loans.”

From Portside via Kurt Stand: Merkel won in Germany, but will she have to coalition with the rival SPD to govern? <http://portside.org/2013-09-23/germany-votes-wins-and-losses>

Some of our local members and readers are nearly as old as *Dissent*’s Michael Walzer. So his account of a life dealing philosophically and (by his own account) incompletely with feminism as it has evolved throughout his own lifetime has value, perhaps, for both our grizzled deacons

and those with more immediate and contemporary experiences of the inequalities. “The oppression of women is different from all other oppressions,” says Walzer. Yet he believes it must be analyzed “spherically” despite his flat statement...

<http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/feminism-and-me>

Sam Pizzigati’s excellent blog “Too Much,” locally grown (at IPS) and full of both hope (teen essay contestants finger inequality as *the* national malady) and disgust (“Petulant Plutocrat of the Week”).

A flurry of articles about the Sept. 9-13 AFL-CIO convention and the proposals to more closely join up with non-labor organizations:

An *In These Times* piece by the venerable David Moberg on the AFL-CIO convention and prospective makeover

http://inthesetimes.com/article/15600/a_makeover_for_the_labor_movement/

DSAer Mike Hirsch’s day by day blog from the convention, plus a Sept. 27 wrapup piece:

<http://www.independent.org/authors/michael-hirsch>

Mike Hall from DSA’s Talking Union...

<http://talkingunion.wordpress.com/2013/09/13/delegates-commit-afl-cio-to-grow-labor-movement-through-diversity-inclusion/>

From Kurt Stand... a *Portside* take on the convention doings by Steve Early:

<http://portside.org/2013-09-16/house-labor-needs-repairs-not-just-new-roommates>

[Sequester Plus Shutdown and Default Threats – A Triple Threat for Public Service](#)

Monday, September 30th, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> October 2013**

By Bill Mosley

As the *Washington Socialist* went to press, the federal government was threatened with a partial shutdown on October 1, the end of the federal fiscal year – a threat that has become all too routine in partisan-gridlocked Washington of late.

Combine this with the ongoing, across-the-board federal budget cuts known as the “sequester” and the possible default on the federal debt by mid-October unless Congress acts to raise the debt

ceiling, and the public perception of government has never been lower. And that is exactly how conservatives want it.

The standoff is less between differing Republican vs. Democratic philosophies of governance than between those who want government to work vs. those – nearly all right-wing Republicans – who want it to fail. After the GOP was unsuccessful in its attempt to unseat Obama and recapture the Senate in 2012, the Tea Party Republicans who have come to dictate the party's direction in the House of Representatives have determined to use their leverage to tear the government apart, brick by brick if necessary. They perceive the GOP's gain of a handful of House seats in the last election as a mandate – notwithstanding that voters nationwide actually supported Democrats for the House by a margin of 1.4 million votes; the Republicans' small gain was strictly due to districts that were gerrymandered by GOP-controlled state legislatures.

Simply put, many Republicans don't want government to work, or at least work for most people. The more "responsible" Republicans – realists like House Speaker John Boehner or New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie – do want government to work, if mostly for the wealthy and large corporations, and they have no problem with government when it comes to military spending and the rest of the national-security apparatus. They also have been willing to cut deals with Democrats, understanding that politics is, as the saying goes, the art of the possible.

On the other hand, the far-right fringe is determined to undercut the very notion of government in order to achieve its long-term objective of savaging social spending and cutting taxes for the wealthy. Its initial target is Obamacare, and has made defunding of the Obama administration's signature domestic achievement the price for both keeping the government running after October 1 and extending the debt ceiling. As flawed as Obamacare is, its passage served as a statement that the government should be responsible for ensuring that Americans have access to health care (although the program fell well short of true universal coverage).

Likewise, the sequester gutted a wide range of government programs, from Head Start to food programs for the poor, from unemployment benefits to mass transit. The strategy is clear: The far right wants to destroy any idea that government can or will help Americans of modest means. They hope this will cause millions of likely Democratic voters to become alienated from politics and stop voting. Better still, the right might convince more working-class white voters – the "Reagan Democrats" of the 1980s – to support the conservatives' homophobic, sexist, racist and religiously intolerant social agenda. As Thomas Frank pointed out in *What's the Matter with Kansas*, once these voters become convinced the government won't or can't help them with their economic troubles, they base their allegiance on social issues – which favors the Republicans.

However, a shutdown can be risky politics. The last time Republicans engineered a politically motivated government shutdown was 1995, under then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich. The scheme failed to help Republicans at the polls, with Bill Clinton convincingly winning re-election the following year and the congressional elections resulting in no net gains for either side.

What can Socialists do about this? Except as a part of broader coalitions, we're not going to affect what Congress does over the next month. We can and should continue to educate the

public about the need for a vigorous public sector and the potential for the government – combined with an engaged, expanded electorate – to not only provide a safety net for the least fortunate, but to be an active instrument in reducing inequality, generating opportunity, and fulfilling the Declaration of Independence’s promise of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

[Short takes: Navy Yard, Fossil Fuel Wars, Snowden Affair](#)

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A NOTE ON THE NAVY YARD SHOOTINGS

Less than a year after Newtown, yet another mass killing fills the headlines – this one in our own backyard. But unlike Newtown, there is hardly even a pretense among elected officials that they intend to do anything to prevent future massacres. The gun lobby is too powerful – not only the National Rifle Association but also the gun manufacturers who drown with cash any meaningful effort at reform.

Already, opponents of gun control arguing that controlling assault weapons – the lethal force used at Newtown – would have been useless in this case, since the Navy Yard killer’s principal weapon was a shotgun. But this bolsters the argument that banning specific weapons is only part of the solution to gun violence. As [DSA’s Bill Boteler](#) wrote following the Newtown shootings, greater access to mental health care is an important part of preventing future tragedies. Closing the gun-show loophole is another part of the puzzle. But needed most of all is a turning away from the coarser side of American culture that celebrates violence and fetishizes individualism. As socialists, one of our goals should be creating a culture of community, one that brings people together in mutual support rather than driving them apart into lonely and possibly destructive isolation.

— **Bill Mosley**

A REVIEW OF A REVIEW: FOSSIL FUEL WARS

For a green/socialist overview of recent climate change news and climate change activism, DSA members may be interested in “The Fossil Fuels War,” a survey of developments in the fossil fuel arena by socialist environmentalist John Bellamy Foster. In the September 2013 *Monthly Review*, Foster notes that mainstream energy analysts as recently as 2010 were worrying about “peak oil” and a looming crisis of declining production in the fossil fuel industry – a

development that seemed to threaten capitalism with future energy shortages, but one that also promised to accelerate a global transition from fossil fuel use to more sustainable energy sources.

In a remarkably short time, though, fears about “peak oil” have been eclipsed by the rapid progress of technological developments facilitating the exploitation of “unconventional” fossil fuel sources, which together promise to extend the carbon fuel era long beyond the era of expected shortages once predicted by peak oil theorists. The new unconventional fossil fuels include Canadian tar sands from Alberta, liquid petroleum and natural gas reserves located deep beneath the ocean floor – the search for which occasioned the Deepwater Horizon oil well disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 – and deep reserves of shale gas and “tight oil” that are currently being extracted through fracking in many parts of the United States.

The discovery of unconventional fossil fuels and capitalism’s development of new technologies for tapping them are “unexpectedly catapulting the United States once again into the position of a major fossil fuel power,” Foster notes in “The Fossil Fuels War.” Unfortunately, the same trends have “catastrophic” implications for the climate.

Climate change researchers and activists including Bill McKibben of the organization 350.org warn that the vast majority of unconventional fossil fuels need to remain in the ground to prevent continuing climate change that could soon prove “irreversible.” Given continued CO₂ emissions and the changes in temperature expected from them, the activists warn, the continued melting of summer sea ice in the Arctic, by increasing the amount of solar energy absorbed by the oceans, and the continued melting of permafrost regions in Canada and Siberia, by releasing large volumes of the potent greenhouse gas methane into the air, may together push the climate past a “tipping point” where future human efforts to reverse or slow the process will become futile.

McKibben and many of the world’s leading climate scientists contend that the long-term atmospheric concentration of CO₂ needs to be less than 350 parts per million (ppm) for the tipping point to be avoided. At present, though, the average CO₂ concentration is roughly 392 ppm. And in the view of McKibben and many other observers, the continuing development of unconventional petroleum, natural gas and shale oil reserves that capitalist governments and corporations are hoping to profit from would make it impossible to bring CO₂ concentrations down rapidly enough to prevent a “runaway” greenhouse effect with dire consequences for civilization.

The fight to block the proposed Keystone XL Pipeline to make dirty, CO₂-intensive tar sands oil from Alberta more available to world markets is one key activist campaign that Foster mentions in his *Monthly Review* survey of this issue. Others that 350.org is promoting include organizing to push local governments, large universities and even banks to divest themselves from stock ownership in fossil fuel producers. But as a somewhat unconventional socialist, Foster argues that such “supply side” activist campaigns – although important – will not be enough.

Instead, he cites respected experts with the British Royal Academy and the Tyndall Institute for Climate Research to the effect that “demand side” efforts at energy conservation also are required – measures that probably are incompatible with the continued existence of growth-based

capitalism. Foster also expresses a long-term concern of many leftwing climate activists about the need for western societies to address the climate issue through a fundamental change in social relations — not merely through rapid development of solar and wind power technologies at the urging of a technocratic green elite.

For more details, see Foster's [somewhat lengthy review](#) in the September 2013 *Monthly Review*.

— **Andy Feeney**

SNOWDEN & US

When Edward Snowden's revelations were published, many of us thought the kinds of government surveillance they uncovered had been known a decade ago (as described in *Wired*). At that time we thought that al-Qaeda was a real danger and if a lack of privacy helped keep us safe so much the better. Besides, what was there to hide?

However, the political environment changed with the ending of the war in Iraq, the killing of Osama bin Laden, the Arab spring, and the winding down of the war in Afghanistan. Yet the U.S. government programs did not change, nor did Congress see that the new situation required a change in the public social contract. The government prosecuted its efforts with the same vigor it prosecuted World War II and the Cold War. Although this vigor is celebrated with the likes of Seal Team 6, it seemed dubious with whistleblowers like PFC Manning and Edward Snowden. Promising not to execute Snowden if he returns to the U.S. does not suggest an understanding of his needed contribution.

Snowden's and Congress's new disclosures have changed the game. The National Security Agency has most likely spent tens of billions of dollars creating a world-class data warehouse to find only 54 instances where this data helped detect terrorist attempts. Of these attempts, only 13 were in the U.S. and only one was a "critical" assist. To spend so many billions to block one terrorist attempt is a waste, or at least blindness to alternative strategies. So what is going on? This question has been what Edward Snowden is all about. His actions have initiated a policy review that is very necessary and one the executive and legislative branches have failed to provide to the American people. To treat such a person as a spy only points out that the system is badly broken and lacks imagination to see alternative techniques and an understanding of our constitutional rights.

Also unnerving is that the FISA cyber court reviewing the NSA's information requests was appointed by our Chief Justice, whose major contribution has been changing our political contract from one person, one vote to one where corporations are voters and the rich and corporations run the show. The US's political and economic system is badly corrupted by undue monetary influence. Do we want to grant this corruption access to all our personal information?

Edward Snowden has started a badly needed policy review which Congress is joining and releasing new information. Let us make sure the investigation of domestic spying is complete so we understand our options.

— Daniel Adkins

[Virginia State Elections for 2013: Extremely Modest Hopes](#)

Monday, September 30th, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> October 2013**

By Daniel Adkins

Virginia conservatives have bolstered their influence by having state elections in years where there are no federal elections. The 2011 off-year election vote was only 36 percent of the 2012 national election turnout. Conservatives are more likely to vote in those years than others, possibly because urban and suburban areas have more mobility and voter turnover.

Also, Republican gerrymandering has made Virginia elections more challenging to Democrats. Republicans benefit by Democrats' being concentrated in cities, but gerrymandering in the House of Delegates aided Republicans, helping them achieve a 65-32 supermajority.

In the House of Delegates, Republicans do not even tell the Democrats where their committee meetings are. One northern Virginian delegate told another, more southern delegate that his school district had students speaking a hundred different languages. The more southern delegate responded, "How could that be, there are only 20 languages in the world." The diversity that northern Virginians take for granted does not impact many parts of the state.

The Virginia Senate is currently divided 20 – 20, but the lieutenant governor breaks the tie, giving the Republicans the edge. The Tea Party takeover of the Virginia Republican Party was aided by having a convention instead of a primary. The Democrats' long-term hope would be for the exurbs to go Democratic by 2020 when the next redistricting occurs. Turning Virginia blue is a slow process.

Recently, Republicans have passed laws dismantling many abortion clinics and achieving other Tea Party goals. However, Bob McDonnell, the current Republican governor, did sign a transportation bill important to Northern Virginia.

The Republican candidate for governor is current Lt. Gov. Ken Cuccinelli, who is famous for opposing Obamacare, investigating Virginia university climate scientists, limiting women's health options, proposing to limit divorce options, and being a Tea Party favorite.

The democratic candidate for governor is Terry McAuliffe, who has been a big fundraiser for the Democratic Party as well the party's national chair. A claim to fame is wrestling an alligator to secure a \$15,000 campaign contribution. He is also a businessman who tried to locate an electric car factory in Mississippi, I guess for the educational excellence.

The Democrats' candidate for lieutenant governor is Ralph Northam, who is the only MD in the Virginia Senate. He is famous for pointing out the Republican's bill to monitor women's reproductive health by trans-vaginal probes. Unfavorable publicity cut short parts of the bill. Dr. Northam is opposed by one of the most extreme of right-wing politicians, E.W. Jackson, who has said, "Liberalism and their ideas [abortion] have done more to kill black folks who they claim so much to love, than the Ku Klux Klan and lynching and slavery and Jim Crow ever did, now that's a fact."

The Democratic candidate for attorney general, Mark Herring, is running on supporting Virginia tech industries, the expansion of Medicaid, civil rights, safety, and the right of women to make their own health decisions. Mark Obenshain, who favors ideology over the common interest, opposes Herring. Obenshain has proposed granting legal rights at conception, mandating photo identification to cast a ballot, and gerrymandering Senate district boundaries in an off year.

Voting for Virginia Democrats will not aid democracy by getting the money out of our electoral politics or making our economy safe from banks too big to fail. However, it will help make Virginia safer for diversity and everyone's health. A Democratic Virginia could lessen crushing poverty and give efforts mitigating climate change a voice. Potentially, a Democratic Virginia could give the 99 percent a better base to fight back.