

The Washington Socialist
Articles from September 2013 Issue
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[Welcome to the Labor Day 2013 edition of the Washington Socialist](#)

Monday, September 2nd, 2013



Welcome to the *Washington Socialist's* Labor Day issue, marking a full year of monthly online publication for an old nameplate that ran atop anywhere from three to six tabloid editions per year back in the 1980s.

The newsprint voice of what was then called the DC/MD/NOVA DSA local appeared irregularly in that era, to be sure, but almost always managed to mount a Labor Day issue of some sort. We, now Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America, continue that tradition. ***Remember you can get an email of this intro message every month when the newsletter is published, with annotated table of contents and links to individual articles. Email woodlanham@gmail.com to be included on the notification list.***

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On the left, we have an ambivalent relationship to Labor Day, the holiday that by many accounts was designed specifically to distract US workers and their potential allies from the insurrectional potential of May Day, the international workers' day of observation and re-commitment.

It's a mixed blessing for us all that both holidays, today, remain days of resistance and struggle. The still-distracted, fearful and resentful collection of class fractions that make up (to use an asynchronous phrase) the 99 percent don't really have to choose among these two days, but most acknowledge Labor Day if only to note the end of school vacations with a final three days of fitful family celebration – half Fourth of July, half Ash Wednesday.

The US labor movement, which minted the first federal Labor Day holiday in 1894 in a perhaps-perverse attempt to include working people in the sphere of American Exceptionalism, finds itself more embattled than ever, with declining membership and influence. Having willfully been isolated by its leaders from the left through most of the post-WW2 era, labor fumbles to find a vocabulary and practice of successful resistance and rebirth. Our discussions here all focus on the relevance of a socialist perspective to regaining labor's voice, scope and engagement.

And don't forget DC Metro DSA has a regular membership meeting Saturday, Sept. 14, 1:30 p.m., at the main MLK Library, 9th and G NW, and the following Thursday the Socialist Salon – “How do we think about Socialism?” – Sept. 19 at Hunan Dynasty on Capitol Hill, 215 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, 6:30 p.m. Check our [Meetup site](#) for updates.

We begin our issue with Bill Mosley's rhetorical question: Does organized labor have any stake in the success or failure of the DC Statehood Movement? Digging into the history of the movement and its relation to labor in a progressive civic culture, he finds lots of reasons to say “yes.” [Read complete article](#)

Next, follow Kurt Stand's account of current actions, within and without labor organizations, to **cross national boundaries** and re-forge alliances of workers based on the facts of struggle. One of the acknowledged tragedies in the history of the left has been the tendency, since World War I, of workers to coalesce within their national boundaries in times of conflict rather than to assert and practice international solidarity. What are the practices that are pushing back against this trend, and who is succeeding? [Read complete article](#)

Andy Feeny examines the **prospects for the Washington Post Co.** as a local institution and an information source as it is purchased a wealthy supergeek with a reputation as a “disruptor.” The peculiar path of the concept of “creative disruption” lies behind many of these descriptors for Jeff Bezos, the Amazon.com super-entrepreneur. How does this convoluted intellectual history bear on what might happen to the WaPo? Is Bezos Schumpeter's rough beast slouching through his risk-riddled economic cosmos? Or just your average dot-com billionaire? [Read complete article](#)

Woody Woodruff relates the short half-life of last year's bills creating **paid sick leave and raising the minimum wage** in the Maryland General Assembly. Sponsors vow to learn from experience and re-launch the efforts in the 2014 session, and signs of growing material support in the state as well as parallel efforts – some successful – in other cities and states give hope that this year might have a different outcome. [Read complete article.](#)

In our short takes, Bill Mosley notes that DC's mayor soon must affirm or veto the Large Retailer act that will force Wal-mart to pay a living wage to its employees, and that he needs to hear from his constituents about it as he threads a needle between being elected with strong labor support and his dependency on the favors of the business community. Dan Adkins has his own take on Bezos and the *Post*. Andy Feeny reviews a book on well-paid scientists who fudged the facts on health and the environment to the benefit of their corporate benefactors. [Read complete article](#)

Short takes 2: DC-DSA members who participated in the Aug. 24 commemorative event for the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom deliver some impressions of the day. [Read complete article](#)

Finally! Members and readers of the *Washington Socialist* are remembering to contribute to “**Good Reads,**” our compendium of other voices of interest to folk on the left. We have an excellent selection this month, including a roundup of the many articles that helped make a pretty

strong case – even in the mainstream media – that the original 1963 March’s radicalism has been carefully sanitized by history and its interested powers, and needs to be reviewed and revealed in its fullness. [Read complete article](#)

[Annals of Capitalism Dept.: The “Ultimate Disruptor” at the Washington Post](#)

Monday, September 2nd, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2013**

By Andy Feeney

Superman to the rescue? Jeff Bezos & the economics of change

After years of falling ad revenues circulation and shrinking circulation, the *Washington Post* may have found an economic savior. In August, CEO Donald Graham announced that after owning the *Post* for some four generations, his family is selling the paper for \$250 million in cash. The purchaser is billionaire Jeffrey Bezos, famed in business circles for having turned Amazon.com into a global powerhouse, then successfully diversifying his company beyond the publishing field into many other Web-related markets.

Many media observers hope Bezos, with a fortune estimated at \$25 billion, has such deep pockets that he can afford – if he wants – to keep the *Post* in existence for decades, even if it never becomes profitable again. They also say that Bezos also has shown himself a remarkably patient investor, at least for an American, displaying an almost Japanese-style willingness to endure years of low profits or none at all to fashion Amazon into a highly lucrative electronic empire.

This makes him fascinating to journalists who have long lamented the tendency of many other US business executives to pursue exactly the opposite path – to sacrifice the future welfare of great business enterprises to the short-term goal of keeping big institutional investors happy.

As noted by admiring reporters, Bezos since the mid-1990s has become one of the world’s richest people by initially frustrating his own investors, “refusing to realize Amazon’s profit potential” for the first seven years of the company’s existence, to quote Adam Lashinsky in an admiring article in *FORTUNE* magazine.

Rather than deliver dividends to investors, Lashinsky notes, Amazon under Bezo’s leadership invested aggressively in expansion and the domination of its chosen field, then moved beyond publishing to invade other kinds of online retailing. Beginning in 2002, profits then started to pour in. Partly as a result, Amazon’s stock price has risen by 10 times over just the last 6 years, and Bezos has become a multi-billionaire.

To Bezos admirers, this speaks well for the patience and sheer capitalist skill and determination that he could bring to the *Post* as its new owner.

Liberal and/or Libertarian Politics: Bezos as Champion For Gay Marriage – and Maybe For Literacy, Too

Bezos in leading Amazon.com also has reportedly proven himself to be a reader and a lover of the printed word, which some observers think bodes well for the future of journalism at the *Post*. His politics are liberal enough [or possibly just libertarian; one of his charities is reported to be *Reason* magazine] for him and his wife to have donated more than \$2 million to a recent gay marriage referendum in Washington state.

Largely because of his politics, his reading habits and his fortune, then, Bezos is being hailed by some as a potential champion for the kind of serious journalism that has led the *Post*, especially since the Watergate affair, to be a major force in local, national and global affairs.

In capitalist terms, in short, it's arguable that Bezos has the potential to become a newspaper publishing hero – a multi-billionaire who will fight for sane and intelligent journalism, just as Rupert Murdoch has vigorously fought for the opposite kind.

But why are the pundits so impressed by Bezos and his purchase of the Graham family flagship? Is it because of his politics and his money alone?

The Way of the “Great Disruptor”

No one who is looking forward to Bezos's stewardship of the *Post* is calling him a sentimentalist, an enormously rich entrepreneur who just happens to revere the legacy of Woodward & Bernstein's coverage of Gordon Liddy and other Watergate ne'er-do-wells.

Instead, *FORTUNE*, in naming Bezos businessman of the year in 2012, called him “the ultimate disruptor,” one who has “upended the book industry and displaced electronics merchants.” Rather similarly, a business analyst named Susan Bidel at Forrester Research, quoted recently by the Associated Press in a story about Bezos, calls him a “premier disruptor.”

Noted author and *New Yorker* staff writer Ken Auletta, speaking in August on the *Diane Rehm Show*, also has echoed *FORTUNE* and the AP by tagging Bezos as “the great disruptor in technology.” And in the online publication *Insurance & Technology*, reporter Katherine Burger recently hailed the “disruption Jeff Bezos brought to the world of retailing” for the role it has played in the insurance industry's entry into web-based sales.

“Disruptor,” “disruptor,” “disruptor.”

So the *Post's* last great hope for survival now apparently lies in the hands of a man famous for being a “disruptor”?

If so, why is this supposedly a good thing?

In recent American elections, how many presidential candidates actually have won the Oval Office by promising to “disrupt” the U.S. economy?

With the exception of those anarchist malcontents who recently supported the Occupy protests, and except for a handful of extreme environmentalists and some radical socialists as well, how many ordinary Americans look forward to an economic future marked by “disruption”?

Would even most DSA members willingly sublet an apartment or a house to a tenant who promised to “disrupt” it? Probably not.

Why, then, are journalistic observers ranging from *FORTUNE* to the *Diane Rehm Show* now praising Bezos for his disruptor skills?

On “Revolutionizing the Instruments of Production,” As Marx and Michael Harrington Saw It

For many democratic socialists, it is no news that our capitalistic economy thrives on significant change – even disruptive change.

Writing more than 160 years ago in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels proclaimed that the capitalist investor class, the “bourgeoisie” as they called it, “cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with these the whole relations of society.”

This made industrial capitalism unlike any other form of economic organization that had gone before it, Marx and Engels argued. As they put it,

“Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form was the first condition of existence for all previous industrial classes. [But] constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.”

Later on in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, Marx went beyond such largely rhetorical flourishes to explain the mechanisms of why and how capitalist economies repeatedly generate radical economic change.

Marx noted that repeated capitalist investments in labor-saving machinery have much to do with this; he also credited capitalists with having an obvious self-interest in the more efficient use of raw materials and natural resources in their factories, and thus in underwriting the development of many kinds of resource-saving technologies.

But more fundamentally, Marx thought, the primary factor behind constant revolutionizing of production in capitalist societies is the very nature of the capital accumulation process itself.

Through investing capital, reaping profits from such investments, then reinvesting the profits in even more profit-generating activities, wealthy investors in capitalist societies generally attempt to make their large fortunes grow ever larger, without limit, and in this way force modern industrial societies always to push “beyond a boundary” set by every economic status quo.

This process of capital accumulation repeatedly reshapes the way that entire industries and entire nations work, Marx indicated in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*. Many Marxists agree that ultimately, this is unsustainable. In Marx's view, it leads the process of industrial production to become ever more capital-intensive, and relatively stingier in its payouts to labor, so as to push down profit rates over time – thus putting the entire system in crisis.

In the shorter term, Marxists tend to agree, unchecked accumulation of capital, because it is not sustainable, generates depressions and financial panics, crises of seeming over-production that can be resolved only when large quantities of capital investment are destroyed.

Is this the sort of “disruption” that readers of the *Post* — not to mention the printers who physically produce the paper, the delivery people who get it to the readers, and the vendors who ultimately provide the publishing company with newsprint and ink — should expect in coming years, as Jeff Bezos patiently steers the company back to profit-making again?

In truth, the future prospects of the Post's unionized workforce under Bezo's leadership seem mixed at best.

“There will, of course, be change at The Post over the coming years ... The Internet is transforming almost every element of the news business ... There is no map, and charting a path ahead will not be easy.”

– **Jeff Bezos, August 5 letter to employees of the *Washington Post*, about his recent purchase of the paper for \$250 million in cash**

The Graham family has a long history of abusing its unionized printers and writers, and some labor observers suspect that Bezos might have to go a long way to treat the Post's workers any worse. Representatives of the Post's organized workforce so far have seemed cautiously optimistic – at least in their public statements – on what Bezo's takeover may mean for the paper.

Yet Bezos could eliminate the jobs of printers and *Post* distributors completely if he transforms the paper into an entirely electronic publication, which is not beyond what some observers expect he could do. And critics say that Amazon under his leadership has engaged in union-busting in Germany.

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/05/business/workers-of-amazon-divergent.html?_r=1&

According to a *Huffington Post* story from September of 2011, meanwhile, employees at an Amazon warehouse in Allentown, Pa. not long ago were forced to work long days in 110 degrees heat or risk being fired.

According to the Lehigh Valley, Pa., *Morning Call* article of Sept. 11, 2011 on which the *Huffington Post* story was based, Amazon kept paramedics on staff at the warehouse to care for individuals suffering from excessive dehydration and heatstroke. However, the company did not invest in costly air-conditioning equipment that might have solved the over-heating problem.

Meanwhile, employees failing to meet high productivity standards were “threatened with termination,” with some losing their jobs and being escorted from the facility in view of former coworkers – a sight that “encouraged some workers to conceal pain and push through injury” for fear of being fired as well.

<http://www.mcall.com/news/local/amazon/mc-allentown-amazon-complaints-20110917,0,6503103.story#ixzz2dOeydWi>

In hailing Bezos as a “great disruptor,” though, it is unlikely that even FORTUNE magazine is expecting him to act just like a 19th century robber baron in his treatment of workers. Nor is it probable that Ken Auletta and Diane Rehm truly believe he will “revolutionize the instruments of production” in exactly the ways that Marx might have predicted.

DSA’s co-founder Michael Harrington, who followed Marx in characterizing capitalism as a relentless agent of constant economic change, once wrote that American capitalism truly is a more “revolutionary” economy than Soviet Communism ever hoped to be, except that economic revolution in the US is generally being driven by conservative Republican business executives who hate large-scale economic planning, and hence generate economic “revolution” by accident – with sometimes humorous, sometimes tragic results.

But it seems unlikely and Ken Auletta of the *New Yorker* and Katherine Burger of *Insurance & Technology* online are thinking about “disruption” precisely as Michael Harrington portrayed it, either. So what are they talking about?

The Harvard Prof Who Popularized Disruptive Innovation:

How Big Firms Can Solve the “Second Mouse” Problem

A good guess is that many of the media mavens consider Bezos a hero for the ways he seems to promote the sort of “disruptive innovations” that an eccentric Harvard Business School professor named Clayton Christensen has promoted in a recent string of best-selling books on corporate strategy.

Christensen now has a rather ambitious web site promoting his theories, while also extolling his religious faith in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints – at least until recently, one of his web pages cited his experiences as a Mormon missionary and explained how it contributed to his economic vision.

<http://www.christenseninstitute.org/>

Before launching the web site, though, Christensen achieved fame in business circles as the author of *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* (1997), his first breakthrough publication.

Along with coauthor Michael Raynor, Christensen also wrote *The Innovator's Solution: Creating and Sustaining Successful Growth* (2003). And through these and other books of similar cast, he has won real fame in business journalism circles for his ideas on how innovation works.

In *The Innovator's Dilemma*, Christensen addressed what some people have called the “Second Mouse Problem,” as in: “The early bird gets the worm; but it’s the second mouse that gets the cheese.”

Great companies that already are investing significant resources in innovation, Christensen noted, chiefly to keep existing customers happy and exploit the higher-income levels of a given market, often get undercut in time by “disruptive,” smaller rivals that initially focus on making lower-quality products, or exploiting seemingly less promising technologies, or serving a lower income customer base, or all three.

Examples of “disruptive” innovation as defined by Christensen include the PC computer makers of the early Internet age who eventually undercut and out-competed IBM and other big mainframe computer makers. A second example is the saga of Toyota in the 1950s and 1960s initially focusing on making cheap, seemingly low-quality cars that would never compete with Detroit, then moving up-market and eating Detroit’s lunch in the long run.

Still another example mentioned on Christensen’s web site is the way that discount retailers in recent years have undercut and sometimes bankrupted traditional, full-service department stores.

Such “disruptive” innovators – the “second mice” in the joke mentioned above — succeed by exploring obscure market niches, and by initially accepting low profit rates as well, so as to invest in the future. In this way they eventually grab huge chunks of market share from their bigger, better-established rivals (the “first mice,” who sprung the trap) and replace those rivals at the top of the corporate food chain.

This was the problem for large, established, somewhat high-tech companies that Christensen described in *Innovator's Dilemma*. In *Innovator's Solution* and several other books since then, he has gone on to formulate solutions for it.

According to Christensen and Raynor, bigger and more established companies, to survive, also need to explore the lower ranges of their markets and the initially less attractive technologies or products that serve them. They need to innovate constantly, and not merely through introducing annual model changes to please high-income customers. Instead, they constantly need to work on innovations that will expand their markets to a larger, lower-income customer base.

In doing so, they, like their upstart rivals, will turn former luxury goods – like personal computers or cell phones, say, into mass market commodities — one aspect of “disruptive innovation” that makes it a positive force, in Christensen’s view of the universe.

Finally, Christensen states, big innovative companies need to accept lower-short term profits in pursuit of higher long-term market share, so that they beat potentially “disruptive” rivals at their own game. Clearly, several aspects of Christensen’s “disruptive innovation” model seem to fit Bezos’s style of corporate management at Amazon, which is probably why his admirers hail him for being such a disruptor.

But beyond Christensen, there is an older economic theorist of disruptive change who has inspired many American business journalists for the past 35 years or so.

To put Christensen’s ideas into context and to understand the moral universe of American capitalism and its defenders today, progressives would do well to familiarize ourselves with the work of the great Austrian-born economist Joseph Schumpeter.

The Disruptive “Entrepreneur” as Economic Hero: Schumpeter’s Vision of Capitalism as Creative Destruction

Many decades before Christensen won fame for his insights about “disruptive” innovation, Joseph Schumpeter of Harvard, an Austrian-born conservative who had studied Marx at the University of Vienna and had a fundamentally conflicted view of Marx’s economic ideas, laid the groundwork for American business journalism’s contemporary love affair with radical economic change.

In his best-known work, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, first published in 1942, Schumpeter broke with some conservative critics of the New Deal, and with its radical and liberal defenders as well, by arguing that most of their theories about advanced capitalism were irrelevant, for they relied on basically static models of an economy that – as Marx had insisted earlier – is fundamentally revolutionary.

“The problem that is usually being visualized is how capitalism administers existing structures, whereas the relevant problem is how it creates and destroys them,” Schumpeter wrote in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*.

As he put it:

“The opening up of new markets, foreign or domestic, and the organizational development from the craft shop and factory to such concerns as U.S. Steel illustrate the same process of industrial mutation – if I may use that biological term – that incessantly

revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating the new one. This process of Creative Destruction is the essential fact about capitalism. It is what capitalism consists in and what every capitalist concern has got to live in.”

In the 1930s and 1940s, Schumpeter was a major figure in American economics and in 1947 was elected by his peers to be president of the American Economic Association. His relationship with socialist and leftwing economists of his day was a curious one.

In *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, rather memorably, he professed to believe that capitalism would not survive in the long run, although he greatly preferred it to socialism. He further argued that a socialist economy could be economically workable and democratic in form – although a recent biographer, Thomas McGraw, contends in *Prophet of Innovation: Joseph Schumpeter and Creative Destruction* that Schumpeter was being deeply ironical in this positive portrayal of socialism, and that a close reading shows he meant the opposite of what his words seemed to say.

Whatever Schumpeter’s real feelings about socialism’s potential, however, he served at Harvard as the mentor of the radical son of a respected banking family, Paul Sweezy, who went on to found and edit *Monthly Review*, then and now the leading independent journal of Marxist economics in the United States. The two men reportedly never agreed about the merits of socialism and capitalism, yet Schumpeter admired intellectual brilliance wherever he found it, and according to McGraw’s biography, Sweezy became his favorite student, out of an impressive cohort of potential Harvard rivals.

As McGraw’s points out, however, Schumpeter despite his affection for Sweezy was first and foremost the champion of the capitalist entrepreneur, the kind of disruptive business innovator whose vision and daring made “Creative Destruction” [in Schumpeter’s view] so successful.

The Entrepreneur As Economic Hero: “His task is breaking up old, and making new, tradition”

Over a career stretching from 1911, when he first described the entrepreneur as the agent of creative and disruptive change, to his death in 1950, Schumpeter centered his theoretical focus on entrepreneurs and what motivated them, as well as what they contributed to long-term economic progress – at least, “progress” in Schumpeter’s terms.

In his groundbreaking *Theory of Economic Development*, in 1911, Schumpeter went to some pains to describe the motivations of the men – in his view, they tended to be men – whom he considered central to capitalism’s health, if not its survival. As he wrote back then,

“The typical entrepreneur is more self-centered than other types, because he relies less than they do on tradition and connection and because his characteristic task – theoretically as well as historically – consists precisely in breaking up old, and creating new, tradition.”

Rather than merely being motivated by money, Schumpeter thought in 1911 – although he could later defend “entrepreneurial profits” – the typical entrepreneur was inspired by “the dream and the will to found a private kingdom,” often a family business that could be passed on to heirs.

As part of this aspect of the entrepreneurial character, Schumpeter wrote, “there is the will to conquer: the impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others, to succeed for the sake, not of the fruits of success, but of success itself.” And last but not least, “there is the joy of creating, of getting things done, or simply exercising one’s energy and ingenuity.”

As McGraw’s extremely pro-capitalist yet still impressive biography points out, Schumpeter also credited entrepreneurs, aided by the advertising industry, with essentially creating new wants for the masses, since the possibilities that the satisfaction of basic needs offers to disruptive innovators is rather small. Good entrepreneurs create economic demand for new goods, Schumpeter thought; they do not simply follow it. And advertising leads the way.

Schumpeter also believed that speculative venture capitalists, not the patient savings of virtuous widows or even established business owners, made a key contribution to the ways that entrepreneurs helped pull capitalist markets out of potential stagnation.

Aided by venture capital which bankers in many cases create out of virtual thin air, Schumpeter believed, entrepreneurs can revitalize potentially stagnant economies through the introduction of

- (a) new or unfamiliar goods,
- (b) new or unfamiliar methods of production,
- (c) the opening of new and/or unfamiliar markets,
- (d) the development or indeed the “conquest” of new sources of raw materials, and/or

(e) the introduction of new kinds of business organization into an existing market.

(McGraw, *Prophet*, 70-73.)

With this model of entrepreneurial activity in mind, McGraw indicates, Schumpeter over his long career opposed much of the New Deal legislation of the 1930s, on the grounds that it would discourage risk-taking by entrepreneurs and prolong the Depression.

He defended large quasi-monopolistic companies against critics who denounced them for stifling competition, on the grounds that large companies could provide entrepreneurs with momentary shelter from the “great gale of Creative Destruction” constantly roiling capitalist societies, and in this way could foster needed innovations that smaller firms might not be able to introduce.

“*The changes in the offing will turn The Post upside down.*”

– **Janet Asteroff, commentator on PBS.org., Aug. 6, 2013**

Schumpeter as he grew older also defended high, quasi-monopolistic profits for successful businesses, on the grounds they were needed to motivate entrepreneurs to take risks. He defended widespread economic inequality under capitalism for just the same reason.

And in predicting the possible demise of capitalism in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Schumpeter did so largely out of fear that government regulation and corporate bureaucratization were stifling the kinds of entrepreneurial zeal, and especially the ambition to establish family business dynasties, that made entrepreneurs tick.

A bit like William Whyte in *Organization Man* (1956), Schumpeter lamented the effect of large-scale corporate capitalism on the radical individualism and soaring ambitions of potential entrepreneurs.

Why does any of this matter today, however?

Schumpeter as Theorist of Neo-Liberal Business Revolution

A little reflection, and the occasional look into such business publications as *FORTUNE*, *Forbes*, *Bloomberg's / Business Week* and *The Economist*, suggests that Schumpeter's ideas about

Creative Destruction and entrepreneurial genius have inspired a large part of the Neo-Liberal, free-market revival that has played such a destructive role in U.S. politics since the 1980s.

With Schumpeter's ideal entrepreneur and Creative Destruction in mind, it can be argued, American business leaders for the last three decades have been rather cheerful about the outsourcing of industrial jobs to China: after all, this move into "new markets" is one of the hallmarks of innovation as Schumpeter described it.

The growing gap between the super-rich and everyone else in the United States is arguably a good thing, from the point of view of "disruptive innovation," for big rewards help inspire the kinds of entrepreneurial zeal we want and need.

The self-centeredness and ruthlessness of such famed innovators as Steve Jobs also are good things, from a Schumpeterian perspective; that's what successful entrepreneurs are often like.

Indeed, the small bookstore owners that Jeff Bezos helped to ruin economically, through the dazzling growth of Amazon, are just ancillary casualties of Creative Destruction, which preserves our vibrant capitalist economy by periodically disrupting and destroying entire industries, supposedly for the long-term benefit of everyone.

Perhaps it is unfair to unload all of Schumpeter's legacy onto the head of Jeff Bezos, who has in fact made it easier and cheaper for many people to purchase books, and whose fortune has in fact helped to bankroll gay marriage initiatives.

Perhaps Bezos will not prove to be as self-centered and ruthless an avatar of Schumpeter's ideal entrepreneur as Steve Jobs was at Apple. Perhaps he will save a great newspaper, and in doing so, perhaps he will treat the *Post's* current workforce a bit more kindly than Amazon's warehouse manager at Allentown apparently treated his heat-stressed employees back in 2011.

But at this point, with the *Post's* advertising revenues down and the entire newspaper industry in a slow crisis due to the shifting of advertising dollars to the Internet, Schumpeter's words from 1911 and 1942 are sobering reminders of just how destructive "healthy" capitalist change can often be.

As Bezos himself wrote in an open letter to *Post* employees in early August, "There is no map, and charting a path ahead will not be easy." Just what kind of "disruptive innovation" that Bezos has in store for *Post* readers and *Post* employees, and perhaps even *Post* advertisers, will only become clear over time.

Editor's note: a complementary take on Bezos by Daniel Adkins is elsewhere in this issue.

[Global Labor Solidarity: History and Hope](#)

Monday, September 2nd, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2013**

By Kurt Stand

Variations on a theme/Elements of a future: Four Instances of Global Union Action

US Labor Against the War: a network of local trade unions and trade unionists that serves as an anti-war voice in labor and as a labor voice in the anti-war movement. USLAW supports the Congressional Progressive Caucus Budget as part of its “Jobs Not War” campaign and supports the Iraqi Civil Society Initiative non-violent resistance to the pro-corporate government and social structure left in the wake of the U.S. invasion. Calling for complete withdrawal of US military forces from Iraq and Afghanistan, USLAW also opposes direct or indirect US military intervention in the Syrian civil war. That position is consistent with solidarity for Iranian unionists confronting repression; a solidarity equally opposed to US economic sanctions and military threats against Iran. Building support between across battle lines, USLAW has brought oil worker and other Iraqi unionists to the US and delegations of US unionists to Iraq. And it has announced support for Chelsea Manning, joining defense of civil liberties threatened by the Patriot Act to its defense of US labor rights.

National Domestic Workers Alliance: an organization of house cleaners and nannies, workers who enable other families to have two earners, enable better-off families to enjoy leisure those whom they employ don't have. Overwhelmingly female and immigrant, it is a workforce often forced to live outside of labor law and civil law protections; in consequence these are amongst the least paid and most exploited workers. NDWA has been waging increasingly successful campaigns to pass city-wide and state laws to improve their wages and protect their

rights as workers and human beings. Despite being atomized at their workplaces, domestic workers have created ties of mutual support that cross neighborhoods and borders. Initiatives NDWA has taken in the United States parallel similar initiatives in Southeast Asia, in western Africa. Global coordination and unity between domestic worker networks and associations secured the first International Labor Organization Convention when “Recommendation of Decent Work for Domestic Workers” was adopted in 2011. NDWA is part of the United Workers Congress, which defines itself as “... a strategic alliance of workers that are either by law or practice excluded from the right to organize in the United States.” That network includes the National Guest Worker Alliance (NGA), which has also build up links with workers in the countries from which they come, leading to cooperation with the organizations comprising the Asia Floor Wage Alliance. That latter group is seeking a regional wage standard – based on a living wage – and respect for labor rights.

Coalition of Black Trade Unionists: a constituency group within the AFL-CIO with roots in independent initiatives of African-American workers to gain full representation within organized labor and to build opposition to racism in society at large. International labor solidarity has been part of CBTU’s program since its founding. Organizing opposition to apartheid South Africa at a time when most labor leaders were silent or complicit, in 1974 it became the first national US labor body to call for an economic boycott of South Africa and for an end of US government support for the system of white minority rule. In subsequent years, CBTU condemned the Pinochet coup in Chile, the Abacha junta in Nigeria and the Duvalier regime in Haiti. Current stands it takes include support for Palestinians’ right to self-determination, opposition to the U.S. boycott of Cuba and solidarity with Third World unionists struggling against anti-worker economic policies imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Instead, CBTU calls for the U.S. to give African, Caribbean and Latin American nations aid and trade benefits equivalent to those of European nations; fairness impossible within the framework of free trade agreements. Therefore its focus today is the AFL-CIO’s “Campaign for Global Fairness,” which supports debt relief, worker and democratic rights and enforceable rules for global trade and competition that values people over profit.

United Steelworkers: an AFL-CIO union and a leader of coalitions that call for a national industrial policy that incorporates environmentalism. USW’s equally principled international

solidarity has been expressed in its ongoing support of the militant, independent Mexican National Union of Mine and Metal Workers battling police violence and government prosecution. Another form its policy takes is participation in global corporate union alliances, such as one at Caterpillar in which USW and United Auto Workers local unions coordinate bargaining strategy with sister unions from Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, France, Germany, India, and Japan. But most perhaps most significant is USW's joint initiative with Unite (the largest union in the UK and Ireland) to create [Workers Uniting](#). Building a single organization across borders may be the most effective way to combat transnational corporate anti-union practices, and their promotion of anti-working class trade, financial and political programs that also cross borders. Yet the union's leadership recognizes that true unity requires understanding of difference. To that end, USW has joined South Africa's National Union of Mineworkers, unionists from Sweden, Britain and elsewhere to participate in a 4-year shared leadership training program. The goal is to create a framework for understanding the different legal systems, historical traditions and conditions of life workers face, to turn the reality of diversity into a strongpoint of a shared struggle.

Distinct Strands Woven Together: Labor History Themes

Examples of the above can be multiplied – international solidarity built upon autonomous networks of mainly local unionists, those that are connected to or built upon independent grassroots movements, and groupings built within and through structured national labor bodies. These form distinctive, mutually reinforcing elements of progressive change in worker organization at home and abroad. Or at least in embryo; important as each instance, each campaign, forum, initiative may be, these are still far from able to match the strength and cohesion of global capital. Yet they do point a way forward and challenge the hopelessness that labor's decline creates; a decline that creates a permanent sense of insecurity among millions and makes a mockery of workers attempt to grasp hold of their own futures.

Such a grasp will only be made secure through an alternative power linking international labor solidarity to the ability of worker organization to defend rights at local worksites. The need and possibility of making that connection was already becoming clear two decades ago with the globalized economy impacting ever greater numbers of people. Paul Garver – an SEIU

activist from Pittsburg who subsequently worked on corporate campaigns for the International Union of Food and Allied Workers headquartered in Switzerland – noted in a speech given in Australia at a 1990 conference on 21st century perspectives on the labor movement that:

“The ‘triumph of capitalism’ does not bring history to an end. The very success of the new order of international capital creates the conditions for greater integration and unity of the far flung working classes. Young women from peasant villages labour for the same corporations as skilled workers in Flint.

“Vast numbers of migrants and immigrants cross and re-cross national borders in search of work. The same communication and transportation technology that makes possible corporate command and control from a single location also makes it easier and cheaper for unions and workers to coordinate their global efforts. Regions as diverse as the command economies of Eastern Europe and the most isolated areas of the Amazon jungle are linked today by the penetration of capitalist production into all areas of the globe. And as workers in all these areas become more exposed to the insecurities and uncertainties of the new global order, their common interest in a more just and democratic order becomes increasingly obvious.

“Without international worker solidarity, solidly based in local and national grassroots, no international trade order acceptable to the majority of the world’s people can be imagined. ... [Progressive economist] Robert Heilbroner has asserted that the defining feature of a *capitalist* society is the existence of a business class, one deeply embroiled in the concerns of maximizing profit and accumulating private wealth. By analogy we could define a *socialist* society as one which is deeply involved in the creation of a working class movement capable of representing the aspirations of the vast majority of the world’s peoples. In today’s context of globalised capital, the workers’ movement must be as *international* as its transnational capitalist counterpart. Karl Marx did not spend all of his time in the reading room of the British Museum – along with other socialists he tried to create lasting international associations to link workers across borders.”

Forms of cross-border solidarity have existed since the birth of trade unionism – some of the earliest craft unions in the U.S. were initially extensions of British unions. The practical work of Marx to which Garver alludes was embodied in his work building the First International – the International Workingmen’s Association – founded in 1864 partly to build support amongst European labor organizations for the North once the civil war’s anti-slavery character became fully manifest, partly to counteract employers’ attempts to have workers scab on one another across national borders.

Nonetheless, although capital, with origins in slavery and colonialism, has always been international, its initial power was more often expressed on a local and national plane. Therefore, in virtually all countries, the primary path of unionism has been from city-wide to national organization. Trade union strength in much of the world was at its height in the three decades after World War II based on national agreements; international solidarity often being more symbolic than real. Labor leaders tended to identify closely with “their” employers, their government.

That identification proved to be a recipe for disaster. The global tendencies of capital became more pronounced in those years, reflecting the inner logic of capital to expand and the use of that tendency to undo the concessions that previous labor victories had imposed upon business. The erosion of labor mobilization at the worksite and the atrophying of practical measures of cross-border organizing meant that initial efforts to rein in the growing strength of transnational capital as its power became more manifest from the late 1970s, proved toothless. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, corporate power abandoned all restraint, indulging in an orgy of militarism. Business interests used the lack of unified labor organization to leverage downward the conditions and rights of working people everywhere.

That lack of labor unity was particularly devastating in the United States. Anti-Communist purges within the labor movement during the late 1940s inhibited opposition to U.S. corporate global expansion and led to support for government foreign policy. “Business unionism” replaced militancy at home and abroad with consequences Beth Sims (from the solidarity organization, Inter-Hemispheric Education Research Center) accurately described in 1992:

“As alternatives to class-based analyses, the AFL-CIO ... offer[s] prescriptions for ‘apolitical’ trade unionism aimed at increasing the size of the pie through enhanced productivity and labor’s piece of the pie through collective bargaining. The notion of class struggle is inconsistent with the corporate labor-business relations advocated by the AFL-CIO. This promotion of a so-called apolitical trade unionism, however, is a political choice with political outcomes. Refusing to question the underlying assumptions and relationships of capitalism, the U.S. federation has demonized radical responses to capitalist exploitation ... In so doing, the AFL-CIO has, intentionally or not, supported the global economic and political status quo.

“The federation has given U.S. labor’s official stamp of approval to political and economic systems that reflect U.S. style concepts of free-market capitalism and minimal political participation. In the process, it has undermined movements for workplace control and democracy and rejected attempts to analyze and restructure fundamental relationships among owners, workers and governments. When as in Brazil (1964), the Dominican Republic (1965), Chile (1973), it had found that radical movements were too strong, it has rejected even minimal electoral democracy and supported military coups. It has placed itself on the side of governments and elites that prop up the global dominance of the United States and the economic dominance of owners over workers.”

Since the early 1990s, internal developments within U.S. labor contributed to a gradual change from the reality Sims recounted to the orientation Garver described. The necessity for a new global policy was a critical factor in John Sweeney’s successful campaign to win election as AFL-CIO president in 1995; the initial steps toward a more progressive direction then initiated have been furthered and deepened in the years since. Far more, however, remains to be done; the break with the past was partial.

Here too labor history needs to be recalled, for its path has not only been from small to larger, it has also been about intersecting paths of organization. One stream of unionism was chartered by skilled craft unionism, another embodied by a populist social unionism, and a third expressed in revolutionary industrial unionism. Visible in most countries, in the U.S. these took clearest shape in the American Federation of Labor from the 1880s forwards, the Knights of

Labor in its brief rise and rapid decline in the late 19th century, and the birth and destruction of the IWW soon thereafter. Elements of the best of all of these laid the basis for the rise of the CIO during the New Deal years. Strong inclusive workplace organizations came together with community-based and national progressive/left political movements, combining collective bargaining with social justice. The concessions to Cold War reaction Sims described eliminated much of the dynamism of all three elements and replaced them with a parochialism that lay the seeds of the weakness capital is unrelentingly attacking. The kinds of initiatives being taken today by fast food workers, by workers at Walmart, point to the possibility of a new synthesis – just as do the domestic and global initiatives undertaken by USLAW, NDWA, CBTU and USW.

Collective and Individual, Individual and Collective: Possibilities for the Future

Current AFL-CIO direction is oriented toward building a coalition with other social justice organizations aimed at transforming the political terrain in the U.S. How to do so has been a recurrent theme of the Federation's (unprecedented) open discussion taking place in preparation for its September 11 -13 Los Angeles Convention. Many of the comments to date have focused on alliance-building goals; however, such plans will be realized only if coalition partners have equal voices in developing long-term as well as short-term strategy. The legitimate need to respond to the pragmatic interests of union members cannot be allowed to lead to an "us first" pragmatism that sacrifices fundamental working-class interests for immediate gains – which was the underlying rationalization for past policies that had such a deleterious impact in creating genuine global solidarity. Campaign strategies need to be combined with democratic forms of organization and democratic processes of coalition-building, a difficult but absolutely crucial aspect of building ties with working people abroad. Absent that, a campaign strategy can "professionalize" labor internationalism, making it fully staff-driven. Far better is to root global union activity in local union organization. By connecting international labor solidarity with other aspects of union activity, the rank-and-file will be better placed to take initiatives and be engaged in the development of policy. Thereby local organization and education can be equal parts of a multi-tiered process rooted in action.

The instances of labor international solidarity with which we began all speak to the possibility of creating such a movement. USW provides an example of how to increase the

practical mechanisms of union-to-union solidarity, building upon existing organization that connects mutual action to mutual understanding; a solidarity that embraces difference. NDWA's roots in feminist, immigrant and anti-poverty grassroots organizing has helped create structures that are both flexible and strong. Thus an international movement has emerged amongst those employed in the smallest workplaces, connections created between workers whom law and circumstance, language and culture, tend otherwise to isolate. CBTU draws on the experience of fighting racism and of advancing the particular interests of African American unionists as means to strengthen the labor movement as a frame to approach global solidarity. Applying affirmative action principles to create the basis for a genuine equality is as necessary for unity abroad as it is at home. A foreign policy independent of U.S. government strictures is necessary too, an independence forcefully expressed by USLAW. Premised on understanding that no alternative domestic policy is possible in the U.S. without determined opposition to war, USLAW recognizes that such opposition is strengthened by building bonds with unionists from countries labeled as "enemy."

When unionism is reduced to collective bargaining, then the full human dimension of workers experiences, hopes and strivings is lost. The "business unionism" that prevailed for so long reproduced the manner in which capitalism divides individuals against themselves – and therefore set up a conflict between the different aspects of members' identity. From there it was a short step for too many working people to see their interests as opposed to those of workers abroad, just as it became too easy for "worker" interests to be seen as opposed to those of civil rights, of feminism, of environmental needs. The process of building a class conscious global labor movement reverses that direction, allowing the distinct aspects of individuals to be expressed in common movements rooted in self-awareness. In a work describing the connection between the women's movement, labor organization and international solidarity amongst banana plantation workers in Honduras, Dana Frank quotes one activist's self-description:

"I am a unionist of the heart, completely dedicated to a cause that because it is so deeply about social justice, compels me to a greater and greater level of commitment ... But above all I am a woman from head to foot; and as a woman I feel responsibility to continue raising the banner of dignity, of respect, of pride."

Building on organizing already under way, the labor movement needs to develop the possibilities for that spirit to flourish amongst workers here. Thereby we will find the means to build the strongest bonds of organization among workers at home and abroad.

This is dedicated to the memory of Stephen Coats, executive director of the Labor Education in the Americas Project (and its predecessor, Guatemala Labor Education Project) until his untimely death earlier this year. Steve, throughout his life, expressed the true meaning of international labor solidarity.

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[Labor day good reads](#)

Monday, September 2nd, 2013

The Washington Socialist <> Labor Day 2013

***First, more on the March For Jobs and Freedom, then and now:**

Harold Meyerson's wonderful piece in *The American Prospect* on the socialists involved in 1963 March planning. <http://prospect.org/article/socialists-who-made-march-washington>

A piece by Robin D.G. Kelley on the difficulty of stripping the sanitizing myth away from the real history of the March... <http://bostonreview.net/us/robin-kelley-big-glitz-marches-are-not-movements#.Uh40eE3frWJ.blogger>

Gary Younge, writing in the *Guardian* the day after the official Aug. 28 event. The difference between 1963 and now is "African Americans have greater access to the levers of power even as systems of power operate to pretty much the same effect."

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/28/martin-luther-king-barack->

[obama?CMP=ema_565&et_cid=47044&et_rid=7923761&Linkid=http%3a%2f%2fwww.theguardian.com%2fcommentisfree%2f2013%2faug%2f28%2fmartin-luther-king-barack-obama](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/28/martin-luther-king-barack-obama)

One of the contemporary accounts of the 1963 march and its impact. This one is by the great Murray Kempton... thanks to Kurt Stand for unearthing this gem... <http://portside.org/2013-08-28/stacks-new-republic-march-washington-1963>

In These Times's account of the 2013 march:

http://inthesetimes.com/article/15520/the_march_on_washington_at_50_massive_crowds_diffuse_demands

The formal government observation of the March anniversary took place on the actual date, Wednesday, Aug. 28. Dr. Jack Rasmus, writing in DSA's "Talking Union," contrasts the stilted quality of that event to the organizing sizzle evidently associated with "Moral Mondays" in North Carolina. <http://talkingunion.wordpress.com/2013/08/31/north-carolina-moral-mondays/>

From Jose Gutierrez: **MLK, democratic socialist**

Towards the end of his life, King was drawing far-reaching conclusions based on his experiences. He was increasingly considering the idea that a just division of society's resources would have to mean breaking with the rules of capitalism, which relies on the poverty of black (and Latino) workers as an important source of super-profits due to their cheaper and more exploitable labor. As he told journalist David Halberstam in early 1968, "For years I labored with the idea of reforming the existing institutions of society, a little change here, a little change there. Now I feel quite differently. I think you've got to have a reconstruction of the entire society, a revolution of values."

King also began to talk about the need for socialism. In a speech delivered to his staff in 1966, he said, "You can't talk about solving the economic problem of the Negro without talking about billions of dollars. You can't talk about ending the slums without first saying profit must be taken out of slums. You're really tampering and getting on dangerous ground because you are messing with folk then. You are messing with captains of industry... Now this means that we are treading in difficult water, because it really means that we are saying that something is wrong... with capitalism... There must be a better distribution of wealth and maybe America must move toward a democratic socialism."

<http://www.socialistalternative.org/news/article20.php?id=1015>

INEQUALITY...

From Andy Feeney:

Sequester Cuts to "Decimate" Funds for Public Defenders — Without Helping the Taxpayer

The *Wall Street Journal*'s opinion and editorial pages are rarely forums for "compassionate conservatism," or indeed for compassion of any other kind. But in the Opinion section of the

Aug. 21 *Journal*, one former federal judge appointed by George W. Bush and a second appointed by Bill Clinton issue a joint statement warning that due to spending cuts arising from the “sequester” of this year’s federal budget, the nation’s system of federal public defenders for lower-income defendants is “being decimated.”

The two coauthors, Paul Cassell (appointed by Bush) and Nancy Gertner (appointed by Clinton) add that “As former federal judges from opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, we both understand that these shortsighted cuts threaten not only to cripple the federal defender system, but to disrupt the entire federal judiciary — without producing the promised cost savings.” For more details, check out the Aug. 21 edition of Rupert Murdoch’s most recent American purchase at

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324635904578644173998221896.html>

“Too Much,” **Sam Pizzigatti**’s newsletter on greed and inequality at its occasionally amazing worst.

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

ENVIRONMENT AND LABOR

A great piece from *Labor Notes* reporter **Jenny Brown** about convergence in the enviro and labor effort on climate change

<http://www.labornotes.org/2013/02/climate-change-drowning-out-%E2%80%98jobs-vs-environment%E2%80%99-debate>

and in the same vein from the **Labor Network for Sustainability** :

<http://www.labor4sustainability.org/uncategorized/national-climate-assessment-an-opportunity-for-labor/>

Via Ben Davis, serious repression of labor rights in “friendly” nations in CAFTA despite signed agreements....

<http://www.aflcio.org/Blog/Global-Action/Stop-Honduran-Labor-Abuses-Now>

ALT-LABOR ACTION:

The Nation: <http://www.thenation.com/blog/175803/afl-cio-exploring-new-investments-alt-labor-and-texas-organizing#>

In the NYT: **The Worker’s Defense Project**. <http://www.thenation.com/blog/175803/afl-cio-exploring-new-investments-alt-labor-and-texas-organizing#>

Wow, the Workers' Defense Project raises echoes of the venerable Worker's Defense League, founded 1936 by Norman Thomas and others and still cranking, with many familiar names associated: <http://workersdefenseleague.org/board.html>

VISIONS ON THE LEFT

Here's a discussion from the *Financial Times* of dueling socio-economic theories about **“the tragedy of the commons,”** a key conundrum for democracy and socialism. Note that Lin Ostrum, the 2009 Nobel laureate in economics and first woman to get that prize, includes in her toolbox of problem-solving strategies for “common pool resources” issues this one: “cheap access to conflict-resolution mechanisms.” As democratic socialists, we note that exclusion from these kinds of mechanisms is the most common mode and indicator of capitalist hegemony (think of corporate lobbyists and their grip on the national legislature)... Doug Henwood of *Left Business Observer* posted this superb article on Facebook Aug. 31.

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/afc5377e-1026-11e3-a258-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2dZ2LMOAL>

Democrats May Keep Dominating US Politics for Years to Come, Suggests Noted British Leftist, But They Can't Fix Economic Malaise (*contributed by Andy Feeney*)

The sharp polarization of US politics since President Obama's election in 2008 is seen by some hopeful observers as marking the emergence of a new political majority, by others as “cause for despair,” notes venerable British leftist Perry Anderson in the May /June 2013 *New Left Review*. In Anderson's view, though, what remains unchanged despite Obama's two presidential victories is “the monochrome ideological universe in which the [American] system is plunged: an all-capitalist order, without a hint of social-democratic weakness or independent political organization by labour.”

In a long and often witty article on how Democrats and Republicans have sometimes shown enough flexibility to switch sides on key American controversies (such as civil rights for nonwhites, for example), Anderson traces the basically capitalist contours of American politics through Obama's first administration. His article notes how mass participation of women and nonwhite votes, along with the decimation of the white industrial working class through corporate outsourcing, has markedly altered the shape of the electorate since the 1970s, yet without undermining the clout of big corporations.

Anderson links this contemporary account with the up-and-down contest of capital vs. labor since World War II ending with a “system-wide deadlock in the regime of accumulation” that pervades today's politics and economics. Thus “The neo-liberal order has become a political no-man's land, in which no organic formula of rule is now in sight.” What either the Democrats or the socialist left should do about this — assuming we want a new “organic formula of rule” to succeed — Anderson doesn't say. But his article does make for an interesting read.

For more details, see Perry Anderson, “Homeland,” in the May/June *New Left Review*, or click to read it online at <http://newleftreview.org/II/81/perry-anderson-homeland>.

From Jose Gutierrez: The “Freedom Budget” released by the A. Philip Randolph Institute in 1966 is discussed in a review article here: <http://socialistworker.org/2013/08/27/freedom-budget-all-people>

FOR FREE STATERS: the always-juicy “**Maryland Juice**” site reports (Aug. 18) on the one-half of the state delegation that voted to keep the NSA surveillance program rolling as is and the other half that didn’t:

<http://www.marylandjuice.com/2013/08/voters-confront-md-congressmen-about.html>

**This post was updated Sept. 4, 2013 to reflect two additional links.*

[Labor’s Stake in DC Statehood](#)

Monday, September 2nd, 2013

The Washington Socialist <> Labor Day 2013

By Bill Mosley

Organized labor, both local and national, has a lot on its plate these days, between the expansion of the aggressively anti-union retailer Wal-Mart here and elsewhere, competition from low-wage overseas labor and the rise of union-busting as an industry. Should labor also include statehood for the District of Columbia among its priorities?

One would almost be tempted to say “of course not,” except to the extent that everyone should be outraged at the notion of the United States treating the more than 600,000 residents of the national capital as colonial subjects, without voting representation in Congress or full control over its own laws and budgets. Labor has bigger things to worry about, such as its own survival, right?

However, from time to time the District’s disenfranchisement has popped onto labor’s radar screen, if even at a far corner. And, I would argue, the District’s achieving statehood would be a bigger boost to labor’s prospects than either union members or statehood partisans may realize.

In fact, labor – both individual union members and labor organizations themselves – had a hand in the 1997 founding of the Stand Up! for Democracy in DC Coalition, also known as Free DC, the grassroots, pro-statehood organization. In July of that year Congress, ostensibly over concern for DC’s financial problems but really to punish the city for re-electing Marion Barry as mayor, temporarily stripped the District of virtually all of its limited self-government, vesting all powers in the congressionally appointed Control Board. DC activists, elected

officials and other citizens formed Stand Up! to challenge this assault on home rule and to re-energize the movement for full statehood. At that time, locals of AFGE, ASCME, the Hotel and Restaurant Employees and SEIU were listed on the coalition's letterhead as supporters. (Our local DSA chapter also was one of the organizational founders). Also, a number of labor organizations are listed as supporters of DC Vote, founded in 1998, a group that expresses sympathy for statehood but focuses mainly on DC voting representation in Congress. However, at no point has DC Statehood become a major focus for local labor.

But why should labor care whether DC is governed by local or federal officials? Because labor would get a fairer shake from an empowered DC government than from members of Congress acting as viceroys over a colonial possession.

Big business in DC has enjoyed a cozy relationship with the District's colonial overseers that predates the home-rule years, one that left DC labor, and most DC residents, by the wayside. Harry S. Jaffe and Tom Sherwood, in their 1994 book *Dream City: Race, Power and the Decline of Washington, D.C.*, described it thus:

The white business community, represented by the Board of Trade, held more political power than the three commissioners appointed by the president. The businessmen simply leapfrogged the commissioners and went to [John L.] McMillan's committee [the House committee that oversaw DC]. Board of Trade executive director William Press would drop by to sip cocktails and negotiate the business community's legislation poolside at the home of ... McMillan's committee clerk.

Yet even in the pre-home rule years, a liberal-to-left political culture was evolving in the District that made the city more progressive than the country as a whole, and certainly more so than almost any Congress has been. It's easy to see why. First, for the past half-century, DC has been majority African American, infusing local politics with a concern for economic and social justice. In this way DC is no different from many cities across the U.S. with majority-black populations – except that those cities are parts of states where the conservatism of the suburban and rural populations dilutes the liberalism of the urban areas. Not so in wholly urban DC.

Also, a substantial portion of DC residents of all races came to the city to work for, lobby or otherwise join the orbit of the federal government. These people tended to bring with them a positive, "can-do" attitude toward government more consistent with liberal-to-progressive politics than with conservatism.

The District government has shown its generally pro-labor colors from time to time, such as by setting the local minimum wage one dollar per hour higher than the national level. The DC government also has been inclined to require project labor agreements (PLAs) for major city-funded projects. PLAs bring unions on board at the start of large construction projects as partners rather than adversaries. DC has used PLAs in such projects as Nationals Park and the new convention center.

The DC Council also showed its support for labor in passing the bill (still, at this writing, under consideration by Mayor Gray for signing or veto) that would require big-box stores such as Wal-Mart opening in the District to pay wages and benefits above the DC minimum wage. Also, the DC government been open to unionization among its own employees.

In its legislative oversight of DC, Congress has more frequently interfered in social issues, such as abortion or drug policy, than it has in economic or labor-related ones. One exception has been local schools. Congress, as much as from hostility to teachers unions as over concern for children's education, established the publicly funded, non-union charter schools as rivals to the traditional, unionized DC public schools.

Clearly, organized labor would benefit from the District operating with all the rights of a state, without Congress constantly peering over its shoulder – and some unions and their members realize this. The task now for the DC statehood movement is to convince labor to invest time, muscle and perhaps money in the effort, rather than merely their names and a handshake.

[March and Memory: Reflections on the Aug. 24, 2013 observation](#)

Monday, September 2nd, 2013

A good spirit prevailed even in a confusing setting; that is how I would characterize the rally. We –myself, Lisa, Rosa – showed up at about 11:00 am; walking from the Foggy Bottom Metro stop to the War Memorial. Along the way we followed youth in a marching band, at the rally's edge we saw people milling around. A lot of folk were walking to the Lincoln Memorial, many others were walking the other way. We were unable to hear the speakers, of those in the crowd there were signs and petitions about police violence, but no one theme seemed to dominate – not even voting rights though clearly its suppression is a critical loss of what had been won so many years ago. We tried to hook up with some friends; that we were unable to do so was a good indicator of the size of the event. By happenstance we finally found the DSA contingent – a Bayard Rustin banner flying high. Circumstances prevented us from going with our DSA comrades to hear John Conyers. Instead, we stayed at the edge of the rally, which apparently was ending though no one seemed certain of that; lots of random conversations centered on people asking each other what was going on. Questions asked, however, without frustration; everyone we spoke to was happy just to be present.

The above might sound like a disappointed comment and indeed there is much else that could have been done. But the rally, the commemoration was valuable in and of itself; a time to gather around principles and values of love and togetherness; to reject the hatred poisoning our society's politics, our society's values. And in that, it was a true homage to the 1963 March on Washington. Most of the tributes to that march leave out the reality that different goals, different agendas brought people together – differences which were to grow in the months and years

ahead, especially when some refused to speak out against the poison of war, which King and others protested. Most of the tributes paint a picture of moral benediction that leave out the racist answer to the March: the church bombing in Birmingham the Sunday following killing four children, leave out the battles and compromises ahead in a movement that won many triumphs but was not triumphant – with consequences with which we still live.

Yet those truths don't deny the historic importance of that March 50 years ago, a march we honored on Saturday because it stands as a reflection of how moral decency, the human urge for equality and togetherness, can forge itself as a power. And it was a truth also expressed this past 24th – the power of hope when it moves into action.

–*Kurt Stand*

The demonstration was disorganized, but the diversity and numbers of people attending were awesome. Of many different banners, the most stunning to me was carried by members of the Alabama NAACP, a group that faced savage repression in the 1960s, yet kept on fighting.

I was also extremely impressed by some 300 members of the Lennox Road Baptist Church (of Brooklyn), all dressed in black T-shirts proclaiming that particularly class-conscious message from the Prophet Amos, “But let justice roll down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream.” Some seemed sympathetic to DSA. There likewise were countless signs, banners and T-shirts demanding justice for Trayvon Martin; showing solidarity with the march by the UAW, CWA, AFCSME, SEIU, AFT and Local 1199; and promoting other social causes.

While other DSAers went ahead carrying signs promoting Rep. Conyers' full employment bill, H.R. 1000, a friend and I handed out the *Democratic Left*, national DSA's flyers and literature on the Conyers bill and other job-creation legislation.

–*Andy Feeney*

Fifty years after the original march, cellphones and other devices allowed a scattered DSA contingent to collect most of its folks on a slope between the main path and the parallel boundary of the Reflecting Pool, and just inside the partial boundary of the World War II monument, one of many features of the mall that were undreamed of in 1963. And there we sat, ate, took the occasional mass selfie and chatted almost undisturbed by the faraway speakers. As it turned out, we were in a sound microclimate; only a hundred feet away closer, we were told by late-comers, the speakers could be plainly heard.

As the early afternoon waned, many of us began to make our way up to Capitol Hill for the DSA reception at Hunan Dynasty on Pennsylvania Avenue, where our local's Salons are usually hosted. We were joined by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich), who spoke about the economic conditions that lent to the need for his [HR 1000](#) – a “Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment and Training Act for the 21st Century” that would apply a small transactions tax to Wall Street trades earmarked to create public service infrastructure jobs and enhanced job-training programs. The 84-year-old congressman, who began his House tenure two years after the original March, was

vigorous and unbending. As he often says, the bill affirms “the idea that the federal government can, and must, play a major role in putting Americans back to work.”

— *Woody Woodruff*

[Paid sick leave, minimum wage advocates planning round 2 in Md. legislature](#)

Monday, September 2nd, 2013

***The Washington Socialist* <> Labor Day 2013**

By Woody Woodruff

A well-crafted attempt to bring mandatory paid sick days for 700,000 Maryland workers not now covered was launched in both houses of the Maryland legislature last January.

It didn't fly. Neither did a bill to raise the state's minimum wage.

By the *sine die* close of the session in April, the many structural ambushes for progressive legislation built into Maryland's process had overcome the bills. Melissa Broome, a senior policy analyst at the [Job Opportunities Task Force](#), echoed the hard-earned experience of many progressives in April when she blogged at the session's close “There's a well-known understanding in our state capitol that important bills rarely – if ever – pass in the first year.”

Though legislative backers of this and other progressive measures are just emerging from summer torpor, organizations like JOTF and its coalition wing, Working Matters, are gearing up for a return engagement. A parallel campaign to raise the minimum wage in the state will also try to improve on a loss in the 2013 session.

Kate Planco Waybright, executive director of labor-backed Progressive Maryland, raised hopes just before Labor Day that the minimum wage effort has a shot.

“But most important is the growing momentum to raise low-income workers' wages as workers nationwide are organizing and fighting for fairness in new ways at a pace and on a scale not seen in many years,” Waybright wrote in the organization's newsletter Aug. 29.

“[Rep. John Delaney's \(MD-6\) August announcement](#) offering to personally help finance efforts to raise Maryland's minimum wage, and [Rep. \[Donna\] Edwards' town hall](#) Aug. 26 pushing for raising the federal minimum wage, indicate how the labor movement and allies have raised this need higher and higher on the agenda for Congress and legislators across America.” Gov. Martin O'Malley has suggested that the state minimum wage increase might be on his list of sponsored bills for the 2014 session, which would be his last before leaving office.

A principal hurdle that stops many bills is the Fiscal Note, an economic impact statement for bills that is routinely generated in the House of Delegates Economic Matters Committee and its Senate counterpart, the Finance Committee.

The fiscal note for Del. Tom Olszewski's Earned Safe and Sick Leave bill (HB0735), which would have provided up to seven earned sick leave days per year for workers in private and public sectors not already covered by labor agreements, is a case in point. As Broome pointed out in her committee testimony, the bill would "allow all workers to earn one hour of paid leave for every 30 hours worked, accruing up to a maximum of 7 full days – or 56 hours – per year. "

The costs to employers were the main theme of the fiscal note. In addition to unspecified but direly-couched disadvantages for the state and local governments that hire part-time workers, the note found that "it will cost Maryland employers \$192 million to provide new earned sick days for employees," a deal-breaking lump sum. More understated was a finding by the same research unit – the Institute for Women's Policy Research – that the 24 cents per hour additional cost per employee would be nicely offset by a 25 cent per hour saving on wages "as a result of lower turnover and reducing the spread of illnesses in the workplace." The committee's Business Regulation subcommittee returned an unfavorable report, adopted by the full committee.

Public benefits are seldom on the radar in most fiscal notes. This structural business-biased ambush, plus hostile (and inaccurate) observations from Republican members of the committee, brought the bill's unfavorable report in mid-March and its withdrawal in the House by prime sponsor – and Economic Matters member – Olszewski, a Baltimore County Democrat. Though Democrats had a substantial majority on Economic Matters, few had sprung to the bill's defense during the lengthy hearing. The standard mantra that even a good bill must fail in two sessions before passing on a third attempt appeared to be in force.

Broome's blog post reflected eagerness to relaunch the effort, which was bolstered in its House and Senate hearings by testimony and turnout from mostly Baltimore-based labor and alt-labor organizations. "It is well established," Broome's committee testimony said, "that lack of access to paid sick days disproportionately affects low-wage and service industry workers. Of workers with annual earnings of less than \$24,999, 69% are unable to take a day off when they or their family members are sick. Less than one quarter of food service workers have access to paid sick days."

The public health benefit realized because food service workers would have an alternative to coming to work when sick was not addressed in the fiscal note. But it's a clear plus for the bill, as emphasized in a [Baltimore Sun op-ed by a food service worker](#) in August.

Questioned about the next steps for the bill, Del. Olszewski said in an email "I am looking forward to re-introducing the initiative next session as lead sponsor. I plan to reshape the bill to overcome objections from last year, and am thankful for the meaningful conversation and lively debate that took place over the bill last session and since. With input from other legislators, advocates and opposition we are busy crafting a comprehensive piece of legislation, learning from the experience last year. This is a strong bill that is needed now, more than ever- Maryland

families are struggling to make tough decisions between their health and the well-being of their families.”

Another plus for the bill is a growing group of state and local governments that have enacted, or are debating, paid sick leave. Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Portland, Ore. and (below) most recently New York City have all passed bills.

In New Jersey, where 1.2 million workers are without paid sick leave, women legislators are taking the lead on a bill similar to the Maryland effort. New Jersey workers could earn up to 7 paid sick days a year (5 days if a workplace has fewer than 20 employees). “While some corporate interests might say otherwise, the fact of the matter is that earned sick days are good for New Jersey’s businesses,” said Lizette Delgado Polanco, executive director of the SEIU New Jersey State Council. She was quoted on the aggregator site newjerseynewsroom.com, where she continued “The health of our economy depends on the health of our working families – and the health of our working families depends on this legislation.”

New York City’s Council passed paid sick leave this summer, sort of, but the peculiar politics of the city and its current sizzling mayoral race have kept it hostage. It is supported by a veto-proof majority of the Council, according to [The New York Times](#), but was being delayed legislatively by Council president Christine Quinn, who is a mayoral candidate. According to the legal-affairs website Mondaq the bill was passed over the Mayor’s veto June 26, with last-minute provisions tightening the definition of “family member” and delaying implementation if the city’s economy declines in the meantime. (This is the city with Wall Street, we recall...)

New York may be a big boost for other efforts. [A Washington Post article](#) quoted Deborah Ness of the National Partnership for Women and Families on the New York City vote: “It’s a huge pivotal step for the country,” she says. “I believe that if we can show that it works in New York City, it just reinforces that you can make it work anywhere.”

A paid sick leave law appears to defy the business community’s expectations in Connecticut, one of the nation’s wealthiest states and the first one to pass a bill, in 2011. It was limited in scope, covering only enterprises with 50 or more workers and many loopholes – chain restaurants, for instance, could count each outlet as a separate entity and slip under the 50-head limit. Still, the New York Times was able to [find some grumpy small businessmen](#) but no labor or other advocates on the side of paid sick leave.

It took [The Wall Street Journal](#) to find a fan in Connecticut’s Democratic Gov. Dan Malloy, who said after nearly two years’ experience with the bill – in the midst of this spring’s tough flu season – he has talked with a variety of employers statewide who “now admit it really wasn’t that big of a deal.” He added “A lot of the early criticism about how this would be abused just hasn’t turned out to be the fact,”

Massachusetts activists under the banner Raise Up Massachusetts are [launching a complex campaign](#) to put both a \$10.50 minimum wage increase and paid sick leave on an initiative ballot.

In Maryland the messages are not getting mixed, for good or ill. [Raise Maryland](#) announces it will again pursue a minimum wage increase bill for the state (last year's, killed in committee also, would have raised it from \$7.25 to \$10 per hour by 2015, then index it to inflation). Many of the organizations in support of paid sick leave, including unions, are also supporting the minimum wage increase. But the lead sponsors may be different. One of the lead sponsors for a minimum wage hike from last year, Del. Alicia Braveboy of Prince George's, will probably be sidetracked this year by her campaign for state Attorney General. The other lead sponsor, Montgomery County Sen. Rob Garagiola, has announced his resignation from his seat after losing a primary battle for the Democratic nomination for the 6th Dist. Congressional nomination, a seat eventually won by Democrat Delaney, above – who now has pledged money and activity on behalf of the state bill.

Some of the hopeful signs in other cities and states have to be balanced against a [campaign to forbid paid sick leave and minimum wage laws](#) being legislated in or within states – led, no surprise, by the American Legislative Exchange Council, the unspeakable Koch-funded ALEC. North Carolina appears to be next.

Maryland, not a state particularly vulnerable to the ALEC virus, nevertheless has a strong pro-business bias built into legislative procedures, and these will require mobilization to overcome. Most of the action came from Baltimore organizations and individuals in the 2013 session, and the DC suburbs of the Free State will need to step up in advance of next January.

[SOCIALIST TAKES AND TAKEAWAYS](#)

Monday, September 2nd, 2013

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TELL MAYOR GRAY: SIGN LARGE RETAILER BILL

DC Mayor Vince Gray remains on the fence as to whether he will sign or veto the Large Retailer Accountability Act, passed by the District Council last month, that would require newly established big-box stores in DC to pay its employees at least \$12.50 an hour. The urgency of putting this law in place as soon as possible is magnified by the plans of Wal-Mart – notorious as much for its low wages and stingy benefits as for its hostility to union organizing – to open as many as six new stores in DC, three of which are already being built.

Gray needs to be reminded that he was elected with substantial union support, as well as the endorsement and active support of Metro-DC Democratic Socialists of America. Metro DC DSA has been working with Respect DC, the coalition working to ensure that Wal-Mart respects its workers and the community if it wants to do business in the District. The bill was just

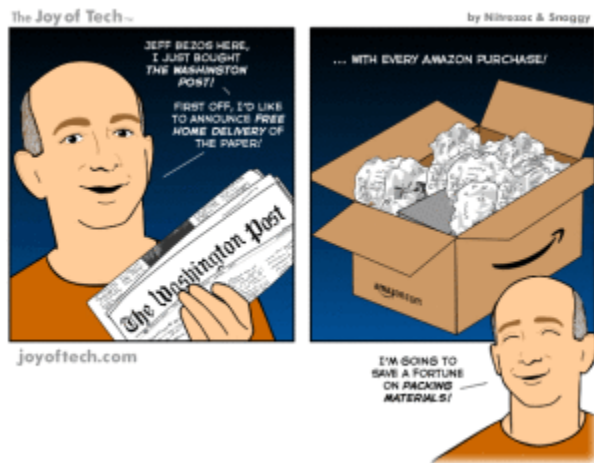
transmitted to Gray last week (Aug. 30) and he has ten business days to decide. If you live in the District, call Mayor Gray today at (202) 727-6300 or send him an e-mail at eom@dc.gov to demand that he remember who helped him get elected – and to pledge his support for the bill.

— *Bill Mosley*

BEZOS' WASHINGTON POST

Jeff Bezos' purchase of the *Washington Post* in early August was a major surprise but not without some logic. Bezos' business focus channels Steve Jobs in theory and style. Writers claim that he is focused on customer service, a long-term view of business, and inventing and reinventing business models.

His style is often as sharp and confrontational as Jobs's was, and Amazon is hardly friendly to unions. He has had difficulty with unions in Germany, and in Pennsylvania Amazon workers were not happy to bust their butts in 100-degree heat. His Pennsylvania warehouse did get air conditioning after a local paper ran an article on the debacle. Somehow posting an ambulance outside the warehouse was not seen as a sufficient response to the heat. The *Washington Post's* union has sent him a welcoming letter and we can only hope that he and the workers can work together to invent the future.



By permission:

<http://www.geekculture.com/joyoftech/joyarchives/1884.html>

A big plus is that Bezos is a serious businessman who plans and executes for the long term like many other West Coast businesses as compared with Wall Street firms running amok on an obsession with quarterly profits. He is criticized by other businesses for not raising profits. A serious analyst would approve of plowing profits into the growth of an operation and reinventing work processes. This tactic firmly establishes and expands your business. Minimizing one's initial profits could be seen as avoiding the eating of your seed corn just for the sake of greed.

Bezos' political behavior has been inconsistent and possibly business-linked. Amy Goodman said on "Democracy Now" Aug. 7 that "Critics of the sale [of the Post] have cited Bezos's close

ties to the U.S. government. In 2010, Amazon pulled the plug on hosting the WikiLeaks website under heavy political pressure. Earlier this year, Amazon inked a \$600 million cloud-computing deal with the CIA.”

Bezos has acted positively, from a progressive point of view, on one issue. When a former employee asked him to donate \$100,000 to the gay marriage issue, being contested electorally in Washington state, he and his wife donated \$2.5 million. Most major corporations are often more focused on hiring the best people than on fretting about who the employees sleep with or marry.

— *Daniel Adkins*

Editor’s note: a complementary take on Bezos by Andy Feeney is elsewhere in this issue.

Books: **Distorting the Truth to Save the Market: How a Handful of Brilliant Scientists Muddied Public Debate On Issues Ranging from Tobacco Smoke to Climate Change**

When rightwing champions of the oil industry, like Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma, want to portray the problem of global climate change as a “hoax” or a “liberal myth,” some turn to fundamentalist Christianity or simple anti-intellectualism in hopes of discrediting the overwhelming agreement among climate scientists about the perils of “greenhouse” gas emissions, most notably of CO₂ and methane.

Yet cooperating with Inhofe and other know-nothing foes of mainstream climate science are a handful of seemingly respectable researchers, some of whom have achieved high honors in their respective fields. Why have scientists of this caliber joined in what environment activists often call “global warming denialism”? And how seriously should we take their objections to the alleged “consensus” on climate change touted by Al Gore, James Hansen and other climate activists?

In their book *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, historians Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway trace the “denialism” of high-ranking climate contrarians to the Cold War struggle against Communism in the 1950s, and to the libertarian zeal of some Cold War scientific warriors who apparently concluded in the 1950s that merely attempting to regulate corporate pollution and corporate misbehavior would threaten capitalism and strengthen the forces for Communism of the most totalitarian kind.

One of the most vehement skeptics about climate change, former atomic physicist Fred Seitz, is a former president of the National Academy of Sciences; however, Seitz also directed a program for R.J. Reynolds in the early 1980s that sought to generate scientific evidence in defense of tobacco smoking. Another prominent greenhouse contrarian, Fred Singer, coauthored a report in the 1990s attacking the EPA for attempting to address the health risks of second-hand smoke.

In *Merchants of Doubt*, (paper, Bloomsbury Press 2011) Oreskes and Conway note that these and a handful of other scientists, some of them extremely prominent in national security circles in the 1950s, at least a few of them Eastern European refugees, have not only cooperated in defending the tobacco industry from regulation over the years. At various times they have also denounced the now widely accepted finding that chlorofluorocarbons or CFCs are damaging to the ozone layer.

Through corporate-backed conservative think tanks such as the George Marshall Institute, they likewise have rallied in support of Ronald Reagan's proposed "Star Wars" program, or Strategic Defense Initiative, while the majority of scientists were concluding that it was unworkable. Some also attacked the late Carl Sagan for associating the likely consequences of nuclear war with "nuclear winter," and recently a few have tried to denounce environmental writer Rachel Carson, author *Silent Spring*, for initially pointing out what are now quite well-documented risks with DDT and other pesticides.

In *Merchants of Doubt*, Oreskes and Conway point to many examples of these contrarian scientists accepting large financial contributions from the polluting industries they were defending, suggesting their public statements have been far from disinterested. But the book makes it clear that their strong anti-Communism and their basically libertarian opposition to government controls over business as a likely "road to serfdom" have been at least as crucial as the financial rewards in inspiring their attacks on mainstream science. Democratic socialists and environmentalists would do well to read this account of how loyalty to rightwing economic ideology has swayed the scientific views of some otherwise brilliant individuals, many of whom really should have known better.

For more information on *Merchants of Doubt* and the ideas it explores, click on the web site <http://www.merchantsofdoubt.org/>. The book also can be ordered through Amazon at <http://www.amazon.com/Merchants-Doubt-Handful-Scientists-Obscured/dp/1608193942>

— *Andy Feeney*