

# The Retiree **ADVOCATE**

The Monthly Publication of  
**PSARA EDUCATION FUND**  
“Uniting Generations for a Secure Future”

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**Protect  
Washington Act  
Yes on I-1631**

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## **Save the Date!** **Meet the Writers, October 14**

**J**oin PSARA for what promises to be the liveliest literary event of the fall, Sunday, October 14, at 2:30 p.m.

PSARA hosts Michael Withey, progressive attorney and author of *Summary Execution*, and Kit Bakke, veteran activist and author of *Protest on Trial*.

Withey's book deals with the 1981 murder of labor leaders and Union of Democratic Filipinos activists Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes, and the subsequent trial which exposed the role of the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship and US government agencies in the crime. Bakke writes about the 1970 trial of the Seattle Seven, members of the Seattle Liberation Front.

The event will be held at Bay Vista Tower, 2821 2nd Avenue, Seattle, and will be a fundraiser for PSARA.

## **Benefit Concert for PSARA** **Featuring Peter Costantini and Lou Truskoff, August 5**

**T**here's still time to register for the August 5 concert featuring PSARA members Peter Costantini and Lou Truskoff. The concert will be held on Sunday, August 5, at 2:30 p.m., at the Bay Vista Tower, 2821 2nd Avenue, Seattle (the building behind the Seattle Labor Temple). We will provide cold drinks and some delicious snacks.

Lou and Peter first sang together in the 1970s at an event in support of the United Farmworkers boycott. Later they formed a quintet, the Solidarity Singers, along with friends Mark Aalfs, Janet Stecher, and Susan Lewis (the latter two now of Rebel Voices). The group performed around the Puget Sound region in the '70s and '80s and featured songs of solidarity and social justice. Peter and Lou have sung together periodically ever since and are looking forward to bringing their music to PSARA.

To reserve a spot, please RSVP by email to [concertpsara@gmail.com](mailto:concertpsara@gmail.com) (preferred), or call the PSARA organizer Mike Andrew, 206-261-8110. If registering by phone, please leave a phone number where you can be reached. We will send you a confirmation along with parking and building access information. (If you previously registered but have not received a confirmation, please let us know.) The building location is easily accessible by bus. We will be taking donations at the door; checks should be made payable to PSARA.

We hope you can join Peter, Lou, and other PSARA members for an afternoon of spirited and uplifting music. We look forward to seeing you there!

## **PSARA Debuts New Logo**

**P**PSARA members debut our new logo at a July 8 rally commemorating the 40th anniversary of Kadima's 1978 anti-Nazi march and rally.

As you can see, the new logo emphasizes racial and gender diversity and highlights the "action" part of our name.

Many thanks to PSARA member Steve Butts, who designed the logo and worked with our union printers to produce PSARA's new banners, business cards, and stationery.

Look for the new banner when you're out at rallies, pickets, or other actions.



## The Retiree ADVOCATE

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or visit PSARA on Facebook

## EOI's 20th Anniversary Celebration

Please consider joining PSARA's table at the Economic Opportunity Institute's 20th Anniversary dinner, September 20 at Fisher Pavilion, Seattle Center.

EOI works with PSARA and other grassroots organizations, community coalitions, and elected officials to make Washington State a more equitable and just place for everyone to live, work, play, and raise a family.

EOI is an independent, nonpartisan, non-profit public policy center using research, education, and advocacy to shape public debate and advance new policy ideas that help build an economy that works – for everyone. They primarily focus on promoting high-quality education, high-road economic development, modern work-life standards, retirement security, and shared investments in our common future.

The dangerous political forces we now face require urgent action to defend our communities, support families, and advance opportunity for all. Our support for EOI is critical to the success we are able to achieve together.

Tickets are \$100 and include a fun social hour (complete with games, a live DJ and a photo booth!), a delicious buffet dinner, and an educational, inspiring program.

Visit [www.eoionline.org](http://www.eoionline.org) and click on "events" for more information or to reserve your spot - enter "Ruth Egger" where it asks for table captain. Or call Ruth at 206-949-2069.

### PSARA Co-Sponsors Candidate Forums

PSARA will co-sponsor two September forums for state legislative candidates:

**Friday, September 14**, 1:00 p.m., SHAG Tukwila Village, 14350 Tukwila International Blvd, Tukwila, 98168.

- The event will include candidates and incumbents from the 11th, 30th, 31st, 33rd, 34th, 37th, and 47th Legislative Districts.
- The event is also sponsored by the ADS Advisory Council, AARP, SHAG, and City of Tukwila.

**Friday, September 28**, 2:30 p.m., North Bellevue Community Center, 4063 148th Ave NE, Bellevue, 98009.

- This event will include candidates and incumbents from the 5th, 41st, 45th, and 48th Legislative Districts. Possibly the 1st and 46th districts will also be invited.
- The event is also sponsored by the ADS Advisory Council, AARP, SHAG, Bellevue Network on Aging, and Kirkland Senior Council.

### Senator Elizabeth Warren says...

*"Big corporations have money and power to make sure every rule breaks their way; people have voices and votes to push back."*



# A Pivotal Moment in History

Excerpts from a speech by Jeff Johnson to the WSLC Covention, July 18

Sisters, brothers, and friends, this is a bittersweet moment for me – after 32 years with the WSLC and the past 8 years as your President – I will be retiring at the end of this year.

I have had the great fortune of working with you and many great leaders over the decades in our movement, and this has made me a better leader and a better advocate for working people.

I am so thankful for the opportunity to have spent the better part of my adult life working every day with passion for worker rights, and for economic, social, and climate justice.

It has been a dream come true and an honor to help channel our movement's energy and direction in the struggle for a better life for our families and our communities. And to participate in meaningful community/labor partnerships in the struggle for progressive and equitable change.

For this I will be forever grateful. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

In the meantime, I have 6 more months to work with you and we have a lot of work to do together.

\*\*\*\*\*

We are at a pivotal moment in the history of working class people and there are a number of things we need to do.

Billionaires, bankers, and elite extremist politicians like Trump, Senator McConnell, and Speaker Paul Ryan are attacking us from all sides.

For 40 plus years the plan has been to deplete the commonwealth and to funnel trillions of dollars into the hands of the wealthy.

The plan has been - To defund public schools and to disenfranchise working class voters.

The plan has been - To pit white workers against brown and black workers and immigrants.

The plan has been - To privatize Medicare and Social Security and to voucherize and kill off Medicaid.

The Plan has been - To silence the voice of the labor movement and to stop our organizing for progressive and equitable change.

And they have had some victories. But they have not by any means won the war. It is our efforts that will determine the ultimate victor.

Our future will be determined by our actions.

\*\*\*\*\*

Everyone has a personal story, and I want to give you a snippet of mine:

When I was 7 my Father died at the workplace, leaving my Mother with three children ages, 10, 7, and 18 months to take care of.

My Mother went to work for \$1 an hour, the minimum wage at the time. While she didn't have more than a high school education, she had innate strategic organizing skills and a knack for reading people. She parlayed these skills into helping a local politician become a rising star in the state legislature and a state job for herself.

And it was the collectively bargained wages and benefits she received as a state employee that allowed us to own a modest house, take occasional vacations, provide asthma medication and braces for my sisters, and repair my broken bones. Today at the age of 95, my Mother stills receives a pension bargained by state employees.

My Mother taught me three things: Always work hard because you never know what will happen in this life. Appreciate and learn from people's differences. Our strength is in our diversity. Always stand up for what's right. If you do, others will too.

Now my Mother is one of my heroes, but despite her strength of character, the strength of workers standing together is what prevented my family from tumbling into poverty.

This is what our opponents have miscalculated – working people were not born with silver spoons in their mouths; we were not born mistrusting those who are different from us; we weren't raised with a sense of entitlement or greed.

Instead, when given a fair chance to have a voice at the workplace and in society, we tend towards equality, equity, and justice.



Jeff Johnson

\*\*\*\*\*

Sisters, brothers, and friends, unless we are Native American, we all come from immigrant families with rich immigrant stories and heritages.

And it was the hard work, blood, sweat, and tears of our immigrant families, along with slaves, and Native Americans that built the America we know and love.

My Father's family emigrated from Sweden and Mother's family from Croatia – and they worked in the coal mines, the steel mills, and the factories in and around Pittsburgh.

I am proud of my family's heritage. It is part of who I am and how I think.

But I am also proud of the Filipino American community and heritage that helped build our fishing industry in the Northwest and our agricultural industry in Wapato; I am proud of the Somali community for the rich texture they add to our culture and their hard work in our service industries; and I am proud of the immigrant families from Mexico and Central America who toil in the fields to put bread on our tables and help build our houses.

We are a country built on the backs and dreams of immigrants, and we need to speak out and say No to the politics of hate, bigotry, and intolerance.

We need to speak out and say Zero Tolerance to the politics of hate and racism!

Jeff Johnson was elected President of the Washington State Labor Council (WSLC) in 2010 and reelected in 2014. He is a member of PSARA.

# PSARA Resolution on Inhumane Immigration and Detention Policies

Adopted by the PSARA Executive Board, July 19

**WHEREAS**, the immigration and detention policies of the United States government shock the conscience of all who care about human dignity and human rights, and

**WHEREAS**, the forcible separation of parents and children repeats the brutal history of slavery and the incarceration of Japanese Americans in our country, and

**WHEREAS**, the refugees seeking to enter the US legally and requesting asylum are fleeing conditions of war, terror, and violence, which are often exacerbated by US military support for oppressive regimes and death squads, therefore be it

*In the photo at right, members of PSARA, NOW, and the 34th District Democrats picket in front of the SeaTac ICE Detention Center.*

*Photo courtesy of Karen Richter.*

**RESOLVED** that PSARA opposes the detention policies and family separations imposed on immigrants seeking entry to the United States, and those immigrants already residing in the United States, and be it finally

**RESOLVED** that PSARA is committed to working with our community partners to further social justice, including civil rights, human rights, and immigrant rights organizations, to resist these unjust and inhumane policies.



PSARA commemorates the 100th birthday of revolutionary leader Nelson Mandela with a quote from one of his speeches:

***"Where globalization means, as it so often does, that the rich and powerful now have new means to further enrich and empower themselves at the cost of the poorer and weaker, we have a responsibility to protest in the name of universal freedom."***

**Nelson Mandela**

*Photo: Reuters*



## Bob's World 2

# Okinawan American Long-Term Care: Nesan + Professionals

By Bob Shimbukuro

**T**om (Chonin, or oldest son)

The scene in Arlington in August after I arrived at Tom Nisan's house: Toki Nesan had given me instructions about how to help the home health care personnel without interfering with their protocols.

Tuesday morning---

"I'm going to the store, Tom. What do you want to eat?"

"I'd like some ramen."

About an hour later, Zenwa texted me. We had separated in the store because he needed to get some stuff for himself: "Dad, where are you?"

"Oh, got lost. I forgot what I was looking for."

"Ramen, Dad."

"Oh yeah, thanks."

Fifteen minutes later, we're back at Tom's house. I prepared the ramen quickly, but I'm greeted with, "WHERE THE F\*\*\* HAVE YOU BEEN? IT'S WAY PAST ONE OCLOCK. TAKES YOU THAT LONG TO MAKE RAMEN?"

"Sorry, Tom. It takes me a lot longer to do things now."

Felt bad.

\* \* \*

Toki (Nesan, or oldest daughter)

December 1988. My brother Sam handed me the phone, "Toki wants to talk to you." Just as Tom (Chonin) was expected to take care of the financial and external concerns of the family when Dad died, Toki Nesan was expected to help Mom take care of the younger members of the family; in our case, a family of seven kids, stretching over 14 years. Boss of the internal concerns. A second mom, so to speak. I know what she's going to ask.

"Why do I feel like Sam just wants to see me before he dies," asked Toki.

"Because that's the way he feels."

"So, if I wait until Christmas to come, he'll probably live until Christmas."

"No, you should look at it as, he wants to see you before he dies, but if you can't make it, that's okay with him. He worries only about Bruce after he dies. The question for you really is, 'How would you feel if you didn't come and he did die before Christmas?'"

Toki cancelled her Christmas reservation, came a week earlier than planned, and Sam died in Bruce's arms about 20 minutes after talking to Toki in person.

\* \* \*

Tom: "Hey, Bob. How's Mom?"

Bob: "What did you say?"

"What...nothing." I was disappointed. I had lost contact.

Later, Toki suggested to me, "You have to stay in their world."

\* \* \*

Staying in their world

Zen Uncle is having problems. Ghosts. In the room. Cousins Dianne and Charlotte are trying to calm him. "You're just hallucinating," they inform Uncle (their Dad). Uncle wasn't buying any of that.

Manu, Uncle's care worker, is not present at the time. She previously took care of Kiyoko Auntie, but when Auntie died, the family decided to hire her to care for Uncle who also needed help. She was well acquainted with the family.

When Manu arrives, she sizes up the situation quickly as Uncle informs her of the ghosts. She picks up a broom, and asks Uncle, "Where are the ghosts?"

She swats the ghosts where he points, and calls out, "Go 'way, ghosts. Go 'way. No bother him."



The ghosts go away, Uncle settles down. Uncle goes to sleep.

\* \* \*

In my perfect, visionary world, there would be universal income, and the NESAN of the world (I'm sure that people like them are in every culture) and care workers are paid a family living wage plus benefits and most of all, get time off so they get some relief.

Actually, they should be paid more. They should be paid what these wannabes who dream-up-financial-schemes-for-one-percenters-to-steal-from-the-working-poor get paid.

\* \* \*

It had been an emotional two-three weeks that had started with my birthday, a 50th anniversary of Social Security and an 80th anniversary Medicare Party. It had also turned into a "Black Lives Matters rally" that had reached Washington D.C. and the Virginia house in which I was staying. But much as I wanted to, I didn't really have time to comment on the Facebook chatterbox that was going on. I was fighting my own personal battles.

*Continued on Page 11*

# How the ACA Changed American Incomes

By Mike Andrew

Ever wonder why Republicans still go apoplectic over the Affordable Care Act (ACA or Obamacare)? Well, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has the answer: the ACA redistributes income from the rich to the poor.

How? Because tax increases to support ACA benefits were concentrated among the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans, while its benefits were spread broadly among the poorest 40 percent, the CBO found.

In 2014, the year the ACA took effect, household income was very unevenly distributed. Households at the top of the income distribution received significantly more income than households at the bottom of the distribution.

According to CBO's estimates, average income among households in the poorest 20 percent of the population was about \$19,000. Average income among households in the richest 20 percent was about \$281,000, almost 15 times more.

Even within the top 20 percent, income was highly skewed toward the very top of the distribution. Average income among households in the bottom half of the richest group (the 81st to 90th percentiles) was about \$151,000; average income among the 1.2 million households in the top 1 percent of the distribution was about \$1.8 million.

Those amounts include social insurance benefits (such as benefits from Social Security and Medicare) but exclude the effects of government policies that directly affect household income either through means-tested transfer programs or through the federal tax system.

Means-tested transfers are cash payments and in-kind benefits from federal, state, and local governments that are designed to assist individuals and families with low income and few assets. They include benefits from programs such as Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or food stamps), and

Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Federal taxes include individual income taxes, payroll taxes, corporate income taxes, and excise taxes.

According to CBO estimates, average household income *before* transfers and taxes was almost 60 percent higher in 2014 than it was in 1979 in real (inflation-adjusted) terms – an average growth rate of 1.3 percent per year.

But growth was not uniform across the income spectrum. In fact, income growth among households in the bottom 80 percent of the income distribution was less than half the overall growth rate – only 26 percent for households in the poorest group and 28 percent for households in the middle.

Meanwhile, among households in the richest 20 percent, average income in 2014 was almost double (95 percent higher) what it was in 1979. Because of those differences in cumulative growth rates, income inequality was much greater in 2014 than it was in 1979.

But from 1979 through 2014, for households in the bottom 20 percent, cumulative growth in income *after* transfers and taxes was significantly greater than cumulative growth in income before transfers and taxes – 69 percent versus 26 percent. They are still losing ground compared to the richest 1 percent, but at a much slower rate.

The faster growth rate was due to both the expansion of means-tested transfers (especially Medicaid) and a reduction in federal taxes due to expansion of refundable tax credits provided through the individual income tax.

Means-tested transfers and federal taxes caused household incomes to be more evenly distributed. In 2014, those transfers and taxes increased average income among households in the poorest 20 percent by \$12,000. On the other hand, average incomes for households in the highest 20 percent decreased by \$74,000 – or more than 25 percent – to \$207,000.

Means-tested transfers and federal taxes are both progressive. In other words, low-income households receive a larger share of their income as means-tested transfers than high-income households do, and high-income households pay a larger share of their income in federal taxes than low-income households do.

Although all households have some form of federal tax burden, high-income households pay a majority of federal taxes because they make the most money. The richest 20 percent of households, which received about 55 percent of all income, paid more than two-thirds of federal taxes in 2014. In contrast, households in the poorest 20 percent, which received about 4 percent of all income, paid less than one-half of one percent of federal taxes that year, the CBO estimates.

Changes in the rules governing transfers and taxes had direct effects on the distribution of household income in 2014. The most significant effects resulted from implementation of several provisions of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Together, CBO estimates, the provisions of the ACA that were in effect in 2014 boosted household income, on average, for those in the bottom 20 percent, and reduced income for households in the top 20 percent – especially for households in the top 1 percent of the income distribution.

Similar benefits also accrued to the middle 60 percent. For them, growth in income after transfers and taxes was significantly larger than growth in income before transfers and taxes – 42 percent versus 28 percent.

Mind you, this is not an increase in *discretionary* income – the ACA mandates that the extra income goes to pay for health insurance and that alone – so the poorest Americans still struggle to pay for housing, food, utilities, and other necessities. Nevertheless, the ACA made basic medical care accessible for millions of Americans who could not afford it before.

# Protect Washington Act - Yes on 1631

By Bobby Righi

On July 2, the “Yes on 1631” campaign handed in signatures to the Washington Secretary of State in Olympia. In all over 360,000 signatures were handed in to assure that the needed 260,000 valid signatures are there to put the “Protect Washington” initiative on the November ballot. Now the work begins to pass the initiative into law.

The coalition built to develop this initiative is the broadest and most diverse seen in this state, or anywhere else. It represents something new and hopeful. Communities of color, tribes, and workers are in the fight. They are also educating the coalition about the multifaceted way that climate change and pollution affect their lives and communities and what is needed to address the problems.

It is this hopeful coalition that has given volunteers all across the state the energy to gather the signatures to put the initiative on the ballot.

The ballot measure commits the state to massive reductions in CO2 emissions: 20 million tons per year, which, by 2035, would be 40 percent lower than they were in 2014. The plan

initiative creates paths to full retirement credit for fossil-fuel-industry workers within five years of retiring. For those who have worked in these industries between one and five years, it would provide a year of guaranteed income, health care, and retirement contributions for every year the employee has worked. For those who have worked in the industry for more than five years, it would cover them with a wage-insurance program for up to five years, making up whatever income difference there might be between their old wages in the fossil-fuel industry and their new ones in non-fossil-fuel sectors. All of this, the measure’s architects stressed, would be funded through the carbon-emissions fee.

This historic initiative has attracted the attention of people across the nation who are anxiously waiting to see



communities about why we need to pass this initiative. Starting right after the primary, the “Yes on 1631” campaign will move into heavy action mode – knocking on doors, making phone calls, and talking to people who are undecided or maybe haven’t even heard much about the initiative. The plan is to make thousands of phone contacts by Labor Day to identify those who are undecided. There is a weekly “101 Canvassing” training which we are all urged to attend. More information will be coming. It will take the work of all of us to win.

The situation is summed up by Steve Garey, our own PSARA worker-poet, who is quoted in an article about 1631 in the current issue of *The Nation*: “This policy is about old people planting shade trees for their grandkids,” Garey says. “This is going to be classic ‘organized people versus organized money.’ It’s not just ‘us and them’ anymore—it’s ‘us and us and us and us and them’ now, and it’s made all the difference in the world.”

*Bobby Righi is PSARA's Membership Co-Vice President and a member of PSARA's Climate and Environmental Justice Committee.*

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***It's not just 'us and them' anymore—it's 'us and us and us and us and them' now, and it's made all the difference in the world.***

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imposes a carbon-emissions fee on big polluters—using the resulting billions of dollars in revenue for a series of investments in clean energy and water. The money would be spent on the economic, environmental, and health care revitalization of communities on the front lines of global warming; on low-income energy-assistance programs; and on both job retraining and wage and benefit protections for workers in fossil-fuel-reliant industries as those industries are phased out over the span of a generation.

With money raised from the \$15 per ton fee on CO2 emissions (starting in 2020 and scaling up thereafter), the

how it does at the polls. Of course, the fossil fuel industry is also paying attention, and the Western States Petroleum Association recently formed the “No on 1631” political action committee with the support of the big companies, like BP, Shell, Chevron, Phillips 66. The PAC has already paid more than \$130,000 in fees to a national consulting firm that helps battle ballot measures and claims to have a 90 percent success rate in defeating measures big business doesn’t like.

But we have hundreds of organizations, like PSARA, who have members who will talk to their friends and family members, their churches, unions, and

# On Orders from Trump, the Social Security Administration Violates Workers' Rights

*A statement from AFGE (American Federation of Government Employees), reprinted from The Stand*

The American Federation of Government Employees is obligated under the law to represent all employees covered by its negotiated contracts, but the Social Security Administration is deliberately and illegally restricting the union's ability to uphold this obligation, AFGE leaders say.

"The agency is attempting to wipe all traces of our union from SSA offices and deny workers their legal rights to representation," AFGE National President J. David Cox Sr. said.

On Monday, July 9, SSA management unilaterally implemented extensive changes to the contract that had previously been negotiated with AFGE Council 220 to execute President Trump's May 25 executive orders, which gut federal employees' workplace rights and protections. The union attempted to negotiate with the agency but SSA managers walked away from the talks after just three days.

"SSA has evicted union representatives from their offices and stripped them of their access to computers, phones, personnel files, and other tools that are vital to effective representation," said Witold Skwierczynski, president of AFGE's National Council of SSA Field Operations Locals (AFGE Council 220).

"Bulletin boards that provide employees with information on their rights and how to contact their union representative were ordered to come down at all SSA offices," Skwierczynski said. "Employees are being denied their right to meet with the union stewards during the workday to address workplace disputes, whistleblower retaliation, discrimination, and other issues."

On December 7, 2017, SSA gave written notice to AFGE that they were terminating the existing Collective Bargaining Agreement. On March 19, 2018, SSA and the union signed a CBA ground rules agreement that would allow them to exchange contract article



proposals on August 9, along with a mutually agreed upon bargaining schedule that would extend over the coming year.

On May 25, President Trump issued 3 executive orders weakening employee unions and eliminating employee civil service protections. On May 30, AFGE filed suit in federal court arguing that the Trump directives violate federal law and the U.S. Constitution. Department of Justice lawyers argued to the court that the EOs constituted only guidance to federal agencies and it was up to each agency on whether they follow the guidance.

"SSA followed the Trump administration's executive order 'guidance' with gusto, joy, and clear purpose," Skwierczynski said.

On June 5, SSA reneged on the ground rules agreement, in the form of a letter to the union, stating that they were unilaterally applying the executive orders to 21 of the 44 existing Contract Articles. This will in turn allow SSA to:

- Fire employees for performance after a 30-day improvement period as opposed to the contractual 150 days;
- Eliminate employees' ability to file grievances on terminations, performance appraisals, or awards;
- Bar union representatives from filing and representing employees in grievances on "official time";

- Cut official time by 88 percent;
- Bar the union from using SSA office space and equipment; and
- Require the union to pay for their own travel and expenses while bargaining and for monthly joint meetings with management.

The union attempted to bargain the changes with SSA from June 27-29, but three days was not enough time to negotiate the extensive changes and contract cuts. No agreement was reached but SSA stated in violation of the law that it would unilaterally implement its proposals on July 9. The union filed an Unfair Labor Practice grievance on June 29 asserting that SSA's unilateral implementation of its proposals is illegal.

"AFGE will continue to fulfill our legal obligation to represent all employees in the federal government – no matter how ruthless the administration is in trying to shut us down," Cox said. For more information, visit [www.afge.org/FightBack](http://www.afge.org/FightBack).

*The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is the largest federal employee union, representing 700,000 workers in the federal government and the government of the District of Columbia.*

*The Stand is the online publication of the Washington State Labor Council.*

# MS-13: Made in America

By Mike Andrew

The notorious MS-13 gang has become Donald Trump's bogeyman, the justification for a cruel and racist immigration policy.

What Trump won't tell you, though, is that MS-13 is as American as apple pie. The "13" in the gang's name refers to 13th Street, also known as Pico Boulevard, in their home town of Los Angeles, just as the "18" in the name of their rivals, Mara18, refers to 18th Street.

Not only was MS-13 born in America, but the rise and expansion of the gang mirrors US foreign policy.

In 1979, a faction of military officers seized power in El Salvador. Their purpose was to crush the revolutionary peasant movement that had begun some years earlier in response to a rigged election.

In spite of his declared commitment to "human rights," US President Jimmy Carter supported the coup because he feared that Soviet agents would use the peasant movement against US interests.

Although they nationalized some private companies and some large landholdings, the military junta running the country was opposed to large-scale land reform, and meant to rule El Salvador in the interests of its wealthy classes.

Soon, civil war broke out. In response, the military launched brutal death squads to assassinate revolutionary leaders. Eventually the death squads – called Sombra Negra, the Black Shadow – progressed to what they called "social cleansing," wholesale murder of everyone they perceived as criminal or indigent.

In October 1988, Amnesty International reported that death squads had abducted, tortured, and killed hundreds of suspected dissidents in the preceding 18 months.

Most of the victims were trade unionists, members of workers' cooperatives, human rights workers, members of the judiciary trying to establish

criminal responsibility for human rights violations, returned refugees and displaced persons, and released political prisoners.

The squads were made up of Armed Forces intelligence officers and members of the security services trained by the US military. They were "chillingly efficient," Amnesty International said.

Victims were sometimes killed in drive-by shootings in broad daylight and in front of eyewitnesses. At other times, victims were kidnapped from their homes or on the streets, their bodies found dumped far from the scene. Others were simply "disappeared."

Victims were "customarily found mutilated, decapitated, dismembered, strangled or showing marks of torture or rape." The death squads' MO was "to operate in secret but to leave mutilated bodies of victims as a means of terrifying the population."

Salvadorians began to flee their country, coming to the US and settling in cities like Los Angeles where there were already existing Spanish-speaking communities.

They still found no peace, because the newcomers were preyed upon by already existing criminal gangs. Some Salvadorian youth soon set up their own gangs for protection.

One of those gangs came to be known as *Mara Salvatrucha*. *Mara* means "gang," and *Salvatrucha* is a slang term referring to members of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, a peasant guerilla group fighting the Salvadorian junta.

Refugees from the other side in El Salvador's civil war also showed up and formed rival gangs. They were followed by Sombra Negra, and many killings by the death squads were wrongly attributed to gang members.

In 1993, Bill Clinton became president. In his 1994 omnibus crime bill, Clinton specifically defined mere membership in a gang as a federal crime. Consequently, deportations dramati-



*Bill Clinton's mass deportations in the mid-90s encouraged MS-13 to expand to El Salvador.*

*(Photo: Getty Images)*

cally increased among Salvadorian immigrants accused of gang associations.

This did not reduce gang violence in the US at all, but it did create an opportunity for MS-13 and similar gangs to colonize El Salvador. They came back to their homeland much like US companies arrived in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries – flush with cash and armed to the teeth.

MS-13 also began to establish international alliances, not with countries, but with drug cartels like the Sinaloa and the Mexican Mafia. The cartels furnish product and capital, and MS-13 provides the muscle to protect the cartels' territories. They are, in short, the Marines of the international drug trade.

El Salvador was easily colonized by drug money because the legal economy was weak, based on sweatshop industries making products for export to the US. The country's number one export is T-shirts, accounting for 16 percent of its international trade, followed by electrical capacitors (6.6 percent), and raw coffee (5.1 percent). Sixty-six percent of El Salvador's legal exports go to the US, and more than 43 percent of its legal imports come from here.

Almost all of El Salvador's illegal drug exports go to satisfy demand in the US.

# Talking to My Daughter About the Economy, or How Capitalism Works – and How It Fails, by Yanis Varoufakis.

A book review by Michael Righi

Do you like your economics straight? Or, filtered through Sophocles, Faust, Frankenstein, and The Matrix? Some markets, according to former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, are “Oedipal,” and capitalists are prone to behaving like Icarus. Varoufakis obviously assumes his young daughter is literate!

Occasionally I have reviewed economics books for the *Advocate*, trying to get the main points across, not really in the expectation that you would read them. But, this one: read it if you can!

It is, first, a history of the development of capitalism from way back to when humans first invented agriculture, and a surplus was created. A ruling wealthier class sprung up, using the surplus to support themselves and develop military power. And, most importantly for Varoufakis, the surplus enabled them to build temples and support priests who, surprisingly enough, preached that the wealthy had a divinely-sanctioned right to rule.

For Varoufakis, today’s religion is Economics. Economists have come up with a basketful of convenient theories that support modern-day capitalists. Here are two: “There is no such thing as unemployment, really, workers just need to lower their wages;” “Forcing countries or people to repay debt, by cutting back on spending, will restore a healthy economy.”

Varoufakis describes many more such self-serving theories, even though it is a short book. One particular section we all need to be aware of is the one on public debt. Varoufakis shows how essential public debt is to the functioning of capitalism, funding infrastructure and bailouts and social welfare (discouraging uprisings). And he shows how public debt also reflects the power relationships of the system, with the wealthy refusing to pay their just share of taxes, and banks lending money (and getting safe interest payments) to make up the public debt gap the rich created by not paying their fair share.



Yanis Varoufakis with his daughter Xenia  
(Photo: The Guardian)

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**An “idiot” (*idiotis* in Greek) means a “fool” today, but originally it meant someone who refused to think of the common good. Idiots are now in power.**

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This is a short and small book, so the history of capitalism jumps to the “enclosures” in pre-industrial Britain, where serfs were driven off the land so that feudal lords could raise sheep and sell wool. Land, labor, and new machines became commodities, sold for money and available for profit-making. Debt (and interest, formerly condemned as “usury”) fueled this process, and, once again, a new Protestant ethic was developed that embraced the individual, the entrepreneur, and interest-bearing loans.

Varoufakis channels and simplifies the ideas of the great economic philosophers, from Marx to Keynes. He brings the ideas up to date. Will machines control us or provide us with respite and leisure? What can we do about the destruction of jobs and livings, and ever more meaningless employment, with a small minority enjoying the profits of technology?

Back to the Greek, once again. An “idiot” (*idiotis* in Greek) means a “fool” today, but originally it meant someone who refused to think of the com-

mon good. Varoufakis shows how the planet’s environmental crises, and, in particular, the argument that markets will solve the problem, are a great example of orchestrated stupidity. Idiots are in power.

Is there a solution? Varoufakis urges democratic control and ownership of our machines, our money, and our planet and resources. He is short on specifics, for sure, but we can fill those in ourselves. We have to get rid of the ideology first, and recognize that’s exactly what most economics is – the science of “markets will make everything all right.”

I hope his daughter, Xenia, enjoys the book. I did.

*Michael Righi is a retired economics professor and a member of PSARA.*

## Bob's World 2

Continued from Page 5

Bob: "I came here to give Toki a break, but I also wanted to thank you and her for everything you've done for me and our family, while I had the chance."

Tom: "So, you think I'm going to kick off soon?"

B: "Well, partly, but I think I may kick off soon too."

T: "How come?"

B: "The doctor said I had COPD."

He looked at me up and down, humphed and said, "You'll live a lot longer than me, believe me."

\* \* \*

The night before I left, Tom wanted me to cook hamburger.

"How about ramen instead?"

"Okay, that sounds good."

And a little later, "Ah, that was the best ramen I've ever had." I had put a little hamburger in it.

"Thanks," I answered feeling a lot better. But the way he was getting around, I didn't think he'd last out the month.

\* \* \*

Tom requested, "Let's sing. Something."

Tom and Toki used to sing together a lot. I remember them singing "Side by Side," "You are my Sunshine," '40s and '50s songs. But Toki doesn't remember what they sang that night other than "Hawai'i Pono'i" and the Punahou alma mater: "O'ahu, a."

Postscript: Toki, who had also spent a lot of her retired life caring for our younger sister Ann, now lives in the Residential Living level of a continuing care facility. (The six levels are: Residential Living, Assisted Living, Memory Support, Health Services, Home Care, Palliative Care / Hospice). Her days as a caregiver are pretty much over, but she still gets to be with Ann's 5-year-old grandson, Ichiro, who she says is a lot of fun.

*Bob Shimbukuro is Associate Editor of The Retiree Advocate and Co-Chair of PSARA's Race/Gender Equity Committee.*

## Off a Cliff: Bering Sea Ice Nearly Gone

By Mike Andrew

"We've fallen off a cliff: very little sea ice remains in the Bering Sea," according to Rick Thoman, an Alaska-based climatologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Thoman said that this year the ice disappeared four weeks earlier than in any other year except last year, when its extent was also well below normal levels.

The ice cap over the Chukchi Sea, just north of the Bering Sea abutting Alaska's northwest coast, is also abnormally depleted. It recently began its melting season earlier than ever measured before.

The ice loss has real consequences for the people in the region, scientists say.

"The low sea ice is already impacting the lives and livelihoods of people in Western Alaska coastal communities by restricting hunting and fishing, which are the mainstays of the economies of these communities," Thoman said in an interview.

"Without the ice, it's very difficult, if not impossible, to put food on the table," added Brian Brettschneider, a climate scientist with the International Arctic Research Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.



Map of polar ice from Inside Climate News

## To Renew or Donate

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# Meetings and Events

**West Seattle Hot Topics for Seniors & Senior Wannabes:** Noon – 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, August 1, Southwest Library, 9010 35th Ave SW, Seattle, (35th & Henderson). Topic: Effective Activism: Being a Better Activist. Brown bag lunch.

**PSARA Climate and Environmental Justice Committee:** 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m., Thursday, August 2, Washington State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. All welcome.

**PSARA Government Relations Committee:** 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m., Thursday, August 2, Washington State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S. All welcome.

**PSARA Fundraising Concert with Peter Costantini and Lou Truskoff:** 2:30 p.m., Sunday, August 5, Bay Vista Tower, 2821 2nd Avenue, Seattle. Cold drinks and snacks provided. Please join us for a rousing afternoon of song.

**PSARA Southend Committee:** 1 p.m., Thursday, August 9, White Center Library, 1409 SW 107th St., Seattle. This month: Mental health issues. All are welcome as we plan PSARA events in South King County.

**PSARA Fundraising Committee:** 10:30 a.m. - Noon, Monday, August 13, Washington State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S. All are welcome.

**PSARA Education Committee:** 2 p.m., Tuesday, August 14, Washington State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. All are welcome.

**PSARA Race/Gender Equity Committee:** 11 a.m.–12:00 p.m., Thursday, August 16, Washington State Labor Council office, 321 16 Avenue S, Seattle. All are welcome.

**PSARA Executive Board Meeting:** 12:30 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, August 16, Washington State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. All are welcome.

