

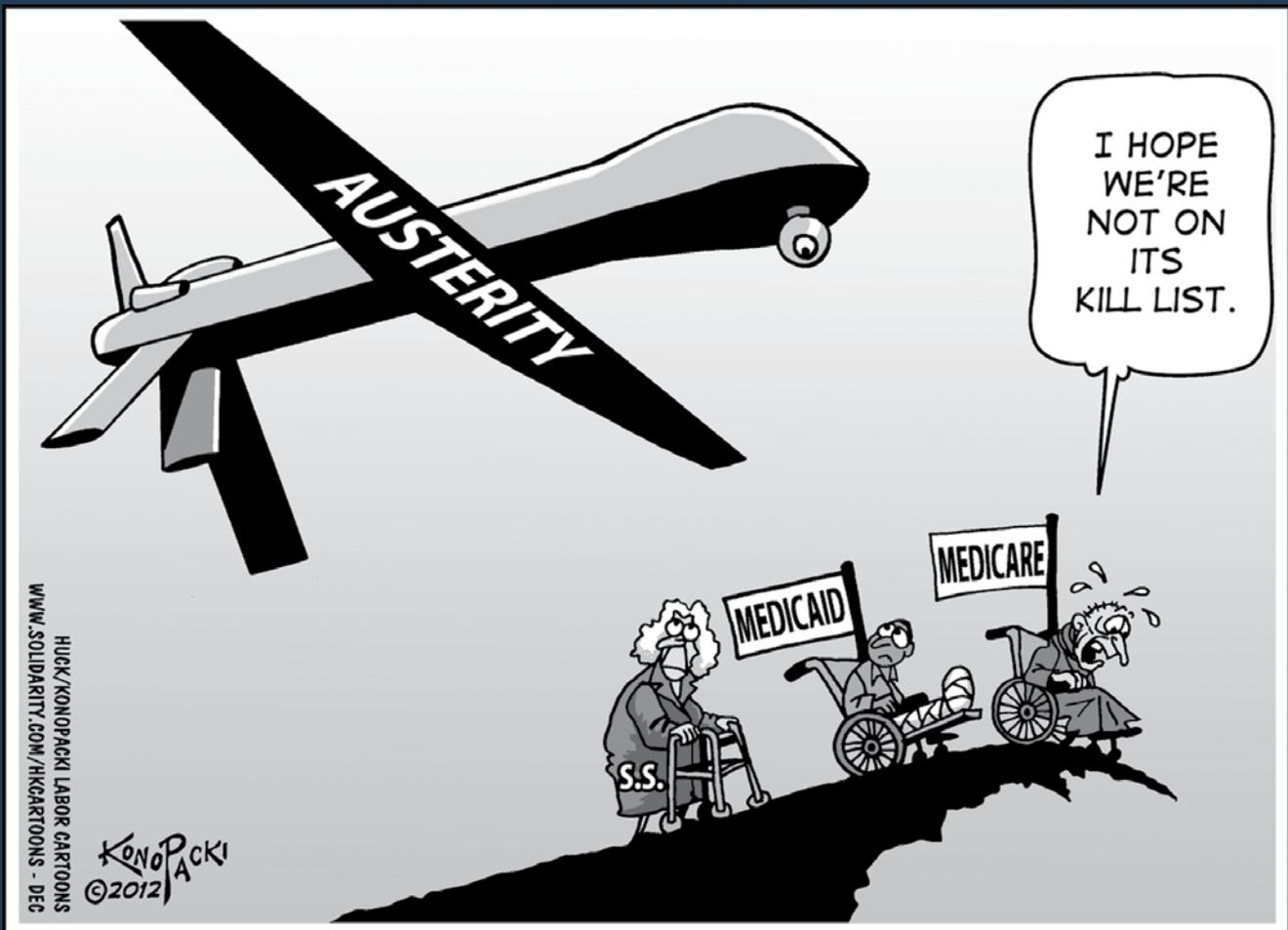
DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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of America**

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We Won - Now Keep Pushing

Maria Svart, DSA National Director

As recently as this summer, it looked as if the 2012 national elections had the potential to be nothing short of disastrous. Mitt Romney remained within striking distance of President Obama's narrow lead, while the GOP seemed poised to increase its far-right majority in the House and threaten the Democratic majority in the Senate.

What a difference a few months makes.

Instead, on the morrow of the election we awoke to a far more favorable prospect. In addition to the reelection of President Obama, the Democrats increased their Senate majority and cut into the Republican majority in the House. Organized labor defeated a major anti-union ballot initiative in California and won a referendum to repeal the anti-union "emergency management" law in Michigan. Voters in four states approved gay marriage through referenda, while voters elsewhere voted against the drug war by legalizing the recreational use of marijuana. And instead of preparing to consolidate their power, the Republicans faced the prospect of prolonged disarray, with its moderate and far-right factions already battling over the future direction of their party. A changing electorate gave lie to the mantra that the U.S. is fundamentally a center-right nation. The coalition of organized labor, African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, women (particularly single women), young adults, and progressives that delivered Obama both of his victories is growing and forms the basis of a majoritarian, social democratic political project.

We should reject the argument that demography is destiny, and that current demographic trends portend any specific political outcome. It's entirely possible that the Right will succeed in maintaining its hegemony by integrating Latinos and Asians into a reconfigured white identity, as was the case with the Irish, Italians, and other ethnic groups who arrived during earlier waves of immigration.

But there's no question that the large-scale changes underway create openings for our politics that haven't existed in a long time. For the first time in years, it feels as if the tide of history is slowly but surely moving with us, not against us. DSA is working hard to take advantage of these opportunities. This year, local activists around the country held numerous public events marking the 50th anniversary of the publication of Michael Harrington's *The Other America*. In collaboration with the National Politi-



cal Committee, locals have also begun to organize GET UP trainings to give our activists the intellectual tools they need to understand our economy and effectively communicate the socialist alternative. And in the coming months, DSA will roll out a new website and social media strategy to complement our work on the ground and bring us into the 21st century.

Still, the challenges that we face are great – and immediate. Just days after the election, President Obama and Democratic leaders in Congress signaled their willingness to agree to massive changes in Social Security and Medicare as part of a so-called "Grand Bargain" over taxes and entitlement spending. DSA activists in locals around the country need to mobilize against the proposed cuts and to demand tax increases on the wealthy.

We've said it many times in this space over the last few years, but it bears repeating. Our role is to push President Obama and Congressional Democrats hard to stop them from shredding what remains of our meager welfare state. The election didn't signal an end to this battle, but rather the opening of a new and potentially dangerous phase. President Obama will never have to stand for reelection again, raising the possibility that he will sell out his base in a "Nixon goes to China" moment.

We can't let that happen. This issue of *Democratic Left* focuses on how we can stop it. Read it, and keep pushing! ♦

The Voters Defeated the Right; Time to Build the Left

by Joseph M. Schwartz

President Obama owes his re-election to the black, Latino, trade union, feminist, and LGBT communities. It is they who rebuffed a Romney candidacy that relied heavily on the thinnest of veiled white nationalist appeals. A whopping 92 percent of Romney voters were white; and the only age group that Romney won handily was seniors. Obama in turn drew 55 percent of his vote total from whites and 45 percent from people of color. He won 55 percent of the women's vote, 65 percent of union members, and 80 percent of voters of color (including 71 percent of the Latino vote and 73 percent of the Asian-American vote).

This progressive voting block got help from the other side. Republican senatorial candidates' extremist and objectionable remarks about rape, combined with Romney's "self-deportation" remarks, meant Republicans could make few inroads among female independents or socially conservative Latinos. Voter suppression laws backfired – at least momentarily, instead spurring record African-American and Latino turnouts.

Saying that, this electoral victory is no validation of the Obama administration's centrist policies, examples of which include pushing tax cuts over public job creation; settling for a stunted, pro-corporate health care reform instead of Medicare for All; and barely aiding the foreclosed while treating the banksters with deep massage.

Neither was it smart politics. Bolder policies leading to an unemployment rate under 7 percent would have seen

Obama waltz to victory. Instead, the first Obama administration governed in a cautious manner in part because, until Occupy, the Left never brought adequate pressure to bear. As Obama's pro-Wall Street consiglieri appointments showed, the administration never used its bully pulpit, except in off-the-record conversations, and then to spite progressives.

Nor is Obama's victory a permanent realignment of the American electorate. The midterm congressional electorate is usually more affluent and whiter than the presidential electorate. Only if the Obama administration pushes for public jobs, aid to the foreclosed and progressive immigration reform can it expand the 2014 congressional electorate, creating a more-or-less permanent left-of-center majority. If it won't prioritize reversing the decline in working-class living standards, it may see more of its remaining white working-class support accede to populist Republican cant. Note that November's white turnout declined by 5 million (or over 5 percent!) from 2008. These stay-at-homers disproportionately came from white working-class swing voters who spurned Obama, but couldn't buy into the plutocratic Romney.



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Michael Harrington (1928-1989)

Democratic Socialists of America share a vision of a humane international social order based on equitable distribution of resources, meaningful work, a healthy environment, sustainable growth, gender and racial equality, and non-oppressive relationships. Equality, solidarity, and democracy can only be achieved through international political and social cooperation aimed at ensuring that economic institutions benefit all people. We are dedicated to building truly international social movements – of unionists, environmentalists, feminists, and people of color – which together can elevate global justice over brutalizing global competition.

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“Deficit hawk” austerity policies may excite business writers, but full-employment policies deliver swing working-class voters. Witness the auto bailout’s enabling Obama to win Ohio and the upper Midwest. In Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin white blue-collar workers voted nearly 50 percent for Obama. The labor movement delivered these voters, and played a crucial role in electing progressives Tammy Baldwin and Sherrod Brown to the Senate, as it did for Elizabeth Warren in Massachusetts. Now labor can demand that the administration fight – if only for its own survival – to legislate the right to organize as a basic civil right. Will it? Only if forced.

Even before the election, the administration leaked its intent to seek a “long-term solution” on budget and entitlement issues akin to the 2010 Simpson-Bowles congressional commission recommendations, which favored three times as much spending reductions as tax increases. The administration now hints at cutting the long-term growth rate of Social Security benefits by altering the cost of living adjustment formula, an unnecessary move and a cowardly capitulation when minor reforms such as removing the cap on income taxed for Social Security would make the system permanently solvent.

That acquiescence to corporate ideology needs confronting by militant street heat. Advocates of austerity would revert to the four “Ds” of neoliberal capitalism: deregulate the economy, decrease tax rates on the rich and corporations, defund public provision, and de-unionize the labor force. Except as raw meat for corporate carnivores, this makes no sense. We live in a wealthy society that can afford a more generous welfare state – but only if we tax the 1 percent and corporate America, those who have reaped 90 percent of the benefits of the last 30 years of economic growth. We can further save hundreds of billions of public revenue if we cut unnecessary new weapons systems and end incarceration of nonviolent drug offenders. We do have a runaway health care cost problem, but that can be bridled through a single-payer plan that takes the profit motive out of health care provision.

The Left also must ensure that Washington deals with the impending “fiscal cliff” by prioritizing economic recovery and full employment over spending cuts. If no agreement on future tax and budgetary policy is reached by January 1, an additional \$110 billion of spending cuts will transpire. (The cuts in domestic “discretionary” spending would cut anti-poverty programs, such as Title I funding for low-income schools, and hobble federal regulatory agencies.) If all these parts of the “fiscal cliff” come to fruition, the annual budget deficit will indeed fall in calendar year 2013, but at the expense of cutting aggregate economic demand and sparking a double-dip recession.

Just as the Coalition on Human Needs argues, the Left should also press to eliminate tax cuts for the rich and corporations, preserve entitlements and restore domestic cuts, while maintaining military spending reductions. We must also reverse two other deleterious parts of the “fiscal cliff.” The 2 percent FICA payroll tax cut will expire, robbing average families of nearly \$1,000 in purchasing power, while the looming \$26 billion cut in extended unemployment benefits will devastate the lives of some 1.5 million unemployed people. Winning that means forcing President Obama to grow a backbone. The president has the upper hand, as the GOP desperately wants to avoid defense cuts (their industrial policy for their districts) or the blame for tax hikes on the middle class. There’s no need to give in to Republican bluster.

So what unique added value can DSA contribute to the emerging local coalitions of community groups mobilizing for a real solution to the fake fiscal challenge? For starters, DSA can educate the public about the unnecessary and harmful nature of austerity politics, showing that you can’t cut your way out of a recession, but you can publicly invest profitably in green jobs, infrastructure, job training and research and development.

DSA’s GET UP project (Grassroots Economics Trainings for Understanding and Power) comprehensively critiques neoliberal capitalism and promotes an alternative program for full employment and social justice. Student debt may be the next financial bubble, and the GET UP program addresses it, as it does the fight to make higher education a social right. DSA locals joining YDS in fighting for student debt relief would also allow for a more seamless recruiting of younger and more diverse activists.

In addition, DSA can enhance its “The Other America is Our America” project by joining black, Latino, and white anti-poverty activists in demanding that the Obama administration honor the upcoming 50th anniversaries of the March on Washington and the War on Poverty by advancing a comprehensive anti-poverty program. Four democratic socialists organized the August 1963 March on Washington: A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King, Jr., and UAW President Walter Reuther. The march called for “Jobs and Freedom,” recognizing that political and civil rights can be realized only through economic justice.

2014 will mark the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty and debate will rage as to whether or not the War on Poverty failed or was murdered. DSA and its allies must argue that while the War on Poverty did not go far enough, it won crucial victories whose policy legacy lives on today in programs such as Food Stamps, the Earned Income Tax Credit, extended unemployment benefits and the still vibrant Social Security, all of which currently keep some 30 million Americans out of poverty, even as

46 million live at or below the disastrously low official poverty level.

But the street heat needed to move public policy in a progressive direction cannot succeed without addressing our country's "democracy deficit." The unbridled role of corporate and wealthy individual campaign contributions means that, absent public funding of elections, democracy is for sale. Thus, as we struggle against the politics of

austerity, we must insist that political democracy is only fully achieved when accompanied by economic and social democracy. ♦

Joseph M. Schwartz is a vice-chair of DSA and a member of its Philadelphia local. A Temple University professor of political theory, he is the author, most recently, of The Future of Democratic Equality.

After the Election: Keep Fighting

By the DSA National Political Committee

The Right, backed by a toxic flow of big money into politics and shameless efforts at voter suppression, tried to turn the 2012 election into a mandate for a regressive political agenda. The Republicans intended to overturn the modest gains of the president's first term and roll back progressive reforms dating back to the New Deal. Political circumstances – a weak economic recovery, a gerrymandered redistricting of the House of Representatives in many states, U.S. Senate contests for twice as many Democratic than Republican seats and a disillusioned progressive voting base – favored the Right.

Despite these conditions, the tenuous voting coalition that had elected Obama in 2008 reassembled in sufficient – and in some instances increased – numbers to reelect the president, and every senatorial progressive incumbent, as well as add several new women progressive senators to that chamber. Though the House remains in Republican hands, a few of the most rabid Tea Partiers lost their seats. Progressives made significant gains in many state elections. Referenda throughout the country on gay marriage, on curbing the power of big money in politics, and on preserving union rights, generally had positive results. Taken as a whole, the results were a narrow but decisive victory for progressives that more than exceeded expectations, demonstrating just how out of touch the Republicans are. Progressive voters and their organizations can be justly proud of their role in achieving this result.

However, we should find no reason for complacency. The national electorate remains sharply and almost evenly divided. While we applaud the steadfastness of African-American voters, the growing importance of a progressive Latino and Asian electorate, and the mobilization of women voters, we are concerned that across vast swathes of the country, a majority of white voters, in particular older males, voted for the preferred candidates of the 1 percent. Those states not only awarded their electoral votes to Romney; their statehouses and governors remain committed to austerity, gerrymandering election districts to favor Republicans, and suppressing social movements. In lower-turnout non-presidential election years, the toxic flood of campaign cash, voter suppression and gerrymandering could

keep this status quo. Moreover, to sustain the progressive coalition and ensure future victories the election has to lead to legislative accomplishments that favor the 99 percent. Passively sitting back to rely on demographic changes in the electorate would be a disastrous strategy.

While we note the tactical brilliance of the Democratic campaign in holding the line in crucial swing states, the presidential candidate avoided any commitments to substantive change in the realm of economic policy or worker rights. The myriad and growing problems facing the working poor and the most vulnerable segments of the population were studiously ignored. The labor unions, feminist groups, communities of color and progressive organizations that provided the ground forces will have to mobilize strongly now to reap any real benefit for the people they represent.

The task is complicated because the next obstacles are entrenched within the core of the Democratic Party. On the day after the election, "moderate" neoliberal groups like the Third Way and the Concord Coalition started placing editorials in the liberal media calling for a "Grand Bargain" that would cut "entitlements" in return for modest reforms in taxation. They appeal to a freshly-re-elected President Obama whose cautious centrist instincts demand that he return to seeking "bi-partisanship" with Republicans.

The challenges are many, and the best way not to lose heart is to address them sequentially. First, we must resist the immediate blackmail of the "Fiscal Cliff," that illegitimate offspring of the "Deficit Crisis" mania that paralyzed Washington in Obama's first term. DSA will work together in local coalitions with the many organizations of the Coalition on Human Needs, to defend the interests of the working poor and most vulnerable members of society.

DSA will also advance sensible demands that may not be those of all coalition members. Cutting military budgets and recognizing that military projects are ineffective at generating jobs are essential to right the economy. Medicare is best fixed by expanding it to cover all, young and old. A financial transactions tax would go a long way toward reducing the deficit.

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In 2013, DSA will help mobilize for an August March on Washington for Democracy and Equality, making use of materials from its events around the 50th Anniversary of Michael Harrington's *The Other America*. We also support the call of Cornel West and Tavis Smiley for a White House conference on ending poverty.

And, we will organize for the YDS campaign for Affordable and Accessible Higher Education and to support the Student Loan Forgiveness Act.

Since the election results firmly placed immigration reform on the national agenda, DSA reaffirms its support

for comprehensive reform that welcomes and eases the path for millions of new citizens and we will actively take parts in campaigns to achieve it.

DSA cannot try to do everything that should be done, but should strive to do a few things well. Part of our internal political education program, using GET UP (Grassroots Economics Training for Understanding and Power) materials, is to bring together our analytic and organizing skills so that we can better set and carry out our local and chapter priorities.

DSA is determined to use the breathing space won in the election campaign to refocus our resolve and strengthen our work for real social justice. ♦

The Chicago Teachers Strike, with Deborah Meier

By Bill Barclay

Why do business people want to privatize schools? "Because that's where the money is," says Deborah Meier, citing Willie Sutton's famous response to a reporter who asked him why he robbed banks.

Meier, senior scholar at the Steinhardt School of Education at New York University; author; former teacher in Chicago, New York and Philadelphia; and founder of innovative schools in East Harlem and Boston, is considered the founder of the small-schools movement. We were talking about the Chicago teachers' strike that surprised Mayor Rahm Emanuel as well as a lot of other people – and interests – among the champagne and brie education "reformers."

As Meier suggested, the strike showed both how angry teachers are (it was followed by teacher strikes in some Chicago suburbs as well) and how that anger can be productive with good leadership. Once again it demonstrated a lesson we too often forget: collective action can be effective. Beyond the impact on Chicago public schools themselves, that lesson may be the most important legacy of the strike.

And why are teachers so angry? Meier had an interesting answer: the credentials touted by public school "reformers" such as former Chicago Public Schools CEO Jean-Claude Brizard¹, former D.C. schools chief Michelle Rhee and former New York City schools Chancellor Joel Klein in NYC have not been what a good job they did with the public schools. Rather, they trumpet the number of schools they close and/or convert to charter schools that offer the

opportunity for transferring public tax dollars to private corporations. To accomplish this goal, those "reformers" add layers of bureaucratic control and reporting structures to the public schools, numbing the creative impulses of teachers and children alike. The outcome drives parents – and, often, young college graduates in Teach for America – to conclude that the only option is a charter school.

The strategy is much like that of neoliberal policies at the national level: to insure that government is ineffective and wasteful, thus undermining confidence that through collective, democratic decision-making we can shape our future, creating a better world for ourselves and our children.

Why did this fight-back come from Chicago teachers? The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) is the oldest American Federation of Teachers' local in the country; it had been a leader in education for many years. Over the past decade, however, the union had lost the respect of many of its members as well as parents of Chicago schoolchildren. This dynamic changed when the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE) won the CTU presidency and vice presidency in 2010. Karen Lewis, the new president, along with her vice president Jesse Sharkey and the CORE-affiliated trustees, immediately set about both democratizing the internal operations of the union and, of equal importance, building links between the union and parents. Thus the strike was not primarily about wages but, as the excellent study produced by CTU says: "The Schools Chicago's Students Deserve" (http://www.ctunet.com/blog/text/SCSD_Report-02-16-2012-1.pdf). The



¹As I write, Brizard, who was handpicked by Mayor Emanuel, has become Emanuel's fall guy, resigning as superintendent of schools after only 17 months.

study outlines a vision of the future for Chicago's school children that is sharply at odds with that of Stand For Children or Children First as well as Mayor Emanuel, but one that resonates with parents and children in the schools. CTU's study called for the expansion of art and music programs, more "wrap-around" services to reach at-risk children, recognition that class size matters (Emanuel talked about going as high as 55 students in a class), and equalizing funding across schools. These are all pieces of a vision that should be embraced by true education reformers – but the study has been largely ignored by those who currently run the Chicago public school system.

One of the most talked-about issues in the strike was the extent to which standardized tests are the measure of both teachers' and students' educational success. The school board wanted these tests to count for 50 percent in teacher evaluation, but CTU refused, eventually winning the 30 percent state-mandated minimum. In many respects, standardized testing is the symbol of the neoliberal education "reform." Such tests create quantified outcomes that can be compared, much like one can say a particular

business is more or less profitable than another. These tests also mean that principals or other education executives do not have to know much about teaching and learning as they assess their educational labor force: all they have to do is read and compare scores. However, as Meier pointed out, no country that she knows of has tested its way to the educational top, and even the Chinese education system is moving away from use of these standardized tests.

It is not that other educational systems, such as the very successful Finnish system, make no use of these tests, because they often do. However, the tests do not drive the educational curriculum, and are not significant in teacher evaluation, but rather are used as a diagnostic tool to help teachers, students and parents improve learning. And ultimately it is learning that education should be all about. Meier described learning as the process by which we, individually and collectively, learn to speak and think more thoughtfully and with greater insight. This is an educational goal we should all embrace. ♦

Bill Barclay is an Oak Park, IL DSA member.

Chinese Students and Workers Confront Global Capitalism

By Paul Garver

We can grasp the dynamics of contemporary global capitalism through the prism of Foxconn. Nearly a million young Chinese workers assemble over 50 percent of all the electronics products consumed on the globe at 30 of its factories in China. In those massive production complexes armies of young men and women perform monotonous repetitive assembly tasks under quasi-military discipline 60 hours a week for minimal pay.

Foxconn, controlled by Taiwanese billionaire Terry Gou, is China's largest exporter and 60th largest global corporation, with annual revenues of \$79 billion (2010). Its largest corporate customer is Apple, whose iPhones and iPads it manufactures, but most other major global electronics companies also contract Foxconn for their final assembly tasks. Sophisticated components and parts are manufactured in Korea, Japan, Europe and the USA, shipped to China for final assembly, and then re-exported for sale to more affluent consumers in North America, Europe and Japan. About \$5 of the cost of an iPhone or iPad pays the wages of the Chinese workers who assemble them, while another \$5 goes to Foxconn executives and shareholders. The rest goes to the manufacturers of sophisticated components and to Apple's gross profits, currently about 36 percent of gross revenues.

Foxconn is a linchpin of the most profitable sector of global capital. Although its own operating profit margins are

razor-thin, shaved by the constant cost-squeezing of Apple and other corporate customers, Foxconn has made itself indispensable to global capital by fully utilizing its strategic position in China.

Foxconn first constructed two massive factory/dormitory complexes with half a million workers in China's first export-processing "free trade" zone in Shenzhen. After living costs soared in Chinese coastal cities and a wave of despairing Foxconn workers hurled themselves from windows of its high-rise dormitories, Foxconn sought sites in interior Chinese cities, where workers living closer to their home villages could be paid lower wages than in Shenzhen. To help Foxconn cope with the breakneck pace demanded by Apple to supply its latest lines of iPhones and iPads, provincial political authorities scrambled to enlarge airports and roads, distribute tax breaks, and facilitate the construction of new factory/housing complexes in Chengdu and Chongqing, Zhengzhou and Taiyuan. Local authorities help Foxconn recruit hundreds of thousands of new assembly workers, plus thousands of industrial engineers pouring out of vocational schools.



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The most “flexible” workers employed by Foxconn are “student interns” between 16 and 18 years old (and occasionally as young as 14) supplied to Foxconn by vocational schools. Thousands of “student interns” are assigned to work long hours at various mind-numbing repetitive tasks at Foxconn factories regardless of their major field of study. Those who try to escape these harsh conditions are warned that they will not receive their school diplomas if they leave. Although they receive a minimum wage (and no benefits at all since they are not covered by labor law), many student interns actually are forced to pay for the privilege of being exploited by paying tuition and placement fees to their schools.

If a trade union exists at all at a Foxconn factory, it is controlled by management and the “union” chairperson is a company official. Foxconn workers understandably regard these unions as useless and irrelevant. There are decent labor laws and regulations on the books, but little or no enforcement.

Sixty-hour work weeks are routine and often exceeded in peak periods at Foxconn, although the law specifies a maximum average of 49 weekly hours. Pay is often withheld or fines levied as punishment for minor infractions, like talking to your fellow workers. Humiliating punishments (such as reciting from memory quotations from Chairman Gou) are imposed for failure to meet exacting production quotas. After a deadly explosion caused by accumulations of aluminum dust killed or maimed many workers at the Chengdu plant, Foxconn provided compensation to the victim’s families and promised improvements. Two months later a similar explosion occurred at another Foxconn factory near Shanghai.

Under these circumstances, worker resistance at Foxconn is sporadic and often individual. Many workers quit in the middle of the month (and hence receive no pay at all for hours worked). Occasionally a spontaneously organized slowdown may cause the removal of a particularly abusive line supervisor. At the beginning of 2012, in a grisly echo of the tragic suicides of 2010, one group of 200 Foxconn workers gathered on a roof in Wuhan to threaten mass suicide. They won a few concessions, but 45 of them were fired as a consequence. However, resistance among Foxconn workers has increased during 2012. In September, thousands of workers fought with Foxconn security guards and destroyed their vehicles and installations outside the Taiyuan factory, and a few days later a short strike of quality control inspectors and assembly line workers at the Zhengzhou factory protested the excessive work pressure growing out of Apple’s rejection of scratched iPhone cases.

Mike Daisey’s stage show, broadcast on the radio program “This American Life,” reached a wide U.S. audience with dramatic anecdotes about the suffering of Foxconn workers, framed in a fictional narrative which led to the show’s retraction. But the program did interview

Charles Duhigg, who has reported in the *New York Times* on labor conditions at Foxconn and the role of Apple in the supply chain.

The ultimate source for detailed understanding of labor conditions at Foxconn is a small cluster of Chinese academics and students from Greater China (Mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan), who have worked with determination over recent years to improve conditions for Chinese workers. In the summer of 2010 over 60 students and scholars conducted field studies at 12 Foxconn factories throughout China, carrying out in-depth interviews and questionnaires with nearly 2000 workers. Fourteen of them worked on Foxconn assembly lines for several weeks to observe first hand. Smaller field studies were conducted again in 2011 and 2012 to ascertain if Foxconn was making any changes in response to the increased public scrutiny. The Hong-Kong based Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior (SACOM) has been the leading force organizing pressure against Foxconn and Apple as part of its campaign to improve conditions for Chinese workers in the electronics industry (www.sacom.hk).

Beginning this year, this flow of reliable information is supplemented by audits conducted by the Fair Labor Association (FLA). Although Apple had previously conducted audits of its suppliers, it had neither released information to the public nor intervened in any consistent way to remedy the violations of its own supplier code that they uncovered. Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak publicly praised Daisey’s stage show; the bad publicity forced Apple to request that the FLA, a consortium of universities and apparel companies who claim to be socially responsible, conduct Foxconn audits and make them public. The audits of three Foxconn factories released in March 2012 corroborated the findings of SACOM and the Chinese scholars, but make only modest recommendations for incremental changes. SACOM researchers since March have demonstrated that most abusive conditions at Foxconn factories, including intensification of work pressure to compensate for trimming excessive overtime hours, and the forced labor conditions for student interns have continued unabated, particularly at the Foxconn factories not part of the first audit.

Foxconn is not the only case where students are deeply involved either as exploited workers or as activists on Chinese labor issues. Mainland university students leafleted Coca-Cola factories to inform workers hired through labor agencies of their rights. A few of these students worked briefly at Coke factories as agency laborers as part of their investigations. Student interns made up 50 percent or more of the auto parts workers that carried out a long and ultimately successful strike at a Honda transmissions plant in 2010, setting off a wave of strikes for higher wages in that industry. They won an immediate 40 percent wage increase for regular workers, but over 70 percent on the lower rate for student interns. The Honda workers also won the right to elect their own

grassroots union representatives, with support from a reforming labor official.

Students and intellectuals play a key role in advocating for Chinese workers because of the vacuum created by the failure of the trade union bureaucracy to represent workers. Very few of the “internal migrant” workers from rural villages who make up the bulk of China’s assembly and construction workers have any connection to trade union structures, which are dominated by Communist party and state officials at the national and provincial levels and by management representatives at the factory and office level. Although some trade union reformers would like this to change, the pressure to keep the “unions” as mere transmission belts for the party apparatus resists innovation. The “reforming” Guangdong provincial administration promised to regularize the numerous informal NGOs that advise and support the struggles of migrant workers, but in fact this has meant bringing them under firmer state and party control and forcing the closure of independent labor NGOs.

The microcosm of the Foxconn/Apple campaign demonstrates that resistance being organized by activist intellectuals and workers in Greater China to the abusive conditions being created by the buyer-driven capitalist global production system can help galvanize a counter-movement to global corporations.

NGOs like SACOM are committed to a long-range strategy of building workers’ own self-organization rather than merely providing external support to their struggles. In an extraordinary document of March 23, 2012 entitled

“Give Apple workers a voice in their future,” SACOM joined with other international NGOs and the ITUC (the umbrella organization of global labor unions) and the International Metalworkers’ Federation (IMF – the global union alliance that includes electronics workers) to point out that independent trade unionism and collective bargaining are needed to ensure labor rights.

FLA audits are based on an inadequate understanding of the dynamics of global capital. Apple cannot credibly threaten to dump Foxconn as a supplier, nor will Apple or the other global electronics corporations cease demanding the lowest prices from their suppliers, ensuring low wages and harsh working conditions for their workers. To confront 21st century global capitalism we need more than factory inspections. While the ultimate responsibility for improving the lot of Chinese workers falls to their own organizing efforts and to Chinese society, external pressure on branded global giants like Apple helps open up space. We need a sophisticated and determined international movement of worker solidarity, supported by a network of global citizens and informed consumers.

For my other related articles and links to recent political economic analyses from Greater Chinese and other scholar activists who support the Foxconn campaign, see <http://talkingunion.wordpress.com/?s=Garver> ♦

Paul Garver, a member of DSA’s National Political Committee, is a retired global union organizer and co-editor of Talking Union.

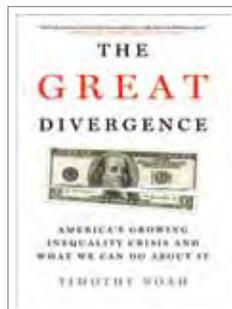
Inequality, Poverty and Politics

By Frank Llewellyn

The Great Divergence: America’s Growing Inequality Crisis and What We Can Do About It.
Timothy Noah. Bloomsbury Press. 264 pp. \$25.

The Rich and the Rest of Us: A Poverty Manifesto.
Tavis Smiley and Cornel West. Smiley Books. 222 pp. \$12.

Timothy Noah’s *The Great Divergence* and Tavis Smiley’s and Cornel West’s *The Rich and the Rest of Us* frame inequality quite differently. Both are intellectual, political and social histories that span a century but focus most on changes to our politics, policies, and economy over the last few decades. With all the footnotes any scholar would demand, they still remain completely accessible to the non-academic reader. While they



cover some of the same ground and promote similar policies, you will be much less informed by reading only one of them.

Timothy Noah focuses on the rise of corporate wealth and political power, documenting the ways in which changes in government policy directly contributed to the increased wealth of the 1 percent, including government actions that increased economic inequality and undermined working- and middle-class living standards. (And unlike many, he doesn’t skip over the importance of unions in growing and maintaining those standards.) Noah refutes all of the arguments that the increasing inequality of the last 30 years is unimportant or without negative societal consequences, using statistics in novel ways that challenge conventional



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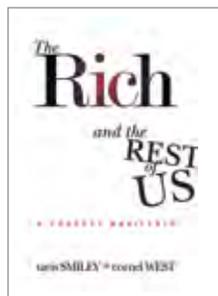
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thinking. I was particularly taken by his challenge to American exceptionalism, pointing out that a child's parentage is now a greater determinant of future earnings and wealth than a parents' genes are of a child's height and weight. Nor is Noah shy about labels for the different strata of the rich that are wonderfully direct for a book on public policy, moving from the "Sort of Rich" all the way to the "Stinking Rich" – the top .01 percent making \$9.1 million or more, who have increased their share of the national income by nearly 400 percent since 1979.

Noah's book deliberately doesn't focus on the poor or the near-poor. For that, we turn to Tavis Smiley and DSA Honorary Chair Cornel West, whose book was sparked by "The Poverty Tour: A Call to Conscience" they organized in August of 2011 and a follow-up symposium, "Remaking America: From Poverty to Prosperity." A central aim of *The Rich and the Rest of Us* is to make the poor visible again. The book contrasts poverty's treatment as a political issue during the New Deal and the Great Society periods against Reagan's and Clinton's emphasis on "individual responsibility" and character issues. They argue that we are far more likely to respond politically to issues of poverty when we see them as the result of the structure of the economy instead of the effect of the personal qualities of the poor.

Like Noah, Smiley and West focus on political solutions to the economic crisis; they also view our obligation toward the poor as a deeply moral question. They challenge the political class to respond to the 150 million who are poor or near-poor – by raising consciousness in the tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Both books call for more jobs and increased taxation of the rich. Smiley and West propose a 12-point program to redesign social and economic policy and reduce the political power of corporations, including a White House conference on the eradication of poverty – and even include a letter-writing kit in the book.

These books ought to have been major influences on the election campaign. Unfortunately, the candidates only



danced around these issues, at best accepting incomplete versions of the policy proposals. The Romney campaign (and most Republicans) didn't challenge the political narrative of declining middle- and working-class living standards directly. Instead, it framed objections to higher taxes on the wealthy and corporations as impediments to job creation. Romney and Ryan would mention poverty, wages and living standards, but only as symptoms of a weak economy.

The Obama campaign rightly exposed Romney's intellectual and political commitment to extremism and the 1 percent economic agenda. Other than promising to create 12,000,000 jobs over the next four years, Romney's economic program proposed only tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations, repealing Obamacare, and rolling back regulation. During this campaign, President Obama didn't mention poverty or propose a truly large-scale job creation program. He didn't even attack Romney's jobs number, which simply restated the Congressional Budget Office's job creation forecast – a number that was not dependent on either candidate's election. Sixty percent of that number just keeps up with minimal population growth, while the balance is only 25 percent of what's needed to meet the needs of the 23,000,000 who are under- or unemployed.

Obama did not make that argument nor address poverty for political reasons. He believed he could not hold onto middle- and working-class voters by proposing to spend enough to generate full employment or fund poverty programs. He blamed everything on the Bush policies and said (rightly) that we can't go backwards.

Progressives have won the debate on taxing the wealthy with arguments that linked increased taxation of the rich to the wellbeing of middle- and working-class people. We will not win the debate on poverty until we convince those middle- and working-class people that anti-poverty programs providing the poor with income also protect their interests. Of course, to make that argument, Obama would have had to turn into the leftist the Right has characterized him as instead of the centrist he has governed as for the last four years. ♦

Frank Llewellyn is a member of DSA's National Political Committee and is the former national director of DSA. Follow Frank on Twitter @FrankLlewellyn.

Save the date – August 24-28, 2013

2013 is the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, D.C. Four democratic socialists organized the 1963 March on Washington – A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King, Jr., and UAW president Walter Reuther. The march



called for "Jobs and Freedom," recognizing that political and civil rights are only fully meaningful when accompanied by economic justice. As part of our **The Other America is Our America 50th Anniversary Project**, DSA will organize a large contingent to participate in the march.

Kitchen Table Economics: What is “Right To Work?”

By Duane E. Campbell

The right to join a union and to negotiate for a living wage and decent working conditions should be available to all workers. Republican politicians are trying to take this basic right away in several states by proposing legislation misleadingly named “right to work.”

Right to work (RTW) laws do not guarantee anyone a job; that is, there is no actual right to work. Rather, RTW laws make it illegal for unions to require that each worker who benefits from a union contract pay his or her fair share of the costs of administering that contract.

“Right to work” is a propaganda slogan that the corporate-owned media has successfully branded and repeated. We should avoid echoing the phrase. Instead, we should call these laws what they are – an assault on unions. According to the Economic Policy Institute, in states that have adopted RTW legislation, annual wages and benefits are about \$1,500 lower than for comparable workers in non-RTW states, for both union and nonunion workers. And the odds of getting health insurance or a pension through one’s job are also lower.

The way to economic recovery isn’t to lay off workers, slash their salaries and benefits, and threaten

the retirement plans of people who have been paying into them for over 30 years. But that is what politicians in Wisconsin, Indiana, New Hampshire and other states are doing as they pass RTW legislation. And by making it harder for workers’ organizations to have staff and to sustain themselves financially, RTW laws undermine unions’ bargaining strength and workers’ participation in politics.



Twenty-two states – predominantly in the South – already have RTW laws, mostly dating from the Joe McCarthy era. Since the Republican sweep of state legislatures in 2010, a coalition of corporate lobbyists, right-wing anti-worker politicians and extremists including Grover Norquist and the Koch Brothers have sponsored

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RTW legislation and similar attacks on unions in dozens of states. When they can't win completely they often introduce other "paycheck deception bills" to limit unions' participation in elections and politics.

The great US "middle class" (read: affluent working class) did not just happen. It was built by the hard work of our parents and grandparents and the unions that represented them. Union power created the 40-hour work week, paid vacations, and wages that were once the envy of the world. But today workers and unions are under siege. In several states working people today are fighting the greatest class war in over 100 years. And we can

expect little help from a political system that has aided the looting of the country. As democratic socialists we should lend our support to unions and working people in general in defeating these anti-worker RTW proposals.

Duane Campbell is a professor (emeritus) of bilingual multicultural education at California State University Sacramento, a union activist for over 40 years, and the chair of Sacramento DSA. His most recent book is Choosing Democracy: a Practical Guide to Multicultural Education (2010). He blogs on politics, education and labor at www.choosingdemocracy.blogspot.com and www.talkingunion.wordpress.com. ♦

Kansas Socialism Is In the House, Again

Meet Jackie Sewell: socialist, feminist and new YDS organizer

By Michael Hirsch

Kansas may count as a "red state," one that's backed national Democrats only on the rarest of occasions, but it has a proud radical tradition, too. A strong abolitionist center, it produced a fiery populist uprising and hosted a strong socialist presence in Lawrence. It also spawned a first-rate socialist newspaper, *The Appeal to Reason*, which at its height in the first decade of the 20th century had a circulation of some 200,000, counting among its regular contributors Eugene Debs and Upton Sinclair.

Now it's produced Jackie Sewell, the new Young Democratic Socialists (YDS) organizer.



DSA Honorary Co-chair Cornel West and Jackie Sewell.

followed; these only reinforced her tendency toward thinking critically.

As an activist, she gravitated toward backing immigrant workers' struggles, as she worked with Wichita State YDS supporting the fight of Florida agricultural workers in the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and joint actions with

leaders from Wichita's large Spanish-speaking immigrant community.

She graduated from the University of Kansas, majoring in Spanish (no surprise there, given her interest in immigrant issues) with a specialization in women, gender and sexuality studies.

As the YDS organizer since the summer, housed in New York City where she had never lived before coming on board, she's already hit the road several times. She's visited colleges and universities including Wesleyan, Penn State, Brandeis, the College of Wooster and Ohio University in Athens, to deliver her Grassroots Economics Training for Understanding and Power (GET UP) presentation on student debt and the crisis in higher education.

Sewell says she's "excited to work on our YDS campaign for affordable and accessible higher education." The campaign encompasses the fight-back against the drop in state and federal funding for schools, resisting the efforts of boards of trustees to privatize universities and the stifling explosion in student debt, which now outstrips even credit card obligations.

"Since the start of the great recession, 43 of the 50 states have decreased funding for higher education on all levels," Sewell points out. "Spending per student reached a 25-year low this year. We know education is a right, and it's a right that needs protecting. We need to mobilize students especially around tuition freezes as a first step and way more transparency in how universities spend tuition and their budgets."



Sewell, as with every once-and-future YDS staffer, has a job chockablock with work. In line with YDS priorities, she is busy generating basic educational materials ranging from introductions to socialist and feminist theory to the congressional Student Loan Forgiveness Act. “We want to make the YDS website resource-rich,” she says, “so chapters doing tabling and holding meetings can easily get the information they need off our site.”

She’s also working with DSA National Director Maria Svart to initiate a series of educational presentations via SKYPE or Google+. Her portfolio includes leading activist training sessions, looking to develop today’s YDS recruits into tomorrow’s leaders, and facilitating a smooth transition for graduates from the mostly campus-based YDS to the generally older and off-campus DSA.

It’s not all big-picture work for the new organizer. An average day has her staying in touch with chapters through

emails, Facebook exchanges and conference calls with chapter leaders. “We need to know what chapters want and how the national organization can help them, especially with speakers and campaign planning.” She also stays in close touch with at-large members wanting to be involved but having no local chapters in their areas.

So what do the folks back home think about her move to what many rural conservatives think of as Babylon on the Hudson? And what do they think of her organizing the day-to-day work of the largest socialist youth group in the United States?

“My mom, with her working-class background, is proud of me,” she said. “My dad [a small businessman] not so much.” Or not just yet, we think. ♦

Michael Hirsch is a New York City-based labor writer and an editor of Democratic Left.

Locals Focus on Elections and Today’s Other America

National and state elections took place this fall as our economy struggled to recover from the worst recession and greatest levels of inequality since 1929. Some DSAers were able to find ways to make a difference in the elections, volunteering as canvassers in swing states or for local candidates. Many used the 50th anniversary of our founder Michael Harrington’s historic book *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* to re-introduce the “invisible poor” into the public discourse, urge mobilization for solutions, and celebrate our organization’s history. They strove to combine analysis with coalition building that addresses the profound structural causes of the current crisis and the threat to democracy posed by the corporate-funded right wing. Here are a few examples of effective local actions:

Motor City Mobilizes

For many years, Detroit DSA members have volunteered together in elections – to the point that the Michigan State Democratic Party has come to respect them as significant players. Candidates actually seek their volunteer work in close but significant races. So the Detroit comrades were prepared and well positioned when the unexpected happened.

The newly redistricted Michigan 11th Congressional District was considered a safe Republican seat for incumbent Thaddeus McCotter, with 57 percent registered Republicans. The Democrats’ sacrifice candidate, Dr. Syed Taj, was running on a platform of creating jobs and protecting Social Security and Medicare. But McCotter’s nominating petitions were thrown out for massive fraud, and he resigned his House seat. The Republican primary

went to volatile Tea Partier Kerry Bentivolio, disliked even by his own party. Suddenly, the race was up for grabs.



Detroit DSA canvassers for Syed Taj.

DSA Local Chair David Green gave a house party, a form of fundraising allowed, indeed encouraged, under election law. The checks collected at them are made out directly to the candidate’s campaign, not the DSA Political Action Committee (PAC). The fundraiser for Taj exceeded expectations. Among those in attendance were Rep. John Conyers, Jr., Mich, State AFL-CIO President Karla Swift, AFT-Mich. President David Hecker and other union notables. Only the credibility that comes from years of campaigning could bring such prominent people to the party.

As polls showed the race dead even, DSA volunteers showed up on three Saturday mornings as an organized group. Some canvassed while those unable to walk longer distances phone-banked – as a DSA group. The local publicized the dates to its members on its website and

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Facebook page, sent email, and followed up with phone calls. Unfortunately, Taj lost by 46 percent to 53 percent, as most Republicans voted a straight ticket.

Detroit DSA also educated their members about DSA member Michelle Fecteau, who ran for the state Board of Education, and for attorney Mark Bernstein who ran for University of Mich. Board of Regents on a platform of making college tuition affordable; both won in close races.



John Conyers with supporters at the Detroit DSA fundraiser.

Earlier in May during the primaries, Detroit DSA drew over 100 people to a fundraiser for Rep. Conyers at Colors Restaurant. The guest of honor was Jim Hightower, progressive radio commentator, syndicated columnist, and editor of the *Hightower Lowdown*. He entertained the audience with his humorous observations on Republicans, the Tea Party, and Mitt Romney. Co-hosts were Reverend David Bullock, president of the Detroit branch of Operation PUSH; David Hecker; Tim Carpenter, executive director of Progressive Democrats of America, and Marjorie Mitchell, executive director of the Michigan Universal Health Care Access Network. DSAers in Atlanta, San Diego and Chicago also held fundraisers for Conyers, using the house party format. After overcoming a primary challenge, Conyers again won in the general election, with 81 percent of the vote.

Winning in Massachusetts and California

In September, first-time candidate Mary Keefe, backed by the Mass Alliance – a coalition that includes Boston DSA – won a five-way primary election to emerge as the Democratic Party nominee for state representative in the 15th (Worcester) district. Keefe ran as an open progressive, supporting a hike in the gas tax, abortion choice, gay marriage, and environmental protection against strong conservative opposition. She was also the only candidate to endorse the revenue bill supported by the Campaign for Our Communities, which would raise \$1.4 billion in new revenue, mostly from the rich, for schools, potholes, transit, police, parks and libraries. (Worcester has lost 40 percent of its local aid from the state in the last decade.) Her other



Bob Simpson, Greater Oak Park DSA and the Chicago Teachers Solidarity Campaign, helped show community support for the union.

backers included the AFL-CIO, Neighbor to Neighbor, Mass. Nurses, SEIU, and Carpenters local 107. Boston DSA volunteers organized three car caravans to Worcester for door knocking and voter ID, including on election day. Keefe won, 76 percent to 24 percent!

In California, non-partisan propositions are typically the arena where the class struggles take place. This year DSAers found it particularly important to work for Prop. 30 (school and university funding through a slightly higher sales tax and higher income taxes on personal incomes over \$250,000) and against Prop. 32 (which would have banned labor unions from using payroll deductions, their main source of income, for political spending). DSA volunteers in our four California locals jumped into the fray, and their efforts were successful, part



DSAers Michael Nye and John Lockett table in East Bay.

of a historic turn-around for the state. San Diego DSA also volunteered for former Rep. Bob Filner's successful campaign to become Mayor of San Diego.

East Bay hosted a presentation by Lenny Goldberg of the California Tax Reform Association about corporate tax dodging, progressive solutions to state budget problems and organizing for Prop. 30, and leafleted at a city fair and at commuter train stations (BART) for Prop. 30 and against Prop. 32. Duane Campbell reports tabling on the Sacramento State campus, offering a popular course on "The Economic Crisis and its Alternatives," speaking on these issues in a number of classes to previously uninformed students, and working

with the Sacramento Progressive Alliance. “We had some great victories in California,” says Campbell. “We defeated the billionaires’ efforts to crush organized labor and to continue the anti-tax radicalism.”

The Other America turns 50: Calls to action, not nostalgia

Central Ohio DSA held a panel presentation in October marking the 50th anniversary of the publication of *The Other America* and the current state of poverty in America. The program included a seven-minute clip from the film *Ain't I A Person* on the nature of poverty, by Keith Kilty, who also moderated. This was followed by a reminiscence and social justice framing by Bob Fittrakis of Columbus State Community College, a local activist and publisher of the *Free Press*; a presentation on economics by Fadhel Kaboub, assistant professor of economics, Denison University; and an historic view by Kevin Boyle,

professor of history, Ohio State University. Linda Cook, senior attorney at the Ohio Poverty Law Center, explained economic exploitation and costs that weigh on the poor, followed by a presentation by Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, director, Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks.

Boston DSA was a major player in a highly successful day-long symposium on “Poverty Since the Great Society” at Brandeis University, attended by 120 people. Former YDS organizer and Brandeis graduate student David Duhalde was lead organizer, and current YDS organizer Jackie Sewell gave a GET UP presentation on the student debt crisis. Speakers included professor and *American Prospect* editor Robert Kuttner and journalist Bob Herbert. The event was sponsored by the Heller School for Social Policy’s Poverty Alleviation Concentration and funded by the Louis D. Brandeis Legacy Fund for Social Justice (founded by Jules Bernstein, a DSA veteran, who also spoke). ♦

In grateful appreciation to those members and friends who supported the campaign for *Democratic Left*:

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Taking GET UP on the Road

By Peg Strobel

In June, Bill Barclay and Peg Strobel set out for California to do a GET UP workshop on “U.S. Capitalism in Crisis and Social Market Alternatives” at six different DSA locals. GET UP stands for “Grassroots Economics Training for Understanding and Power.” It covers inequality, housing, debt and finance, and the alternative policies that would restructure the US political economy. Laced with interactive exercises, its goal is to equip people to identify and counter neoliberal arguments about the economy and society.



Each local – Des Moines, Los Angeles, San Diego, Boulder, Fort Collins and Wichita – attracted more than

their usual DSA attendees; in most cases, half or more were new people. They included local members of Occupy, community organizers, unemployed folks, students, union members and people from faith-based groups.

Boulder’s audience of 30 was a good size for maximizing audience participation. In the “income walk,” people representing the bottom four quintiles (20 percent) of the population, the 80-98th percentile and the top 1 percent take positions along a line that marks one foot for every \$10,000 of income. They locate their place by 1979 income and then shift to their 2006 income (the cusp of the financial crisis). It is stunning to see the 1-percent person not only leave the room, but disappear down the street! At the request of

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the Wichita folks, we included a special reference to the estimated income of the Koch brothers, whose headquarters are in Wichita. On the same scale, each Koch would end up about 23 miles out from the workshop.

In the housing skit, audience members act out (with a script) the experience of buying a house in 2005 and refinancing in 2007, illustrating the actions of both mortgage lenders and the agencies that rated risky investments as safe, thereby contributing to the financial collapse of 2008. The workshop ends by contrasting “reforms” that increase the role of the market, with reforms that lessen the market’s role and social market alternatives that remove the role of the market – in the areas of health care, education, housing and labor.

In sum, this GET UP workshop argues: Together, the U.S. had three decades of growing inequality, with huge income growth among the top 1 percent. This income inequality generated a rise of speculative financial activity, which drove a housing bubble and financial crisis, followed by economic stagnation. We must move the political discussion towards social market alternatives.



DC DSA held a well-attended GET UP workshop Nov. 10, co-sponsored by DC Jobs with Justice, the Communications Workers of America, and United Food and Confectionary Workers Local 400.

Other GET UP workshops explore neoliberal principles, student debt and the decline in funding higher education. Contact the national office if you want to host a GET UP. ♦

Peg Strobel is a member of Chicago DSA and the DSA National Political Committee; former director of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum; and professor emerita of gender and women’s studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

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