

The Retiree **ADVOCATE**

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"Uniting Generations for a Secure Future"

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Report from Paris

By Bobby and Michael Righi

You were in Paris?! Wow, what did you see? "Well, we went to a lot of meetings and discussions." Did you at least get a T-shirt? "Yes, we did. It reads: 'Climate Justice Now!'"

For almost two weeks we "attended" the COP21 Climate Summit. We had come to participate in what were going to be huge demonstrations in support of a strong and fair agreement. But then, the attacks in Paris and the French government's overly repressive response meant that activities were going to have to be smaller and more creative.

We were not official representatives of any organization. But there were open gatherings of climate activists everywhere in Paris – at the official site in Le Bourget, in the working-class suburb of Montreuil, in theaters and community centers all over Paris. Our subway map became quite frayed figuring out the day's route (yes, a paper map does mark us as old-school).

Now that the actual text has been published, we realize the concerns we were hearing from folks from all

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February 25 Is 2016 Senior Lobby Day

By Chuck Richards and Tim Burns, PSARA Government Relations Committee Co-chairs

The 2016 legislative session begins on Monday, January 11. And Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA) members will be going to Olympia on Thursday, February 25, 2016 on Senior Lobby Day to once again urge legislators to consider both increasing revenue and sharing the prosperity slowly returning to the state's economy with seniors and working families across the state.

Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA) released their 2016 legislative agenda at the December 17 winter membership meeting. It includes a mix of funding suggestions and advocacy for policy programs. PSARA members committed to turn out for the February 25 Lobby Day, to organize carpools, and to make appointments for group visitations in the afternoon.

With a legislature so closely divided between the two major political parties, it is more important than ever for PSARA members to have conversations with moderate Republican as well as Democratic legislators about shared prosperity being the surest way to strengthen the economy of Washington State.

Working arm in arm with labor and community allies, we are promoting PSARA's 2016 Legislative Agenda:

- Elimination of tax exemptions with no public benefit
- Allocation of new resources for low income housing
- Supporting steps to expand health care coverage
- Establishing a state minimum wage
- Investment in public transportation creating Green Jobs

And, as in years past, PSARA is offering its members transportation to reach Olympia on February 25. If you haven't already signed up at PSARA's Winter Party contact us at govrelations@psara.org or the PSARA office at (206) 448-9646. If you are interested in riding on the I.A.M. Bus provided by District 751, contact Jackie at jackieboschok@hotmail.com or (206) 890-1009.

We are helping neighbors network within their legislative districts so that we can lobby together most effectively for the things we believe strengthen Washington families.

We Are Unstoppable, Another World Is Possible

By Jeff Johnson, reprinted from *The Stand*

COP 21 came to a close Saturday afternoon, December 12. As international delegates finalized text of the Paris document and prepared for celebratory photos, the streets of Paris erupted with a stronger message: "We are unstoppable, Another world is possible," "1.5 to stay alive," and "As the seas rise, we will rise."

Civil society, unions, young and old, 10,000 strong lined the streets of the Champs-Elysees with red flowers and

kilometers of red cloth representing red lines that can not be crossed if we are to have a just and livable planet. Unburdened by diplomatic text and nation-state hierarchy, people raised their voices to recognize that to actually save the planet, the majority of oil, gas, and coal reserves need to stay in the ground. And that a transformation of the scale that it will take to reverse the

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For up-to-date information about PSARA and issues important to all of us, visit the PSARA website: www.psara.org

PSARA Winter Meeting: Time of Change

Photos by Garet Munger



Outreach Vice President, Vivian Lee, Diversity Co-chair, Mildred Ollee, and David Loud, PSARA's representative to the Washington Health Care is a Human Right Coalition prepare for their presentations to the general membership meeting.



Incoming Administrative Vice President, Bobby Righi, reports to the membership about the experience she and her husband, Michael, had at the recent international climate conference in Paris. Bobby talked about the inspiring people they met from all over the world who are determined to fight for climate justice and a better world.



PSARA members express their appreciation to Maureen Bo for her devoted volunteer work as PSARA's Administrative Vice President. Maureen decided to step down as Administrative VP but will continue as a member of the Executive Board.

Making Retirement Security Real for Everyone

By Robby Stern

PSARA is leading a campaign to achieve the goal of making retirement security real for everyone -- both present and future generations. We have a two-pronged strategy of advocacy and education.

Social Security Works Washington, a large coalition of organizations led by PSARA, is using the 2016 election cycle to promote a broad retirement security agenda. Below is a letter from Social Security Works WA to Senator Patty Murray. Similar letters are being sent to the entire Washington congressional delegation. PSARA members will be asked to take actions in support of this campaign as will the members of other organizations in the coalition.

Dear Senator Murray,

The Social Security Works WA Coalition wants to thank you for the various ways you have led and/or supported efforts to expand Social Security. We appreciate your reintroduction of the RAISE Act thereby creating a discussion about needed improvements.

At the same time, we believe the improvements in the Raise Act are not enough given the crisis in retirement security that is looming for our country. We would like to discuss with you whether you would consider the following amendments to the Raise Act. Alternatively we would like to request your support for the policy changes embedded in this letter along with a commitment to co-sign other legislation with these provisions.

Given the historic income inequality in our country and the economic realities imposed by this inequality, huge numbers of Americans will be unable to meet the financial demands of their senior years. It is necessary to expand both Social Security and Medicare to address this impending crisis. We would like to have the opportunity to discuss with you the following reforms to these two vital social insurance programs.

Regarding Social Security, we wish to discuss your willingness to provide leadership in the elimination of the cap on Social Security taxable earnings in order to pay full benefits for the next 50 years. Elimination of the cap will also provide revenue necessary to create a care giver credit, increase benefits for lower income earners and make other necessary improvements to the Social Security system such as applying the CPI-E to annual cost of living increases. We see these reforms as needed in addition to the reforms you proposed in the RAISE Act.

Regarding Medicare, we would like to discuss expansion of the Medicare system by lowering the age of eligibility, thereby bringing a healthier cohort into the system and in that way creating more revenue. We also want to discuss your leadership, and what we can do to assist you, in winning the right of the government to negotiate over the escalating cost of prescription drugs. In addition, we hope you would consider supporting a slight payroll tax increase for funding Medicare that can lead to other necessary improvements including coverage of dental, hearing and vision services and expansion of the minimal long term care benefit.

Social Security Works WA appreciates your continuing opposition to any cuts or additional means testing in Medicare and Social Security. We hope you will join us in opposition to the application of the Chained CPI to Social Security or raising the age of eligibility as these proposals would be a step backward. We appreciate that you have already made clear your opposition to any scheme to privatize or partially privatize Social Security.

We also are hopeful that you will oppose any cuts to Medicare including the introduction of vouchers, increasing premiums or co-pays or limiting or cutting existing benefits.

The combination of aging baby boomers and historic income inequality has



created a lethal economic formula for a very large vulnerable population in our country. We believe the reforms we are recommending are essential if the bottom 95% of our population are to enter their senior years with the hope of achieving economic security and the dignity and respect that comes with knowing you have the means to navigate life's financial challenges.

We would very much appreciate the opportunity of discussing these issues with you and your staff.

A delegation from Social Security Works WA met with two of Senator Murray's staff on December 14. We elaborated on the needed expansion of Social Security and Medicare and requested a meeting with the Senator to ask her to introduce legislation early in 2016 that will include the changes that were identified in the letter. The staff committed to talk with Senator Murray's scheduler to set up a time for a meeting.

On December 18, we had a meeting with Rep. Adam Smith's staff, leading to a meeting with Rep. Smith, and we will follow a similar path with the other members of Washington's congressional delegation.

At the same time PSARA is launching the PSARA Education Committee work-

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Space Needle Workers Still Fighting for Justice at the Needle!

By Eunice How

At Seattle's most prominent landmark, food and beverage workers, elevator operators, greeters, reservationists, valets, and purchasing employees represented by UNITE HERE Local 8 are standing strong in a four-year labor dispute over job security and union rights.

The Space Needle is a privately owned, for-profit tourist destination at the heart of Seattle Center, an otherwise publically owned campus for art, entertainment, and leisure activities.

According to a recent *Restaurant Business* magazine ranking, the SkyCity restaurant at the top of the Needle is the highest grossing restaurant in the state of Washington and the 47th highest grossing restaurant in the United States. The Space Needle is owned by the wealthy Wright Family, who also own and/or operate a number of other businesses in the Seattle area, including Chihuly Garden and Glass, MTR Western Bus Company, and the Cedarbrook Lodge, which was recently added to the MLKCLC "Do Not Patronize" list.

Workers at the Needle have been without a union contract since 2012 when the Space Needle unilaterally terminated its contract with Local 8. In 2013 workers filed charges against the Needle over numerous alleged



*Civil disobedience in front of the Space Needle, Labor Day 2015.
(Photo courtesy UNITE HERE Local 8)*

"and the past three years have been excruciating. Work shouldn't be this stressful. My coworkers and I are committed to our jobs and want to share in the success of the Symbol of Seattle."

Throughout much of the dispute, Space Needle management withheld raises from union workers, choosing instead to hire non-union temporary employees at higher wage rates. Workers eventually won raises from the company in July, 2015, after 1,113 days.

Throughout this dispute, community support and labor solidarity have been vital in moving the campaign for job security and union rights forward. Workers and their supporters have taken action numerous times in 2015, including picket lines, press conferences, delegations, and a Labor Day act of civil disobedience. At every turn, PSARA and other allies have stood with Space Needle workers.

On October 30, 2015, the regional director for the NLRB issued another complaint against the Space Needle, alleging the illegal termination of union activist and servers' assistant Fernando Jimenez. "This job meant a lot to me and my family. I'm doing what I feel is right, for myself and other employees so no one else has to be in this situation," said Jimenez. Two additional unfair labor practice charges have been filed against the Space Needle in the last month.

Despite the Space Needle's ongoing anti-union campaign, workers are standing strong and will continue to fight until there is justice at the Needle!

Eunice How is an organizer with UNITE HERE Local 8 and a member of PSARA.

"Raises won't do us any good if our jobs are subcontracted out and we return to poverty wages."

violations of federal labor law; and in January, 2015, the NLRB found that management committed five violations of federal law. These include polling, coercing, and otherwise intimidating workers and failing to recall two workers from routine layoff as a result of their union activity. The Space Needle has refused to accept the NLRB's decision and bring workers back to work, instead appealing the ruling to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

"I've been a line cook at the Space Needle for 10 years," said Andy Roos,

Following raises, workers celebrated that they would finally be able to afford to live in Seattle, go back to school, and more fully provide for their children. However, the fight has continued for job security protections.

"Raises won't do us any good if our jobs are subcontracted out and we return to poverty wages. We will continue our fight so these jobs will remain quality jobs at the Symbol of Seattle, not just now but for the next 50 years," said elevator operator Michael Hall.

The Importance of Racial Equity in Policymaking

By Misha Werschkul, Executive Director of the Washington State Budget & Policy Center and a PSARA member

The fight for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s made significant gains toward a vision of fairness and justice for all. Yet, as we look around our state and country today, we still see significant disparities by race in income levels, access to education, and incarceration rates. We are not yet at a place where all Washingtonians have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

It is clear we have much work to do when the unemployment rate for Black Washingtonians is double the rate for the state as a whole, or when 60 percent of Black children live in families with economic hardship, while 39 percent of children statewide do. Two out of every five Latino workers in Washington earn less than \$12 per hour. These disparities persist in part because of longstanding inequities in our budget investments and policy decisions that make it harder for communities of color to have access to things like good schools and living-wage jobs.

The Washington State Budget & Policy Center's mission is to use research and analysis to advance the well-being of Washington communities, improve the

economic security and social opportunity of all Washingtonians, and support the essential role of government in promoting a just and prosperous society. We know that we cannot make progress as a state in these key areas without advancing racial and socioeconomic equity. This is central to the work of PSARA as well; we cannot achieve retirement security for all if we ignore the fact that Black and Latino Washingtonians have significantly less on average in retirement savings than White Washingtonians. The only way to get the outcomes we want is to focus on equity.

At the Budget & Policy Center we are working to integrate a racial equity framework into all of our work. We recently co-produced two important reports with our partners from communities of color (Facing Race and Creating an Equitable Future for Washington State), and we focused our annual Budget Matters Summit on December 9 on how we can work together to advance racial equity in policymaking, budget decisions, and the political process. Other steps we are taking in our work are to disaggregate our data by race, incorporate the stories of people who are impacted by state



policies and budgets in our research, and work in partnership with and make ourselves accountable to communities of color. While we still have a long way to go, we are proud of the steps we are taking as an organization.

There are many resources available for organizations who want to advance racial justice in their work. One that I would especially recommend is the *National Equity Atlas* (www.nationalequityatlas.org) and the *King County Equity Impact Review Tool* (www.kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice). Please feel free to contact any of us at the Budget & Policy Center if you want more information or resources.

Making "Miracles" Real: Investing in Green Technologies

By Bob Barnes and Connie Voget, PSARA Environmental Committee

Earlier this month, just prior to the Paris Climate Summit, Bill Gates debuted the Breakthrough Energy Coalition, which he claims will provide "energy miracles." The organization's goal is to plough resources into researching new technologies to replace our current dependence on fossil fuels. We need to continue researching appropriate new technologies, and Gates should be commended for that. But praise must be tempered because his plan misses the mark by not prioritizing the continued development and expanding use of current green technologies so they can be applied on a scale that can actually make a significant difference now, in today's real world.

Gates should be using his influence to mobilize his billionaire buddies to direct the majority of their green investments into applying existing technologies on the energy grids of the world. Countries such as India are not waiting for miracles.

They are deciding right now whether to invest in green power or coal plants. With few subsidies going to new technologies and the price of coal so cheap, it's not hard to guess which choice they will make. The world can't wait for some yet-to-be-discovered magic solutions. Wrong decisions made today will lock us into a continued planet-cooking future for decades to come. Gates himself admits that it will take 20 years to develop new technologies and another 20 to implement.

Resources must be directed toward solutions available today. Research and development must build off these current solutions. A transition to a just economy must be implemented. Research by itself does nothing to address the disproportionate impact on the global south, the poor, and communities of color.

Washington State Labor Council President, Jeff Johnson, reporting from

the Paris Summit, pointed out that "multinational banks are funding the fossil fuel industry at nine times the level of renewable energy projects." Regarding a just transition, he said it "is no less than a social and economic transformation of our economy which leaves no worker and no community behind...It will require ending fossil fuel subsidies and redirecting public and private funding to investments in the renewable energy economy and clean energy technology. The new jobs must require the right to collectively bargain wages and conditions of work."

The "miracles" Mr. Gates dreams of will best be discovered as we deploy market-ready green technologies. The Wright brothers didn't stop working on their plane after Kittyhawk just because of science fiction dreams of aircraft of the future. Those dreams were built on the wings of the very real technologies present during their time.

"Being Tortured Has Been the Best Experience of My Life"

Part I of an Interview with David Ayala, Organizer with Working Washington

Reprinted from *Foreign Policy In Focus*

"I think that being tortured has been the best experience in my life."

David Ayala-Zamora's face is serious. "Being tortured is like running a marathon. It taught me how committed I am in the struggle for justice. And it's kind of fortified me in some ways, because you learn how much capacity you have in this body."

Ayala was a young labor organizer in El Salvador during the civil war of the 1980s when he was arrested and tortured by security forces. After a couple of months, legal bumbling by his captors and an attorney with connections led to his release. He was able to escape through Mexico to the United States.

Settling in the Pacific Northwest, Ayala resumed his work as a union and community organizer. He also advocated for peace in Central America. Since then, he's devoted many years to organizing day laborers, immigrants, and airport workers at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

Ayala's life became a vector of slow-motion blowback — intelligence jargon for the unintended consequences of covert actions. The torture and murder of tens of thousands in the 1980s by the Salvadoran military dictatorship, in close alliance with the U.S. government, forced many opposition activists like him to escape into exile in the United States. Here, some ended up working again for the same values, often with other Latin American immigrants.

You could look at it as history flipping the *guatusa* — a Central American gesture of insult — at President Ronald Reagan and the Salvadoran oligarchs. Or you could call it poetic justice.

For Ayala, it was an inescapable responsibility: "Those of us who were touched by people who gave everything for justice, we have to try to keep them alive and with us through the work we do. It's almost like a ghost following me, the words of Monseñor Romero, whom they shot down. He said that our lost comrades only die when I stop fighting.

"And he said, 'If they kill me, I'll be reborn in the Salvadoran people.'"

God's Kingdom Come to Earth

Ayala grew up in a middle-class Salvadoran family. In a predominantly Catholic country, he was raised Baptist.

In his youth, David recounts, he had conflicts with some of the principles of traditional Christianity. He read a lot about liberation theology: "It gave me a different frame; it helped bring my ideas and my critique of the status quo into a Christian perspective. I'm not a religious practitioner, but I still have a framing based on Christian principles."

For example: "It's our work to build God's kingdom and make it come to Earth. And it's not just this spiritual kingdom; it's more about practical things. Jesus said that all the laws come to two things: love God with all your heart and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself."

A slender man with graying hair, Ayala could still pass for a bespectacled bookworm. But a tumultuous life has seasoned his principles with praxis, and his path has been a demanding and often harsh teacher.

In 1980 in El Salvador, he remembers, "I was not organized. I was just reading liberation theology and trying to figure out myself." But there was an organized revolution happening. That January, "there was a big march of all the popular organizations" representing the Salvadoran opposition to the country's oligarchs. When it got to the center of San Salvador, the capital, it was violently repressed by security forces.

"People were running into the cathedral. And I, instead of running away, I wanted to see what was going on. So I started moving toward the front. A little stupid, huh?



"I got to the front, to a point where the police were shooting at me. Then there was a kill, a woman behind me. There was a lot of shooting. They shot this kid's leg. It was broken, and there was a lot of blood. And those guys were coming.

"Well, I just grabbed the kid. And I raised my hand, and I just said, 'We need to get out of here.' So we started walking in the other direction. And I said 'Peace! Peace!' holding the kid, walking. They didn't shoot us.

"The ambulance came by and saw us. The kid was all full of blood, and I was too. And they thought I was hit, too, so they took me and the kid out. So when I got to the hospital, I said, 'I'm not hit, it's just the kid.'

"I was in shock, so I didn't realize that I was messed up. So I started walking towards the house. And then suddenly a car passed by, and they yell 'compa!' — buddy — "and they throw me a bag. 'Change of clothes!'"

Ayala didn't realize it then, but those good Samaritans were helping wounded people avoid the military, who hunted them down after demonstrations.

Editor's note: This is Part I of an interview with David Ayala by Peter Constantini, both PSARA members. The rest of the interview will appear in subsequent issues of the Retiree Advocate.

New Energy at Labor Council

Interview with Martin Luther King County Labor Council Executive Secretary, Nicole Grant

By Mike Andrew

New energy has been infused into the Martin Luther King County Labor Council (MLKCLC) with the election of Nicole Grant as Executive Secretary.

Grant, an electrician by trade and a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) 46, is the first woman to be elected to the top spot at the MLKCLC. She has wasted no time in putting her own stamp on the organization.

"The Labor Council is ripe for a renaissance," Grant says. "We have the excitement of winning concrete victories – on paid sick days and the minimum wage, a successful teachers strike [and on bargaining rights for Uber and Lyft drivers]. There's new energy in the city, and maybe we'll have new energy in the Labor Council.

"We have an opportunity, the opportunity to engage in important fights – on collective bargaining rights, the TPP, retirement security, rights for transgender workers.

"The big thing is to engage our affiliates and delegates in new ways. Regular working people have power, and we can win victories that affect everyone."

One of the toughest battles Grant sees looming on the horizon centers on collective bargaining rights, an issue which is central to the very existence of the labor movement.

"It's a war at this point," Grant said grimly. "So-called right to work, attacks on collective bargaining. There couldn't be more at stake."

Grant believes that reinvigorating the Labor Council and its affiliates is key to protecting workers' rights to organize.

"It's not possible to stop 'right to work' without focusing on growing our movement, on finding ways to open the doors to all workers. We have to shed our inhibitions and go after industries that have not been organized. That's one reason the Uber drivers' campaign is so exciting.

"Growth and power. That's what we're doing here."

Grant is optimistic despite the obvious challenges.

"People want to engage," she says. "They just need an organization that welcomes them.

"And this is values based. We have to prioritize their values and the values of their neighbors and the people they work beside. That will drain the power of partisan attacks."

PSARA has a huge role in the labor renaissance Grant wants to bring about, she says.

"Retirement security is central to the question of income inequality," Grant said. "There's no more pressing issue than right to retire with dignity.

"Corporations talk about numbers, sustainability, but it's not an economic conversation, it's a moral conversation. It's a moral requirement to treat seniors with dignity, not steal from them."

Grant is not only the first woman elected to lead the MLKCLC, but she is young – under 40 – and has two energetic children at home, so her day-to-day life illustrates the issues that face working women.

"Yes, I'm a working woman," she says. "Working women's problems are my problems. Women's voice in the workplace has long been suppressed. Our issues are buried deeply in the conversation about income inequality.

"It's all linked. Child care, maternity leave, pay equity. Look, if you're facing a bill for \$1,500 a month for childcare you can't even afford to get a job.

"So we have to push back against the careers women are tracked into –

against gendered division in the workplace. There's no reason women can't be successful journeyman electricians, but not too many are. I was completely successful in my industry.

"Give them an in," Grant added. "It's time to turn our attention to women workers and their issues – to fight for the rights of retail workers, servers, caregivers."

Looking at labor issues with a racial lens is key to Grant's approach, an orientation that sparked a successful Union Jobs Fair reaching out to communities of color and the LGBT community in October.

"It's necessary for the labor movement to recognize the enduring character of racism. It's complete poison for our movement," she says.

"That's another thing that's so exciting about the Uber and Lyft drivers. Many of them are people of color and immigrants. The campaign was led by people of color, and it's completely centered in empowering people of color.

"Also the Seattle teachers' strike," she added. "One of the things that was central to the strike demands was to have racial equity teams in every school in the city, to ensure that people of color have equal opportunity."



Nicole Grant



Grant (center) with Washington State Labor Council Secretary-Treasurer Lynne Dodson (left) and President Jeff Johnson (right). Pierce County Labor Council Executive Secretary Patty Rose is in the background. Nicole, Jeff, Lynne, and Patty are all PSARA members.

Greece: Pensions, Debt, and National Sovereignty

By Mike Andrew

In an example of naked bullying, the European Union (EU) forced the Greek government to withdraw a spending bill that was scheduled for debate on December 17.

The bill, which included provisions to save what was left of Greece's pension system, was intended to mitigate some of the worst effects of the EU-imposed austerity program which has gutted the Greek economy.

A spokesperson for Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said that the EU threatened to withhold 1 billion Euros (\$1.1 billion) in aid if the government went ahead with the legislation.

According to Reuters news service, EU finance ministers met to approve the aid package as soon as the Greek government dropped the spending bill.

The EU claims that under the terms of the latest bailout agreement signed by Tsipras's government in August, all economic legislation must be pre-approved by Greece's international creditors.

At the heart of this new attack on Greece's sovereignty is the country's pension system, a key part of its social safety net. To understand this, let's look at three factors.

First and foremost, retired workers have a right to live. Not merely subsist, but live in at least modest security and comfort after decades of work.

Greek retirees no longer have that right. Because of pension cuts mandated by the EU as a condition of loans to the Greek government, half of Greek retirees try to live on \$721 per month or less.

Second, retired workers continue to contribute to society economically even after they've stopped working for wages. They contribute by spending money. Cut their pensions and reduce the amount of money they have to spend, and you destroy demand and therefore jobs.

Pension cuts of up to 44 percent have reduced the buying power of Greek retirees, and Greece's GDP has dropped by almost one-third since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008.

Third, giving workers the opportunity for early retirement – retirement at 55 instead of 65 or 70 – clears the

way for younger workers to find jobs. This is especially important when the economy is not growing and therefore not producing new jobs -- in Greece, for example.

Increasing the retirement age, which the EU forced Greece to do, also increases unemployment among young workers – which in Greece today is a staggering 50 percent.

EU finance ministers claim the austerity program will reduce Greek indebtedness, and ultimately benefit the country.

But there's nothing wrong with debt. All governments carry debts, even ones that balance their budgets. In fact, selling government bonds – the most common form of public indebtedness – is one of the revenue streams governments count on when making their budgets.

This debt usually doesn't hurt ordinary citizens at all. In fact, it can benefit them. If the government can get banks and private funds to invest in its operations by buying bonds, it won't have to collect as much money from citizens in the form of taxes.

One downside to debt is that you have to pay interest on it. Usually this is no problem, and governments look at debt service as just one more cost of doing business.

But if the debt is really immense – and Greece's debt is now nearly two years worth of GDP – then interest payments will be correspondingly large. And they will be larger still if investors lack confidence in the government's ability to pay them off, because they'll try to compensate for the extra risk by demanding higher interest.

At some point, interest payments will take over other government spending. The government will have to spend money on debt service that could have gone to pensions, infrastructure projects, schools, or any other project that would benefit its citizens rather than corporate investors.



Athens: Greek pensioners demonstrate against cuts

This problem becomes even more severe when, as in Greece, the creditors interfere in domestic politics and impose no-spending policies that cause the economy to contract. Then the government will find tax collections down and unemployment payments up, adding to its financial burden.

The other downside to debt is that you have to pay it back.

For most governments this is also no problem, because debts don't all fall due at once. You can sell new bonds to pay off the old ones as they fall due. For Greece this is no longer possible, because no one thinks Greece can pay off its enormous debts. Therefore no one – apart from junk bond speculators – wants to buy new Greek bonds.

If Greece controlled its own currency, it could monetize the debt. "Monetize" means that the government prints enough money to cover the debt and just hands it out. Obviously this is inflationary, and if the debt is large this policy will probably result in devaluation of the national currency – which is what Greece did in the 1980s.

However, since Greece joined the Eurozone in 2001, it no longer has that option because the European Central Bank controls the Euro. Greece has nothing to say about the money supply. For Greece to change its debt profile, it would have to reassert its national sovereignty and leave the Eurozone, something Greek voters do not yet want to do.

Report from Paris

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over the world are exactly the concerns that did not make it into the negotiated agreement. Indigenous communities are – already – losing access to crucial natural resources because of climate change. And provisions in the agreement are going to allow polluters, rather than cutting their own emissions, to buy carbon credits by planting forests (this is called REDD), often driving people from their lands.

The finalized agreement did not acknowledge human rights, nor was there any provision for compensating countries or communities for “loss and damage.” U.S. negotiators were particularly aggressive in not admitting any liability for the gigatons of carbon we have pumped into the air.

We learned, from very informed and dedicated young people in many organizations, more about the meaning of “climate justice.” Based on which countries have historically been the major polluters, and on the wealth they have accumulated in a fossil-fuel-based economy, a fair agreement would have meant much, much more ambitious carbon-cutting targets for the wealthy (in particular, the U.S.) and a much more robust plan for transferring funds and technology to the less-developed countries. Nothing remotely approaching that sense of justice made it into the agreement.

We spent several days in workshops listening to small farmers and fishers, from everywhere you can imagine, describe a

Bobby and Michael taking part in the two mile chain of climate activists on Nov. 29. This involved over 10,000 people defying the French government’s ban on demonstrations right before the COP21 meeting. (Photo courtesy of Bobby and Michael Righi)



world where their livelihoods are already being threatened by climate change (heat, floods, drought, typhoons). And yet they are a major part of the solution. Sustainable, agro-ecological, soil-restoring farming can sequester much of the carbon that meat-intensive, pesticide, and chemical fertilizer based industrial methods now spew into our air. Do you suspect that huge agricultural corporations did not allow this idea into the agreement? You suspect right.

Meanwhile, as Paris was drawing to a close, the same countries (and sometimes the same negotiators) were beginning a meeting in Nairobi for the World Trade Organization. The Paris agreement makes it clear that actions to combat climate change must be consistent with world trade rules. And what do world trade

rules say?? That any actions countries take to, say, limit the export of dirty fuels or stop corporations from dirty mining or fracking projects can be construed as trade barriers. Which agreement do we think will take precedence?

Not to be discouraged! We were heartened by hearing from activists from dozens and dozens of countries and organizations; they are savvy and committed. When we remember Paris, it is them we remember. We are counting on them, and they are counting on us. It is they who are world-changing, not the agreement itself.

Bobby Righi is PSARA's new Administrative VP and also on PSARA's Environmental Committee. Michael Righi is a member of PSARA's Education Committee.



Demonstration in “the Green Zone,” the area for civil society. This organization wants the fossil fuel corporations out of the climate negotiations.

(Photo courtesy of Bobby and Michael Righi)

We Are Unstoppable, Another World is Possible

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climate trends that have already created millions of water and food refugees will require placing human rights, indigenous rights, gender equality, and a just transition at the very core of the transformation.

It is easy to get wrapped up in the COP 21 process with all of its complexities and emotional tumult, but for all the strengths and shortcomings of the final document, the real impact is that 195 countries, 140 national leaders, civil society groups, unions, and businesses have begun to recognize that we are in a race against time to save our planet.

Sharon Burroughs, President of the International Trade Union Confederation, put it this way, "The race to stabilize the climate has begun; but, tragically, too many governments still lack ambition for the survival of their people.

"But trade unions know that the road was never to Paris, but through Paris, and our resolve to manage a just transition in the face of the largest and most rapid industrial transformation in human history is stronger than ever."

The most lasting impression that I will have of the Paris climate talks is the level of knowledge about climate change, the understanding of the impacts that it is having and will have on our work and our standards of living, and the commitment to climate justice that I heard from union leaders and representatives of civil society from India, Brazil, Mexico, Senegal, Canada, France, Germany, Norway, Peru, Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, and from all over the world.

It gives me great hope that we are not

alone in Washington State and that our actions do make a difference. Every action to reduce carbon makes a difference. Every conversation about a just transition makes a difference. If we do it right, the fight to reverse climate change is the fight to rebuild shared prosperity for all of us, not just the few.

With regard to the text of the Paris Agreement, there are some strengths and weaknesses. The document does commit countries to "holding the global average temperature to well below 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5 degrees C above pre-industrial levels."

A growing scientific consensus is that we may be too late to limit temperature increase to 1.5 degrees C unless we dramatically increase our global emission reduction pledges before the year 2020 when the reduction regime officially begins. While the text would have been significantly stronger if it required countries to raise their pledges before 2020 and to establish an enforceable way to review both individual country and cumulative emission reduction pledges, the agreement does create a review discussion in 2018 and then establishes a five-year review process beginning in 2025.

At the 2009 Copenhagen climate talks a goal of developed countries raising \$100 billion annually for adaptation financing for developing countries was put forth. To date about \$62.5 billion has been pledged. However, in the Paris text, at the urging primarily of the United States, the \$100 billion figure was removed from the document. While

the text still recognizes the obligation of developed countries to help developing countries, the financing will now cover both mitigation and adaptation purposes. In light of the huge cost it will take to lower carbon emissions and to adapt to the devastating impacts of climate change (some estimates place it at \$1 trillion a year) it is clear that we are far from making the most elementary steps needed to globally finance the transition.

Finally, language regarding just transition, decent work, quality jobs, and human rights are recognized in the document, but only in the non-binding preamble. Nonetheless, this is a first step. Unions and civil society groups must keep pressing on all levels of government and with businesses at the bargaining table that a transformation of our economy without justice is unacceptable.

The Paris Climate Agreement does give us a starting point from which to create a global renewable energy economy. And also a starting point to create a climate and economic transformation rooted in equity and justice.

Naomi Klein, author of *This Changes Everything*, quotes Movement Generation organizer Quinton Sankofa, "Transition is inevitable, justice is not." No truer words have been spoken. It is our job as union leaders and civil society leaders to make sure that no worker, community, or country is left behind, because to do so is simply to perpetuate the inequalities that define our current fossil fuel regime.

Jeff Johnson is President of the Washington State Labor Council and a member of PSARA.



The average Walmart worker at the end of the day often has to skip meals and go to work hungry so that their children can eat. Workers have less than \$5.00 a day left to spend on meals for their families. By that measure Walmart CEO Doug McMillon would have \$5,225 dollars for daily meals. The pile of food in this picture demonstrates what can be purchased for that many dollars.

Contrast that pile of food with the tray in front. And note that while Walmart workers can get a 10 percent discount on items purchased in the store, the discount cannot be applied to most staple food items. The tray illustrates the amount of food that you can buy with \$4.95.

Making Retirement Security Real for Everyone

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shop entitled "Making Retirement Security Real for Everyone." This workshop is both educational AND inspiring. We are asking our members to help locate venues where we can present the workshop throughout the region and across the state. Please contact the PSARA office if you can help with contacts for organizations and venues where the workshop could be presented.

Chutzpah

When Dina and I were flying home from a wedding this month, I finished my book and began perusing the Alaska Airlines magazine. I ran across Alaska CEO Brad Tilden's column, "Spirit of Alaska – A World of Good" in which he noted that this issue of the magazine featured Melinda Gates and the generosity of Bill and Melinda.

I won't dwell on Bill and Melinda. What was stunning to me was Tilden's comment "...this spirit of giving regularly comes to life at Alaska Airlines. We're doing more and more from a company perspective to give back to the community." He goes on to say, "But it's really the employees of Alaska who are leading the way."

I have no doubt the Alaska employees are generous. But Alaska CEO Brad Tilden is personally responsible for funding a huge part of the effort to defeat the SeaTac minimum wage and then bankrolling the lawsuit to try and undermine the efforts of low-wage workers to achieve a \$15 per hour minimum wage. A number of these workers, many of them immigrants, work for contractors who in turn provide services to Alaska Airlines.

While Mr. Tilden wants to present himself as a generous community-minded person, his actions in fighting the \$15 minimum wage are greedy and directly contradict "giving back to the community." What Chutzpah!

Seattle Labor Chorus's New CD: "Gonna Rise Again"

By Jim Douglas

Even if choral music isn't your cup of tea, you might want to give a listen to "Gonna Rise Again," the new album by the Seattle Labor Chorus. This is choral music as it ought to be – a variety of styles, accessible but not boring, harmonies that draw on jazz and dissonance, but always with an eye to enhancing the song.

Besides that, there's the subject matter of the songs themselves. This is "labor" music in the broadest sense – there are certainly songs about unions and labor issues and organizing. But there are also songs about immigration, slavery, war, and consumerism.

The mood of the music can swing from song to song – from the grim anger of Bob Dylan's "Masters of War" to the consumerist "Mr. Ad-Man" (a parody of the 1950s hit "Mr. Sandman"). From Jackson Browne's "Lives in the Balance," about the marketing of war in the United States, to "Harriet Tubman," with the lessons for today of the escaped slave extending a lifeline on the underground railroad. "Blood and Gold" combines anti-war lyrics and a dissonant East European melody. "Statue of Liberty" asks whether Liberty is still able to say "give me your tired, your poor."

"Triangle Fire" and "Take Off Your Hats" bring labor history to life. And "Twenty Four Seven," "I'll Organize," and the final song, "Rise Again," address current working conditions.

Sung with passion and humor, the CD is a must-listen. An added bonus is the cover, an original piece of art by Jon Williams, the graphic artist at Real Change newspaper. The drawing gives the sense of a movement that's rooted in history, involves women and men, people of color and white, and is multi-issue – and that sings! It's partly a fantasy, but also a prediction – we are "Gonna Rise Again."

You can get your own copy at any chorus performance or at www.SeattleLaborChorus.org/products.html or www.CDBaby.com/cd/SeattleLaborChorus. Cost is \$12 (\$11 for orders of 10 or more), plus \$2 shipping and handling.

Jim Douglas sings with the Seattle Labor Chorus and is a member of PSARA.

To Renew or Donate

PSARA Education Fund
2800 1st Avenue, Room 262, Seattle WA 98121
Donations are tax deductible

- Basic contribution: \$20
- Limited income/living lightly: \$15 or whatever you can afford
- Supporting: \$50 New contributor
- Sponsoring: \$100 or more Renewing contributor

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Meetings and Events

PSARA Environmental Committee: 10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., Thursday, January 7, WA State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. All welcome as we discuss our 2016 activities.

PSARA Government Relations Committee: 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 7, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 1st Ave., Seattle. All welcome as we discuss Senior Lobby Day and other local and federal issues.

Green Lake Discussion Group: Noon to 1:30 p.m., Thursday, January 14, Green Lake Library, 7354 East Green Lake Drive N., Seattle. Brown bag lunch. Nick Licata will be reading from and discussing his book, *Becoming a Citizen Activist*. All are welcome. For further information contact Susan at sjlevy.01@gmail.com

PSARA Diversity Committee: 11 a.m. - noon, Thursday, January 21, Seattle office Washington State Labor Council, 321 16th Avenue S., Seattle. All are welcome as we plan our activities for 2016.

PSARA Executive Board Meeting: 12:30 p.m. - 3 p.m., Thursday, January 21, Seattle office Washington State Labor Council, 321 16th Avenue S., Seattle. All are welcome.

Annual Senior Lobby Day: Thursday, February 25. Contact Co-chairs Chuck Richards and Tim Burns at govrelations@psara.org or call the PSARA office, 206-448-9646, if you are interested in going to Olympia with PSARA to advocate for PSARA's legislative agenda. See article on page 1.

To Bert Brecht

By Phyllis Baker

I think we are living at the end of the Dark Ages.

The people have been in ignorance because their masters were ignorant.

Now their masters are learning, but the people are learning faster.

I think we are living at the end of the Dark Ages.

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was a German poet and playwright. Fleeing the Nazis in 1933, he arrived in the United States in 1941. After being investigated by HUAC, he returned to East Germany in 1946.

In his 1939 poem "To Posterity" Brecht wrote "Indeed I live in the dark ages!"

Phyllis Baker is a PSARA member and a valued member of the Advocate proof-reading team.

