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March on Washington 50th Anniversary



The Socialist Roots of the March on Washington (or, How Could Glen Beck Miss Them?)

by Joseph M. Schwartz

Political pundits have long lionized the August 1963 March on Washington and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech as a clarion call to end legal segregation. This interpretation of King as solely an advocate for a "discrimination-free" America accords with America's dominant ideology of equality of opportunity – if we compete as equals in a capitalist market economy, then the distribution of winners and losers will be just. Glen Beck appropriated this sanitized view of King when he held a Tea Party rally against affirmative action on the 47th anniversary of the march, claiming that if King were alive he would have been in attendance (!).

For once, Beck's instincts to find a socialist under every bed failed him; King not only embraced affirmative action, but also argued that only with the achievement of a full range of social rights – to a meaningful job, health care, child care, and housing – could political and civil rights be meaningful for all. The main organizers of the 1963 rally: Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters founder, A. Philip Randolph; Bayard Rustin of the Fellowship of Reconciliation; and Walter Reuther, president of the United Automobile Workers, had all been young activists in the Socialist Party of Norman Thomas. Rustin, whose sexuality denied him the visible leadership role in the movement that his organizing acumen and oratorical brilliance merited, had been beaten nearly to death several times on the Freedom Rides. Ella Baker, mentor of the student militants in the Student Non-Violating Coordinating Committee, had trained in the 1930s at the left-wing Brookwood Labor Center and the Highlander School.

From the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, all these individuals called for a full employment economy, including a public jobs program targeted at impoverished areas. King, speaking last, put forth a lyrical vision of a world free of hatred and racial discrimination, in part to push President Kennedy to increase his support for pending civil rights legislation. But on the eve of the march, King, addressing the AFL-CIO Executive Council, evinced his broader commitment to economic justice, speaking of his "dream of a land where men will not take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few."

King, during his theological training at Crozier Seminary and Boston University, had been profoundly influenced by the Christian socialist theologians Walter Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Neibuhr and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Michael Harrington became aware of King's socialist convictions when in July 1960 Harrington helped King organize a mass protest at the Los Angeles Democratic Party

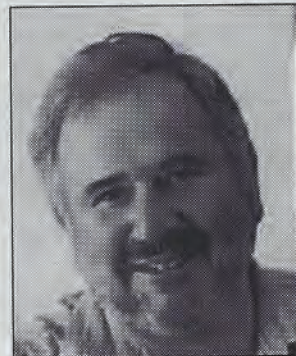
convention to press for a strong party platform on civil rights. King hid out in a hotel room for two days with Harrington and a few aides to avoid the press hounding him for an early presidential endorsement; there Harrington had long talks with King in which the minister's Christian socialist convictions became

quite apparent. Harrington would later muse that King's commitment to building a broad civil rights coalition may have led him to avoid putting his socialist convictions front and center. But in a talk to a Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) staff retreat in Frogmore, South Carolina in May 1967, King remarked that "something is wrong with capitalism...and maybe America must move towards a democratic socialism."

King understood that African-Americans would not gain social equality absent full housing integration, as neighborhood social networks are the key to finding good jobs. He also recognized that equal education for all children could only be achieved in schools integrated by both race and class – an insight lacking on the part of today's "educational reformers" who blame teachers rather than poverty for unequal educational outcomes. In the summer of 1966, King moved the movement north to fight for fair housing in Chicago and its suburbs. The vicious white backlash against these efforts led to a toothless 1968 Fair Housing Act. And in 1973, when the Supreme Court banned state court-mandated busing across school district lines, the die was cast in favor of well-funded suburban public schools for the affluent and underfunded inner city schools for the poor.

While the victories of the civil rights movement gave rise to a mass African-American middle class, the ravages of deindustrialization, combined with both parties' abandonment of our cities, means economic apartheid persists today in African-American unemployment levels twice that of whites; the mass incarceration of inner city youth; and the average African-American family only owning one-tenth the assets of the average white family.

As a radical, King also understood the relationships among militarism, class domination, and racial injustice. In his April 4, 1967 Riverside Church speech denouncing the war in Vietnam, King held that "the evils of racism, economic exploitation and militarism are all tied together."



If he were alive today, he would likely point to our wasteful imperial military budget – and our light taxation of the rich and corporations – as major potential sources of revenue that could overturn the inhumane politics of budget austerity.

King believed that “the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” He lost his life fighting for the union rights of Memphis sanitation workers on the eve of the launching of the Poor People’s Campaign. Today King’s spirit can be found in the fight for citizenship

rights for undocumented workers and in the struggle of low-wage workers of all races to win a living wage. We can best carry on King’s legacy by embracing his insight that democracy can only be achieved when power is in the hands of the many rather than in the hands of the few. ❖

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Claiming the 1963 March on Washington

By Bill Fletcher

August 28 will mark the 50th anniversary of the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Publicly associated with Dr. King’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech, this march brought more than 250,000 people to the nation’s capital to demand freedom and jobs. Initiated by Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters President A. Philip Randolph, the effort became a joint project with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the day went down in history as a powerful show of force against Jim Crow segregation.

It is barely remembered that the March on Washington was for freedom and jobs. The demand for jobs was not a throwaway line in order to get trade union support, but instead reflected the growing economic crisis affecting black workers. It is also barely remembered that the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

played a key role in the event, but the civil rights leadership insisted that the militant rhetoric of the original speech by SNCC’s then chairman John Lewis (now Congressman John Lewis) be toned down.

Over time this great event has risen to levels of near mythology. The powerful speech by Dr. King, replayed in part for us every Martin Luther King Day, has eclipsed all else, so much so that too many people believe that the March on Washington was entirely the



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Michael Harrington (1928-1989)

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work of Dr. King, when in fact he was a major player in a project that was much larger than any one person.

As August 2013 approaches, there has been very limited public discussion regarding an anniversary march to commemorate the 1963 event. What has apparently been taking place are a series of closed-door discussions regarding some sort of celebratory action. Particularly disturbing are the suggestions that any one person, organization, or family can claim the legacy of the March on Washington. But should any one constituency claim that legacy, it is a group that does not appear to be at the table: black labor.

Randolph and other black labor leaders, particularly those grouped around the Negro American Labor Council, were responding to the fact that the black worker was largely being ignored in the discussions about civil rights. Additionally, the economic situation, as referenced earlier, was becoming complicated terrain for black workers. As historian Nancy MacLean has pointed out, the elements of what came to be known as deindustrialization (which was really part of a reorganization of global capitalism) were beginning to have an effect in the U.S., even in 1963. As with most other disasters, it started with a particular and stark impact on black America.

In 2013, black workers have been largely abandoned in most discussions about race and civil rights. As National Black Worker Center Project founder Dr. Steven Pitts has repeatedly pointed out, with the economic restructuring that has destroyed key centers of the black working class, such as Detroit and St. Louis, much of the economic development that has emerged has either avoided the black worker altogether or limited the role of black workers to the most menial positions. Thus, unemployment for blacks remains more than double that of whites and hovers around Depression levels in many communities.

In that sense, August 2013 must not be a reunion tour of old civil rights leaders – with all due respect – reminiscing about a bygone era, but rather it should be a militant mass protest of the way both race and class are playing themselves out in today's America. August 2013 cannot be held hostage to discussions that focus solely on the memory of Dr. King amid a debate about who has the right to claim that memory; we must recognize the breadth of the movement that brought about the 1963 March on Washington.

Yet more importantly, August 2013 must be about today and the issues that are affecting the dispossessed, including but not limited to black America. It must be a moment to highlight the struggles that the bottom 90 percent of the population is engaged in fighting. It must be a moment to reissue the call for jobs and freedom, bringing those demands into the 21st century by emphasizing issues that include voting rights, genuine economic development, peace, and nothing less than planetary survival.

In 1983, I participated in the 20th anniversary of the March on Washington. Although it attempted to raise the issues of the day, such as the threat of Reaganomics, it was clear that the canonization of Dr. King was a central feature of the day for too many of the marchers. One of the worst ways to remember Dr. King, and for that matter the 1963 March on Washington, is by canonizing a particular individual. It would be far better to use the inspiration from that great day in 1963 as the energizing force for a renewed round of struggles. ❖

Bill Fletcher Jr is the co-author (with Dr. Fernando Gaspas) of Solidarity Divided; the author of "They're Bankrupting Us" – And Twenty Other Myths about Unions; a senior scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies; and the immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum. Follow him at www.billfletcherjr.com.

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The Forgotten Radical History of the March on Washington

By William P. Jones

The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which occurred 50 years ago this Aug. 28, remains one of the most successful mobilizations ever created by the American Left. Organized by a coalition of trade unionists, civil rights activists, and feminists – most of them African American and nearly all of them socialists – the protest drew nearly a quarter of a million people to the nation's capital. Composed primarily of factory workers, domestic servants, public employees, and farm workers, it was the largest demonstration – and, some argued, the largest gathering of union members – in the history of the United States.

That massive turnout set the stage not only for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which President John F. Kennedy had proposed two months before, but also for the addition to that law of a Fair Employment Practices clause, which prohibited employers, unions, and government officials from discriminating against workers on the basis of race, religion, national origin, or sex. And, by linking those egalitarian objectives to a broader agenda of ending poverty and reforming the economy, the protest also forged a political agenda that would inspire liberals and leftists ranging from President Lyndon Johnson to the Black Power movement.

Yet, despite that success, the Left has largely relinquished its claim to the legacy of the March on Washington. By the 1980s, a broad consensus had emerged that attributed the success of the protest not to its radicalism but to its narrow focus on, as journalist Juan Williams wrote for the PBS documentary “Eyes on the Prize,” “moral imperatives that had garnered support from the nation's moderates – issues such as the right to vote and the right to a decent education.” While conservatives Stephen and Abigail Thernstrom congratulated Randolph, King, and others for suppressing demands for “radical, social, political and economic changes,” leftist Manning Marable chided civil rights leaders for failing to “even grapple with [the] social and economic contradictions” of American capitalism. Only in the late 1960s, according to Williams, did the movement expand its agenda to include “issues whose moral rightness was not as readily apparent: job and housing discrimination, Johnson's war on poverty, and affirmative action.”

Contrary to popular mythology, the demonstration was initiated not to break down racial barriers to voting rights, education, and public accommodations in the Jim Crow South but to highlight “the economic subordination of the Negro” and advance a “broad and fundamental program for economic justice.” The roots of the protest stretched back to the March on Washington Movement, which

Randolph initiated to protest employment discrimination during the Second World War, and it was renewed in the 1960s by the Negro American Labor Council, a nearly forgotten organization that Randolph and other black trade unionists formed to protest segregation and discrimination in organized labor.



The official demands of the protest included passage of Kennedy's civil rights bill, which mandated equal access to public accommodations and voting rights in the South, but marchers also wanted to strengthen the law by requiring all public schools to desegregate by the end of the year; “reducing Congressional representation of states where citizens were disfranchised”; blocking federal funding to discriminatory housing projects; and prohibiting government agencies, unions, and private firms from discriminating against potential employees on the basis of race, religion, color, or national origin.

March leaders insisted that such racially egalitarian measures would be ineffective unless coupled with a minimum wage increase, extension of federal labor protections to workers in agriculture, domestic service, and the public sector, and a “massive federal program to train and place all unemployed workers – Negro and white – on meaningful and dignified jobs at decent wages.” Countering Malcolm X's charge that the march had been co-opted, journalist Harvey Swados observed that this “merging of two streams of thought and action” produced an agenda “surpassing anything conceived of by white liberals and well-intentioned officialdom.”

We have lost sight of that radicalism, but it was hard to miss on the day of the march. “We are the advanced guard of a massive moral revolution for jobs and freedom,” Randolph declared in his opening remarks to the rally that would culminate, nearly two hours later, with King's famous speech. While King would challenge the United States to live up to the promises of equality and freedom contained in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, Randolph insisted “that real freedom will require many changes in the nation's political and social philosophies and institutions.” For example, he explained, ending housing discrimination would require civil rights activists to assert that “the sanctity of private property takes second place to the sanctity of a human personality.”

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Lending a decidedly American flavor to that implicitly socialist ideal, Randolph asserted that the history of slavery placed African Americans at the forefront of the revolution. "It falls to the Negro to reassert this proper priority of values," the seventy-four-year-old trade unionist declared, "because our ancestors were transformed from human personalities into private property."

Walter Reuther, of the United Auto Workers union, agreed that [Kennedy's] bill needed to be strengthened. "And the job question is crucial," he declared, "because we will not solve education or housing or public accommodations as long as millions of American Negroes are treated as second-class economic citizens and denied jobs."

The most scathing critique of Kennedy's bill came from John Lewis, the twenty-three-year-old representative of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, who pointed out that the bill did nothing to protect the disfranchised sharecropper, the homeless and hungry, or a domestic servant who earned \$5 a week caring for a family that brought in \$100,000 a year. "Let us not forget that we are involved in a serious social revolution," Lewis declared, calling on marchers to find alternatives to a system "dominated by politicians who build their careers on immoral compromises and ally themselves with open forms of political, economic and social exploitation."

Moderates objected to the militancy of Lewis' speech, but they failed to restrain him. Randolph and Bayard Rustin convinced the SNCC leader to add a tepid endorsement of Kennedy's bill and to drop a line pledging to "pursue our own 'scorched earth' policy and burn Jim Crow to the ground – non-violently." They pointed out that such statements undermined the legislative objectives and Gandhian principles that had been integral to the March on Washington Movement since the 1940s. Randolph dismissed complaints that Lewis used "communist" language such as "revolution" and "masses," however; stating that he had done so "many times myself." By the time Martin Luther King came to the podium, there was no need for him to reiterate the specifics of the March on Washington's agenda, which may explain why his speech proved so appealing to moderates.

When Obama first ran for president in 2008, he distinguished his own political philosophy from that of the civil rights movement. While he credited Lewis and other members of the "Moses Generation" with defeating Jim Crow and paving the way for him to become the first black president of the United States, the candidate associated his own political beliefs more strongly with "the economic populism of the New Deal – a vision of fair wages and benefits, patronage and public works, and an ever-rising standard of living." Tapping into a widespread nostalgia for the "Greatest Generation," he suggested that the egalitarian politics of "the sixties" destroyed "a sense of common purpose" that was subsequently captured by the Right. A similar narrative is employed by those who praise Occupy Wall Street for salvaging the economic populism of the early-twentieth-century Left from the egalitarian politics of the civil rights and feminist movements. "'We are the 99%' conveys a deeply moral, democratic message that represents a leap beyond what most left activists have been saying since the 1960s," Michael Kazin wrote in *Dissent*, discounting both the lasting appeal of race and gender equality and the degree to which they have been linked to struggles for economic justice.

Let's hope that the Left does not make the same mistake of underestimating the ability of a civil rights rally to include demands for radical economic redistribution. This year the progressive community has an opportunity to shift the tone of the anniversary to emphasize the fight for economic and racial justice. Now, more than ever, the Left needs to reclaim the radical legacy of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. ❖


Excerpted from a longer article in Dissent, Spring 2013.

William P. Jones is Associate Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His next book, The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights, will be published by W.W. Norton & Co. in July of this year.

Warm greetings from the DSA local in Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s hometown to everyone commemorating the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

We honor those who participated in the march 50 years ago and the new generations who carry on the struggle. We have not reached the promised land, but together we SHALL overcome.

In solidarity, Metro Atlanta Democratic Socialists of America.




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Some Socialists and the 1963 March on Washington

By John Nichols

When the key organizers of the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom” gathered on the morning after the epic events of Aug. 28, 1963 – which began with the delivery of a “living petition” for racial justice by a quarter of a million Americans and finished with the president of the United States hailing the march as a stride toward “translating civil rights from principles into practice” – they did so at the Socialist Party’s National Conference on Civil Rights.

“We will need to continue demonstrations,” declared A. Philip Randolph, the initiator and director of the march. Randolph, the labor leader who had first called for a march on Washington in 1941, when he was advocating for the integration of defense industries, argued that: “Legislation is enacted under pressure. You can’t move senators and congressmen just because a measure is right. There must be pressure.”

Randolph’s remarks were covered on the front page of the *New York Times*, which made cursory reference to the fact that he and other leaders of the march had gathered at an event organized by the Socialist Party. It was not news that Randolph was appearing with the socialists. The man who in his days as a young radical editor had been described as “the most dangerous Negro in America” was a longtime member of the party and an ardent democratic socialist. The march’s deputy director, Bayard Rustin, identified as a pacifist and a social democrat. Among the prominent figures who participated in the march was Norman Thomas, the six-time Socialist Party candidate for president of the United States. The speaker who hailed the march as “the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation,” the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., would later recall that, “a little Negro boy listened at the Washington Monument to an eloquent orator. Turning to his father, he asked, ‘Who is that man?’ Came the inevitable answer: ‘That’s Norman Thomas. He was for us before any other white folks were.’”

As political and media elites mark the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington this summer, it will be intriguing to see whether they make even scant reference to the role played by Randolph, Rustin, Thomas and their allies in calling for, organizing and framing the message of the march.

It is neither necessary, nor accurate, to suggest that the March on Washington was a socialist endeavor – or anywhere near as radical in its influences and intents as critics such as South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond claimed at the time

The march was bigger than any individual ideology or partisanship. The speaker list included religious figures, such as King, who were influenced by Walter Rauschenbusch’s “social gospel” but who did not identify as socialists. Republican lawmakers, such as New York Senator Jacob Javits, hailed the march and announced that it would help them to organize members of “the party of Lincoln” in support of pending civil rights legislation.

But a reasonable regard for history argues for recalling that a number of socialists, especially Randolph, the longtime leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, played a pivotal role in making the march a reality – and in advancing its essential message: that of a campaign for “jobs and freedom” that recognized the vital significance of linking economic and social justice.

This is not a historical aberration rooted in the ferment of the 1960s; in fact, quite the opposite. Throughout American history, from the days when Tom Paine imagined a social-welfare state in his last great pamphlet, “Agrarian Justice,” to the days when Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* featured the world’s most prominent radical writers along with reports on the rise of a militant new party, the “Republicans,” to the days when Franklin Roosevelt consulted with Thomas before assuming the presidency, to the days when White House aides circulated copies of Michael Harrington’s *The Other America*, to the days when Teddy Kennedy hailed Harrington as “a thundering Old Testament prophet demanding that our country honor its promise to the poor and the weak,” socialists have informed and influenced the American experience. This has not made America a social democracy, any more than the equally long and significant influence of libertarians has made America a free-market state. But this country used to have a good deal more respect for the value of ideas and idealists, and an understanding that the solutions to great challenges might well be found not in a compromised center but on the inspired right or left.

Randolph and other key figures from the March on Washington visited the White House to outline a “Freedom Budget” that had as its goals the abolition of poverty; guaranteed full employment; fair prices for

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farmers; fair wages for workers; housing and healthcare for all; and the establishment of tax and fiscal policies that respected the needs of working families. Lyndon Johnson gave Randolph a Medal of Freedom but not a full embrace of the Freedom Budget. While the War on Poverty was surely influenced by Michael Harrington's writing and by Randolph's advocacy, it never saw the commitments that the young writer or the aging labor leader sought.

Nothing saddened Randolph more, as he believed that the Freedom Budget was essential to making real the full "jobs and freedom" promise of the March on Washington, as expressed by Dr. King in his stirring plea "to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood."

Interviewed in the mid-1970s, Randolph explained that: "My philosophy was the result of our concept of effective liberation of the Negro through the liberation of the working people. We never separated the liberation of the white working man from the liberation of the black working man."

"The unity of these forces," argued Randolph, "would bring about the power to really achieve social change."

The March on Washington was an epic event in American history. It occurred on a single day, but it was part of an arc of history that began long before Aug. 28, 1963, and that extends to the present. A. Philip Randolph, who lived until 1979, was able to reflect on a good measure of that history. But the old socialist was not inclined toward self-congratulation. Rather, in his last interviews and speeches, he recalled the Freedom Budget and he spoke of the work yet to be done. Among all the reasons for recalling Randolph's remarkable contributions, it is perhaps most important to remember that Randolph was not satisfied. The March on Washington bent the arc of history toward progress, but Randolph never stopped applying pressure – to Democratic and Republican presidents, to members of Congress of every ideology, to the labor movement. He was an independent radical who always believed, as he said on that morning after, "We will need to continue demonstrations." ❖

John Nichols is Washington, DC correspondent for The Nation, associate editor of The Capital Times and author of many books, including The S-Word (2011) and Uprising: How Wisconsin Renewed the Politics of Protest, from Madison to Wall Street (2012). He will speak at DSA's 2013 convention.

Fairer Sex

There's been a lot of handwringing lately over what is or is not feminist. Notable bones of contention include: ladyblogs, working in finance, doulas, "having it all," housewifing, rioting, protesting, protesting in lingerie, getting married, watching "Girls." Essays in publications ranging from mass-circulation glossies like *The Atlantic* to small literary magazines like *n+1* have appealed to a widespread fascination with the confused meaning of the term. The narcissism underlying the debate is parodied by the blog "Is This Feminist?" featuring stock photos of people shaking hands, walking the dog, and doing laundry. The pictures are rated as either "representing feminism" or "problematic."

With no sense of what feminism is, these writers turn to personal experience. With each step and gesture, they wonder what they're contributing to feminism. Is navel-gazing feminist?

Let us borrow a definition from bell hooks: Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression.

It cannot be about this or that group of women's ability to have careers or about individual moments of empowerment while doing laundry. Feminist movements have long suffered from the disconnect between white middle-class feminism, often focused myopically on certain careers and lifestyle choices, and the goals of working-class women.

The "Wages for Housework" demands of 1970s Marxist feminists sought to make women's uncompensated labor under capitalism visible whether the woman was a bourgeois housewife, a factory worker, or a poor mother. Since capital requires the housewife to reproduce the worker, they argued, this need dictates the role of women up and down the class system.

Those who demanded state wages for housework sought two things: First, to make wifely love visible as productive work. Second, to uncover for women the leverage that workers have in their potential to strike. "To say that we want money for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it," wrote Italian feminist Silvia Federici, "because the demand for a wage makes our work visible ... both in its immediate aspect as housework and its more insidious character as femininity." This was feminism designed not to increase individual compensation, but to reveal and create power while undoing sex roles in all realms of life.

By Sarah Leonard



Looking for expressions of these objectives helps sort out what, today, is usefully “feminist.” If feminism is in fact the struggle against sexist oppression, and not merely a thousand little paths toward women’s personal fulfillment, we can orient ourselves toward struggles that not only benefit large numbers of women, but highlight the ways in which uncompensated labor shapes the meaning of what it is to be female.

Consider a movement rarely discussed in terms of feminism, certainly not in the *Atlantic*. Domestic Workers United (DWU) is “an organization of Caribbean, Latina, and African nannies, housekeepers, and elderly caregivers in New York, organizing for power, respect, fair labor standards and to help build a movement to end exploitation and oppression for all.” They recently pushed a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights through the New York State Legislature against all expectations.

DWU members know that their labor is brutally exploited because of the sexist assumption that care work done in the home is an act of love and shouldn’t be subject to such crass impositions as labor standards. Employers of domestic workers frequently refer to these workers as “part of the family” – meaning, as always, that women in the kitchen don’t need to be compensated. The DWU is fighting to gain recognition for labor that has been historically pushed from public view again and again.

The plights of the housewife and the domestic worker are not the same, but they are linked. It is an ideological sleight of hand that renders care workers “part of the family” instead of properly paid employees.

Marxist feminists described housewives as arbitrarily uncompensated for their contributions to the economy. The domestic workers’ movement, located in the most rapidly growing sector of the US labor market, has the power to address the way un(der)compensated work underwrites the global economy by caring for the sick, young, and old.

The DWU’s struggle serves a similar revelatory function to the Wages for Housework campaign. Once care work across social strata is considered real work, radical compensatory mechanisms become imaginable, whether an unconditional basic income or Nancy Fraser’s “universal caregiver model” with its many redistributive mechanisms designed to sever the link between gender and work.

Wages for Housework insisted that labor did not mystically become love by virtue of occurring within the household. And members of the DWU are converting what has been a tactical weakness – the invisibility of female labor – into a demand for power and recognition. If the feminism of the future is about more than bloggers watching “Girls,” it will have to directly address how sexism enables the exploitation of women today, and draw on the rich Marxist and socialist tradition of fighting for the recognition of women’s work. ❖

Adapted from Jacobin, Issue 7-8: “Emancipation.” Sarah Leonard is an editor at Dissent magazine and a member of DSA. She is also an editor at The New Inquiry. Follow her at @sarahlrnr.

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Remembering Margaret Thatcher, with Loathing

By Michael Hirsch

As minister for education in the early 1970s Tory government she was labeled “Thatcher the Milk Snatcher” for curtailing free milk to school children.

That was a foretaste of Margaret Thatcher as the United Kingdom’s prime minister from 1979 to 1990, whose new-model austerity regime auctioned off public housing and bled the nation’s cost-free health care and school systems. She cowed the unions, jailed militant strikers, and forced the layoff of hundreds of thousands of workers as she shuttered or sold for parts state-owned steel mills, coal mines and rail lines from Lands End in southwestern England to John o’Groats in Scotland’s far north.

Thatcher backed every imperial adventure of three U.S. presidents, plus one of her own – the war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands. That martial drumming got her wobbly government re-elected, a stunt British writer Warren Ellis called “the most shameless, vote-grabbing, artificial war scam in 50 years.”

Thatcher was the first European leader to abandon even a rhetorical commitment to cooperation with the trade unions. She jettisoned the then-prevailing conservative

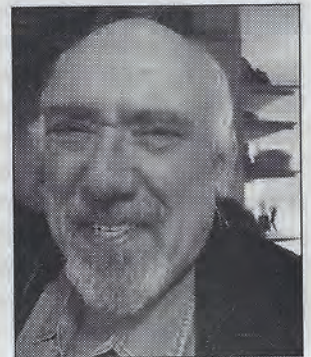
vision of a social market, which even the continent’s Christian Democrats endorsed. Long considered the architect of a bloodless neoliberalism – the corporate ideology of laissez-faire economics that boosts privatizing state-owned properties (usually at fire-sale prices), shrinking social services, prizing inequitable flat taxes over fair tariffs on business and the over-privileged, and blocking workers’ rights to organize collectively – she was more appropriately its first grand mason. She would shortly be followed by Ronald Reagan in the United States, but never exceeded.

“The Iron Lady” is best-known for three chilling pronouncements. She referred to the then imprisoned Nelson Mandela as “a common terrorist,” when the anti-apartheid leader was neither terroristic nor common. Her oft-quoted “There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families,” translated as denying the need for social welfare provision or collective responsibility. There was no social world in her cosmology. And her bluster that “there is no alternative” to capitalism was a taunt to the poor and cast-off to suck it up.

If Reagan’s affect was as the kindly, if quackish, horse doctor administering strong medicine, Thatcher’s was Ken Kesey’s coldly brutal Nurse Ratchet. Her challenge to doubters in her own party, whom she derided as “wets,” was “You turn if you want to. The lady’s not for turning.”

Predictably, she presided over an explosion in income inequality, something whose growth slowed under succeeding Labour governments and is galloping again under the present Tory regime. Out of office, when asked to name her greatest achievement, she responded “New Labour,” a reference to how Labour’s Blair and Brown governments that followed nearly two decades of Tory rule echoed her key economic policies, sans much of the brusqueness and ill-will that marked her own reign.

In the end, she was formally undone by her own Tory parliamentary majority. Facing mass demonstrations and crashing poll numbers over her plan for a widely disliked flat “poll tax” and internal disagreements over closer monetary integration with the European Union, Thatcher was made to understand her party risked losing the next



Poster from *The Socialist Worker* (UK, 1980), design by John Houston and Bob Light.

election with her as leader. So the “grocer’s daughter,” whose humble-like background she made much of despite her Oxbridge education and posh accent, resigned in 1990 to a life of leisure as Baroness Thatcher and the great good friend of an actual terrorist, Chile’s Augusto Pinochet.

Her death on April 8 at age 87 from advanced dementia – she was then living at the Ritz, London’s toniest hotel – was received variously. The current Tory government, despite crying poor-mouth over public spending, arranged a state funeral at a cost of some \$16 million in public funds, while a hurriedly called House of Commons congress spent six hours beatifying her. Prime Minister Cameron applauded her as “not a consensus politician but a conviction politician” and one who “didn’t just lead our country, she saved our country.” The scabrous *Daily Mail* aped Cameron in naming her

“the woman who saved Britain.” Even President Obama larded it on, noting in classic Orwellian that “The world has lost one of the great champions of freedom and liberty, and America has lost a true friend.”

Elsewhere on the Sceptered Isle, it was party time, with champagne and all-night dancing in the streets. Those living in England’s North, hardest hit by her and successive administrations’ industrial closings, were said to party the heartiest. In Northern Ireland’s Derry, a sign read “Iron Lady, rust in peace.” “Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead” was among the most requested songs on Spotify and Pandora, placing second among commercial downloads in the U.K. ❖

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

What’s Left for Education?

By Ron Scapp

For more than two decades the assault on public education has been underway; it shows no sign of slowing down. From redirecting public funds from community schools to public and for-profit charters and home schooling to the growth of educational entrepreneurship, the loan-sharking of commercial student loans and Arizona’s vote to ban ethnic studies, public education (and those few private schools serving a genuine public good) has suffered multiple hits.

Making matters worse are efforts by well-intentioned individuals and groups inspired by the exceptional “success-despite-the-odds” stories mass-marketed in films such as “Waiting for Superman,” with their subtexts of busting teachers’ unions said to function by definition at the expense of children’s learning. Even many working poor and middle-class parents got sold on the neoliberal position championed by such as former Chicago Public Schools head and now Education Secretary Arnie Duncan – that “school choice” is the natural and necessary consequence of market forces that will eliminate failing schools. This would be done, in large measure, thanks to the visible hands of hedge fund managers “investing” in education

Note that students and families suffering this educational assault are predominantly African American, Latino, recent immigrants and people of color. Their children attend public schools in precisely those major urban areas whose programs are being slashed and terminated. This attack on education is a continuation of the historical assault on minorities in the United States, validating the claim that much of this education reform is racist and itself exacerbates the growing disparity known as “the achievement gap.”

As we confront the harsh realities of the new “new economy” (read: work more, earn less) and its influence

on schools, teachers, administrators, parents and students, it’s fair to ask, What’s left for education? Specifically, what’s left after 1) the reworking of the national budget and the further dismantling of support (entitlements); what funding will be left for education, and how will it get distributed?

2) the triumph of the neoliberal and social/economic conservatives’ embrace of the notion that education is necessary only as a jobs training program and 3) educators are forced, in an age when jobs are literally on the move, to chase those jobs via curricula and pedagogies determined by the whims of the market and fickle consumer desires? These beg the question: What is a left/progressive education agenda in this age of assault?

Given the enormous financial pressure on school districts and elected officials to cut a deal, it is hard to say exactly what will be left for education, other than less. Despite the rhetoric suggesting that nothing is more important than our nation’s children and their education, working and lower-middle-income families will likely find going to school even more difficult, starting from kindergarten. We will be told in the name of fiscal responsibility (and austerity) that everyone must contribute to our national debt cutting initiatives. We will be told that education isn’t about money, that it is about “performance,” the performance of well-trained teachers



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and the performance of ambitious students. We will be reminded that all we need to do is to want to succeed and push forward, despite the legacy of racism, sexism, homophobia and class elitism. Good luck to that.

In this grim scenario, educational reformers will assert that schooling is the way out of economic inequality, that is, as the road to a well-paid job. Education so framed becomes embraced as little more than jobs training, and teachers will be judged on the “job-readiness” of their students. Thus the burden of thinking and rethinking the fundamentals of economic social justice get reconfigured and redirected away from debating government’s role in regulating capitalism and on to blaming teachers for failing to produce workers with the necessary skills set to keep the United States competitive in a global economy. Here teachers are down-sized to deskilled distributors of information to enhance a student’s marketability; genuine literacy and critical thinking will be viewed as luxuries we can no longer afford; and education as a life-long process of learning, growth and understanding will be reduced to transient training programs.

So the bad news is that anyone committed to education in all its cultural and vocational facets is up against a real struggle with the political Right, with neoliberals, and even with students convinced that education is meaningful only if it leads to becoming a member of the one percent. There are real obstacles to overcome – consumerism has so thoroughly infiltrated our education system that today many students, from all economic positions, expect to purchase a diploma (one way or another) and forgo the rigorous and introspective process of becoming a critically minded citizen, which is the heart and soul of democracy.

The good news is that even the most materialistic student can be drawn to learning. That means re-engaging students to become critically literate, self-reflective and engaged citizens. This can be and is being done

nationwide, but it demands an explicitly left/progressive identity. It needs to be embraced and enacted by schools of education and teachers’ unions. It means reclaiming education by ensuring that teaching facilitates learning and that education, as Paulo Freire asserted, is the practice of freedom, for the individual and for democracy. We need to learn to think democratically in the spirit that Walt Whitman, John Dewey, bell hooks, Maxine Greene and Sonia Nieto have all offered as the true hope for the democratic experiment.

So, the question, What’s left for education? is a question about direction, vision and commitment. It is a call to reclaim education from those who would have us believe that information is merely knowledge and that knowledge in itself is wisdom. It is a question that demands us to directly challenge the claim that education is best understood and improved by using corporate models and metaphors. We must insist that education is not a business, that students are not customers and that what takes place in the classroom is not a product to be packaged, mass-produced and distributed, globally – despite the increased fascination with professors lecturing to as many as 40,000 students online, as in the trend toward “massive open online courses,” – aka MOOC.

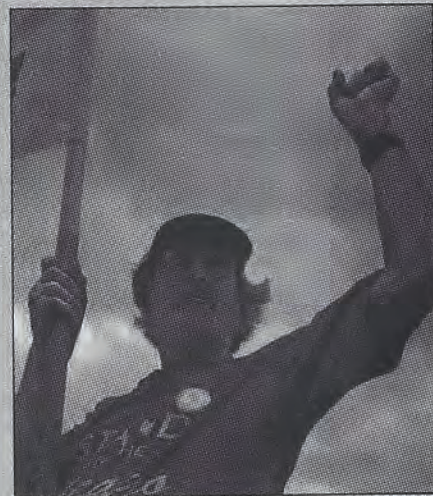
DSA members and others are positioned to provoke a national conversation on what a real education comprises, making it an intrinsic part of what the late philosopher Richard Rorty called it, the battle to “achieve our country.” ❖

Ron Scapp is the founding director of the Graduate Program in Urban and Multicultural Education at the College of Mount Saint Vincent, the Bronx, where he is a professor of humanities and teacher education. He is currently serving as president of the National Association for Ethnic Studies and is a longtime member of DSA.

Announcements

The DSA National Political Committee (NPC) recently appointed Bill Barclay as our new National Member Organizer. His volunteer job duties include welcoming new members through a monthly “new member orientation” conference call. Bill is also a co-chair of the NPC Program Committee, which works with the leaders of DSA locals in carrying out our national priorities. Bill has a special emphasis on mentoring new DSA organizing committees as they do the hard work of starting new DSA groups in their communities.

We also have a new Volunteer Coordinator, Lee Levin. Lee worked for unions for 20 years, including eight years as executive director of the Coalition of Labor Union Women. Currently, she is a full-time mom. She welcomes new volunteers and finds ways for them to build DSA at the national level.



Bill Barclay

Eleanor Simmonds: December 11, 1927 – April 14, 2013

by Herb Shore

Eleanor was a founding member of the San Diego DSA local and was active in the San Diego left at least as early as 1975. In those early days, most of our local's organizing meetings were held in her and her equally activist husband Victor Richmond's home. Vic passed away in 1993.

In those years of her political activism, Eleanor was a key contributor to the San Diego DSA newsletter, and wrote book reviews for almost every monthly issue. Her reviews were appreciated by other DSA local chapters around the country.

Until her last days, Eleanor remained dedicated to the organization she helped found. Even in ill health she strongly expressed a concern that the struggle for democratic socialism continue, and her heartfelt hope was that more youth join in and continue the fight. Her commitment is an encouragement to all of us.



Our Locals in Action

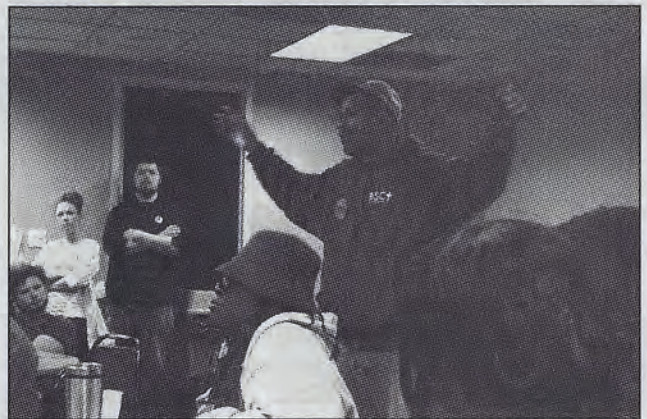


The DSA Socialist Feminist Team organized chapters around the country to participate in Bowl-a-thon fundraisers for the National Network of Abortion Funds, which enables low-income women to access safe abortions. Pictured are DSA teams from NYC and DC.



PHILADELPHIA – UNITES ALLIES IN FORUM ON AUSTERITY

Philly DSA has been working hard to deepen their ties with other activist groups and to increase their visibility in the city's progressive scene. In May they organized and cosponsored an exciting and very successful forum on



Philadelphia DSA co-sponsored a lively and well-attended public forum on austerity issues.

austerity, with four other leading activist organizations: Fight for Philly, the Philadelphia Unemployment Project, Decarcerate PA and Philadelphia Neighborhood Networks (each of whom sent someone to speak on the panel). The event brought activists together to speak on a range of austerity-related issues around which their groups are organizing – from education cuts to regressive local tax policies to the school-to-prison pipeline – and to think of these as interconnected strands of a much larger geographic and historical phenomenon of neoliberal capitalism. DSA Vice-Chair Joseph Schwartz and Philly DSA member

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Michele Rossi put all the threads in context, with excellent talks that showed how much DSA has to add to the educational side of activism in Philadelphia.

Fifty people had been expected, but nearly 90 showed up. In addition to contributing a much-needed socialist perspective to the Philadelphia progressive community's conversation around austerity, the forum enabled the local to increase their mailing list and recruit a bunch of new people to attend their biweekly reading group and help with their upcoming student debt campaign. "Perhaps most important, other activist groups with whom we want to work more closely were able to see how well DSA can organize!" says chair Jared Abbott. They're hoping to plan another public forum in the fall in conjunction with some organizations that didn't take part in the austerity forum, aiming for the local to become a strong and respected voice for change in Philadelphia.

SACRAMENTO – MOBILIZES FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

In April, Sacramento DSA cosponsored two immigration conferences with community groups as a part of the national mobilizations for immigrant rights. On April 10, Sacramento unions held a spirited press conference in front of Congresswoman Matsui's office in downtown Sacramento. On April 12, a Sacramento Immigration



Luis Magaña, OTA de California and former braceros, giving testimony on the history of guest workers at the April 16 conference in Sacramento.

Coalition, including the Sacramento Central Labor Council, SEIU, Unite/Here, DSA and others held a community forum featuring powerful migration stories that will frame the discussion on immigration reform. Testimony was given by high school students, community college, CSU and U.C. students, labor activists and community members.

On April 16 a conference opposing the criminalization of immigrants in the "Comprehensive Immigration Reform Proposals" was held by the Sacramento State Serna Center. DSA, the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), Union Civica Primero de Mayo, Organización de Trabajadores Agricolas de California, Association of Braceros of Northern California (Stockton), and others heard testimony from undocumented students, workers, former braceros and indigenous activists, as well as analysis by faculty and scholars in an effort to advance a human rights perspective on the contentious issue of immigration. Reports on the conferences and position papers can be found at antiracismdsa.blogspot.com. Sacramento local chair Duane Campbell and others distributed the DSA literature piece "Justice for Undocumented Immigrants" and the Spring 2013 issue of *Democratic Left* with the featured photo essay by David Bacon on "A Working Class View of Immigration Reform." The Sacramento local has long been active in immigrant rights going back to the campaign against the anti-immigrant Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986) and Proposition 187 (1994).



Some of the Metro Atlanta DSA members who joined an April demonstration demanding immigration reform and urging their governor not to sign new anti-immigration legislation.

SAN DIEGO – HELPS PASS CITY COUNCIL'S IMMIGRATION REFORM RESOLUTION

San Diego DSA members reviewed immigration reform issues in a membership meeting, and with that preparation

Remember to keep recruiting your friends to DSA for the membership drive! We have a goal of growing by 10 percent in 2013 and we've reached the halfway mark of the year. Share this copy of *Democratic Left* and urge them to support the largest democratic socialist organization in the United States!

attended or participated in two public meetings of the San Diego City Council related to immigration.

Joe Schwartz spoke at the DSA local meeting about the organization's position on immigration reform. His presentation was very well received. The local filmed the talk and plan to extract a portion that can be used later.

Next was a meeting of the City Council Rules Committee, where Council Member David Alvarez presented a draft resolution supporting reform and a path to citizenship. DSA members carried signs supporting the resolution and organized members and friends of DSA to attend. The resolution passed 3-2, with the Republican council members in opposition, but this was enough to forward the resolution to the whole City Council. DSA was in the company of several local Latino organizations and some young immigrant student speakers who came out of the shadows to share their stories. One especially impressive student spoke about how she first learned of her non-U.S.-citizen status while in college when she tried to apply for student aid.

At the full City Council meeting, DSA members were again in attendance. Three spoke in favor of the resolution, identifying themselves as local DSA members. During the public comment portion, Virginia Franco included some text from the DSA statement, "Justice for Undocumented Immigrants: Demand a Real Path to Citizenship" in her two-minute comment. (She had planned a bilingual reading but one minute was reduced from the normal three minutes allowed.) The City Council passed the resolution unanimously!



U. C. Davis YDS marched in solidarity with campus workers this spring.

CHICAGO – PROVIDES AMMUNITION FOR ANTI-AUSTERITY STRUGGLE

On the first Friday of every month for the past few years, the Chicago Political Economy Group (CPEG,

see www.CPEGonline.org) has held a press conference responding to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' release of the previous month's employment statistics. Their analysis, usually calling for an aggressive federal jobs program and a financial transaction tax (FTT), has been used by various Jobs with Justice chapters when they held First Friday demonstrations against corporate and government targets.

Although CPEG is an independent policy and educational institution, several of the founders and most active participants are members of DSA, including Ron Baiman, Bill Barclay and Sid Hollander. The members come from several backgrounds, including economics, political science and sociology, but all share a commitment to making the political economy understandable in the service of working people. They began their work, after CPEG's founding in 2008, with a detailed analysis of the jobs shortfall and outlined a program that would create living wage jobs sufficient to provide employment for everyone willing and able to work (<http://www.cpegonline.org/workingpapers/CPEGWP2009-1.pdf>). DSA endorsed the program at its 2009 national convention. CPEG then worked with Rep. John Conyers' staff to incorporate much of their program into his "Humphrey-Hawkins 21st Century Full Employment and Training Act" (HR 1000 in the current Congress). Their focus on jobs also led to the First Friday reports and actions.

A second major focus of CPEG's education and agitation has been financial reform, in particular calling for (and helping some advocates design) a tax on the trading of financial assets. Sometimes called a Robin Hood Tax, an FTT has been warmly received by groups ranging from Occupy Chicago to members of the Illinois Education Association and Illinois Federation of Teachers. See <http://www.cpegonline.org/workingpapers/CPEGWP2010-2.pdf>.

Since the beginning of 2013, CPEG has worked to bring the FTT idea into the anti-austerity struggle in Illinois. The current focus of the struggle is the teachers' and other public employees' pension funds. The state of Illinois has, for more than 30 years, failed to pay its share into these funds, even while the public employees have always provided their share – it's taken directly from their pay checks. As a result, today Illinois has the lowest level of funding for any state public pension system, facing a shortfall over the long term of more than \$80 billion. And because most Illinois teachers and other public employees were not allowed to pay into Social Security, the state public pension system is their primary source of retirement income.

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Chicago is home to two of the largest derivative markets in the world, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange and the Chicago Board Options Exchange. Ron Baiman and Bill Barclay have taken the lead in presenting revenue solutions to the Illinois public sector pension funding crisis by demonstrating that a very modest FTT would raise significant new revenue for the state that, over time, would end the crisis. (They do not see this in conflict with proposals

for a national FTT and have continued working with NNU for an FTT at the national level). They have forced the Illinois FTT into the political discussion through talks at well-attended public forums organized by Northern Illinois Jobs with Justice in conjunction with state representatives and with publicity help from the teachers' unions.

"Throughout this work, we have consistently argued that the best way to fight the austerians is through proposing revenue solutions, and that these revenue solutions should seek to remake the Illinois (and U.S.) political economy into one that serves all of us, not just the top one percent," says Barclay. "Our work has interested a few Illinois state legislators and we are beginning to work with them on proposed legislation for a state-level Robin Hood Tax. It's a good start but a very long ways to go. We have large and well-funded opponents who are beginning to notice CPEG's work in this arena." ♦



Metro Atlanta DSA supports Atlanta Jobs with Justice's campaign to restore unemployment benefits to contracted school workers.

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