

Works in Progress

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Serving the Olympia community and the cause of social justice since 1990.

May 2019

A business that serves workers will become a business owned by workers

Bethany Weidner

The people who peer into computers on the third floor of the Mottman Building in downtown Olympia are about to embark on a new stage in their working lives. Working Systems started out as an idea to offer tech services during the slack season at Cascadia Research, morphed into an S Corporation providing programming services to nonprofits and unions for the next 25 years, and today is in the process of converting to a worker owned cooperative.

Distinct from the start

The business was unique from its beginning in the 80s when computers were new and little understood. The owners were unique as well. Neither Steven Kant nor Jim Cabbage was principally motivated by money. Neither had gone to school for technology. Jim was a biology major doing marine mammal research at Cascadia Research Collective. Steven worked with computers as an intern at NASA, and later became involved with food co-ops, taught at an alternative high school, supported Nicaragua construction brigades, naturally fiddled with computers and came up with software to keep track of funds and other things.

Steven was running the math center and teaching classes at the Evergreen State College when its staff unionized. He became organizing chair at Local 443 of the Washington Federation of State Employees and in that role honed his computer skills in combat with some bulky old computers. He brought those skills to Evergreen's Labor Center just as local unions were wondering whether this new technology could help them keep track of membership.

"You have to make your own stuff"

The next stop was Cascadia Research Collective where Steven and Jim shared space and began helping groups to acquire and set up computers and networks in the days before the internet. Both kept on with part-time work, which meant they had a freer hand in developing this new area. The fact that they were their own bosses meant it was easy when they decided to leave hardware and focus on creating custom software for their clients. "The dream was to make things we could sell at a really low price to small locals so they could have really good programs," Steven said in a recent interview.

Success in serving unions and workers

"Working Systems" was born as a way to pursue this dream. Working Sys-

No one wanted to give up this workplace that offered so many satisfactions, and served so many people

tems was structured as a corporation by default—the newly minted owners hadn't found others interested in taking on the risk and responsibility of such an untried venture. It turned out that many unions needed this kind of support and Working Systems' client base grew steadily. Starting small with the Washington Public Employees Association, the State Labor Council, Sign Painters, United Way of Centra-

lia and other area nonprofits, they quickly needed more employees. And

like the founders, these new people didn't come from formal IT courses—they too developed programming skills in their own idiosyncratic ways.

But the group still had to make ends meet. They

needed to find ways to make versions of their software that could work nationally. Early on, they connected



The appeal of a co-operative economy

The easiest way to think about how a cooperative differs from a typical business is that in a cooperative, people own it in common and make decisions in common. There's not an outside investor who has ultimate control over the life and work of the business. The other big reason is that cooperatives are motivated by service—to their members or to the people who do the work—and not by how much profit they can reap. Generally, people who join or form cooperatives are also interested in sustaining family businesses, fair trade, equitable community growth, and even protecting natural resources—considerations that in a profit-driven business are contradicted by the profit motive.

The biggest and most familiar co-op in Olympia is the Olympia Food Co-op. The Food Coop is a member-owned co-op managed by a collective formed by the people who work there. People join the Co-op by paying a small fee or purchasing equity, depending on their situation. Most of the other co-ops on this list are worker co-ops, formed by the individuals who produce the goods or services that the business sells. They are their own bosses, managing the organization, performing the work

and shouldering the risks and rewards.

Olympia is fortunate to have the Northwest Cooperative Development Center located right here. They provide a critical introduction for anyone interested in converting to or starting a coop. Then they offer guidance, support and resources to help make that conversion or do the startup. Both Orca Books and Working Systems are working with NCDC on their transitions (see Orca Books notice on page 5.)

A random list of co-ops in Olympia

Olympia Food Co-op and co-op workers's collective

New Moon Cafe

Dumpster Values

Capital Homecare Cooperative

Westside Cooperative Preschool

Eastside Cooperative Preschool

Hidden Village—a manufactured home community

Cascadia Research Collective (not exactly a coop)

Orca Books—forming

Working Systems—forming

with a California company called Union-Friendly Systems (UFSI), and contracted to modernize a software package called MUMS that UFSI had created for the Communication Workers of America (CWA). Another key achievement came with a contract with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) to supply the union's 400 locals across the US with a program to manage their member services.

A worker-centered workplace

The business continued to add products—a whole slate of software programs managing services and membership, creation of websites and training and reporting. Sometimes their programming task can be especially satisfying, as when they added a drop-down menu with choices including "non-binary" to replace the old field that assumed everyone was male. Other times, when there's a critical strike action, they take pleasure in knowing that their software is helping.

Compared to a lot of businesses, Working Systems has an absence of hierarchy. Pay is hourly and the range from top to bottom of the (transparent) pay scale is small. Neither Steven nor Jim is at the top. Benefits are equivalent across the board. As befits an organization that believes in the value of organized labor, everyone is a union member (the CWA). The owners are also members, but not part of the bargaining unit. Because of the distorted way health insurance is offered and premiums are calculated in the US, Working Systems like other small businesses faced increasing difficulty this year in providing reasonable coverage for everyone. As with other issues in this workplace, the decision as to how to proceed came from members of the bargaining unit.

Staying connected to the outcome of your work

Programming is an isolating kind of work that requires a lot of "me and the computer" time to produce outcomes. At the same time, everyone at this shop moves from the screen to the help desk, which means they get to interact with people, solving problems and making lives better. Scott Breidenbach (who's working on the co-op transition) said a visit to a union office can be an eye-opener when you see a staffer struggling with the software; you get to say, "we can fix that!" and then do it. Two people do phone support full time, but everyone

► Workers, continued on page 11

Works In Progress

Works in Progress (WIP) is a community newspaper based in Olympia, Washington and published monthly. The paper was established by the Thurston County Rainbow Coalition which published the first issue in May 1990.

Our mission. The aim of WIP is to confront injustice and encourage a participatory democracy based on justice in the economic, political, environmental and social realms and across classes, races and genders.

How WIP is produced. WIP depends on a volunteer managing editor, supported by the Publishing Committee, to see to the accomplishment of nearly all organizational, administrative and editorial tasks.

How WIP is supported. First and foremost, WIP depends for survival on the contributions and participation of writers, activists, students, organizers, and other members of the community, broadly defined. We also receive support from the Workers' Defense Fund whose purpose is to strengthen organizations that engage in struggle against the powerful for the empowerment of the powerless.

Guidelines for writing for WIP. Our priority is to focus on stories that are ignored or misrepresented in the mainstream media, especially those that relate directly to our mission.

To this end, we seek well-researched news stories, serious analyses of issues confronting our communities and accounts of personal experiences or reflections by local writers. We also consider poetry, graphics, cartoons and articles that challenge the boundaries of conventional journalism.

Submitting your writing: Send an email to olywip@gmail.com with the word SUBMISSION on the subject line. Attach your submission as a word document. Include your name, a brief bio and contact information. WIP volunteer editors will contact you if there is significant editing needed. Send pictures etc as attachments. Pictures should be high resolution with dimensions in relation to the content. Generally 300 pixels is one inch.

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olywip@gmail.com

Proofreading Meeting

Sunday, May 26

115 Legion Way SW

On the cover:

The grocery store checker sees the world, rich and poor, pass by every day.

Art by Richie Ohlson



Labor in all its forms

Our theme for May

This issue is dedicated to Labor in all its forms, from waged to unwaged, labor that takes place in traditional settings such as factories, hospitals, construction sites, offices, schools, etc. to less recognized forms of participation in the economic relations of society like reproductive female labor, rearing children, and caring for elders. All these diverse forms of labor constitute an integral part of the capitalist system in which we live, a system that can be broadly characterized by putting profits first and people last, generating tremendous inequality and social suffering for most of humanity.

One of the most recent reports by Oxfam International points out that “26 billionaires have the same combined net worth as the poorest 3.8 billion people on the planet.” As we can see, the question here is not whether capitalism works. It works quite well and in obscene ways for a despicable minority.

Capitalism is basically organized around the principle of extracting value from the labor of others who have nothing but their labor power to sale in exchange for a salary. It is this type of exchange that allows capitalists to accumulate wealth, which in turn further replicates this model of exploiting other people’s labor.

The world-wide condition of being exploited by capital allows us to speak of class (working class) as a key element in the emancipation of society. From this perspective, class as a category offers the possibility of including the largest possible number of people open to implementing social change. Simultaneously, the category of class lends itself to analyzing and addressing other important forms of exploitation based on race, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

Works in Progress considers that workplace democracy, along with an informed political movement, are essential to the creation of a better world in

which the enjoyment of life and the realization of the full human potential are possible. The determination of all of us, the real creators of wealth in the world, is indispensable. —EQ

Theme for June: Where we find a home and why. It's not just about housing, it's about a home. A home is a place of refuge, where you express your personality, where you might have neighbors—for schmoozing, for sharing views, for creating community, for practicing citizenship. In this country some people—a lot of people!—have their home on the street, or in a car—we object to that. Some people live in manufactured homes in “parks” where they pay owners until those owners might decide to sell the property. Others live in coop housing, or in apartments, sometimes apartments whose owners benefit from property tax waivers granted by a municipality. Some of us live in cozy single-family homes or duplexes. Others in McMansions or “gated communities.” Others of us have two, or five or seven homes! For June, we'd like to know where you live—and more importantly, why. Maybe some reflections what this means and whether we need to change it.

Theme for July: Community. We're hoping for reflections on what it means to be part of a community and how being part of a community might enhance your individuality. Or how the ideology of individualism isolates us and denies us community.

Theme for August: Who's running things? Please share your observations about this at the household, community, national and international level.

Theme for September: What we do to make the future? Can you share your understanding of the actions and narratives that create the future as we move in to it. Do we want the future to look like the past?

And then this happened...

The necessity defense wins one

In the December 2017 issue of Works in Progress we reported on the trial of people involved in a four-state action to shut off a pipeline carrying oil from Canada. A key motive for the actions was to put the fossil fuel industry on trial by using the necessity defense: actions taken to stop the flow of oil were necessary in order to prevent a harm larger than the harm caused by the act itself.

An important aim behind the valve turning strategy was to bring the necessity defense into courtrooms, arguing that climate-based civil disobedience is necessary as a lesser evil compared to the harm being done by producing and burning fossil fuels.

In that trial in South Dakota, Judge Laurie Fontaine ruled that defendants Michael Foster and Sam Jessup could not use the necessity defense; such testimony “could confuse or mislead the jury into believing the legitimate concerns regarding climate change are an excuse or defense to the crimes charged.” That was exactly the case the valve-turners had hoped to bring before the jurors.

Now valve turners will get their chance. On April 8, 2019, the Washington Court of Appeals Division One reversed a decision made in the State of Washington v. Kenneth Ward. Ward was one of the people arrested in the four-state action for turning the valves on Kinder-Morgan pipelines transporting oil from Canadian tar sands into the US.

The Washington court found that “Because the harms that Ward asserted he was trying to alleviate were more than just climate change, generally, but also included both the specific dangers of Canadian tar sands oil and the impacts of sea level rise on Washington, Ward's actions were not intended to be merely symbolic in nature. As such, the evidence he planned to introduce was not solely aimed at inducing jury nullification and the trial court erred in preventing Ward from introducing evidence in support of his necessity defense.”

As the Court of Appeals explained in their ruling:

“Washington recognizes a common law necessity defense. The defense may be raised when a defendant demonstrates that they reasonably believed the commission of the crime was necessary to avoid or minimize a harm, the harm sought to be avoided was greater than the harm resulting from a violation of the law, the threatened harm was not brought about by the defendant, and no reasonable legal alternative existed.

“Based on the specific harms that Ward asserted he was trying to avoid, his actions were not merely symbolic. The protesters' intent was to physically stop the flow of Canadian tar sands oil into the United States. It was a direct way of preventing a uniquely potent contributor to climate change from entering the United States.

Special events

.Celebrate workers!
May 1, Sylvester Park, 3-7pm

2019 NW Green Home Tour
Sat, May 4, 11 – 5

Innovation, artistry and craftsmanship; remodels and cutting-edge work. Go to nwgreenhometour.org for a map and tickets (\$0-\$25 sliding scale).

May General Assembly
Sat, May 4, 2 PM (visit tables at 1 PM) at Sylvester Park, 615 Washington St.

Seeking to transform our city through participatory democracy; provide a structure for non-ruling class people to resist domination. All welcome.

Working People’s Summit –Workshop on Homeless Response Strategies
Sat, May 4, 9:30 to 11:30 am at Capital High School, 2707 Conger Ave NW, Olympia.

Help determine the city's response to the homelessness crisis.

Rally for Missing or Murdered Indigenous Women

Sun, May 5, 10 am to 7 PM at the State Capitol Building

Dolls dressed in red will represent the missing and/or murdered indigenous peoples.

“Thurston for Bernie” Action Team Kick-off

Mon, May 6, 7pm, Thurston County Courthouse 2000 Lakeridge Drive SW Building #1 Ground Floor.

Jacobin Reading Group
Wed, May 8, 6 am, Orca Books, 509 E. 4th.

DSA discussion of articles of interest .to socialists primarily from Jacobin. jacobin@olydsa.com for more information.

Women of Color in Leadership

Sat. May 11, 11-1 pm, 816 Adams.

WOCL is a group cultivated as a safe space for women of color to discuss issues, events, and experiences that uniquely affect them. More info : Shawna Hawk at 360-352-8526

Justice in Crisis

Mon, May 13, 6:30 - 8:30 pm, the Unitarian Church, 2315 Division St NW, Olympia.

Short films (40 minutes total) by Brave New Films. *By the Numbers, The Power of Fear, OverCriminalized, To Prison for Poverty, Time to Come Home, 20 Years is Enough. Discussion with Marilyn Roberts (NamI)* and others on relevance to Thurston County. Presented by NamI and Justice Not Jails. cdmckinley@earthlink.net

Western Worker Cooperative Convening

Sat, May 18, 10 am - 4 pm, The Olympia Center, 222 Columbia St NW.

Skill-building and organizing workshops in partnership with Northwest Cooperative Development Center. \$120 fee includes lunch; \$60 for co-op members. Some Spanish translators. Info and registration at conference@usworker.coop

Working People’s Summit
Sun, May 19, 9 to 3 at Hotel RL, 2300 Evergreen Park Dr SW
Join workers from across the South Sound for a day of workshops, discussions, and collective action. Sponsored by the Thurston-Lewis-Mason Central Labor Council.

Off the Grid Tiny House/ Sustainable Living Show
May 31, 10 am to June 2, 5 PM at the Thurston County Fairgrounds
Designers, builders and suppliers will show their wares.

2019 Primary Candidate Forum

June 10, 7 pm, Thurston Co. Courthouse, Bldg 1, Rm 152.
Hear candidates running in the August primary for Port Commissioner, Olympia mayor, Tumwater and Yelm City Council. Info Our Revolution Thurston FB..

For a fuller listing of events of April events, go to LocalMotive.org. For some events posted to WIP after the deadline, check out the WIP Facebook page.

It was never just about raising wages

Celeste Robinson

When the \$15 minimum wage was signed into law in Saint Paul City Hall in November, I burst into tears. I spent three years working on the campaigns for \$15 in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, including 18 months as the co-director of 15 Now Minnesota, where I coordinated the coalition of faith, labor, and community groups that fought for and won \$15 in Saint Paul. I poured my heart and soul into the campaign.

A victory amid continuing fears

Most of the people who saw me that day in City Hall probably assumed I was crying tears of happiness and satisfaction, and in part I was. But I was also overwhelmed with exhaustion, frustration, and fear and that I hadn't expected to feel so strongly. It was hard to celebrate our victory without thinking about the context of what lies ahead.

For millennials like me, the future looks bleak. New headlines break every day exposing the precarity of our global economy where a handful of billionaires hoard the majority of the world's wealth. My generation is having fewer children, citing economic insecurity and fear about global political stability and climate change. I fought for \$15 as a part of resisting that future and building something better.

Creating billionaires and impoverishing workers

From the beginning, the Fight for \$15 was never just about raising wages, it was also about building public anger at a system where corporations make billions in profits while workers are paid poverty wages. In many ways, it is the modern incarnation of the root of the labor movement, the refusal to accept exploitation.

Even progressive local governments resist

I'm proud to have been part of the movement that will raise wages for more than 100,000 workers, myself included. Even more than the raises, I'm proud of the ways we set an example of how ordinary people can win meaningful political change. But I am also

“If unions can rise to the challenge, young people like me will take notice, and we will join.”

coming to terms with the fact that I had to spend three years prying a minimal concession from some of the most progressive municipal governments in the country. It's intimidating to have fought so hard for so little when we need to win so much.

Young people see looming social change

There are serious battles ahead, far larger ones than a municipal minimum wage, that will determine what life is like for my generation. The tension of massive social change is alive in youth and popular culture: Teen Vogue is writing about general strikes, and Cardi B's Instagram video calling for “action” in response to the government shutdown has more than 20 million views. Many millennials may not have been educated about the value of unions, but the labor movement has so many op-

portunities to harness the revolutionary energy of young people.

Local Teamsters and allies elevated the fight

The local labor movement did just that in the Fight for \$15. Many local unions participated in the movement by devoting staff time, donating money, and most importantly by tying the demand for \$15 in with contract struggles. When Teamsters Local 320 made a \$15 minimum wage a cornerstone of their negotiations for St Paul Public School Nutrition Service workers, it elevated the citywide fight while boosting the morale and energy of the union's negotiation.

The \$15 coalition was strong and successful because it brought together students, union workers, non-union workers, and retirees around the populist demand for \$15. It was thrilling and inspiring to see labor help build the kind of movement that could win a minimum wage increase, and more.

It shouldn't be this hard

On the other hand, there were also times that the unions in the coalition refused to fight with the urgency that working people, and often their own members, demanded. At various points in the campaign, union leaders accepted months of delay in the ordinance process, refused to hold labor-endorsed City Council members accountable, and pumped the brakes on

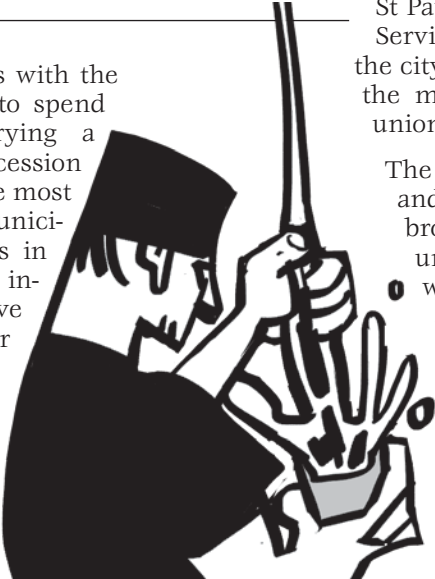
protests that could have won a stronger, swifter policy. These were the disillusioning experiences that made me cry even though we won: it didn't have to be this hard.

There were moments of the Fight for \$15 where I was so frustrated with the local labor movement that I was ready to write off unions as useful allies in the struggle for my future altogether. There were also many moments where I saw our unions step up and be vibrant, powerful, badass communities to unite diverse people and win a better world.

Labor movement's survival depends on youth

Right now, the labor movement has huge opportunities around Medicare for All, the Green New Deal, and more. Working successfully with young people like me will be key not only to the success or failure of these campaigns, but the success or failure of the labor movement itself. We in the labor movement need to push our unions to meet these challenges with all the passion, discipline, and courage that defines the best moments of labor history. If unions can rise to the challenge, young people like me will take notice, and we will join.

Celeste Robinson is a waitress and member of UNITE HERE Local 17. As the co-director of 15 Now Minnesota, she helped win a 15 minimum wage in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, the first Fight for 15 victories in the Midwest. She graduated from Macalester College in 2016. This article first appeared in Workday Minnesota, a project of the Labor Education Service at the University of Minnesota.



Taking a day off from the job on May 1

[Ed note: Olympia's own cherished Food Co-op has returned to its practice of being open every day of the year —except for one single, significant day: it is closed on May 1, International Workers' Day. The Co-op has posted on its website this explanation of why.]

International Workers' Day, May 1, has a long history in this country and others, originating with the United States labor movement in the late 19th Century. On May 1, 1886, unions across the United States went on strike, demanding that the standard workday be shortened to eight hours. This was an important step in workers right to organize and to seek fair treatment from employers. While that particular day had a bloody ending and successes were slow, we look back on May 1st as a day that changed things for workers here and around the world.

Our purpose, which includes to “support efforts to increase democratic process” and to “support efforts to foster a socially and economically egalitarian society,” drives our decisions on how to be a cooperative progressive business every day. We believe our position as a collective with an egalitarian labor structure, makes it appropriate to choose International Workers' Day as a day off in solidarity with others.

Our collective would like to acknowledge that other workers have to go on STRIKE to take this day of observance

off, while we here at the Olympia Food Co-op have privilege to discuss the issues and come to a unified decision together, ultimately deciding to close in solidarity with the movement.

In recent years, May Day celebrations and rallies have focused on the struggles of oppressed communities and immigrant rights. This year is bound to be no exception, as many unions and groups allied with supporting immigrants and low wage workers are planning a day of action.

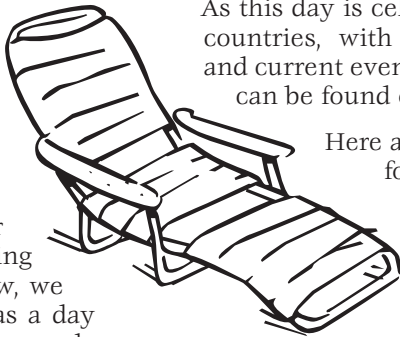
As this day is celebrated in numerous countries, with a variety of history and current events, much information can be found online.

Here are some places to look for more information:

Industrial Workers of the World—A Union for All Workers/The Brief Origins of May Day

These organizations have websites that may be of interest to you...

- Food Chain Workers Alliance
- Grassroots Global Justice Alliance
- Beyond the Movement: Uniting Movements
- Organized Workers for Labor Solidarity
- Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
- National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights



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Penny wise and pound foolish

The campaign to make members quit paying union dues

Chris Brooks

Holly Lindsey, has been a licensed home child-care provider for 22 years and a union member for 12. She joined SEIU 925 when the local formed in 2006.

Who’s knocking at your door?

“At the very beginning, the union went house-to-house to recruit us,” recalls Lindsey, who runs a home daycare and preschool near Longview, WA. In time, the union began holding regular meetings. Working from home can be isolating, so Lindsey is thankful for SEIU 925’s large network of childcare providers. “It’s been huge for us to collaborate and communicate as a group,” she says. “The union just opened all these doors for us.”

But the union isn’t the only one trying to open doors these days.

One day in 2017, Lindsey heard a knock on her sliding glass door. A casually dressed man in his 20s stood outside, clipboard in hand. He was with the Freedom Foundation.

“He told me I pay a lot of money to the union for nothing,” Lindsey says. “He tried to give me pamphlets showing how much money I would save if I opted out”—as much as \$500 a year in dues, he claimed. Lindsey felt threatened by the experience. “Most times when people try to bust a union, they do it in the workplace,” she says. “They don’t go to union members’ homes. They don’t bother them and their families like this.”

Soon, Lindsey’s phone was lighting up with calls from others in her local who had been visited by traveling union busters. Then the anti-union mailers and robocalls started, sometimes three a day. They’ve never stopped.

SEIU 925 was the target of an “opt-out campaign,” an anti-union initiative by the State Policy Network (SPN), the web of billionaire-backed right-wing groups that helped fund the Janus v. AFSCME lawsuit. The Washington-based Freedom Foundation is a star member.

Eliminate union participation in election finance

SPN got the Supreme Court ruling it wanted in Janus, which turned right-to-work conditions into national policy for the public sector. All public sector workers now have the option of receiving union benefits without paying for them. If enough workers choose to stop paying dues, union budgets and power will be greatly diminished. That’s the goal of SPN.

SPN is now building on its Janus victory with campaigns to contact government employees in union-dense states and encourage them to drop their membership. Their targets include blue states such as California, Illinois, New York, Oregon and Washington that have resisted passing anti-union legislation. The plan is simple: Gut unions of members and money so they have less influence on state elections. Once sympathetic politicians are in office, corporate interests can pass state laws to torch what remains of organized labor.

SPN is composed of 66 free-market think tanks across all 50 states. To enact their opt-out campaign, the network embarked on a mix of television and radio ads, social media, mailers, robocalls and door knockers. In These Times has reported on internal SPN documents that describe a four-part strategy to “defund and defang” the labor movement.

Leave the union—or stay but don’t pay

The first part is to continue advancing so-called right-to-work laws to starve union budgets. For 15 years, SPN has collaborated with forces like the American Legislative Exchange Council, the National Right to Work Committee and the Koch brothers to get six states to pass right-to-work laws, as well as municipalities in blue states such as Illinois and New Mexico. The crowning success was Janus.

The second part is developing its opt-out campaigns to erode union membership, pioneered in Washington state by the SPN-affiliated Freedom Foundation.

The third part is to require unions to recertify more often with periodic votes, as Wisconsin’s Act 10 did in 2011. Such mandates saddle unions with regular battles for survival.

Who needs a union? Negotiate your own contract

The fourth is to eliminate the right of unions to exclusively represent workers, allowing an individual to opt out of collective bargaining and sign their own contract. This legislation, which SPN has not yet succeeded in getting a state to pass, splinters and weakens unions while creating an opportunity for the employer to sow discord. For example, employers could offer non-union workers a bonus or slightly higher hourly rate to discourage participation.

“Taken individually, they are each bad,” Lafer says. “In combination, this represents a concerted effort to do away with public-sector unions.”

Only a small fraction of workers in the private sector—less than seven percent—belong to unions, down from 35 percent at their peak in 1954. The public sector, on the other hand, has enjoyed a Canadian level of union density, with one in three workers a member of a union. According to the Illinois Economic Policy Institute, Janus could prompt a drop in public-sector membership as large as 8 percent—a loss of 726,000 members—in the coming years.

Opportunity of a lifetime

The Freedom Foundation calls Janus “the opportunity of a lifetime” to starve unions. It ramped up its opt-out campaign with an email drive in May 2018 targeting more than 100,000 public employees in Oregon, California and Alaska. According to Bloomberg News’ Josh Eidelson, the group also had 80 canvassers trained and ready to start knocking on doors in California, Washington and Oregon the day the Janus decision came down. Their goal is to convince 127,000 public employees to opt out of union membership across the three states.

Heavily-funded national tentacles

Meanwhile, the Mackinac Center, an SPN affiliate, publicly launched an opt-out hotline for union members. The California Policy Center, another affiliate, sent a fundraising email to 8,000 union social service workers in Los Angeles County with the stated goal of reducing union dues “by \$300 million in the next three years.” The Pennsylvania-based Americans for Fair Treatment—an organization formed in 2014 whose four board members are SPN-affiliate employees—recently hired a former teacher and anti-union activist to lead an opt-out campaign targeting that state’s 330,000 public employees. SPN spokesperson Carrie Conko confirmed to the Wall Street Journal that

the network is providing support to opt-out campaigns in Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

All of these organizations are directly or indirectly funded by one of the largest right-wing grant-making institutions in the country, the Bradley Foundation, with \$835 million in assets. Internal Bradley Foundation documents from 2015 praise the Freedom Foundation’s aggressive attacks on unions as “a national model.” Similar documents show the Bradley Foundation considered funding for SPN affiliates such as the Empire Center for Public Policy in New York, on the basis

The Freedom Foundation calls Janus “the opportunity of a lifetime” to starve unions.

of their having “the stomach” to follow the Freedom Foundation’s example. In May, the Empire Center mailed New York state public employers warning them to “immediately stop withholding funds from nonmembers’ paychecks” after Janus.

Personal addresses of union members are “a vein of gold”

Opt-out campaigns hinge on the ability for these organizations to obtain government employees’ contact information. SEIU 925 president Karen Hart was dismayed when the Freedom Foundation began contacting members in 2014.

“We were caught totally off guard,” she says. “We had no idea they had obtained a list.” These lists are often obtained through public records requests. In one fundraising letter, the Freedom Foundation described obtaining the contact information of 300,000 public employees in Washington using open records requests as being “like a prospector locating a vein of gold.” The Freedom Foundation claims that its multi-year campaign cost SEIU 925 two-thirds of its members. The union confirms this loss rate, but attributes it to a high-attrition workforce, not the opt-out campaign.

Whether or not the government is obligated to release the personal home address of a high school librarian or a home healthcare worker is a murky legal area. Blocking SPN affiliates from obtaining private contact infor-

mation is one way unions can nip opt-out campaigns in the bud—and several unions are pursuing state legislation to do just that.

After losing a court challenge to block the Freedom Foundation from receiving a contact list of its members, SEIU 925 teamed up with healthcare local SEIU 775 to pass a statewide initiative exempting the personal information of child-care and home healthcare workers from Washington’s open records law. Unions in California and New Jersey have similarly worked with Democrats to pass laws exempting the personal information of government employees from open records requests. The New Jersey law also frustrates opt-out campaigns by only allowing workers to opt out during the 10 days following the anniversary of their hire date.

Deepening member engagement

In many states, public-sector unions have preempted opt-out campaigns with “all-in” campaigns, asking members to sign “recommit” cards confirming their union membership. The American Federation of Teachers says that by the time of the Janus ruling, it had secured 530,000 recommit cards from its estimated 800,000 members nationwide who would be affected. Some locals, like the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), have used these campaigns as opportunities to deepen member engagement. To date, the union has had one-on-one conversations and collected cards from almost 25,000 members.

“We are making the case to our members that our all-in campaign and our contract campaign are inextricably linked,” says Jeff Good, UTLA executive director. “If you want good contracts with good working conditions, then you need a strong union, and we can’t have a strong union if people are choosing to sit out. So we are fighting for a good contract for community schools and building a fighting union that can win.”

Chris Brooks is a staff writer and labor educator at Labor Notes. This article is the first half of an article that appeared in the August 2018 issue of In These Times, published with permission. This story was supported by the Leonard C. Goodman Institute for Investigative Reporting.



Strangling unions to starve public employment

Chris Brooks

The coordinated effort by wealthy financiers to eliminate unions has elements in addition to the “opt out” campaign. As the State Policy Network (SPN) and its right-wing allies secure Republican domination of more state governments, they will turn also to laws requiring union recertification elections.

Regulating unions, not corporations

In Wisconsin, for example, the Republican-controlled legislature in 2011 passed Gov. Scott Walker’s union-busting behemoth, Act 10. Much of the reporting on Act 10 called it a right-to-work bill, but it also made collecting union dues more difficult, dramatically limited the scope of collective bargaining, and created a recertification requirement: Each year, Wisconsin unions must now hold an election and convince more than 50 percent of the bargaining unit to vote for representation. Under this system, anyone who doesn’t vote is effectively voting against the union. Simply getting enough members to participate in a vote for the status quo became one of the biggest challenges.

Imagine how many unions we can decimate

SPN affiliates couldn’t be happier with the results. “In 2010, our Network united our intellectual resources, winning messaging and moral support behind Governor Scott Walker’s heroic efforts to bring historic government union collective bargaining and pension reform to Wisconsin,” SPN president Tracie Sharp wrote. “Most Wisconsin public employee unions have lost between 30 percent and 60 percent of their members in the two years since Act 10 went into effect. And this decline has in turn cost organized labor tens of millions of dollars. Imagine the impact this will have when we achieve even more government union reforms across the nation this year!”

Indeed, Wisconsin AFSCME—which once represented almost every state, county and city employee across the state, close to 63,000 government workers—has now lost 90 percent of its membership.

“It decimated our ability to represent local and state government employees,” says Neil Rainford, a Wisconsin AFSCME staff member for 18 years. Union spokesperson Michael Horecki says that the losses were especially bad in rural areas, where “many counties have few, if any, remaining union members.”

After Act 10, Wisconsin AFSCME let its locals choose whether to keep fighting for recertification, and many stopped seeking official recognition by the state as the exclusive representative of government employees. Instead, they decided to fight for workers outside the official system of collective bargaining.

Finding new avenues to support workers

“We’ve developed this model we call the association model,” says Rainford. “It relies on politics and electing people at the local level, and then we negotiate the terms and conditions of employment annually through a meet and confer process. We have been able to place language from our previous contracts into the employee handbook. We don’t have dues, we have fees, which are taken out of member paychecks by local government. Since we operate outside the state system, none of it requires any oversight or involvement from the state.”

Building new relationships with members

According to many in the Wisconsin labor movement, the shift in AFSCME’s approach was born of necessity. Decades of business-as-usual unionism had turned Wisconsin public-sector unions into highly legalistic organizations incapable of responding to the crisis. “The culture that people have known historically is the business model: professional staff taking care of problems, meeting the needs of members and doing the organizing,” says former Wisconsin AFSCME organizer Edward Sadlowski. “The fundamentals of organizing—mapping out the work-site, identifying leaders, building relationships on the shop floor, that kind of thing—were completely missing from most unions’ culture. Without a vision and no plan to move forward, union density plummeted. For too

many working people, the union has no relevance.”

Engaged and energized teachers

There is hope amidst the wreckage. In Milwaukee, seven out of every 10 teachers are members of the Milwaukee Teachers’ Education Association (MTEA), which has won its recertification elections each year. “Most regions are losing members every single month, and every single month our union is holding steady or putting numbers up on the board,” says MTEA vice president Amy Mizialko.

After the Milwaukee school district proposed a 2019 budget that cut classroom spending by 5 percent per student, MTEA launched an aggressive campaign to restore funding. At rallies, MTEA members often chanted, “If we don’t get it, shut it down.” The threat was not idle. The union spent months organizing escalating actions, from town halls to walk-ins, at which teachers rallied outside schools to greet parents and students with signs and information.

At one raucous school board meeting, union members shouted down the board with chants while the union president delivered 3,000 petition signatures opposing the cuts. At another, more than 3,000 MTEA members and supporters picketed outside the central office, then marched into the boardroom behind a drumline. The union asked members to sign a pledge “to do what it takes” to stop the budget cuts, signaling their intent without using the word “strike.” In May, the superintendent announced that the district was restoring the funding by chopping from the top and making cuts to district management instead.

Being a union member is an act of resistance

That same spirit is evident in Iowa, where, in 2016, Republicans scored a trifecta and seized the governorship and both chambers of the state government. The new legislature passed its own variation of Act 10. The law curtailed collective bargaining, capped wage increases unions could negotiate at the rate of inflation, outlawed the deduction of union dues from paychecks, and required a majority of all eligible voters—even those who are not union members, since Iowa is right-to-work—to vote to recertify the union during an annual two-week election.

Even though the law was largely the same as in Wisconsin, the result was very different: 99 percent of unions recertified.

“It really backfired on them,” says Ankeny High School history teacher Nick Covington. In Covington’s local, the Ankeny Education Association, stewards and activists had personal conversations with everyone in the bargaining unit—regardless of whether they were a member. “We had a color-coordinated system for following up with people who were on the fence. We were constantly communicating,” Covington says.

The Iowa activists had a simple message: Being a union member is an act of resistance to the state legislature that tried to take their bargaining rights. It worked.

Teachers in Florida shared a similar message in response to a new law requiring unions to annually prove they have 50 percent membership. Those that do not must organize a recertification election.

Florida teachers’ unions are tapping into rage over the fact that elected officials are making anti-union legislation a top priority in the weeks following

► Strangling, continued on page 10

Orca Books to convert to membership cooperative

The iconic Olympia bookstore, Orca Books, will be expanding its ownership to the community as it transitions into a cooperative business model. The staff, along with current owner Linda Berensten, have been working with the Northwest Cooperative Development Center (NWCDC) to create a plan for the conversion which will occur over the next six months. Orca Books Cooperative was officially incorporated on April 17, 2019 and will be launching its membership drive at Co-opatopia on April 27th during the Spring Arts Walk.

The bookstore has been a community space for 27 years—not only for author events and storytimes—but for meetings, first dates, and taking refuge from the rain. Orca has won countless community awards for “Best Bookstore,” and has offered donations and support to local schools, nonprofits, and arts’ organizations. A huge part of our business model revolves around evaluating and redistributing used books from all over the globe and literary spectrum. Orca believes that buying and trading used books is community recycling at its best. Billy Frank Jr. called Orca Books “the life of Olympia,” and the staff at Orca are deeply committed to carrying the legacy of Orca Books onward.

Linda Berensten, the current owner, says: “My wish is for Orca to continue, and for me to still be a part of it, but I’m looking forward to having more time to read, travel, and be a grandma.”

Orca Books Co-op seeks to be a multi-stakeholder co-op with four membership classes: Basic Consumer, Low-Income Consumer, Worker, and Organizational. Each member will pay a membership fee which will provide certain benefits, discounts, and voting rights. There will be a board of directors which will consist of member-owners.

John McNamara, with the NWCDC, noted that “co-ops offer long-term stability to businesses that help define a community. Olympia has become a leader in the national co-op community over the last five years. Orca Books offers the community a chance to keep an anchor institution downtown that helps define Olympia’s identity and continue to build a resilient cooperative economy for our community.”

For more information:
<https://www.orcabooks.com/co-op>
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News you might have missed: Extinction Rebellion actions here and abroad

[Ed note: Extinction Rebellion is an international movement that uses non-violent civil disobedience to achieve radical change in order to minimise the risk of human extinction and ecological collapse. Recently, a string of demonstrations blocked bridges and major streets in central London, disrupted train services and saw over a thousand people arrested. The group is rallying behind warnings that significant reductions in carbon emissions must be achieved within the next 11 years to avoid devastating consequences for the planet, such as mass extinction, by the end of the century.]

Portland, Oregon, April 22. Local citizens from Extinction Rebellion took a stand on Earth Day at Zenith Energy, dumping a truck full of soil over the train tracks and planting a “victory over fossil fuels” garden—complete with sheds, scarecrows, and a real growing garden.

Last year, Zenith Energy quietly began exporting tar sands oil from its Willamette River facility. The Oregonian reported that in 2018 alone, Zenith exported more than \$71 million of crude oil, up from only \$2,535 million in exports the year before. Now Zenith Energy is expanding its facility so that it can handle more than three times

the number of oil train cars. Over the past year Zenith Energy transformed a sleepy asphalt operation in the heart of Portland’s industrial district into a multi-million-gallon oil spigot. The oil arriving in the tank cars is processed bitumen, to which a solvent has been added in Canada. It’s known in the industry as “dilbit”—diluted bitumen. According to its manufacturer, it is extremely dangerous.



Some time after this picture was taken, Portland police arrived in large numbers and arrested the Extinction Rebellion protesters.

Oil trains endanger public safety and public health. They create environmental risks for communities that live close to rail lines in Portland and along the Columbia River, and for those who rely on waterways that could be contaminated from an oil train spill. Another note of interest: Zenith Energy is a project of an international hedge fund, Warburg Pincus. Former bail-out doctor and Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner is now president of Warburg-Pincus..

Extinction Rebellion PDX accompanied the action with this statement:

“We believe that local struggles, like the one we’re facing here in Portland, are critical to shutting down the fossil fuel industry. We also believe that it’s high time to begin taking the next step in our movement; that is, coordinating our resistance with our allies all across the PNW, the US and the world, and consolidating our efforts into a unified physical and political force. We want the flow of fossil fuels, and the flow of capital that supports it, to stop—at the brink of extinction, we are not asking for permission.”

For further information: To understand the consequences of the changes at Zenith, Gordon R. Friedman, a reporter for The Oregonian/OregonLive spent a month poring over thousands of pages of records from local, state and federal regulators. He interviewed officials working at nine oversight agencies, toured the Portland terminal and talked with Zenith Energy executives. This extraordinary, alarming article is worth reading. You can find it at <https://expo.oregonlive.com/news/crude-oil-trains>.

Streams, salmon, orca and the cycle of life

Streams are rated healthy when they support many kinds of life. For a salmon stream, that means benthic invertebrates —little “bugs” that live in sediments and have evolved over thousands of years in the cold, clear-running streams of the Pacific Northwest.

The best conditions for stream bugs also tend to be very good for salmon, as these bugs represent part of the primary food supply for young salmon. Salmon later return the favor when they die, becoming food for a variety of bugs in the stream. Salmon also contribute nitrogen, recycled for the trees on the stream banks. And because salmon are the main source of food for the killer whale population, the fact that their runs are dwindling is directly connected to the feared extinction of our southern resident Orcas. As salmon continue to decrease in number, the suffering of our river ecosystems will increase.

League of Women Voters of Thurston County’s final public forum of the year, Where’s the Water: Streams, Salmon, and Orcas, May 7 at the Olympia Center. Doors open at 5:30 pm, program starts at 6:00 pm. Admission is free.

The final presentations of the League of Women Voters’ 6-part forum on water will tie together the series and

describe how our streams sustain us in Thurston County. Previous forums covered our local watersheds and the extent of the County’s water, competing interests vying for a dwindling supply, ways to conserve and protect water, and the threats to water quality posed by stormwater and toxic runoff. A variety of large maps will allow you to trace all the streams and water bodies in the county.

At this final event, speakers will address the different stages in the circle of life. Ann Marie Pearce from Thurston County Planning Water Division will talk about the state of our streams and what Stream Teams are doing to improve it. A map will display streams that still have Chinook salmon runs. Gabe Madel, a fish biologist with Washington State’s Department of Fish and Wildlife will outline prospects and expectations for our salmon population. Kirsten Harmah from the Chehalis Tribe Department of Natural Resources will display a map that shows the formidable and frequent barriers to fish passage, and what the Chehalis Basin Partnership is doing to remove them and restore salmon runs. Last, Cindy Hansen, Education Coordinator of the Orca Network, will talk about the plight of our resident Orcas. They survive at the end of the food chain, as do we—a wake up call for us all.

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The vilification of the Left and the pursuit of [more] capital

Enrique Quintero

Things happen for a reason

It is easy to vilify the left. Effective vilification requires only money, political power, and access to the media. Those presently involved in the current campaign of defaming the left have had access to those three necessary ingredients for such a long time that engaging in the rhetoric of vilification demands very little work. In all practical terms, all that's demanded from them is to keep in mind Hitler's instruction: "if you tell a big enough lie and tell it frequently enough, it will be believed." Seventy-five years after his death, the German Nazi still seems to have many dedicated disciples in America who are willing, and able, to follow his dictum. The contemporary merchants of delusion and slander are of course the usual suspects:

1. Big corporations (money)
2. Political institutions in Washington such as Trump's White House, the Senate, the Judiciary, and political parties working for the interests of Wall Street (political power) and
3. Professional incubators of misinformation and slander such as the sycophants of *Fox News* (the media). To put all this in simpler terms, the triumvirate of economics, politics, and ideological control continue to operate on a daily basis in the U.S.

Nonetheless, at this point in the lethal game of American class-struggle, pointing at the enemy may be important but that identification constitutes no new news. We know who they are, we know how they play this class-game, and we know how to recognize them even after they have changed their names, faces, or the name of their teams. What's more important to ask ourselves now is, what is making the current avalanche of vilification against the left possible? What trigger has activated the visceral attitudes of the organized forces of the American right in the present political moment? And finally, the perennial question of politics: What's to be done?

Socialism, women, the very young and organized labor

Capitalists do not care much about peace of mind. All they need is to

maintain political peace. In other words, they need to preserve a political climate that favors what they consider to be the 'normal, uninterrupted' pursuit of their interests i.e. the expansion of profits. If we take a panoramic view of what for decades has been considered the customary political discourse of America, it becomes obvious that the so-called normality of the existing rhetoric of domination

...deception, slander, defamation, and discrediting the individual precede or accompany all forms of political opposition against the left.

is being challenged by new and emergent (or re-emergent) political actors willing to challenge the current social conditions and propose new alternatives.

This article argues that the agents of disturbance prompting the rabid, vitriolic vilification of the left include the following: the advent of socialism as part of the new American political vocabulary and political reality; the growing emergence of young and socially aware women leading and transforming the old American political arena; the comeback of organized labor leaning towards the left; and the participation of youth (from elementary to high school) who are taking a critical position and actively participating in the discussion of how to construct—in the present time, and with a sense of planetary ecological urgency—the foundations for an ecologically responsible society in the future.

The serious potential threat of these four forces combined has not escaped the political radar of the American right, particularly in the context of the upcoming presidential elections. Unable to mount and sustain a serious critique of the overall platform of social justice and ecological responsibility advocated by the left (an inability demonstrated, for instance, by Bernie Sanders' successful participation in a discussion of health care for all and the Green New Deal on Fox News a few days ago), what is left in the ideological arsenal of the right is the bag of tricks inherited from cold war ideological dinosaurs such as J. Edgar Hoover (FBI) and Allen W. Dulles (CIA). In

this bag, deception, slander, defamation, and discrediting the individual precede or accompany all forms of political opposition against the left.

The new agents of disturbance of American capitalism

Bernie Sanders and his movement deserve a prominent mention in any discussion of the reintroduction of socialism to mainstream political discourse. Nonetheless, this achievement does not stand alone; it rests upon the shoulders of a long tradition of revolutionary organizations (Socialists, Communist, Trotskyists, anarchists, etc.) that goes back to the beginning of the 19th century, and that in a different fashion—sometimes in contradiction with each other—have kept alive the idea that a better world is possible under socialism. While in many instances membership in these revolutionary organizations has been and continues to be small, nevertheless, these organizations, without dismay and in spite of continuous harassment from the repressive organizations of the state, have persevered in their political work among workers, minorities, discriminated against groups, student organizations, and more.

In synch with this revolutionary tradition, the strictly constitutional framing of Sanders' socialist strategy has challenged the aforementioned triumvirate of power, primarily through electoral and parliamentary gains. In 2016 his movement was able to agglutinate 13 million people and he won 23 primaries throughout the nation. In the 2018 elections, Sanders *et al* played a key role in barring the Republican majority from the House of Representatives. In a nod to the traditions in which Sanders works, recent surveys of young adults under the age of twenty-nine show that the majority identify themselves more as socialists than as supporters of capitalism.

Democrats look to the Mueller report, not to any social platform

While the demonization of Bernie Sanders originated primarily within the Republican political spectrum, it has also been echoed by the Democratic Party establishment. This Democratic opposition to Sanders has an old history, and it is not limited to previous attacks on his persona at the hands of the Clintons' vindictive apparatus. A recent article by the *New York Times* (April 16, 2019), describes the current efforts of some Democrats and their 'donor class' supporters to thwart Sanders' potential nomination at all costs. According to the *Times*, these efforts have lately assumed the form of an anti-Sanders campaign via "undisclosed Democratic dinners in New York" attended by, among others, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California, Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer of New York, Terry McAuliffe of Virginia, presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg, and the president of the so-called Center for American Progress, Neera Tanden. Let's be clear. High-ranking Democrats have spent more time waiting for the Mueller Report in order to incriminate Trump than agglutinating popular support behind a social platform that benefits the people and the nation. That's has been the main difference between them and Bernie Sanders.

Attacking progressive women

The next group being vilified is the one comprised by women like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley and many

others. Omar and Tlaib are the first Muslim women elected to Congress, Presley is the first black woman from Massachusetts to serve in Congress, and Ocasio Cortez is the youngest person, not to mention the youngest Democratic Socialist, ever elected to Congress. All these women, particularly Ocasio Cortez and Ilhan Omar, are the recipients of a virulent and vicious campaign of vilification aimed at their identity, their religious beliefs, their personalities, and in the case of AOC, her humble origins in the workforce. This degraded form of civil discourse is carried out through innumerable media actions: via newspapers articles, books, TV shows, sermons, Twitter, Facebook ads, government documents, etc. At the moment of this writing, Omar and AOC continue to be vilified for their progressive political stands, and also for challenging, with their actions, the obsolete ideology of American patriarchs. Besides experiencing direct attacks from the Trump administration and its allies, AOC and Omar have also encountered direct hostility and a clear distancing rhetoric seeking to ostracize their progressive positions within the Democratic establishment.

Disparaging union activism

This spring *Dissent* magazine reported that last year, "more workers took part in strikes than any year since 1986 [and] fully 62 percent of Americans support unions; according to a recent Gallup poll, that number has increased 14 points over the last decade." Moreover, unions played a significant role in the 2018 elections in terms of electing progressive candidates, particularly in states such as Michigan and Pennsylvania. The red state teacher strikes and the Los Angeles teachers' victory a couple of months ago, as well as the airport workers' struggle, all suggest a potential come-back of labor and a clear turn to the left in spite of a steady campaign to undermine union power. This campaign of vilification has been directed mostly to teachers' unions, organized and propelled by the chronic unsubstantiated style of the presidential twitters.

Transformation arising from youth activism

Finally, very young students from elementary to high school level have decided to play an oppositional and transformative role in American politics. The source of this political awareness and decision appears to be twofold. First, it's a survival response to the numerous student massacres taking place in the nation, leading to massive nationwide activism aiming to regulate the relatively free 'distribution' of guns in the U.S. The second source has an international origin. It was sparked in Europe by 16 year old climate activist Greta Thunberg. Her activism and example have found fertile ground within the youth in American schools. This culminated recently in nationwide rallies joining the Global Youth Climate Strike Movement (which is active in more than 1,200 cities in 90-plus countries).

In the words of a young American activist, "If the adults are going to screw-up our entire future, we have to do something about it." Needless to say, if we look at how deliberately detrimental this administration has been for the environment and at the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, Trump's nomination of Greta as spokesperson for the United States at the UN, while declaring that he would offer automatic citizenship to Swedish minors whose first name begins with G, is nothing other than a desperate publicity act designed to trivialize both Greta and her cause.

What's to be done?

First, we need to be alert to the mech-

► the left, cont. on page 11

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Playback Theatre is a spontaneous collaboration between performers and audience. People tell moments from their lives, then watch them re-created with movement, music and dialogue.



An immigration legacy from the Red Coast

Did Steve Miller and Wilbur Ross copy Albert Johnson?

Aaron Goings

Congressman Albert Johnson, one of the Pacific Northwest's most influential politicians, struck many of the same themes in relation to immigrants as does the current commander in chief. Johnson's greatest legacy was the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, which applied a stringent quota system to American immigration policies, and is widely regarded as the most important piece of restrictive immigration legislation in United States history.

On November 5, 1912, voters in Southwest Washington, known then as “the Red Coast,” elected Albert Johnson, editor of the popular *Daily Washingtonian*, to serve as their member of Congress. Over the next twenty years, Johnson became one of the most powerful Congressional leaders in the United States, serving in nine successive congresses until his defeat in the 1932 election.

Johnson's anti-immigrant policies, though inherently racist, stemmed in part from his hatred of working-class radicals. His election came only a few short months after Johnson played a key role in the 1912 Grays Harbor lumber strike when thousands of mill workers affiliated with the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies) struck, shutting down the region's massive lumber industry. The IWW was (and is) an industrial union and revolutionary organization for the express purpose of overthrowing the capitalist system. The Wobs saw the world and their place in it through the lens of class: the fundamental division in industrial capitalist America was between those who owned the means of production and those who worked for them.

During the strike, Johnson and his fellow Grays Harbor editors served as loud and enthusiastic mouthpieces for the anti-Wobbly drive. Johnson battled the radicals not just with the pen, but with the sword. He joined a citizens' vigilante committee composed of Grays Harbor businessmen that assaulted Wobblies, socialists, and their family members, and drove large numbers of them out of Hoquiam and Aberdeen.

Johnson's war with the Red Coast Wobblies, many of whom were newly arrived immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, shaped his extreme attitudes about radicalism and immigration.

In response to his need to more fully express his anti-radical and anti-immigrant attitudes, Johnson established a second newspaper, the *Home Defender*, in May 1912. The opening issue of the monthly explained that its goal was “to take an active part against the spread of radical, revolutionary socialism.” The *Home Defender* also expressed anti-immigrant positions that might have shocked the less-bigoted *Washingtonian* subscribers. “The Growth of Socialism in this country,” he wrote, “may be directly charged to this great incoming heterogeneous mass of undesirable wage-cutting inhabitants, many of them admittedly

temporary inhabitants—who, before they have learned to speak our language and before they know of our customs and institutions, are taught by foreign-born agitators to hate the United States and to contribute their money and their energies to a revolution, bloodless or otherwise, which plots the downfall of our present form of government.”

Johnson was explicit in his desire to use immigration restriction to fight the IWW. He relied on the much-used caricature of the anarchist immigrant to strengthen his argument for restriction. Johnson preferred to let the occasional “blind grandmother” and “crippled child” into the United States than “an immigrant with red in his heart and a bomb in his hand.” Johnson assured his supporters that any “discussion of immigration leads at once to a discussion of the I.W.W.,” and that the combination of these two issues created the greatest and most immediate threat to the United States.

With his decisive victory in the 1912 congressional election, Johnson took his red-baiting, anti-immigrant crusade to the nation's capital. When Johnson moved to Washington, DC, he brought the *Home Defender* along. There, while serving within the minority Republican Party in Congress, he worked to establish the paper as “A National Newspaper Opposed to Revolutionary Socialism.”

Overall, though, the Congressman made his mark on Washington—and on America—not through his hateful editorials, but through his work to enact racist restrictive legislation. During his first term in Congress, Johnson served on the House Immigration Committee.

Northwest newspapers credited his assignment to that committee to the “fact” that “Mr. Johnson has made the immigration problem a matter of special study for many years.” Johnson used his first speech on the House floor to assail Asian immigration, giving the public a hint of what was to come. Speaking of the need to retain a tariff, the Congressman claimed: “China will send her hordes into this country. They will force the wage-earner and the farmer out. . . . Until now a protective tariff wall has kept our people of the great Pacific Northwest from too close competition with these Oriental off-scourings.”

Between 1913 and 1918, Johnson continued to serve on the House Immigration Committee, where he pursued the study of various racist ideologies, including eugenics. He was the chief advocate of these beliefs among his colleagues. He also formed friendships with committee members on both sides of the aisle, a fact that aided his crusade against immigrants and radicals when he was appointed chair of the committee in 1919. Johnson contended that the number of immigrants allowed into the country should be dramatically restricted, essentially arguing for a wall—or, more specifically, bars—to be built to protect the nation's borders:

“Put up the bars against immigration. Enact more stringent laws concerning naturalization and enforce these laws to the letter. Let citizenship be a privilege to those who live and love the United States. Deny citizenship to those newcomers who respect neither our flag nor our institutions and who have imported a mass of isms that, if not checked, must lead to anarchy and revolution.”

Johnson's proposals centered on annual quota limiting the number of immigrants able to enter the country. In 1921, Johnson introduced a bill setting up a quota system limiting any nationality to just 3 percent of the number counted during the 1910 census. The anti-immigration bill passed both houses of Congress by resounding margins, and gained President

The 1924 bill limited European immigrants to 2 percent of each group’s population in the 1890 census. An annual maximum of 150,000 immigrants...

Warren Harding's signature. The purpose of this and similar quotas was clear. Most Northern European immigrants had come to the United States in large numbers prior to 1910, so the law would have little effect on the future entry of British, German, Irish, or Scandinavian immigrants, whereas many potential immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe would be barred from entry.

Still, to Johnson and many of his colleagues, the restrictions seemed too lenient. Building on his public reputation as an immigration “expert,” Johnson took up a position as president of the Eugenic Research Association during 1923–1924. This group pushed for the adoption of public policy based on the pseudo-science of eugenics. The eugenics movement, with Johnson as its chief Congressional advocate, pushed for more stringent limits to recognize Northern and Western Europeans as more intelligent, democratic,

and more readily assimilable into the United States.

On March 17, 1924, Johnson proposed a new bill using the 1890 census as its benchmark. The bill limited European immigrants to 2 percent of each group's population in this country as of 1890. A maximum of 150,000 immigrants, drawn almost entirely from the eugenicists' favored nations, was set as the annual ceiling on all immigration. The act excluded from entry anyone born in a geographically defined “Asiatic Barred Zone,” which included most of the continent of Asia. A final section of the act banned immigration by groups ineligible for naturalization, a category that included the Japanese.

The measure easily passed both houses and was signed by the President on May 26, 1924. The law is rightfully seen as among the most important immigration laws in US history.

The law's impact exceeded even its most optimistic supporters' expectations. In part due to the Johnson-Reed Act, over the 23 years from 1924 to 1947, only 2,718,006 immigrants came to the United

States.

The effects of Johnson's campaigns against immigrants and radicals lasted far beyond his Congressional career. By placing race-based quotas on immigration, Johnson succeeded at “putting up the bars” against millions of people who saw the United States, wars and all, as a potential sanctuary against war and persecution.

Aaron Goings, Ph.D., is a senior researcher at the Institute of Advanced Social Research in Finland. He previously taught at St. Martin's College.

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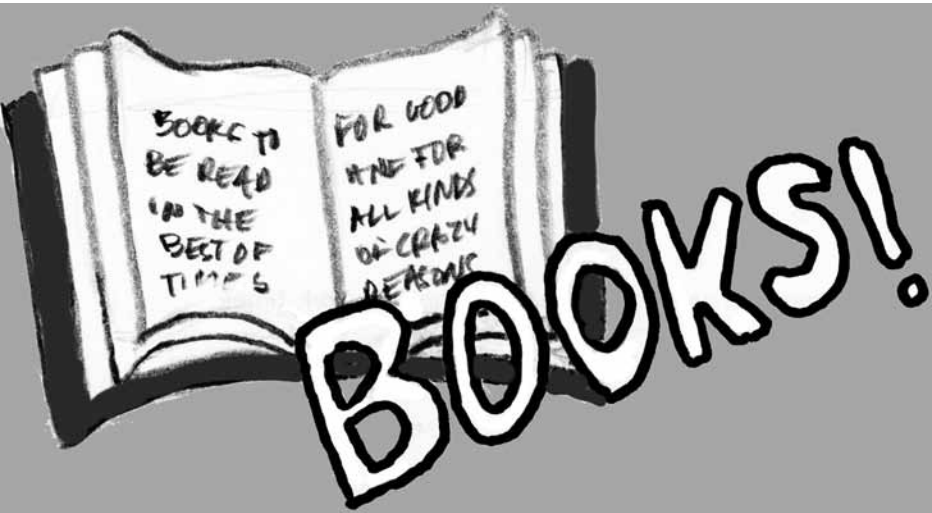
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For an exciting dinner party, put catastrophe on the menu

The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable, by Amitav Ghosh

Kathleen Byrd

Amitav Ghosh, an Indian novelist and winner of numerous honors and awards, including honorary doctorates from the University of Puget Sound and Maastricht College in the Netherlands, is a brilliant novelist and thinker. Ghosh writes that “Studies have shown that a mention of global warming at the dinner table is almost certain to lead to a quick change of subject.”

It doesn’t have to be that way

Read *The Hungry Tide*, for an introduction to Ghosh’s fiction, and then immediately follow with *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Next, organize a dinner party. Ghosh’s book is sure to add a new potency to your conversation.

Ghosh invites readers into his intellectual and imaginative inquiry, asking questions like “What is it about Climate Change that the mention of it should lead to banishment from the preserves of serious fiction? And what does this tell us about culture writ large and its pattern of evasion?” His questions probe underneath the surface of politics, denial, and even capitalism, to ask why the arts, literature, civic planning and other cultural forces fail to consider the reality and reach of climate catastrophe that is our current reality.

A space where we make the future

Ghosh’s local-to-global perspective offers something like seeing a map of the world where Africa is central for the first time. As one friend aptly put, “It will blow your mind!” Ghosh blows open an in-between space between climate deniers and climate activists. This is the space in which most of us live and work. This is where we act in the world and contribute to culture. We make the future here.

He also reminds us of the relationship between empire and colonialism, not just capitalism (Naomi Klein) that drives our understanding and responses to climate catastrophe.

Making time to read

I bought this book last summer after reading *The Hungry Tide*, and until February it remained on my shelf, looking rather bleak. I’ve read dozens of books on climate change, and I didn’t think my winter mood could stomach another. Then I broke my wrist and settled into reading all the books I’d purchased and hadn’t yet read.

Taking time to talk

Now, it’s spring and I want every smart person I know to be talking about this book, about the catastrophes in our midst and the ways in which we are connected and complicit: climate denial and concealment is not about them; it’s about us, all of us. Ghosh confronts the reality of climate catastrophe with nuance and imagination and an appropriate dose of rage: “A special place ought to be reserved in hell ... for reckless planners who build with such disregard for their surroundings.”

Language that reveals rather than conceals

Ghosh’s exposition of the modes and varieties of climate concealment closes in the last section “Politics” with an illuminating critique of the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change whose “diction ... is borrowed directly from the free-trade agreements of the neoliberal era.” This gives “the impression of language being deployed as an instrument of concealment and withdrawal; in contrast with Pope Francis’s 2015 *Laudato Si*, which “challenges contemporary practices not just in its choice of words but also in the directness of its style” which “returns over and over again to the theme of “how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.”

Ghosh reminds us that as dire as our predicament is, every crisis is an opportunity. The opportunity now is to see reality and to spread words that reveal rather than conceal. In recent weeks, I’ve followed Greta Thunberg and listened to her direct and visionary wisdom. *The Great Derangement* is divided into sections that were originally presented as four lectures at the University of Chicago in 2015. As the book advances, Ghosh connects stories, cultural habits, and land use planning, to our knowledge of history and to structures of power at local, national, and global levels.

An honest and hopeful analysis

I hope that Ghosh’s book becomes the subject of many dinner conversations, along with Thunberg’s vision, as they offer a more accurate map, a more honest and hopeful analysis of our current predicament. It might not make you comfortable, but it might help to wake you from a sleep of despair.

Kathleen Byrd is a teacher and writer who has lived and raised her daughter in Olympia.

With friends like these, who needs enemies?

Mary Jo Dolis

The Social Security Board of Trustees released its 2019 report to Congress in April. Right now, the average annual Social Security benefit is about \$16,000. The new Trustees Report confirms that expanding vs. cutting Social Security’s modest benefits is a question of values and choice, not affordability.

What the report actually says:

- Social Security has a large surplus projected to reach roughly \$2.9 trillion next year;
- Social Security continues to be extremely affordable with less than one penny of every dollar spent on administrative costs (this is a fraction of what other industrialized countries pay for similar programs);
- Social Security can pay out ALL benefits owed for the next 16 years until 2035 at which point it can still pay 80% of benefits owed.

Well, *Forbes* magazine of all things, predicted exactly what happened—the news coverage of the report would completely misrepresent the contents:

PBS—“Despite the lack of big short-term changes, both Medicare and Social Security remain on unaffordable financial paths that will without serious reforms soak up ever-larger shares of government spending.”

CNBC—“The report shows the Social Security Trust Fund projected to be depleted in 2035.”

CBS News—“Social Security is on a path to become insolvent in 2035, with only enough money cover about 80 percent of its obligations.”

Fox News—“Social Security Shortfall . Social Security is slated to run dry in 2035, faces shakey fiscal future.”

Here is *Forbes’* (a business magazine!) explanation of why this happens:

“Thanks to decades of a billionaire-funded campaign to undermine confidence in Social Security, the Trustees Report will likely be greeted with cries that Social Security is going broke. The truth is that Social Security is in strong financial shape.

Report shows that Social Security has an accumulated surplus of roughly \$2.9 trillion. It further shows that at the end of the century, it will cost just 6.07% of GDP. That is considerably lower, as a percentage of GDP, than what is spent today by Germany, Austria, France and most other industrialized countries on their retirement, survivors and disability programs.

That brings us to the second misreporting we are likely to see. Along with that modest, unsurprising shortfall being the cause for breathless media reports about supposed collapse, the report will be greeted, again if past experience repeats, with lamentations from many observers that Congress has no plan to address Social Security’s projected shortfall. That is incorrect.

Democrats have specific concrete plans that they stand behind. They plan not just to ensure that all promised benefits will be paid in full and on time for the foreseeable future, but to address our nation’s retirement income crisis by increasing Social Security’s modest benefits.

It is only Congressional Republicans who have no plans —except cutting benefits and turning the program over to private businesses.”

So don’t be fooled.

Mary Jo Dolis is the pen name of a committed skeptic.



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Financial instability up close: A single parent’s memoir

Emily Lardner

Four days of debate in June may yield a progressive Democratic platform focused on addressing systemic inequality. If so, that change will be in no small part because of the ongoing grassroots activism across the country demanding changes. One powerful strategy has been to change the dominant narrative that studiously ignores the systemic undervaluing and exploitation of labor in favor of personalizing poverty as a moral failing.

Changing the narrative matters. The Poor People's Campaign, working towards their Moral Action Congress in DC June 17-19, articulates this as a central tenet of their work:

“We aim to shift the distorted moral narrative often promoted by religious extremists in the nation from issues like prayer in school, abortion, and gun rights, to one that is concerned with how our society treats the poor, those on the margins, the least of these, women, LGBTQIA folks, workers, immigrants, the disabled and the sick; equality and representation under the law; and the desire for peace, love and harmony within and among nations.”

In partnership with the Institute for Policy Studies, the Poor People's Campaign has audited efforts made in the fifty years since the campaign was started by Martin Luther King Jr and thousands of others. The Souls of Poor Folk, available free via the PPC and IPS websites, tackles two central myths: poverty is the fault of the poor, and that, in spite of our abundance in the US, there isn't enough here for everyone to survive and thrive.

The Economic Hardship Reporting Project (EHRP) is similarly designed

to disrupt narratives about financial instability and poverty. Founded in 2012 by Barbara Ehrenreich, EHRP aims to give voice and work to writers and photographers from under-represented groups, following in the tradition of the Farm Security Administration and the Works Progress Administration. As they say on their website, EHRP's “aim is to humanize inequality: Our writers and photographers, some of whom may be on the brink of poverty themselves, tell intimate, heartbreaking and sometimes shocking stories originating from their own communities.”

Stephanie Land, author of the memoir *Maid: Hard Work, Low Pay, and a Mother's Will to Survive*, is a writer whose work has been supported by EHRP. In *Maid*, Lane recounts her experiences living as a single mom in and around Port Townsend and Skagit Valley, making a living cleaning houses. Through her descriptive writing, Land unveils the circumstances of her life as a housecleaner:

“My job afforded me little money to spend on clothes, even for work. I worked through illnesses and brought my daughter to daycare when she should have been at home. My job offered no sick pay, no vacation days, no foreseeable increase in wage, yet through it all, still I begged to work more. Wages lost from missed work hours could rarely be made up, and if I missed too many, I risked being fired. My car's reliability was vital, since a broken hose, a faulty thermostat, or even a flat tire could throw us off, knock us backward, send us teetering, fall-

ing back, toward homelessness. We lived, we survived, in careful imbalance. This was my unwitnessed existence, as I polished another's to make theirs appear perfect.”

Land describes listening to co-workers

...when a person is too deep in systemic poverty, there is no upward trajectory. Life is struggle and nothing else.

and parents at her daughter's preschool and even strangers comment disparagingly on people using food stamps. Most of the time, they exclude her from their judgements:

“When people think of food stamps, they don't envision someone like me: someone plain-faced and white. Someone like the girl they'd known in high school who'd been quiet but nice. Someone like a neighbor. Someone like them. Maybe that made them too nervous about their own situation. Maybe they saw in me the chance of their own fragile circumstances, that, with one lost job, one divorce, they'd be in the same place as I was.”

She also describes encounters in grocery stores where strangers insult her for choosing organic milk for her three-year old daughter, for presuming she has a right to care about her daughter's nutrition.

A pervasive theme in the book is the labor of single parenting. The father of Land's daughter takes care of her occasionally, and for a while, Land lives with another man. However, primary responsibility for caring for her child falls to Land. The work is grueling.

“Single parenting isn't just being the only one to take care of your kid. It's not about being able to ‘tap out’ for a break or tag team bath- and bedtime; those were the least of the difficulties I faced. I had a crushing amount of responsibility. I took out the trash. I brought in the groceries I had gone to the store to select and buy. I cooked. I cleaned. I changed out the toilet paper. I made the bed. I dusted. I checked the oil in the car. I drove Mia to the doctor, to her dad's house.... When I sat down, I worried.”

For several years, Land's daily circumstances lead her to focus on day to day problem solving with no future orientation. She couldn't afford it:

“As a poor person, I was not accustomed to looking past the month, week, or sometimes hour. I compartmentalized my life the same way I cleaned every room of every house—left to right, top to bottom. Whether on paper or in my mind, the problems I had to deal with first—the car repair, the court date, the empty cupboards—went at the top, on the left. The next pressing issue went next to it, on the right. I'd focus on one problem at a time, working left to right, top to bottom.”

What finally allows Land to break out of her day-to-day labor cleaning houses is the risk she takes at Skagit Valley College to apply for financial aid. With that loan, Land was able to stop working as much, complete her associate degree, and move on to Montana to finish a BA in English and writing. In reflecting on her decision, Land writes that it was the legacy of her mother achieving middle-class status (albeit temporarily) through education that let her take a similar risk. As she puts it, shortsightedness kept her from getting overwhelmed, but it also kept her from dreaming: “When a person is too deep in systemic poverty, there is no upward trajectory. Life is struggle and nothing else. But for me, many of my decisions came from an assumption that things would, eventually, start to improve.”

Land's memoir is worth reading, whether or not you've worked as a housecleaner, been a single parent, or have experienced extended financial instability and poverty. Like the Poor People's Campaign, like The Souls of Poor Folk, Land gives voice to the experiences that any progressive political platform must address.

Emily Lardner lives, works and writes in Grays Harbor County.

Strangling

From page 5

the tragic school shooting in Parkland. “All three of the educators shot down were union members,” says Broward Teachers’ Union president Anna Fusco.

“This legislation just proves that these legislators have no respect or value for educators. Their only concern is stripping down and privatizing our schools.”

A petri dish for the nation

Writing in 2017, anti-tax crusader and conservative strategist Grover Norquist, head of the SPN affiliate Americans for Tax Reform, argued that Wisconsin should be a model for all Republican legislatures. He sees union-busting as a way to erode a Democratic fundraising, door-knocking and voting base. “If Act 10 is enacted in a dozen more states,” he said, “the modern Democratic Party will cease to be a competitive power in

American politics.”

On this point, Norquist has wide agreement from labor activists. “Wisconsin is the petri dish for the rest of the country,” says Dave Poklinkoski, president of IBEW 2304 in Madison. “This was an experiment. Billionaires and corporations are trying to figure out how they can maintain their rule. Spreading Act 10 on a national scale is their plan to do it.”

“The current onslaught against labor unions is the largest, the best funded and the most elaborately coordinated in U.S. history,” says Sarah Lawrence College historian Priscilla Murolo. “All unions are in the crosshairs.”

Is there hope for labor beyond merely surviving?

As the recent teacher uprising sweeping the nation has shown, workers are not apathetic. Pushed far enough, and when they see a way, they are willing to fight.

The challenge facing many public-

employee unions, after decades of demobilization, is to learn how to break away from business-as-usual unionism and enlist their members and the community to resist. And they will have to do this with fewer staff and resources than before.

No one decides our fate but us

The unions that are building a fighting culture are the ones most likely to fare well in a right-to-work environment and to beat back legislative attacks. According to the MTEA's Mizialko, the best fortification is a strong, member-run union that is constantly in action, building allies in the community and power in the workplace. “No one decides our fate but us,” she says.

Chris Brooks is a staff writer and labor educator at Labor Notes. This article is the second half of an article that appeared in the August 2018 issue of In These Times, published with permission. This story was supported by the Leonard C. Goodman Institute for Investigative Reporting.

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Continuing programs for peace at the Rachel Corrie Foundation

The Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace & Justice (RFC) is a grassroots, 501(c)3 non-profit organization that conducts and supports programs that foster connections between people, that build understanding, respect, and appreciation for differences, and that promote cooperation within and between local and global communities. The foundation encourages and supports grassroots efforts in pursuit of human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice, which we

view as prerequisites for world peace. Continuing the work begun and envisioned by our daughter, Rachel Corrie, our initial emphasis has been on Israel/Palestine.

The Rachel Corrie Foundation is gearing up once again to support projects in Gaza: the Rachel Corrie Gaza Sport Initiative; the Samira Project (with MECA and Madison-Rafah Sister City Project partners), providing academic and psychological support for Gaza

kids; and the Palestinian Cultural Palace Youth Performances.

Through the years, many in our community have demonstrated support and generosity for these efforts, they can't happen without you. Members of the community can join together once again in sustaining these grassroots projects. Please mark and celebrate Rachel's 40th birthday by standing strong with RCF and with the youth and families of Gaza.



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Workers

From page 1

rotates through the desk dedicated for the IBEW locals. The “management” structure that emerged over time was for smaller groups to meet around their specific tasks (web-based programmers don’t overlap much with desk-top programmers), and then a big meeting with reps from the small groups.

The financial is personal

At times in the past, the idea of forming a cooperative, or handing off the business arose. Those discussions didn’t produce anyone anxious to take on the risks and responsibilities covered by Steven and Jim. Even as a go-

ing concern, any business might lose money from one year to the next. As Steven pointed out, “We have to have a line of credit—at any given time we have \$200,000 out in accounts receivable, and banks aren’t interested in operations like ours.” The crucial exception is a local bank like Heritage, where money becomes available when officers and customers get to know each other. But known or not, the bank wants a personal financial statement and an individual signature on the line. When there was money at the end of the year, it went to improve the business not the owners’ bank account balance.

Programming for the future

Last fall, the discussion of handing off the business turned serious as the founders decided they were ready to retire. With the help of the NW Co-

operative Development Center, the employees of Working Systems opted to move ahead with a workers’ cooperative. No one wanted to give up this workplace that offered so many satisfactions, and served so many people. Scott Breidenbach is part of the Board that has been formed. In talking about the coming reorganization, Scott reflected on the fact that the group will be taking advantage of the opportuni-

ty to develop changes that can move the business to the next level. A million union members using Working System’s products, in 25 different labor unions covering over 750 locals, could be joined by a million more in the coming years.

Bethany Weidner functions as the utility outfielder at Works in Progress

When too much money is concentrated in too few hands, the owners of the money are motivated to look for places to “invest” for themselves: golf courses, more homes, beach homes, bigger beach homes, bigger golf courses, rare wines, famous paintings by artists who died destitute and so on...Not in production useful to the society.”

RankandFile, California

Ranked-choice voting strengthens democracy

The May 2019 interview on “Glen’s Parallax Perspectives” series promotes an increasingly popular electoral reform.

Everybody knows that our nation’s electoral system is broken. The problems prevent us from having an honest, vibrant democracy. The May 2019 interview on “Glen’s Parallax Perspectives” focuses on an exciting, practical remedy for one problem – Ranked-Choice Voting.

Our current voting method frustrates people who would like to vote for the candidate they really want, but they are afraid of “wasting their vote” or the “spoiler” effect. In this situation, voters split between two decent candidates which allows a really bad candidate to win with less than half of the vote. People feel frustrated when they are afraid to vote for the candidate they really want and feel forced to vote for a less desirable candidate who was “electable,” or for “the lesser of two evils.”

Ranked-Choice Voting would solve this problem. It would eliminate primary elections and instead let voters rank the candidates in order of preference in an election. If your first-choice candidate does not win, the votes of people who ranked that candidate first would be transferred to that voter’s second choice. The process might need to repeat again and perhaps again until one candidate ends up with a majority of votes.

Two guests explain clearly how

Ranked-Choice Voting works and how it can strengthen democracy:

- Lisa Ayrault is a very active volunteer with FairVote Washington, where she is the organization’s chair performing the duties of an Executive Director.
- Michael Martin is FairVote Washington’s Legislative Director, working with the State Legislature to bring Ranked Choice Voting to Washington State. Also, Michael is a leader in the Clark County group – one of a growing number of chapters of FairVote Washington.

Throughout the nation, more people—and more local and state governments—are reforming elections in this way.

Everyone everywhere can watch this interview, read a summary or get a list of links for further information through Glen’s blog, www.parallaxperspectives.org. Cable TV subscribers in Thurston County can watch on Thurston Community Television (TCTV) every Monday at 1:30 pm, every Wednesday at 5:00 pm, and every Thursday at 9:00 pm. The program and summary are posted to the blog.

Each program and thorough summary are also posted to the blog’s “TV Programs” category and to a topic category. **Questions?** Contact Glen Anderson, the series’ producer/host at (360) 491-9093 glenanderson@integra.net.

The left

From page 7

anisms of vilification, which include deliberate trivializing of serious issues, serious platforms, serious people. Second, we need to recognize that the struggle against the domination of capital and its interests is a long one. As Terry Eagleton writes, we have to maintain hope without optimism. Finally, we need to be alert to and supportive of the use of political rhetoric that transgresses traditional tropes and in so doing, opens up new spaces for reflection and debate. AOC’s new video on *The Intercept* is a brilliant example.

A way forward with the next generation

In that video, AOC breaks away from tradition. The protagonist of the struggle to address climate change is not a singular actor, but rather a member of one generation seeking to be replaced by members of an even younger generation. The protagonist isn’t driven by her interest in serving as a leader but rather by the suffering inflicted on others through deliberate strategies of vilification and climate denial. The protagonist is merely one person in a long line of people who are committed to doing the right thing for the people and the planet—the axis of history does not run through an individual, but rather the individual places herself in a larger historical tradition. At the same time, the protagonist has a self—she isn’t acting selflessly but rather, she’s acting in the interests of her own and the next generation.

Enrique Quintero is an engaged observer of the current political scene.





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THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

A NATIONAL CALL FOR MORAL REVIVAL

Fifty years ago, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and many other leaders launched a Poor Peoples Campaign to tackle the pervasive problems of systemic racism, poverty, and militarism. By many measures, these interrelated problems are worse today than they were back in 1968. And if you add in climate change and ecological devastation, the urgency is even greater.

NATIONWIDE:

- Voting rights protections in many states are weaker than they were 50 years ago.
- We imprison, detain and/or deport more people than any country in the world
- 140 million people are poor or low-income
- Despite strong economic growth, wealth inequality has expanded, the cost of living has increased, and social programs have been cut dramatically
- 53 cents of every federal discretionary dollar goes to military spending and only 15 cents is spent on anti-poverty programs
- 13.8 million U.S. households cannot afford water, while the poor are bearing the brunt of climate change effects

IN WASHINGTON:

Somebody's been hurting my people and it's gone on far too long:

- 41 percent of people in Washington are poor or low-income—a total of 2.9 million residents. This includes 51 percent of children (839 thousand), 43 percent of women (1.5 million), 54 percent of people of color (1.2 million), and 36 percent of White people (1.7 million).
- From 1979 to 2012, the income for the top 1% grew by 189 percent, while the income for the bottom 99% declined 4 percent.

Systemic racism and its relationship to poverty:

- Washington is one of 17 states being sued over Native voting issues.
- Of the 19,104 people imprisoned, about 40 percent are people of color. Black residents are incarcerated at almost six times the rate of White residents.

Militarism and the war economy:

- 12.6 billion dollars were spent on defense in 2015, with 6.8 billion in defense contracts.
- Almost 117,000 veterans have incomes below 35,000 dollars in Washington—20 percent of Washington's veteran population.

Ecology and health:

- 513,800 people are uninsured.
- 17.3 percent of census tracts are at-risk for being unable to afford water.
- 9,586 tons of NOx are emitted yearly in Washington, a leading cause of respiratory problems.

Everybody's got a right to live:

- Over 21,100 people are homeless, the fifth highest total in the country. Working at the state minimum wage in 2017, it took 86 hours of work per week to afford a 2-bedroom apartment.
- 1.1 million workers make under 15 dollars an hour—37 percent of Washington's workforce.
- 894 thousand people participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Works In Progress

