

DSA May Forum:

Fast Food & Beyond: Labor's Fight Against Inequality



WHEN: Thursday, May 14, 7:30 pm

WHERE: 9 Hamilton Place, Boston (Encuentro 5)—across the street from Park St. T stop

SPEAKERS: Carl Nilsson—*Fight For 15*; Gillian Mason—*Jobs with Justice*

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

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

But one group often ignored in these political and policy debates has more of an interest in fighting inequality and more capacity to do so than anyone else: unions and allied movements of low income workers. Our speakers will lead a discussion of some of these efforts, including current attempts of local fast food workers to organize for a living wage against Big Food.

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

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

Democratic Socialists of America P.O. Box 51356 Boston, MA 02205

Phone: 617-782-8787 <http://www.dsaboston.org>

CONGRESS: Just Say No to TPP Fast Track! And Yes to US-Iran Nuclear Agreement!

4/22/15

President Obama is now trying to push through fast track legislation to help pass his Trans-Pacific Partnership, the latest NAFTA-style “free-trade” treaty Congress is expected to vote on this year. But the TPP negotiations themselves have been kept secret from the vast majority of the American people, although enough has leaked out to recognize this new trade deal as pretty much the same old NAFTA/ CAFTA snake oil.

TPP would continue the 30 year neo-liberal project of pressing down wages and outsourcing jobs, while allowing global corporations to legally challenge financial, environmental, labor, food safety and pharmaceutical regulations enacted by governments, even democratically elected ones like our own—even city councils! These disputes could then be taken before unelected panels of international corporate trade lawyers to recoup lost “potential profits”. So TPP seems to be just the latest attempt to transfer power from governments to private capital.

But with mounting opposition from labor, environmentalists, family farmers and locally owned small business, there’s still a chance we can strangle this monster in the crib. Consult the following websites for background information: www.citizenstrade.org/ www.stopfasttrack.org/ www.flushthetpp.org/, then call Senators Markey & Warren and your representative (202-224-3121).

Opponents of President Obama’s breakthrough negotiations with Iran to limit its nuclear program have been urging additional sanctions on that nation ever since the talks began in December, 2013. A bill proposed by Senators Menendez (D-NJ) and Kirk (R-IL) even promised US political, economic and military support to Israel whenever Netanyahu chose to attack Iran (S.1881). But the Iranians have made it clear that passage of any additional sanctions during the negotiations will end the talks then and there—which seems to be what much of the Congressional opposition wants anyway. As do similar hardliners in Tehran, the governments of Israel and Saudi Arabia, and various Sunni extremist groups including ISIS and Al Qaeda.

But repudiating US–Iran negotiations would undermine Iranian moderates while increasing the likelihood of a US–Israeli attack, leading to more regional chaos, terrorism and nuclear proliferation. Thanks to opposition from Obama, S.1881 and similar legislation seems to be on hold, at least for the moment, and Boston DSA has joined with Peace Action and others to make sure it stays that way. The ultimate solution is still an internationally enforced treaty for a nuclear-free Mid-East, but this US–Iran accord is at least a promising beginning.

For more information visit www.niacouncil.org, then call Senators Warren & Markey and your Congressperson (202-224-3121) to tell them: Speak out against new sanctions! Don’t sabotage the US–Iran talks!

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