

the yankee radical

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www.dsaboston.org

May-June, 2015

DSA May Forum

Fast Food & Beyond: Labor's Fight Against Inequality

WHEN: 7:30 pm, Thursday, May 14

WHERE: 9 Hamilton Place, Boston (Encuentro 5)

SPEAKERS: Carl Nilsson—*Fight For 15*;

Gillian Mason—*Jobs with Justice*

According to the anti-poverty charity Oxfam, the top 1% will soon own more wealth than most of the rest of the world combined. Senator Bernie Sanders notes that the six heirs to the Wal-Mart fortune are richer than the bottom 40% of the American people. Meanwhile U.S. wages have been stagnating since the 1970s, and in this century the standard of living for much of the working and middle class has actually declined. Economic inequality has now become so difficult to ignore even Republicans have taken notice.

So what to do about it? Proposals range from Obama's mildly progressive tax reforms and expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, to doubling down on the same neo-liberal economic policies that helped bring about this decline in the first place—like Obama's proposed new trade agreement. (As an advocate of "bi-partisanship", the President has a foot in each camp.)

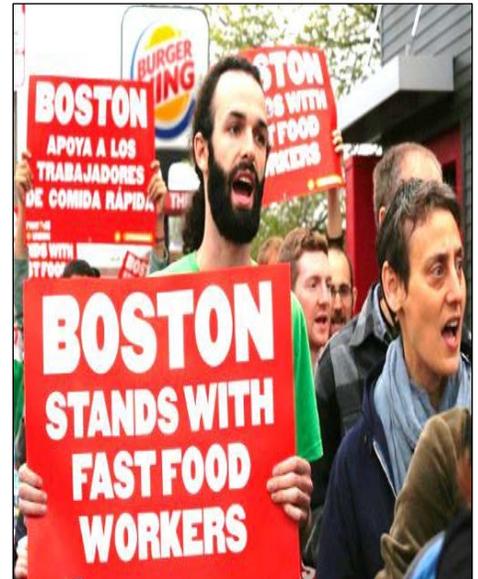
But one group sometimes missing from these policy debates has more of an interest in fighting inequality and more capacity to do so than anyone else: unions and allied movements of low income workers. Our speakers will discuss some of their current struggles, including local fast food

workers organizing for a living wage against Big Food.

Gillian Mason is development coordinator for the Student Debt Campaign at Massachusetts Jobs with Justice, a leading advocate for social justice since 1987, and has also led JWJ efforts in health care and higher education. Previously she worked with MoveOn.Org's Boston Council and the Jamaica Plain Forum, a project of the Institute for Policy Studies.

Carl Nilsson is organizing the Fight For 15 campaign with SEIU to raise the wages of low income workers; last year he led Raise Up Massachusetts, which helped pass the paid sick leave referendum. Carl has also been a stand-up comic, an organizer with MA Neighbor to Neighbor, Barack Obama's 2008 MA field director, and has held similar positions with the campaigns of Governor Patrick in 2010 and Senator Ed Markey in 2013.

Before the forum the BDSA exec board will meet at 6:30 pm; all members are welcome to attend.



<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/15>

DSA June Meeting

Boston DSA meetings are usually held on the second Thursday of each month—like this one on June 11, at 6:30 pm. We meet at Encuentro 5, 9 Hamilton Place, Boston, across the street from the Park Street T stop. Although our agenda has not yet been set, the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign will surely be one item up for discussion. If an outside speaker is invited to make a presentation it will be at 7:30 pm, and those on the DSA email list will be notified. (To get yourself on it, contact yankeeradical@dsaboston.org)



SHORT TAKES

By *Mike Pattberg*

Remain, Reclaim & Rebuild

According to the anti-gentrification coalition Right to the City (RTTC), families throughout Boston are finding themselves at risk of losing their homes precisely because their work and public tax money have succeeded in improving their neighborhoods. So, from **June 2-June 6** RTTC will be campaigning for the “Right to Remain” (in Boston) with a week of canvassing, signature gathering and rallies to build support for Just Cause Eviction, and to influence the 2015 municipal elections. More information: www.righttothecity.org.

Mass Transit Action

The recent Philadelphia train disaster has again highlighted the

decline of U.S. rail service over the last century, spurred by post-WW2 government subsidized white flight from the cities into auto-dependent suburban sprawl. So, acting on the timeworn proverb, “Think Globally, Act Locally,” Boston DSA has joined a new advocacy group: Mass Transit Action—“a coalition of individuals and organizations committed to defending, improving, and expanding public transportation, as both a pressing social need and an ecological necessity.” MTA has already held several pro-transit outreach events and there are plans for a conference in the fall. (www.facebook.com/MassTransitAction)

Tom Gallagher

Former Boston DSA Chair, Allston

state rep and baseball historian Tom Gallagher left us decades ago for San Francisco, where for many years he’s been embedded as a substitute school teacher, resulting in his 2014 memoir, *Sub: My Years Underground in America’s Schools*. As a syndicated pundit, Tom has also been writing on the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign, which he supports. On June 1 and 2 he’ll be re-visiting some of his old haunts for some catching up and liquid refreshment—and we’re invited: **June 1, 7 pm, Doyle’s Café**, 3484 Washington St., Jamaica Plain; **June 2, 1 pm, Sunset Grill**, 130 Brighton Ave.

(Continued on page 4)

Why Health Care Costs Keep Rising

By *Vic Bloomberg*

Robert Kuttner, co-founder of *The American Prospect* magazine, has observed that the failure of the United States to contain medical costs is primarily due to the “unique pervasive commercialization” of our health care system—a system dominated by for-profit providers and insurance companies. For the latter the medical care they reluctantly pay for represents “medical loss.” To hold down these losses the insurance companies have tried in past years to insure only the healthy, limit coverage, delay payments to providers, deny valid claims, establish lifetime caps on payouts, and generally shift costs to patients. Where they have given up most of these practices it was because, thanks to Obama’s Affordable Care Act, they have now been bought off by the delivery of huge numbers of new customers.

Because emulating the health policies that have successfully controlled costs in other countries is so politically difficult, health policy in the United States

has been characterized by attempt after attempt to invent new cost control strategies that will be politically feasible—meaning profit-friendly, with fantastically high hospital care charges generally, and accomplished by and through the health insurance industry in particular. The result has been a staggering list of cost control proposals that don’t work, such as HMOs, PPOs, managed care, capitation, integrated delivery systems, health savings accounts, consumer-directed care, pay-for-performance, health information technology, comparative effectiveness research, chronic disease management, pharmacy benefit management, and much more.

Health care “reform” nationally and in Massachusetts has increased the numbers of people with (often flimsy) health insurance, but the increases have had to be accomplished in part by bribing the insurance industry with large numbers of mandated new customers. And these reforms have little capacity to control costs.

Thus, for example, the headlines in

the *Wall Street Journal*: “Health-Care Deductibles Climbing out of Reach”; “Why Low Growth in Health Costs Still Stings” (“because the divide between out-of-pocket health costs and individuals’ wage growth has widened”). This problem is of special concern here in Massachusetts. Per capita spending on health care is 15% higher than the national average and the state, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, “has the highest individual market premiums in the country.”

During the past 20 years Boston DSA has worked with the Massachusetts Campaign for Single Payer Health Care—a non-profit system of improved Medicare for All. Visit www.masscare.org to find out more.

Vic Bloomberg serves on the Boston DSA Exec Board.



Climate Movement Forges New Allies

By Paul Garver



(<http://thecrimson.com>)

As the piles of snow finally melted and spring blossomed in the Boston area, the movements for climate, economic and racial justice filled the streets and assemblies with voices demanding genuine change.

For me the reawakened Boston movements seemed more numerous, diverse and youthful than in past years. Banners and chants were livelier, demands more radical and inclusive. The bravado and defiance of the Occupy Movement persisted, but with

more direction and purpose, and a sense that breakthrough victories were inevitable, even if incrementally achieved.

I spent much of Harvard's Heat Week on the campus. What struck me was the patience and eloquence of the students, along with their conviction that while Harvard University was not about to accede to their demand to divest from fossil fuels, it would sooner or later be forced to do so. The demonstrators were full of positive energy, and very well informed on issues of disruptive climate change. There were also many supporters from the community, from alumni, and from students fighting for divestment on other area campuses. Tufts University students organized their own substantial protest action the following week.

I found it significant that supporters of the campus divestment movement joined the massive and spirited Fight for \$15 march the same week. It seems that the campaigns for climate justice,

higher wages, worker rights, jobs for youth and against police brutality are starting to link up. Though these separate movements are all gaining traction and winning small victories, they are only beginning to coalesce enough to break through to enduring political relevance.

But the silos that isolate activists from each other may be breaking down. Better Future Project/350 Mass, for example, are not only campaigning for fossil fuel divestment and related climate issues—they are urging their members to join with other campaigns for economic, social and racial justice. [See article below for their May Day statement, in which I fully concur.]

For information on all MA events related to climate justice, visit their website at

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

Paul Garver is a redeployed former union organizer living in Acton.

Solidarity from Boston to Baltimore

By Emily Kirkland on Behalf of Better Future Project/350 Mass

Many of us are part of this movement because we see climate change as a social justice issue. We're fighting for a clean energy economy because we know that the use of fossil fuels has devastating consequences for people already facing economic and racial injustice—especially communities of color here in the United States and around the world. From poisoned air to polluted water, from droughts to flooding to extreme storms, they are hit first and hit hardest.

But to truly stand in solidarity with the communities most impacted by fossil

fuel use and global warming, we need to do more than demand action on climate change: when people of color are beaten or killed by the police, we have an obligation to speak out.

At the 350 Mass campaign summit a few weeks ago, we had the opportunity to share our core values with one another, and compassion and solidarity came up again and again. Putting those values into practice means fighting to end structural racism and state-sanctioned violence against African Americans.

We write today to urge members of the Better Future Project/350 Mass commu-

nity to show solidarity with those protesting the death of Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old Black man, at the hands of the Baltimore Police Department. There are multiple events happening over the next few weeks, including: **Our Jobs. Our Truths. Our Lives**, Wednesday, May 20, 3:30pm—5:30pm, Park Street Station, Tremont Street, Boston.

Our commitment to solidarity should not be limited to a single event crisis. As a community, we need to find ways to stand with other movements and integrate social, racial, and economic justice into everything we do.

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INSIDE

<i>May Forum/June Meeting</i>	<i>p. 1</i>
<i>Short Takes</i>	<i>p. 2</i>
<i>Why Health Care Costs Can't Be Contained</i>	<i>p. 2</i>
<i>Climate Justice Movement</i>	<i>p. 3</i>

(Short Takes: Continued from Page 2)

Good Obama, Bad Obama

Ever since they were announced in December of 2013, President Obama has been forced to defend his groundbreaking nuclear negotiations with Iran from attacks by both Republicans and a few hawks from his own party. But on May 7, 146 House Democrats including Nancy Pelosi signed on to a pro-negotiations letter initiated by Reps. Lloyd Doggett, Jan Schakowsky and David Price. Assuming no defections, this could be the insurance Obama needs to uphold his promised veto should Republicans try to blow up the talks by passing additional Iran sanctions, as they surely will. Signers of the Doggett letter included all nine of our MA House members (even Reps. Kennedy & Keating), and MoveOn.org suggests they be called and thanked for doing so: 202-224-3121. (For background information, visit www.niacouncil.org.)

Then there's this civil war in Yemen. Since late March a U.S. backed Sunni military coalition led by Saudi Arabia has been bombing the Houthis, a Yemeni Shia insurgency supported by Iran. According to the UN, this assault has succeeded in displacing 300,000 refugees in an already conflict-ridden area, leading to a "catastrophic" humanitarian crisis.

Instead of opposing repressive theocratic Iran by arming far more repressive theocratic Saudi Arabia, Obama could re-direct US policy to work for a cease fire and UN negotiated settlement between Yemenis, excluding all outside forces. Could, but probably won't.

Of course the United States shouldn't arm either side in this Yemeni civil war, but the Houthis can plausibly make at least two claims their US armed opponents cannot: They are militant and longstanding opponents of Al Qaeda and the ISIS death cult—and they also happen to live there. (Background info:

www.justforeignpolicy.org)

Let's Squeeze This In: Thanks to our Senator Warren for directly taking on Obama over TPP, which even other TPP opponents don't do, and for highlighting the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (www.citizen.org/investorcases).

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