Gender, Race, Immigration, Prisons, and the Economy

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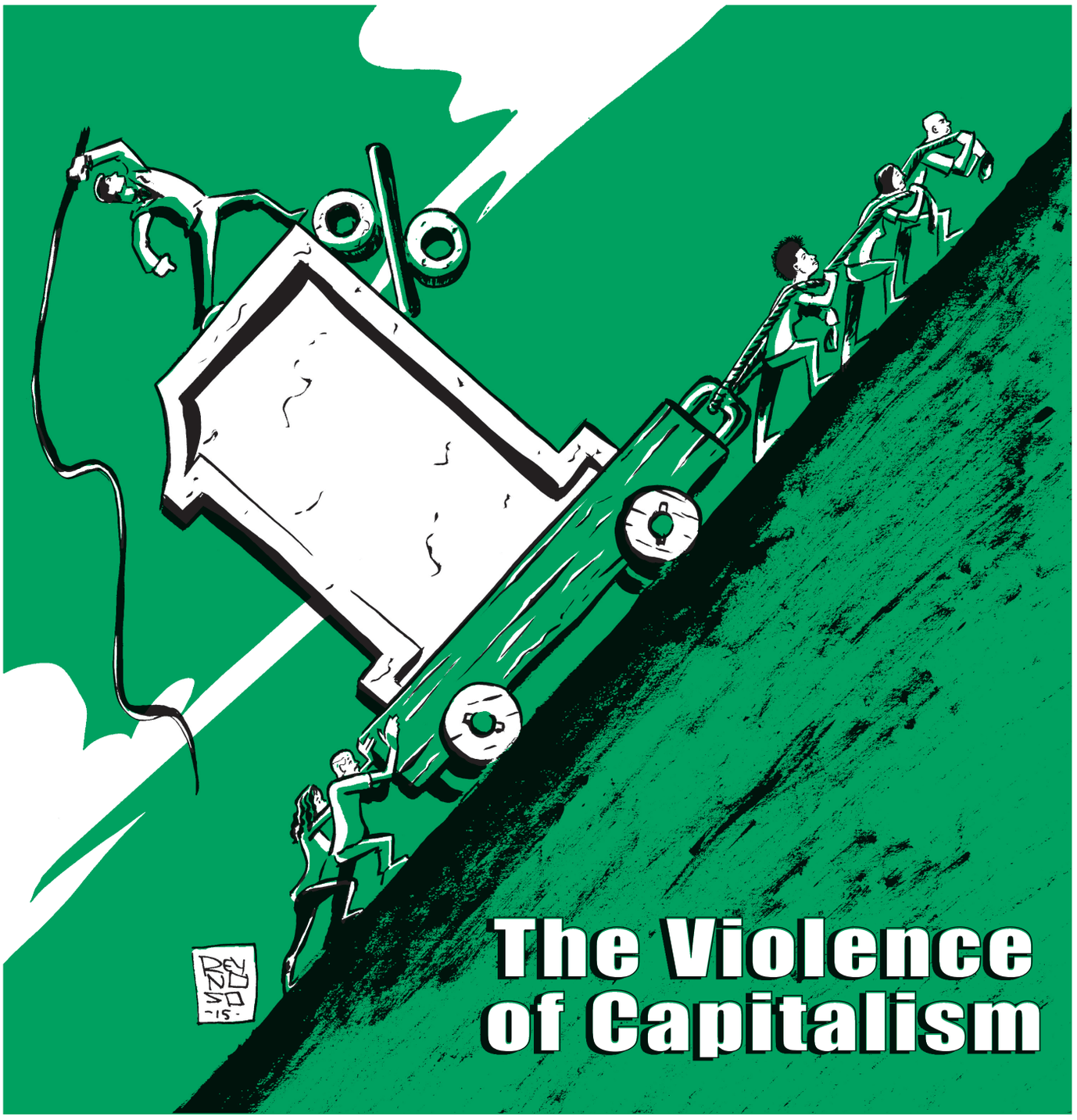

The Violence of Capitalism

From the National Director

Don't Tax and Don't Spend

How the Right Defunded the Government

By Maria Svart

This issue of *Democratic Left* arrives before Tax Day, April 15. As socialists, we know how important a fair and progressive tax system is to a fair and progressive society. It's important, then, that we understand how, for more than 30 years, the right wing has worked to lower taxes for the rich and use the reduced income as an excuse to starve government programs that benefit all of us.

We know that candidates for office consider it political suicide to talk about raising taxes, even on the rich, but it is a complete myth that U.S. income taxes are too high. The truth is that the United States is both the lowest and most regressively taxed nation in the developed world. We spend less of our collective income on public provision than any other advanced democracy. On the other hand, we *do* excel in spending in two areas that violently destroy rather than enhance human life: the military and mass incarceration.

As the articles in this issue attest, when politicians from both major parties cut funding for public programs such as education, housing, child care, jobs, infrastructure, and transportation and at the same time cut taxes for the wealthy and corporations, many people are harmed in palpable ways. This has real consequences. For example, violence against women cannot be reversed without increased social and protective services for women and children and publicly funded child care and parental leave. All these measures would enhance the independence of women and increase their security. Nor can our society end the school-to-prison pipeline that plagues poor black, brown, and deindustrialized white communities without massive public investment in job training and putting people to work rebuilding our tattered infrastructure.

Contrary to capitalist claims, with the notable exceptions of prisons and the military, the United States is the land of small, not big government, in comparison to even the most conservative western industrialized countries and to our own country in the past. Fifty years ago, we spent more of our gross domestic product on public provision than we do now and had higher tax rates on the wealthy. (For more detailed figures, see the websites of the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities cbpp.org and Citizens for Tax Justice ctj.org.)

How did this happen? As Janet Spitz shows in her article, the corporate-funded mass media tell us that taxes are too high and that they sap "entrepreneurial" energy. This is not just an ideology that enhances the wealth and power of the 1%, it's a bald-faced lie, reinforced by the training our business elites receive.

Although a majority of people in the United States favor expanded government spending to fund basic human needs and to end poverty, most also believe they are heavily taxed. This not a completely false belief, as the reality is that families and individuals in the bottom 80% of the income distribution bear the biggest tax burden. In the United States today, the average tax rate on the richest 10% of families is 23%. Although the bottom 20% of U.S. families pay little in income tax, they pay a comparatively high 18% or more of their incomes in regressive sales and property taxes and also often in flat-rate, nonrefundable local and/or state income or wage taxes.

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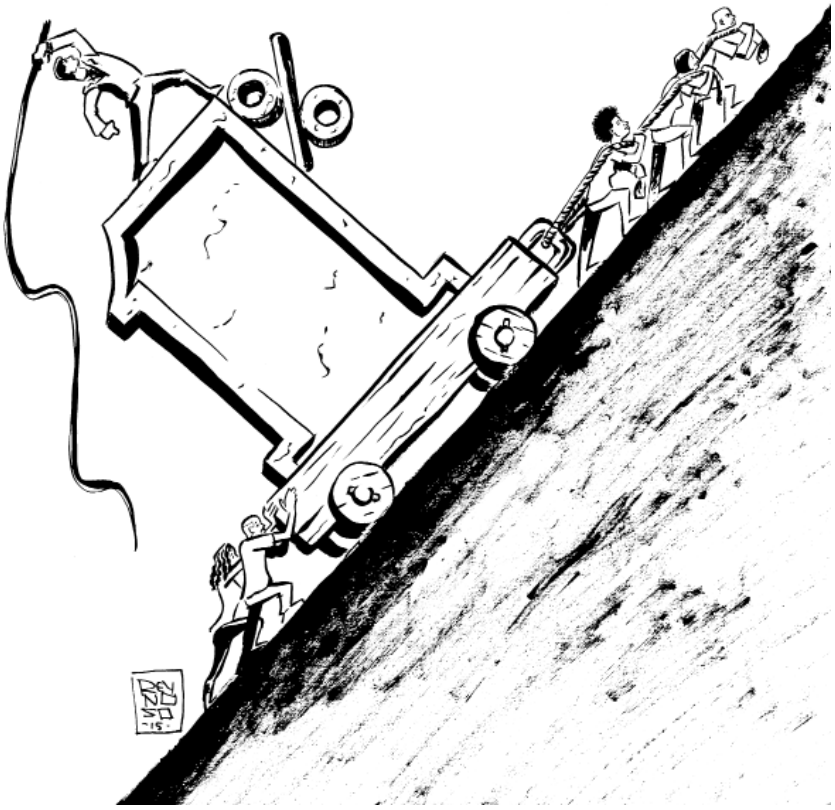
Cover art by Frank Reynoso

Talking about *DL*:

If you would like to participate in a telephone discussion group about this issue of *Democratic Left*, please r.s.v.p. at dsausa.org/calendar or call 212-727-8610. The conference call will be on Monday, April 20, 6 p.m. Pacific/ 9 p.m. Eastern.

And at the federal level they pay a regressive flat-rate payroll tax for Social Security and Medicare. That tax is capped at $135,000 in income. Elsewhere in the industrialized western world, the top 10% pay more than 30% in taxes and the bottom fifth pay under 12%. No wonder many people of the 99% feel overtaxed.

The United States had figures closer to those of other industrialized western democracies in the 1960s, but ever since the mid-1970s there has been a massive lobbying effort by the "wealth protection" industry of lobbyists who have worked overtime to remove whatever progressivity existed in the U.S. tax system. In 2012, the industry spent over $9 billion on such lobbying, with 80% of those funds coming from industry, trade, and professional associations. All these groups work to cut their effective tax rates. And this investment pays off. In 1971, corporate tax revenue constituted over 25% of the federal budget. Today, it brings in only 10% of government revenue.



Frank Reynoso

This reshifting of the tax burden and defunding of government started under Ronald Reagan and continued through the Clinton and Bush years, so it's no wonder that generations have grown up never knowing that government can and should play a positive role in promoting a just and fair society.

As the articles in this issue of *Democratic Left* show, these policies have had a real and terrifying impact on all our lives, but particularly on the lives of women and people of color. All parents, but especially women, have to work a double shift of paid work and then unpaid childcare, and would benefit from decently funded education and childcare policies. Millions of un- and underemployed people would benefit from living wages and job programs that translate into economic security. The North American Free Trade Agreement and the war on drugs, along with rising inequality and joblessness, have forced people to migrate north and filled our prisons here at home.

We can call these assaults economic violence. It is real and it is starving our national soul. If we are to overturn regressive and upwardly redistributive tax and trade polices, our movements must gain more political traction. Only then will our political elites fear a mobilized electorate more than rich lobbyists and campaign donors. The left and labor have to engage in much more creative popular education and street protest to show how the defunding of public programs such as K-12 and public higher education renders our society more inegalitarian than ever. Reversing the Reagan and Bush tax cuts for just the most affluent 2% would add $140 billion a year to our four trillion dollar federal budget. If we abolished federal tax expenditures on corporations (for example, the oil depletion allowance and the corporate exemption from paying taxes on foreign earnings), we could fund another $120 billion dollars in human needs. A wee bit of a Robin Hood Tax—a modest financial transactions tax of 0.25% on all stock, bond, and derivatives trading—could bring in another $200 billion plus and could be the beginning of a real challenge to the power of finance capital.

And, finally, at the state level, if we taxed the top 20% of income earners at the same average rate that we tax the bottom fifth (or quintile), state tax revenue would increase by 10%. Tax and spending policy is a form of class warfare. We, the people, have to take back the income and wealth that we create from those who have long used state power to garner their unjust share. ❖

Visit the *Democratic Left* blog: dsausa.org

I Have WAY More Stuff Than You

How Is This Normal, Just, or Right?

By Janet Spitz

History documents gross inequality: kings and lords took what they could, and peasants struggled along as they might. An intermediate "middle class" of favored underlings provided structural reinforcement then; a similar middle-management group provides legitimacy and reinforcement now for the richest 85 people in the world who own the same value of assets and wealth as the 3,500,000,000 poorest.

Extreme inequality is nothing new. What interrupted its reign was democracy, with its implicit promise of opportunity for all. Democracy did for a time equalize wealth—at least to a degree—in the modern industrialized nations where democracy was, in various forms, adopted.

In the United States, democracy ushered in a relative equalization of income and wealth: the Great Compression, a mid-twentieth-century narrowing of monetary difference between the top 1% and the bottom 90% of the population. This is shown in the central part of Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows income and wealth of the top 1% (top line) and income and wealth of the bottom 90% in the second dark line at the bottom. The missing 9% represents many of the middle managers who reinforce the top 1% and who are rewarded accordingly. Several items stand out in this graph.

First, notice the 1929 fall of the top 1%. This is followed by the mid-century Great Compression, but then the top 1% climb back up, regaining all of their pre–Great Depression income, and more than their pre–Great Depression wealth. By 2007, 24% of all income went to families earning more than $400,000.

Second, the bottom 90% reversed its poor showing in the early twentieth century, with the New Deal's tax codes, public works programs, labor regulation, and income redistribution contributing significantly to the formation of the mid-twentieth century U.S. middle class. But economic democracy eroded in the 1980s after Ronald Reagan's deregulation kicked in. Deregulation created a snowball effect, pushing down wages, wealth, and income among the bottom 90% and causing a measurable decline in the U.S. middle class. Today, those earning less (mostly far less) than $110,000 a year are just as badly off, relatively speaking, as they were 100 years ago. With a higher structural unemployment rate and low-wage, part-time jobs, economic democracy exists no more today than it did before the Great Depression and the New Deal.

Political democracy, too, has eroded in recent years. The *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision gave corporations person status, allowing corporate "persons" to make direct donations to candidates of their choice. Now, the 2015 budget signed by President Barack Obama increases to $1.6 million the amount that one corporate or individual person can give to a single candidate running for office—up from $194,400. This donation can be repeated in each election cycle. If $1.6 million won't buy a congressional vote, what will?

Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, "Income Inequality in the United States, 1913-1998," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 118(1), 2003, 1-39, series updated to 2013 in January 2014. Reprinted by permission.

Creating Ideological Change

How did one of the most democratic of nations—or at least, the nation most vocal in asserting its claim of democracy—revert to such extremes of inequality? Deregulation helped, but one major orchestrated shift in ideology took center stage.

For the U.S. middle class whose incomes rose in the Great Compression, this was a time of opportunity: families bought homes and cars, and children went to college; jobs paid a living wage. The economic difference between managers and workers decreased, so that managers were not all that much better off than the workers who labored under their rule; after overtime, some managers earned less.

For those at the top, this situation was intolerable. To restore business advantage they could no longer, at least in the United States, rely on the violence with which privately hired Pinkertons earlier complemented municipal police. A new strategy was required: corporate insiders turned to higher education to provide a new, more durable basis for broad economic, political and ideological change.

Starting in the 1950s, business education grew. Business bachelor's degrees increased to 20.5% of 2012 undergraduate degrees awarded. Production of MBAs accelerated even more steeply, from 3,280 in 1956 to 191,571 in 2012, when the MBA took 25.4% of all master's degrees. The business class was building a stronger, more resilient foundation for its domination of American income and wealth.

Higher education during the second half of the twentieth century exploded across the board, with degrees in the humanities, engineering, and the sciences all exhibiting robust growth. Business, however, took larger and larger educational shares.

Students learn more from their professors than facts in the text. Social codes tell people how they are supposed to act, think, and interact with each other; management education in particular shapes who business students become. Business students become business leaders, carrying forward the ideological standpoint of this re-emergent business class.

Most importantly, this group accomplished a shift in acceptance of inequality. Repeated reference to "free markets" conflates that phrase with "freedom," a contradiction in terms. Democratic freedom is a state establishment of free speech, free association, generally free behavior, and free votes. Market fundamentalism's "free markets" explicitly reject the very regulatory oversights that democratic states need in order to limit corporate corruption, discrimination, environmental degradation, and gross exploitation of labor for extreme profit.

That business faculty hold views favoring inequality is documented in a survey I conducted in 2009, answered by some 750 faculty employed in major research university business schools and by some 1,325 faculty employed in those same major research universities in other academic fields. Business faculty hold views that are remarkably more sexist than their non-business colleagues, are more racist, and favor higher levels of corruption, including direct bribes. Business faculty are more supportive of telling everyday lies than faculty in other fields. High-status students in these major universities carry this ideology forward, until across the United States today, much of our entire population accepts poverty as a consequence of laziness, and economic privilege and wealth as earned.

Good for Business, Bad for Democracy

Extracting wealth from the work force to enrich those at the very top is bad national policy. The wealthy spend less of their income on products and services; they save more, transferring much of that wealth to foreign tax havens.

The rightward ideological shift toward market fundamentalism creates problems for practical democracy too, particularly democratic ideals. Business corporations are "people" in domestic rights, and more than people in trade agreements, starting with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Under NAFTA, corporations are permitted to sue nations for loss of potential profit decreased by regulations protecting towns, people, and the environment. The 2013 train crash in Quebec province, where Bakken crude exploded, burning a town and killing more than 45 people, occurred along that urban route only after Canada had been forced under NAFTA to abandon requirements that dangerous cargo use a longer, less populated track because those extra miles added costs, decreasing profit. Money buys this.

Political democracy cannot survive when bribes of $1.6 million are made legal.

Some 69% of Americans see inequality as a problem that the U.S. government should do "some" or "a lot" to fix. People are not sheep, but they don't always vote. If extreme inequality is to be curbed, we need a vast electoral turnout now.

Candidates who oppose extremes of inequality and are willing to tax the rich must be provided with at least some funds as well as scores of volunteers to carry the message that our ideology of economic, as well as political, democracy lives on.

For the moment, votes still carry the day. ❖

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The Dialectic of Rape

By Carolyn M. Byerly

Rape keeps insinuating itself into our reality, by way of women's protests and publicized stories. Emma Sulkowicz carries a mattress identical to the one on which she says she was anally raped by a classmate at Columbia University in order to prod the administration into punishing her perpetrator. Stories of gang rapes and assaults by male athletes, fraternity brothers, and high-profile entertainers pepper the weekly news. But rape is not a new problem or story. It has been an anchor issue of feminism for half a century, and it is on today's news agenda because feminists put it there.

Chicago Women's Graphics Collective, www.cwluherstory.org

Women began to rise up angrily against widespread, largely unrecognized, and certainly unpunished crimes of sexual violence in the early 1970s. New York Radical Feminists held a widely publicized public "speak out" on rape in 1971, and similar events followed across the country. The anti-rape movement built quickly, with women protesting police treatment of rape victims and the failure of prosecutors to prosecute accused rapists. Rape crisis centers formed, where volunteers listened to women's stories and accompanied them to police stations to report.

By the late 1970s, rape-crisis groups expanded their work to include preventive education in schools and trainings for police and prosecutors. In large cities first, and then smaller communities, feminists instigated "special victim units" within police departments and the placement of "legal advocates" in prosecutors' offices. State level networks grew across the country, and, by 1979, the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault formed and began holding annual conferences. Women would never again be silent about their assaults, and they had stopped letting men get away with it.

Women of that period faced antiquated rape laws that made it more difficult for prosecutors to build a case. They hesitated to report their assaults, fearing that no one would believe them and that they would be stigmatized, both by the criminal justice system and among those close to them. In 1974, the National Organization for Women's legal team organized a state-by-state rape-law campaign, with NOW leaders using media kits to educate reporters about the issues. The campaign paid off with increased (and better informed) reporting. By the 1980s, news stories incorporated new feminist terminology—sexual assault, violence against women, acquaintance rape, sexual harassment, and so on—and often carried a feminist analysis. Statutes were revised in one state after another. By 1993, for instance, marital rape was illegal in all 50 states.

Socialist Feminists on Rape

The most far-reaching feminist analysis of the problem came from socialist feminists, who situated violence against women at the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism. Sociologist Laura Kramer states that "under patriarchy, women were viewed simply as the property of men and not as individuals in society." Therefore, socialist feminists reasoned, when it came to the issue of rape, men felt that women were simply subordinates who had no rights of their own. For men, rape did not exist. While socialist feminists viewed rape as a form of oppression that was used by men to keep women in their place in society, they struggled at first to find its more specific connections to capitalism.

Most male Marxists and socialists had been silent on whether and how class and sexual oppression coincided. Those few sources that addressed this—for example, Engels's *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Trotsky's statements about women in *Problems of Life, The Revolution Betrayed*, and eventually *Women and the Family*—were all fo-

cused on women's subordination within the family. None addressed sexual violence. Socialist feminists of the 1970s thought in bigger terms than their male comrades about women in society and questioned the ways that sexual violence (and women's fear of it) extended into other institutions, such as the workplace, education, and political life.

Socialist feminists saw women as exploited not only at home (through labor and nurturance associated with the reproduction of the species), but as lower-waged, less powerful laborers in the workplace, and as absent from legislative bodies where public policies were adopted. Rape and other forms of sexual violence figured into the dynamics underlying these forms of subordination. According to Marxist feminist Nancy Hartsock, "we are dealing with a gendered power of relations based in what our culture has defined as sexuality . . . which must be understood to express the experience of the ruling gender."

Hartsock's theory of feminist historical materialism remains one of the clearest expressions of how capitalism and patriarchy work together to suppress women's power. The masculine cultural hegemony that Hartsock referred to came not only through men's outright coercion (sexual assault and implied threats) but also women's efforts to conform to masculine expectation to better assure their safety and well-being.

Socialist feminists helped to factor race and sexual orientation into their analysis of rape. The more complex articulations of rape by socialist feminists remain with us today but are little spoken about in public discourse, particularly in rape stories carried in the mainstream corporate media. In fact, feminist voices of any stripe are less heard from today than in the earlier days of the movement, even as one rape scandal after another has emerged to consume the public imagination. The 2010 round of *Who Makes the News*, conducted by the Global Media Monitoring Project, showed women were subjects in only 27% of the news stories examined, and of those, they were most likely to be cast as the *victims* of violence, rather than as survivors with agency. Few of those stories had a gender analysis.

Men Still Control the News

The muting of feminist voices in mainstream media is in no small way the result of shifts in communications policies over the last two decades that have allowed media ownership to concentrate in the hands of a few wealthy male-dominated conglomerates. Women (and people of color) have been largely squeezed out in these years. The Federal Communication Commission's ownership report of 2014 showed women owning 6.3% of the nation's 1,662 full-power television stations and 6.7% of 5,611 full-powered FM stations. Women also serve in low numbers on boards of the largest diversified media companies (for example, 30% on Disney's and 31% on Viacom's, but only 8% on Comcast's board, and 14% on NBC's), according to company websites. They own few newspapers and hold limited numbers of decision-making roles in newsrooms.

Yes, the Internet, with its myriad websites, blog sites and social media sites, opens new spaces for feminists to speak and be heard, but when they do, they are 72% more likely than men to receive hostile comments, according to one recent *Guardian* article. Speaking publicly about men's violence in any place or format may subject women to backlash. The *Huffington Post* and other alternative news sites report men stalking women online after "trolling" for those who write about rape or other personal subjects in chat rooms and other Internet venues.

Even so, the anti-rape movement has been an international phenomenon. The movement has produced a new language and analysis of rape, which has enabled the reform and/or adoption of new laws, and motivated changes in gender relations. This dialectical process has been slow but productive and continues to demand the leadership of socialists who understand that women remain the majority of the victims of men's violence as well as the poorest members of capitalist societies. ❖

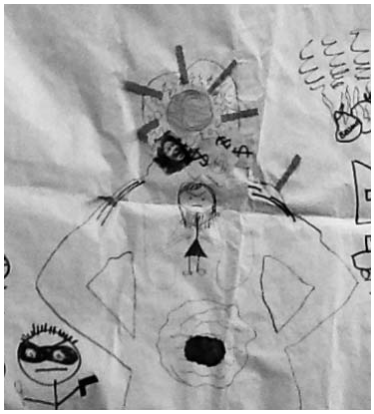
Carolyn M. Byerly, a longtime DSA member, is chair of the Howard University Department of Communication, Culture and Media Studies. An earlier version of this article appeared in the January 2015 issue of Washington Socialist*, an online publication of Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America.*

Mapping Anti-Violence Strategies

By Elizabeth L. Sweet

Among the often unacknowledged side effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the war on drugs are the economic and physical violence they inflict on women, particularly brown and black immigrant women. Driven from their homes, where U.S. policies and practices make it difficult or impossible for them to earn a living, or widowed by the disastrous militarization of the war on drugs, which has killed an estimated 120,000 people in Mexico in the last nine years, or fearing for their lives, as femicide against workers and students throughout Mexico has increased, women go north.

They may be in economic thrall for years to the "coyotes" who smuggle them over the border, but the real physical dangers cannot be overstated. One sign of such danger is the growth along the U.S.-Mexico border of small storefronts that offer women short-term contraception or pills. The women know that they have a very high probability of being raped on their journey north and want to prevent pregnancy.



Body map from Yautepec, Morelos, Mexico

If the women make it to their destination, new types of violence and exploitation await them. In research in Chicago, my colleagues and I heard heart-wrenching stories. The women we worked with described daily assaults on their emotional and physical well-being, ranging from being denied bathroom breaks to being hit on by supervisors to barrages of invective.

Economic violence often results in physical violence. Therefore, we have to pay attention to and care for the bodies of the women affected. Rather than seeing themselves as helpless victims, women can act on their own behalf, and many are doing so to gain control over their violent environments.

As an example, my colleagues and I have worked with immigrant women to first identify their bodily harm and then map the places in their communities where they are most vulnerable and plan strategies to change the environment. The women work in small groups to develop trust with each other, then they draw life-size silhouettes of themselves. The group facilitator asks questions about the impact of violence on their bodies, and they paint, draw, collage, and write their answers on their "bodies."

From the personal maps of their bodies, they go to the political maps of their communities. They discuss the different uses women make of spaces in their community, their right to use space, and when and where they are afraid to walk or enter. The next step is a community audit, in which the women walk, observe, comment about, and take notes of what is safe and unsafe, what is useful or not, and what is accessible or not in their environment. During walks in Norristown, Pennsylvania, and Yautepec, Morelos, Mexico, the women cited cracked sidewalks that made it difficult to pass with a baby stroller, the lack of trees for shade on a hot day, shot-out street lights, and mounds of garbage in some of the alleys that provided cover for assaults. After the community audit, participants draw a map of their community and mark the positive and negative spaces. The group decides on the issues it wants to address and develops a strategy to make changes.

In Norristown, the body maps will be used in a public exhibit to raise awareness about gender violence, and the participants are working on developing a cooperative piñata-making business that will also give them some political leverage. They are working on electing council members who can be pushed to change the map of their community. In Yautepec, the women helped one of the group members who was robbed of all her flea market merchandise. They all (very poor women) pitched in and gave what they could of old clothing, tools and kitchenware so that she could resume selling. They have also organized to work with the local government to close down a drug/party house in their neighborhood.

Although not yet widespread, this comprehensive mapping shows promise as an inclusive way for society to challenge patriarchal and consumer-driven economics that contribute to unsafe cities for women. ❖

Elizabeth L. Sweet is a visiting assistant professor at Temple University in the Department of Geography and Urban Studies. She researches connections between the economy, violence, and identity in Mexico, Russia, Colombia, and the United States.

Subverting Big Money's Attack on Public Education

By Deborah Meier

Sixty years ago, I was active in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) as well as the democratic socialist movement, and I subbed in Chicago public K-8 schools two days a week. Spending those days in the schools raised some doubts in my mind about both the civil rights and socialist agenda. It was clear that the average urban student was being trained to be "dumb," thoughtless (in the literal sense) and accepting of what couldn't be changed. Could we achieve the kind of democracy we dreamed of with such a "dumbed down" public?

Teaching kindergarten restored my faith. Working in a mostly all-black school was the most exciting experience of my life—intellectually, socially, and emotionally. The kids *did* have fine vocabularies, were constantly making sense of the world, had profound questions, and were quick learners when engaged. They weren't "dumb," but they had good reason to follow their parents' advice to be obedient and keep quiet in school. With the impetus of the civil rights movement and movements for school change, though, it seemed as if schools could encourage that liveliness of heart and mind and tenacious imagination that I witnessed during the next decade.

> **"Could we achieve the kind of democracy we dreamed of with such a "dumbed down" public?"**

Teaching became my lifelong occupation, and along the way I found parents and teachers who became colleagues in subverting the boredom that we inflicted on active young children for six hours a day. At the same time, I became an expert on the design of standardized tests and discovered that these tests were amazingly sensitive to what differentiated the "culture" and language of those on the margins of society from those in the center. Somehow, those on the margins always gave the "wrong" answers. It turned out, though, that the "wrong" answers were often right if your context was different, and for a while, it seemed as if the inherent unfairness of standardized tests could be rectified.

By the late eighties, I was part of a political educational network called the Coalition of Essential Schools that included a thousand other schools that offered elite-style education (that is, critical thinking) to the non-elites. The tests that so injured low-income and minority children were crumbling under academic attacks on their reliability and validity. Despite the increasingly conservative/reactionary politics around us, I thought we were going to win.

Foolish me. While I wasn't paying attention, another "movement" of wealthy and powerful people and foundations had plotted out a different path and had done so in the name of civil rights, of "no child left behind." They didn't plan to change the schools that middle-class children attended, which for the most part are working just fine.

Instead, they set out to dehumanize the schools of the poor so that they could be operated more cheaply, contain children for a longer time, pacify the parents, and make a profit. At the same time, not surprisingly, they could destroy teacher unions. School vouchers, which would have opened the way for many for-profit schools, had been the opening salvo in the war against public schools, but when they were defeated, their supporters developed a new agenda.

They wanted data to prove that public schools weren't working, and if you ignored the fact that test scores correlated almost perfectly with family income and that public education is funded by property taxes so that richer districts have more money, test data surely did. There were enormous gaps between the scores of schools in poor districts and schools in middle-class and upper-middle-class districts.

The answer would be charter schools, and many erstwhile allies would be taken in by the promise. The language was compatible with what we had been doing: small schools, parental choice, self-government. But the reality was different, as legislation opened the door to private entrepreneurs and

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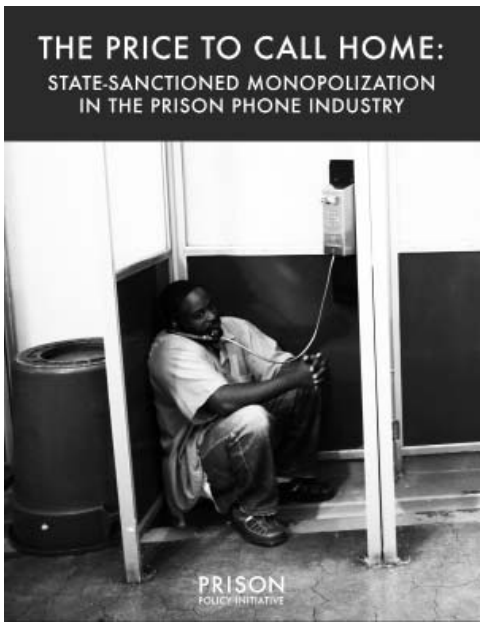
The High Cost of Prison Phones

By Bernadette Rabuy

Technological advances may have brought down the costs of communicating, but there is a niche telephone industry that charges millions of families $1 per minute to keep in touch. The prison and jail telephone industry and correctional facilities profit from families desperate to stay connected. The phone companies reap high profits, and the correctional facilities use phone revenue to augment strained budgets.

In a typical market, consumers choose a product or service based on the lowest price and the best features. However, in the prison and jail telephone market, the state prison or county jail chooses the company that promises to pay the facility the most money in the form of a "commission" on the revenue generated from phone calls. The families that use the service and pay the bills have no say in the negotiations. Further, to recoup the cost of paying the commissions, companies often tack on additional fees that can amount to 38% of what families spend on phone calls.



Prison Policy Initiative: prisonpolicy.org

Punishing families of incarcerated individuals with exorbitant phone rates is counterproductive. Because family ties are essential to low recidivism and successful reintegration, correctional facilities should encourage as much communication as possible between incarcerated people and their lifelines on the outside. Some state prison systems have already recognized the need for low-cost communication and have rejected commissions. As a result, the New Mexico and New York state prison systems, for example, charge less than five cents per minute.

After a decade of pressure from family members and criminal justice reform advocates, the Federal Communications Commission in 2013 set interstate rate caps of $0.21-$0.25 per minute. Since the caps went into effect, call volumes increased nearly 70% in some facilities. However, the ruling only covers interstate calls.

Thus, families pay *more* to talk to a loved one incarcerated a few towns over than they would if the person was incarcerated thousands of miles away. One mother who lives in Rhode Island but has a cell phone with a Texas area code pays $10.99 for a 15-minute phone call with her son who is in a Texas jail. If she had a Rhode Island area code, she would pay the lower rate of $3.15 for that same phone call. Because in-state calls account for 92% of all domestic calls in the prison and jail telephone market, most calls remain unregulated. In October 2014, the Federal Communications Commission decided to consider more comprehensive regulations and accepted comments from the public until January 27, 2015. A ruling is expected sometime in the spring or summer.

Unfortunately, prison and jail telephone companies are fighting to maintain the status quo, and the facilities themselves claim that they need the revenue from commissions. Although exact figures are hard to come by, the FCC concluded that just 0.3% of correctional facilities' budgets is funded by the commission system.

The good news is that FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn and the Alabama Public Service Commission—which has reined in high phone rates, the additional fees, and even high rates for other communication services such as video visitation—have made regulation of this niche industry a priority. Although the FCC comment period is over, activists can make an impact at the state level because, ultimately, telephone justice is a political question. Legislators and state public service commissions need to hear from activists that regulation of this industry is both urgent and necessary. Activists can encourage their states to follow the lead of Alabama's comprehensive regulation of this oft-hidden industry or to bring down rates by rejecting commissions as New Mexico and New York have done. ❖

Bernadette Rabuy is the policy and communications associate at the Prison Policy Initiative. Previously, she worked with the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, Voice of the Ex-Offender, and Californians United for a Responsible Budget.

Not the Perfect Victims

By Emma Roderick

In January 2014, Marissa Alexander, whose lengthy prison sentence for firing a warning shot into the air in order to fend off an attack from her estranged husband galvanized feminists and anti-racist activists around the country, was released after spending three years in prison. She will live another two years under house arrest, wearing an electronic ankle bracelet for which she must pay the state $105 per week. Alexander did not harm anyone. But what about women who do kill their abusers?

These women get significantly less media attention and significantly less support from feminists. Yes, they are the sympathetic subjects of several hit country singles: Miranda Lambert's "Gunpowder and Lead" and Martina McBride's "Independence Day" have both been covered on *American Idol,* and I remember rocking out to the Dixie Chicks' "Goodbye Earl" with friends when I was 13. Even when the women in these songs appear callous (*Ain't it dark, wrapped up in that tarp, Earl?*) they are clearly the heroines: young, white, and conventionally attractive, they win the moral high ground. Only one of the songs alludes to legal consequences.

> **"At least 80% of all women in prison are single mothers."**

Real-life statistics paint a much grimmer picture. Some 75% to 80% of women who kill their abusers are convicted or accept a plea, and most receive lengthy sentences. Although national data on this issue are not tracked, published studies of specific prisons and locations show similar results: women who kill men are given longer sentences than men who kill women, and women who kill their abuser are given longer sentences than women who kill strangers (despite generally having no prior convictions). At least 80% of all women in prison are single mothers, and although the prison population has increased exponentially over the past 30 years for both men and women, it has increased more for women than men (646% vs. 419% between 1980 and 2010).

Angela Corey, the prosecutor in Marissa Alexander's case, argued that Alexander could have left the house rather than shoot. Several studies show that nearly every woman incarcerated for killing an abuser sought help to escape and did not get it. In some cases, the police did not listen to her. Others reached out to shelters but were among the 10,000 turned away every day because of budget slashes. Some succeeded in having their abusers arrested only to see them released on a light bail. Others were offered a spot in a shelter, but decided to gamble on not uprooting their lives and those of their children to move across the country to a secret location, while their abuser stayed in their house, keeping his job, bank account, and community. Women with fewer resources—financial, legal, and personal—are of course the most likely to face challenges in escaping. And although the "battered women's defense" is sometimes effective in reducing sentences, it is far more likely to work for white, middle-class women.

Retaliating against an abuser is not the only crime for which victims of domestic violence end up in prison: many women are strong-armed into committing crimes by their abusers or they are incarcerated for "letting" abuse happen. In one particularly sordid case, the male perpetrator received a 37-year sentence for raping a five-month-old baby, while the baby's mother received two consecutive life sentences for "letting" him do it.

The war on drugs has been devastating for men and women alike, with the percentage of women in prison increasing by 757% from 1977 to 2005, mostly for drug-related crimes. Between 1986 and 1991, African American women's incarceration in state prisons for drug offenses increased by 828%. Often the women have been coerced into drug deals by the men with whom they're involved.

As Marissa Alexander's case shows, concerted action can have an impact. Feminists and anti-racist activists can work with such projects as the National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women, STEPS to End Family Violence, the Prison Birth Project, or any of a number of local and national groups.

Real women who commit crimes because of male violence won't be starring in any music videos. They aren't "perfect victims," but they do deserve a fair chance at justice too long denied. ❖

Emma Roderick is a school social worker and volunteer with the Prison Birth Project in Western Massachusetts.

Children of the Revolution

How to Make DSA Accessible to Parents

By Natalie K. Midiri

As democratic socialists, we recognize that we must fight multiple systems of oppression beyond just capitalism to put real democratic control into the hands of working people and that this fight begins by making participation in our locals accessible to all classes of people—including parents. We don't always think of parents as an oppressed class, but the United States is the only industrialized western country that provides almost no support to the people who are doing the work of nurturing the next generation. Your local or any organization can be allies to parents. Although some of these guidelines are specific to children, many of us also care for adult dependents and these guidelines may be adapted as necessary to support your activist community.

Ask parents what support they need to be active in DSA. The answers may surprise you.

Share the responsibility. We all have a stake in the next generation! In practice, this means that members without children must allocate time for caregiving or managing the logistics of making sure children are cared for during meetings, so that parents can think about politics, strategy, and organizing, too.

Consider how the systems of oppression that we fight as socialists, like racism, classism, male supremacy, ableism, and heterosexism can influence who has care-giving responsibilities in your group. If members of your group who do not normally care for children express concerns about their ability to do so, pair them with an experienced person.

Re-evaluate the time and locations of your regular meetings. Consider holding some of your meetings in a place with built-in activities, such as a public playground or library. Plan a potluck or brown bag in someone's home.

Plan your local's calendar at least a month in advance and share it online so that parents have time to choose to attend events with children or arrange childcare when necessary.

Create and maintain a system for keeping members who can't attend every meeting up to date on your local's work. For example, record detailed notes from planning meetings, send out overviews after DSA-sponsored or attended events, use to-do lists to log progress on your organizing projects, and make sure they are all shared on a cloud platform, such as Google Drive, so that parents can access them at their convenience.

Create a "busy-box" for children who regularly attend DSA meetings. Browse a thrift store for blocks, picture books, and toys for children ages one to three; playdough, race cars, and animal figures for children ages four to six; Legos, puzzles, and coloring books for children seven to nine; modeling clay, paper planes or origami guides, and playing cards for children ages ten to twelve. On week nights, older children may have homework to do, so be prepared to provide a quiet place and some help.

Offer childcare during your meetings and rotate who will be responsible for childcare. Plan activities and appoint caregivers in advance and make sure parents are aware of who will be watching their children. Guidelines for childcare vary, so please check with your meeting space to make sure you meet the legal requirements for caring for multiple children.

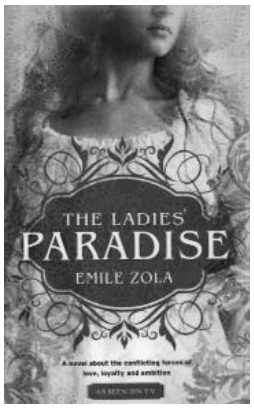
Fundraise to supplement the cost of childcare so that parents can devote their full attention to developing themselves as socialists at important events, especially conferences and workshops that will help them grow as organizers.

Try to make the time children spend in DSA spaces collaborative and fun. Children may not be ready to debate the labor theory of value with you, but they have something to say about issues that affect them and their parents and can be eager to make signs or banners! Children who have good memories of their first meetings are more likely to be active DSA members when they grow up. ❖

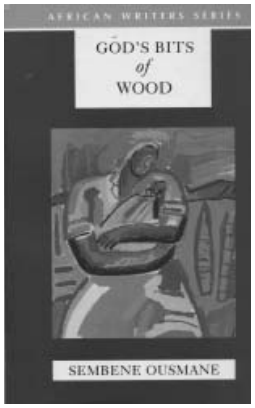
Natalie K. Midiri runs a preschool co-op in Collingswood, N.J., and is an active member of Greater Philadelphia DSA.

Women and Economics in Fiction

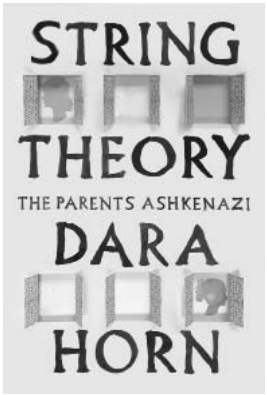
We asked members of the DSA feminist list to tell us about their favorite fiction that illustrates the impact of economic policies on women. Here are their choices.



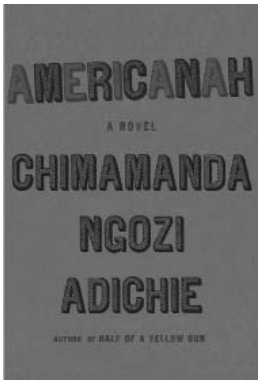
Emile Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise* is a close examination of the department store phenomenon rising in mid-nineteenth-century Paris. Zola's usual social critiques can be found in this novel but with a stronger focus on women and the transformative role they play in Europe's industrial shift. Readers follow heroine Denise Baudu and her attempts to make a life for herself, as she ends up working at the newly founded department store dubbed "The Ladies' Paradise." Zola's detailed prose captures the birth of the consumer society and the story of the hard work behind it. —*Isabel Anreus*



In *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), Senegalese novelist and film director Ousmane Sembene tells a story of a railroad strike in which railroad workers and their families oppose their French masters in order to fight for better living conditions. As the strike goes on, men's ability to provide for their families becomes impossible. Women find themselves in the role of providers. Despite living in a society where women are not involved in any decision-making process, they become conscious of the need for their involvement in the strike and begin taking matters into their own hands. They form a solid women's revolutionary group that rapidly gains strength. Women's involvement influences their children to join the strike using their own tactics. The women organize a historic march from Thies to Dakar. Early in the march, they come face to face with the white policemen, with no fear. They keep going despite confrontations with the police that lead to the death of three of the marchers. The white masters begin feeling the decrease of their power and the need to reconsider the workers' rights. What started as a male-dominated strike ends up being the women's own fight, as their voices make a huge difference in the victory. —*Fatou Camara*



String Theory: The Parents Ashkenazi, by Dara Horn, starts out in 1980 and follows Jacqueline Luria from her physics doctoral program to her marriage to Roger Ashkenazi, a mathematician at the same university, to her abandonment by him ten years later. The short story describes the ordeals faced by a woman in a "man's field"—she is ostracized and isolated by her follow students who are "openly arrogant young men." When she drops out of her doctoral program, "no one objected. In fact her male colleagues seemed to exhale with relief." When Roger leaves her to find himself, she is left to raise two daughters with few prospects for work that will provide an adequate income. The story, a prequel to *A Guide for the Perplexed*, effectively describes the limitations faced by women in science and hints at the problems that single mothers confront. —*Chris Riddiough*



In *Americanah* (2013), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores the experiences of Nigerian women and men in the United States, Britain, and Nigeria. In the course of trenchant observations about race in the United States, Adichie reveals the tensions of class as well, as in the interaction between immigrant hair stylists and the female protagonist, who has won a Princeton University fellowship after enduring poverty. Another immigrant survives as a mistress. Adichie is equally powerful in examining her characters' strategies in Nigeria, as they operate under military dictatorship and gendered expectations. —*Peg Strobel*

Books by DSA Members

Once a year we are pleased to let our readers know about books published by DSA members in the past year or so. Although all these books are available from you know what behemoth, we encourage you to look them up on the web and buy from an independent bookstore if possible.

Dan Arel, *Parenting Without God* (Pitchstone Publishing, 2014)

Sanford Berman, *Not in My Library! "Berman's Bags" Columns from* The Unabashed Librarian, 2013; *Worth Noting: Editorials, Letters, Essays, and Interview, and Bibliography*, 2014 (McFarland & Company, Inc.)

G. Clarke Chapman, *Universal Health Care as a Human Right: The Argument of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2014)

William Durland, *Immoral Wars and Illegal Laws: History, Theology, Military Occupation and Peacemaking in the Human Rights Struggle for Palestinian Independence*, 2011; and *The Price of Folly: A Layperson's Guide to American Plutocracy,* 2013, both published by Createspace.

Geoffrey Kurtz, *Jean Jaurès: The Inner Life of Social Democracy* (Penn State University Press, 2014)

Matthew S. May, *Soapbox Rebellion: The Hobo Orator Union and the Free Speech Fights of the Industrial Workers of the World, 1909-1916* (University of Alabama Press, 2013)

David W. Noble, *Debating the End of History: The Marketplace, Utopia, and the Fragmentation of Intellectual Life* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012)

Ed Ochester, *Sugar Run Road* (Autumn House Press, 2014)

William A. Pelz, ed., *Wilhelm Liebknecht and German Social Democracy: A Documentary History* (Haymarket Books, 2015)

Nichole Shippen, *Decolonizing Time: Work, Leisure, and Freedom* (Palgrave, 2014)

Lawrence Wittner, *What's Going On at UAardvark?* (Solidarity Press, 2013)

NY DSA members turn out for the Millions March on December 13, 2014.

Young Democratic Socialist youth gathered in New York City for the annual winter conference February 13-15, 2015. Photo: Kayla Pace

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chain-store schools that are the educational equivalents of Walmart. Controlled by private boards, they are paid for by taxpayer funds.

Although they represent about 6% of all public schools, charters affect a much larger percent of the schools that house the poor, who now make up 51% of all students in public schools in the country. In the District of Columbia, for instance, 39% of public school students attend charter schools. These schools promote a kind of education aimed to appeal to desperate parents, not to those who have real choices. They're called "no excuses" schools and remind me of the Chicago schools of 1962. In fact, Chicago schools are well on their way to being privatized and returned to the rote education of the fifties and early sixties, for they were then and are now intended for low-income minority children. Buoyed by the disaster of Hurricane Katrina, corporate reformers took over the New Orleans schools and have turned them into an all-charter system. Meanwhile neighborhood schools in the most vulnerable communities are closed and their teachers, disproportionately teachers of color, are let go, while parents scramble for other safe or even semi-safe havens.

It's a crisis, and it won't be won by teacher revolts or even by coalitions of teachers and parents. What our schools need is a renewed civil rights movement and a Democratic Party not beholden to the vast money-making machine on which so many politicians in both parties depend. Meanwhile, one hopes to slow it down.

There are signs of new energy on the left. While some bemoan Occupy's "failure," in fact it introduced a radical concept into our everyday language—the talk of 99% vs. 1%. That's a big step in consciousness raising. And then, although black men and women have been subjected to police violence for a century, we witnessed a groundswell of reaction to the events in Ferguson, Missouri, and Staten Island, New York. On a similar scale there is a growing backlash against the testing regime in many unexpected places—led by "ordinary" parents.

Schools alone cannot fight the forces of big money, but they demand our attention and our activism if democracy is to survive. ❖

Deborah Meier has been a member of various socialist movements—SYL, ISL, DSOC, and DSA to name a few—and has been active for the last 50 years in public education as a teacher, parent, and activist.

Democratic Left

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