

*The Washington Socialist*  
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Editor: Woody Woodruff

## **Chapter Launches New Socialist Book Group**

**By Andy Feeney**

Marx in his earlier works comments somewhere that bees and humans both build themselves houses; however, the bees do so by instinct; humans, at our best, first make conscious plans. With this in mind, and in hopes of becoming more human and proactive in our politics, the Metro DC chapter has launched a Book Group to study different theories of democratic socialism and how to achieve it.

At least initially, the Book Group will supplant our Socialist Salons, and like the Salons it will normally take place starting at 6:30 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month.

The group's first meeting in July featured Ben Kreider, Coleson Breen and Andy Feeney leading a quick overview of the life and thought of Michael Harrington, DSA's intellectual founder.

The second meeting at Soho Cafe in August explored Harrington's classic book "The Other America," a work that helped inspire the liberal "War on Poverty" in the 1960s.

In the future, we hope also to examine the writings of several socialist feminists; Harrington's later works on democratic socialism; David Schweickart's "After Capitalism," on the prospects for market socialism in the United States; the works of Dr. Cornel West on race and socialism; Dr. John Bellamy Foster's ideas on socialist environmentalism; and other writings that members suggest.

Please join us. Seriously-disposed nonmembers are also welcomed.

## **[DSA Sets NoVa Electoral Work](#)**

**By Bill Mosley**

Metro-DC Democratic Socialists of America will join the Northern Virginia Central Labor Council this fall for campaign work on behalf of Democratic candidates.

DSA, while recognizing the shortcomings of the Democratic Party nationally (see DSA's statement on the 2012 elections [here](#)), also is aware of the dangers of a full takeover of the federal government by the Republican Party, especially given how thoroughly the Republicans have become dominated by the party's far right wing. Many DSA locals around the country, including the Metro-DC local, will work in progressive electoral coalitions opposed to right-wing economic and social policies – to “rebuild the left by defeating the right,” as the statement puts it.

While the District of Columbia and Maryland are safe Democratic enclaves, Virginia is one of the nation's major battlegrounds. In 2008 President Obama became the first Democrat presidential candidate to carry the state since Lyndon Johnson in 1964. It's very much in play again this year, with Mitt Romney hoping to put it back in the presidential column for the GOP, and former Democratic Governor Tim Kaine in a tight Senate race with George Allen, the former Republican senator defeated for re-election in 2006.

We need your help to make our 2012 electoral work a success! Contact us to let us know if you can join us for campaigning this fall in Northern Virginia. Specific locations and dates are to be determined. We can provide volunteers with transportation either from DC or a Metro station in Virginia. E-mail [billmosley@comcast.net](mailto:billmosley@comcast.net), call [202-360-5414](tel:202-360-5414) or check our [meetup page](#) to get involved!

## **Faux Predicts Further Erosion of Workers' Rights**

***Book outlines “Servant Economy” as cascade of corporate money deforms politics***  
**By Woody Woodruff**

“There's another crash out there, and we will be very ill-prepared,” economist Jeff Faux told his audience at the Economic Policy Institute Aug. 15. His recent book, *The Servant Economy*,\* traces themes in the U.S.'s growing economic and social inequality since the Fordist bargain – increased worker productivity would be rewarded with increases in wages and benefits – began to unravel in the mid-'70s.

The nation's economic weakness remains unresolved, and this development, Faux said, is “no accident,” nor will a future crash be one. Two factors masked the decline since the 70s – the increasing number of persons in the workforce per household, and the persistent credit bubble. Those palliatives are now exhausted. “By the mid-2020s we can expect a 20 percent drop in the real wages of the average American who has to work for a low or moderate standard of living,” Faux writes.

Even more critically, the gradual erosion of government's participation (at all levels) in the economy (other than as a customer for galloping military product sales) has paralleled the decline in workers' power to enforce that Fordist bargain and left the chips in the hands of the corporate elite and the governing class for whom they have become the essential supplier of funds.

The New Deal arrangement that saw important government participation in the economy lapsed "with the age of Reagan, in which we still live," Faux writes in *The Servant Economy*. "By demonizing, downsizing, and demoralizing civilian government—calling it the problem and not the solution—Reagan and his successors destroyed not only its capacity to plan but also its capacity to react to signals of trouble ahead." That era saw, Faux concludes, "the last serious debate within the governing class on how the nation should respond" to loss of jobs to globalization. "The debate centered on the question of whether the country needed a specific industrial policy to save its manufacturing base." The neoclassical economic theory privileging private capital's prerogatives won out – in the Carter administration! — despite a remarkable consensus on the part of heads of major corporations that national planning was required. Faux doesn't include a critical event – the rapid defunding of the congressional Office of Technology Assessment, seen by the right as the locus of industrial policy. It was finally abolished by the Gingrich storm troopers during the Clinton administration.

Without a national planning consensus, development became increasingly dependent on the whims of private capital and clever marketing of social non-goods, and labor became an appendage, desperate to restore jobs even in an environment where all the power rested with management. "The age of Reagan greatly strengthened the class solidarity of our financial elites and therefore their ability to offload the costs of their folly [impervious to evidence] onto the rest of us."

This has sharpened public distrust in these major institutions. "The catch-22 for the Left: 1. Reversing middle-class decline requires that the government intervene in the economy; 2. The influence of money in politics guarantees that the government will intervene on behalf of corporate interests, not the middle class; and 3. Therefore the middle class will distrust the government and will not support its intervention in the economy."

Faux tells the AFL-CIO's interviewer, Tula Connell, "Media talking heads complain that Washington is 'dysfunctional.' But it is functioning very well—in the interests of those at the top of the economic pyramid," including the governing class of both major parties.

This disparity, clearly, persists in the energy sector, where state and federal governments can't generate funds for public goods, and status-quo development is embodied in the privileged status of Big Oil. The split between environmental and labor progressives over projects like the Keystone pipeline, by any measure a planet-wrecking activity, demonstrates the dependence of what jobs are left on the movement of private capital.

Faux's solution is a progressive coalition around a constitutional amendment to overturn the devastating Citizens United decision that opened the (already breached) floodgates of corporate cash into the electoral arena. If the running sore of corporate cash stands, Faux argues, the

“governing class” will become more and more the chattel of the corporate agenda and “return us to a pre-New Deal set of social relations” ... a “Servant Economy” in which the rights of workers are minimized, “the humiliations of daily working life under raw capitalism will return.” and the labor force is increasingly forced into personal services rather than the making of products.

Faux suggests that a wide swath of voters beyond the left is convinced that there is too much money in the political system, and that a winning coalition could be built around a constitutional amendment to reverse Citizens United. “If the last four years have taught us anything, it is the power of money to intimidate the governing class,” Faux told the EPI audience.

\*(Jeff Faux: *The Servant Economy: Where America's Elite is Sending the Middle Class* John Wiley & Sons 2012.)

## **Invitation to the New Activist Committee**

**By Coleson Breen**

As the local has continued to grow, it has become apparent that there is a great desire to make ourselves heard in local and national politics through non-violent direct action. The DSA has a long history of protesting injustices and, simply put, there are serious threats to the 99% which demand action. Thus we have formed the Activist Committee to plan and organize protest activities. We are in the early stages of planning an action to protest the poor service of PEPCO, the utility that sells electricity to DC and suburban Maryland, and has one of the worst reliability records in the nation. This campaign would also include support for a plan, in its early stages, to create a public utility in Maryland. We need your help to make sure PEPCO is held accountable for its negligence, and that the plan for a public utility gets off the ground.

## **Statehood Effort Resets, Reaches Out**

***Stand Up! gets significant funding***  
**By Bill Mosley**

The DC Statehood movement has come a long way since the birth of the Stand Up! for Democracy in DC Coalition in 1997 (Free DC). The local chapter of Democratic Socialists of America was active in the founding of Stand Up!, established as a non-partisan organization working for full democratic rights and statehood for the District.

For most of its highly active 15 years, Stand Up! has been an all-volunteer organization, funded through member contributions and other modest fundraising efforts. Last year, however, Stand Up! successfully applied for two major grants to launch a campaign to educate the DC public about the need for statehood and to stimulate discussion about strategies for achieving it. Supported by a \$50,000 grant from the DC government and \$1,500 from the Diverse City Fund, Stand Up! created the “Free DC Freedom School,” a unique traveling school bringing the statehood discussion to neighborhoods, churches and organizations around the District. The project was intended to fill a gap in the campaign in the statehood effort: While considerable effort and public funds have been targeted to lobbying Congress and seeking support for statehood around the country, not enough effort had been made to build a strong pro-statehood movement within the District. The funding enabled Stand Up! to provide compensation to a full-time executive director to head up the project.

During the first half of this year, Stand Up! members conducted more than 20 teach-ins in all part of the District, engaging citizens in lively discussions of what statehood would mean for the District. The project culminated in a District-wide “Statehood Summit” in June held at Howard University, where participants heard presentations from DC Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton and other elected officials and activists. The summit produced a number of concrete proposals for advancing the statehood effort, including expanding the education and outreach efforts, engaging in direct action, filing lawsuits and pursuing a legislative strategy.

Stand Up!, building on the success of the traveling Freedom School, secured a second grant this year from the DC government to expand its outreach and education work. This \$25,000 grant will be used to send 50,000 postcards to constituents in targeted congressional districts. The recipients will be asked to send a separate postcard to their member of Congress (via Stand Up!), asking him or her to support DC statehood. At the end of the campaign Stand Up! activists will hand-deliver the postcards to the targeted members, encouraging them to support legislation making DC the 51<sup>st</sup> state.

Statehood would provide the District not only with voting representation in both houses of Congress, but also freedom from congressional interference in DC legislation and budgets. For example, Congress recently banned the District from funding abortions for poor women and has proposed further abortion restrictions, and has threatened to reinstate a ban on District-funded needle exchange programs to prevent HIV and AIDS. No state and no other locality is subject to this kind of federal micromanaging of its affairs.

For more information on the DC statehood struggle, visit [www.freedc.org](http://www.freedc.org).

## What Forces Divide Environmentalists, Organized labor?

**By Woody Woodruff**

Socialists in particular have a lot at stake in Blue-Green alliances – strategic coalitions formed between labor and environmentalists. Both are movements that socialists endorse and participate in. Farsighted labor leaders and workers understand that some big shifts in the working economy are on the way, and they had better have a strategy for it. Environmentalists are pitted against corporate giants whose interests in business-as-usual make them planet wreckers and, by virtue of their stake in the status quo, deniers of science.

Skeptics might suggest that these coalitions are doomed because of a culture clash. To use some long-running stereotypes: College-educated, granola-crunching tree-huggers will never appeal to blue-collar union workers, they argue.

The blue-green alliances are unstable and constantly imperiled, all right – but not because of a bogus culture war. The problem has been the evisceration of national economic planning – the erosion of even the idea of democratic, public planning – in the rise of the right and of corporate dominance since the Reagan era. Labor is right to fear the effects of violent, unplanned shifts in industries, especially energy. The first casualty of poorly designed transitions is the workers, facing long periods of joblessness without retraining or support as the social safety net becomes threadbare.

This hasn't been a sudden shift. Jeff Faux and other left economists (*see related story, this issue*) trace the decline of manufacturing and redevelopment oriented toward public goods to the relentless trashing of government itself since the Reagan presidency, when, for instance, the first radical defunding of entities like the congressional Office of Technology Assessment took place with scornful comments about “picking winners” instead of letting the market do it. “With Reagan's landslide [1984 re-]election, the United States was out of the business of thinking about the future,” Faux writes.

The material product of green economic planning was environmental regulation, and corporations learned quickly how to battle it – with projections of job loss, targeting the fears of workers. “Job blackmail studies” like Ford's on the effects of fuel efficiency regulations “were quickly picked up by the news media and echoed by studies produced by corporate dominated think tanks,” one study summarized.

Inequality ensued: The loss of political power by labor as manufacturing declined and corporate power grew, coupled with the decline of government participation in the economy as resources dwindled, put the movement of capital almost entirely on the private side of the terrain. The Economic Policy Institute's George Sterzinger says "Climate stabilization and energy security are public values that will not be delivered by private free markets acting alone."

The disputed Keystone pipeline from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, for instance, shows the dominance of private capital in these seemingly public projects. Two governments and at least one large international union, the Labors International (LIUNA) became the dog wagged by the tail of Big Oil's exploitation of the tar sands deposits of Alberta. No government, including the Canadian conservative regime of PM Stephen Harper, appears able or willing to undertake large wind or solar development – because corporate money would not underwrite it. But Big Oil is unmoved by "public values."

In Maryland, a labor-green alliance has fought for more than three legislative sessions to put the state's puny resources behind an offshore wind project. Steelworkers have come around to the notion that erecting big turbines in the shallow waters off Ocean City would mean many jobs – more, if some of the materials could be fabricated in the state.

But the struggle has been complicated by Maryland's inability to finance the project itself. Private capital must be tempted by sweet deals from the legislature and – of critical importance – a renewal of the federal tax advantages for wind power development. The current cheapness of natural gas has put that goal nearly out of reach. Maryland, thanks to former GOP Governor Bob Ehrlich, blew all of its bond capacity for years to come on the Inter-County Connector, the controversial 18-mile toll road from Montgomery to Prince George's suburbs, which is rapidly revealing itself as a white elephant. (It must be admitted that Ehrlich's successor, Democratic Gov. Martin O'Malley, dodged his chance to scale back the now-completed project).

Even as the offshore-wind forces gear up for another tilt at the Maryland legislature in January, the labor-green alliance has been stretched to the breaking point by a real divide. Frederick County is preparing to build a trash-to-energy incinerator costing over a half-billion dollars. To have enough fuel to run at capacity, other counties must send their trash along as well. Prince George's – whose last giant landfill is four or five years from being filled up – along with Washington and Howard counties have shown interest in contributing their trash.

The project, which Frederick County workforce officials claim would create 1,600 jobs, has been irresistible to the state's labor community. One state labor official said there were assurances that most of the jobs would be union.

Environmentalists oppose the incinerator because they are campaigning to get their counties to promote a zero-waste mentality that will reduce the waste stream and promote re-use and recycling by consumers, including composting and utilization of food waste. To them, the incinerator is an incentive to produce more trash (and revenue), not less.

The state and its counties are at the mercy of private capital in both instances. Wheelabrator Technologies, which will build the incinerator by 2015 and subcontract the construction, appears

to be footing nearly half the cost, with Frederick County in for about \$361 million. That is way more than the \$260 million in bonded indebtedness the Fitch bond rating company estimated Frederick would issue all the way through 2018 – as it rated Frederick “AAA.” As usual, the public faces the shortfall while the private capital can waltz away.

The inability to democratically, publicly plan for the future that comes with the disproportionate amount of capital in private hands puts both environmentalists and labor behind the 8-ball. Campaigns to right the inequalities that have crippled public policy since the Reagan era are almost certainly prerequisites to permanently securing the green-labor bond.