



the yankee radical

Institute for
Democratic
Socialism

(617) 354-5078 <http://dsaboston.org/> Sept.–Oct. 2002

DSA Fall Conference!

Star Market Struggle • Justice for Janitors • Women and Wal-Mart

Saturday, September 28

2–3:00 pm—DSA election
endorsements

3–5:00 pm—Labor Forum and Rally

6:00 pm—Cookout
(call 617-354-5078)

Cambridge Senior Center
806 Mass Ave., Cambridge
T: Red Line, Central Square
Limited public parking on Green St.

The theme of both national and Boston Democratic Socialists of America this fall is “Confronting the Low Wage Economy.” To commemorate the 40th anniversary of the publication of DSA Founding Chair Michael Harrington’s *The Other America*, national DSA is sponsoring a September 20–22 conference in Washington, D.C. to kick off it’s Low Wage Justice Project (DSAers should have gotten two mailings on this—call 212-727-8610).

On the following weekend, September 28th at 2 pm, Boston DSA is holding a members meeting to consider post-primary election endorsements (see page 2) and, time permitting, possible affiliation with the Commonwealth Coalition (see page 4). After which, in cooperation with the United Food and Commercial Workers

International Union (UFCW), we’ll have an afternoon of education and mobilization for local labor struggles, followed by a solidarity action—and finishing off with Boston’s DSA’s traditional end of summer backyard cookout!

Among the speakers at the 3:00–5:00 pm labor rally will be Brandeis professor Ellen Rosen, author of a recent book on the history of sweatshops, who will analyze working conditions in the global retail trade, especially Wal-Mart. We also hope to hear from Jobs with Justice and the SEIU Janitors, who seem about to go on strike as this is being written. The forum will end with a report from the UFCW on their organizing drive among Star Market (Shaw’s) food workers and how we can help.

A solidarity action will follow the forum. The YR has been advised to be discreet about the details, except to say it will be legal, non-violent, not physically taxing and maybe even fun. If not there’s always the backyard cookout in Cambridge afterwards (call 617-354-5078 for exact address).

This year’s end of Summer DSA members meeting/forum/cookout is a more ambitious effort than we’ve tried in some time. It can only succeed if DSA members and friends turnout. See you September 28!

Bengali Workers Challenge Disney

Friday October 11

Brandeis University, Waltham
Time, Place TBA (Call 781-736-3097,
or eirosen@brandeis.edu)

The Disney conglomerate is into apparel these days. According to the New York-based National Labor Committee, women working at a

Disney contracted factory in Bangladesh have been forced to work over 15 hours a day 7 days a week, denied maternity benefits, beaten and paid just 15 cents for every \$17.99 shirt they sewed. When they publicly denounced these abuses, the Disney Company responded by pulling production from the factory. (Disney CEO Michael Eisner pays himself 133 million a year; it would take a

Bangladesh garment worker 210 years to earn what Eisner does in an hour.)

The workers are asking Disney to stay in Bangladesh while working with its contractor to improve factory conditions. At Brandeis on October 11, two of the workers will be speaking at an event sponsored by the NLC and Boston DSA. Call for time and location.

2 Short Takes

by Mike Pattberg

Grip of Death?

Several members of the Alliance for Democracy are forming a study group to read and debate Marjorie Kelly's *The Divine Right of Capital* and *The Grip of Death* by Michael Rowbotham, described as "a study of modern money, debt slavery and destructive economics." They are looking for a few others to round out the group. Call Britt, (617) 492-1759.

Cornell West

National DSA Honorary Chair Cornell West has left Boston to return to Princeton after some sort of murky dispute with Harvard President Larry Summers. Boston DSAers wish him well as he heads back to New Jersey, and speedy recovery from his recent illness. An insightful and politically astute account of Cornell's troubles at Harvard by

Sam Tanenhaus appears in the June issue of *Vanity Fair*. It is all the more impressive since Tanenhaus, author of sympathetic biographies of Whitaker Chambers and William F. Buckley, is clearly no radical.

This & That

Former Boston DSA Exec Board member Peter Drier's new book, *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the 21st Century*, won the Mike Harrington Book Award from the American Political Science Association. Peter is now Director of the Urban and Environmental Policy Program at Occidental College in Los Angeles . . .

When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, throngs of jubilant Russians tore down the monument to Felix Dzherzhinsky, founder of the secret police under Lenin, from

outside KGB headquarters. (In Eastern Europe it had been statues of Lenin or Stalin). A faint echo of this can be found in a proposal by Dan Burton, the right-wing Republican Congressman from Indiana. He wants to change the official designation of the FBI building in Washington D.C., now named after J. Edgar Hoover, the noted blackmailing-Mob protecting-racist psychopath who ran the FBI as his personal fiefdom for fifty years. Burton is angered at Hoover's apparent complicity in an FBI murder frame-up of an innocent man more than thirty years ago, a revelation coming out of the current John Connolly-Boston FBI case; his bill is co-sponsored by our own Reps. William Delahunt and John Tierney. Go get him! . . .

Get well Liz Keil.

Endorsement Recommendations

The Boston DSA Executive Board voted at its August session to urge the September 28 DSA members meeting to oppose Referendum Questions 1 and 2 on the November ballot, and to recommend endorsement of any of the Democratic candidates for governor except Shannon O'Brien (Of course by September 28 the Democratic nominee will have been chosen).

Question 1, pushed by Barbara Anderson and the Libertarian Party, would abolish the state income tax. The Executive Board believes DSA should oppose it for the same countless reasons we have always opposed Barbara Anderson and the Libertarians. Question 2, a one size fits all initiative sponsored by California millionaire Ron Unz, would

sharply cut bi-lingual education instead of merely reforming it, as the legislature has just done.

On the governors race the E Board supports endorsement of Tom Birmingham, Warren Tollman or Robert Reich, should any of them win the September 17 primary. Tom Birmingham is backed by the AFL-CIO. Warren Tolman, the clean elections candidate, is endorsed by the Sierra Club and Clean Water Action. Robert Reich is supported by many independent liberals, Neighbor to Neighbor and the Boston Herald (but don't hold that against him). None of them are perfect; all would be a progressive contrast to Romney and the Republicans.

Given her positioning as a "New Democrat" fiscal moderate and her closeness to Speaker Finneran, it's hard to feel the same way about Shannon O'Brien. Although many DSAers may vote for her in Novem-

ber, this doesn't necessarily mean expending our meager supply of organizational time, energy and resources.

Of course DSA members are entitled to reject all this free advice, as you have in the past, and come up with your own alternatives. Anyone is welcome to attend, but only members can participate. Endorsement is by a 2/3 vote.

Yankee Radical

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Union Drive at Star Market

By David Dimaria

"We offer our associates (employees) competitive and rewarding health and benefit packages."

—Deborah L. Murphy, *Shaw's Consumer Response Specialist.*

"Shaw's does not engage in any anti-union activity."

—Ashly McGowan of *Bischoff-Solomon, a communications firm retained by Shaw's.*

"The health insurance plan sucks, most of us can only work part-time, even if we want to work full time, and God forbid they think you're involved in union talk."

—A veteran employee of *Star Market as quoted in The Mass Media August 1st 2002.*

In 1999 Shaw's Supermarkets, a subsidiary of the J. Sainsbury Corporation, one of the largest retail food distributors in Great Britain, purchased Star Market. In total these 44 supermarkets spanned across Eastern Massachusetts, from Gloucester to Orleans, and employed about 6000 workers.

On July 27th 2001 the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union began its campaign to assist Star Market workers in their struggle to organize. The company responded with aggressive anti-union activities leading the NLRB (National Labor Relations Board) to issue a formal complaint for violations of workers' rights. The NLRB complaint states that many Star Market managers

called the police to eject union organizers, told store employees not to speak to union representatives, and on more than one occasion "interrogated . . . employees about their union membership, activities, and sympathies." In the same complaint, the NLRB states, "By the conduct described above . . . [Star Market] has been interfering with, restraining, and coercing employees."

About seventy percent of Star Market workers are employed part-time. In some stores this figure is significantly higher. Many part-time employees work 35 hours or more a week and are still refused benefits provided to full-time workers. Those who are employed full-time typically pay about 3 to 4 times more for health insurance than do employees working at union stores. And many seasoned workers make less than 8 dollars an hour.

Despite these conditions, the struggle to organize Star Market has been difficult. Bruce Bureson, a former employee of Shaw's/Star Market describes the realities of working in his store:

"In March of 1997 I was hired at Shaw's Supermarket. The very first thing management did in "orienting" me to the job was to show me an anti-union video. The video depicted Shaw's employees being harassed by union organizers; there were staged interviews with employees who didn't want a union."

Indeed, one of the biggest problems of the Shaw's/Star campaign is trying to speak with workers.

Managers call the police on organizers, photograph them, and employ various other intimidation tactics. However the anti-union ferocity organizers face from management does vary from store to store. Union drives with the least support from the community tend to face the strongest anti-union response. But there are a few stores where management is more hands off, at least in its behavior towards organizing activity outside the store. One way local people can build support for the food workers' struggle is to voice their opinions to businesses operating in their area.

So far the communities of Eastern Massachusetts have helped the UFCW Shaw's/Star organizing campaign tremendously. Hundreds of people have participated in a wide array of actions. The UFCW looks forward to building labor-community solidarity throughout Massachusetts, as it has become an indispensable part of this struggle.

For more information regarding the Shaw's/Star Campaign and how you can participate in your neighborhood please call the United Food and Commercial Workers at 617-557-5488 x7. And a good way to get started is to join with UFCW organizers, other union activists and Boston DSA as we mobilize at the Cambridge Senior Center on September 28!

David Demaria is an organizer for the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union.

Coalition on the Move

By Patricia Schroeder

Over thirteen years ago a number of unions, women's organizations, citizens groups and environmental organizations sat down at the same table to try to elect candidates to the Massachusetts legislature who supported their entire range of issues. They formed the Commonwealth Coalition in 1987 and have since made over 250 endorsements, with over 70% of endorsed candidates winning election. In addition to supporting candidates the Coalition has worked on democracy issues such as clean elections and voter empowerment. But in 2002 the Commonwealth Coalition faced its greatest transition when the leadership of the organization changed: after 13 years Carin Schiewe resigned as Director. Her leadership was celebrated with a fundraising event in June. At the event many speakers recalled the impact Schiewe has had on the progressive movement. Among them were Warren Tolman, candidate for Governor, Representative Jay Kaufman, Kathy Cassavant, Treasurer of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO, and Lucia Mayerson-David of ¿Oiste?. The celebration was also a chance for the Coalition and its members to

welcome Guillermo Quinteros, former director of Chelsea's Commission on Hispanic Affairs, who will be taking the reigns as new Executive Director.

The 2002 election cycle has presented the Coalition with a large number of open seats, including the creation of four new House seats after redistricting. One candidate vying for an open Senate seat is current State Representative Jarrett Barrios (D-Cambridge). Barrios was the first Commonwealth Coalition endorsement of 2002. If elected he would be the first Latino and the first openly gay man elected to the Massachusetts Senate.

The Coalition is also proud to have endorsed Dave Friedman (D-Brighton). Friedman is challenging a conservative, incumbent Democrat (and George Bush supporter!) in the 18th Suffolk district, which is comprised of Brookline and Brighton. Friedman has also received the endorsements of Mass NOW, Mass NARAL, Citizens for Participation in Political Action, Planned Parenthood Action Fund, Boston Teachers Union and Massachusetts Democratic Future, all members of the Commonwealth

Coalition.

We will be hard at work through November for candidates like Friedman and Barrios, trying to increase the progressive base in the State House.

If you would like more information about the Commonwealth Coalition or a complete list of endorsed candidates please contact Patricia Schroeder at (617) 422-0118.

Coalition Endorsed Candidates for the Greater Boston area.

SENATE

Jarrett Barrios (D-Cambridge)
(617) 661-1805

HOUSE

Dave Friedman (D-Brookline)
(617) 254-8683

James Eldridge (D-Acton)
(978) 263-1647

Steve Walsh (D-Lynn)
(781) 599-9535

Rep. Liz Malia
(D-Jamaica Plain) (617) 721-1505

Mark Falzone (D-Saugus)
(781) 231-8041

Patricia Schroeder is Political Director of the Commonwealth Coalition. This article was written before the September 17th primary election.

Women and Wal-Mart

By Ellen Rosen

Barbara is a divorced woman in her mid fifties, and a cashier at Wal-Mart. A high school graduate, she has worked all her adult life—through two marriages, and two children—in a variety of unskilled and low-paid jobs. But Wal-Mart, she says, "is the worst." After three years she earns \$7.34 an hour, gets inadequate medical benefits and has no pension plan. She recently bought a condemned house for

\$100 dollars, and signed it over to her daughter, who now pays the taxes on the property. As a result, Barbara lives there rent-free. On her salary, she says, "I can't afford to pay rent."

Wal-Mart is the largest retailer in the world. With a 23 percent share of the U.S. market, it has 2,744 stores in the U.S. alone, and almost 4,000 worldwide. It employs more workers than any other U.S. com-

pany and more than 1.2 million globally. The company has grown dramatically in the last two decades. Earning \$1 billion in sales in 1979, today it earns as much in a single day.

Today about 20 percent of all employed women in the U.S. labor force—one out of every five—work in the retail industry. Sixty-four percent of non-supervisory workers

Continued on next page

Marching Along with YDS

By James Russell and Heather Caunt

DSA's local youth section, Boston Young Democratic Socialists (YDS), has been showing signs of life lately. In early May, YDS participated in the Wake Up the Earth Festival and the Festival del Pueblo. The latter was a five day celebration of resistance to capitalism from an anti-authoritarian perspective, one of many commemorations of May Day in Boston.

While generally positive, these events also embodied the problems and contradictions that hobble our movement. The Convergence of Struggles March, for example, inspired Roxbury office workers to raise their fists in support. But many local citizens were left unaware of the march's intent, or even unintentionally intimidated by a masked, unknown element in their neighborhood. The march had an air of vanguardism, of outsiders coming into a community uninvited to "liberate" it, instead of

coalitioning with existing networks within the neighborhood.

But more than marches, Wake Up the Earth and Festival del Pueblo were celebrations of a renewed culture of resistance, with music, art, games and film in thirty-four languages, as one speaker noted. For a brief moment they showed that the free and equal society we work for can exist, and sometimes, already does.

In June Boston YDS participated in a protest against World Bank president James Wolfensohn at MIT's commencement ceremony. The protest was particularly relevant and timely, as the city of Cambridge had just passed a boycott of World Bank bonds. The protestors used megaphones and signs to get the message to the graduating seniors that they needed to be critical of what Wolfensohn said in his speech. The most popular of the chants included "More World, Less

Bank!", and its Spanish parallel "Mundo Si, Banco No!" Cambridge Police outnumbered the protestors five to one and blockaded them off so that they had to stay on the opposite side of the wide Memorial Drive. But students, faculty, and parents still got the group's message through the use of the "people's public address system," which consisted of voices shouting in unison.

Boston YDS also attended the Freedom Rally for the legalization of marijuana on September 14th, where we stressed the relationship between the war on drugs and the racist prison industrial system. We are also actively campaigning against Massachusetts ballot initiative number two, an initiative funded by wealthy California businessman Ron Unz, which would eliminate bilingual education and make it possible to sue teachers for using students' native language in the classroom.

James Russell and Heather Caunt are active with Young Democratic Socialists

Wal-Mart, Continued from p. 4

in retail are women. No other occupational category employs such a large percentage.

At home and abroad Wal-Mart's goal is to reduce operating costs—large parts of which are in wages and salaries. Not only does Wal-Mart contract for sweated labor in its export processing zones, but at home Wal-Mart cuts costs by spending 25 percent less on labor than its leading competitors. (According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of September 2000, 69 percent of all women employed in U.S. retail sales earned less than \$7.91 an hour.)

Low wages for workers contribute to Wal-Mart's low prices. Such

prices may only be possible because the company is breaking the law. In fact Wal-Mart has been sued in several states for wage abuse—for violating the Fair Labor Standards Act. In its contracting shops in China, Wal-Mart violates labor laws with impunity, paying less than subsistence wages. In the U.S. men hold 90 percent of its store manager positions, although 72 percent of the hourly sales force is female. Wal-Mart has a long history of sex discrimination suits against it and is now being sued by 46,000 women workers in its California stores. This could be the largest sex discrimination suit the nation has ever seen.

Wal-Mart also saves money at home by denying workers legally

required breaks and lunch hours. As one worker said, "Cashiers don't get the breaks required by law and sometimes get no lunch at all. We are made to work over and not paid overtime." Adds another, "Management is constantly breathing down our necks with subtle threats of being written up or just plain ole fired if we don't meet their demands."

Wal-Mart is known as a successful and well-run company. But it is breaking the law—just like Enron and Worldcom. The only difference is the kind of laws it breaks.

Brandeis Professor Ellen Rosen is researching working conditions in the retail trade (eirosen@brandeis.edu).

Cambridge Beats The Bank

By Basav Sen

On April 29, the World Bank Bond Boycott passed the Cambridge City Council by a unanimous vote. This represents a huge victory for the movement for global economic justice in the Boston area. It is the culmination of more than a year of sustained coalition-building and grassroots outreach.

What is the World Bank Bond Boycott? It is a growing worldwide campaign, making use of a little-known fact about how the World Bank is funded. The Bank raises 80% of its funds by selling bonds in the bond market. Typically institutional investors such as city governments, churches, labor unions, and universities invest in these bonds. Note that these are the very institutions which are susceptible to public pressure, since they are more accountable than private investors. This represents an opportunity for those of us who are struggling for a just global economy—we can pressure these institutional investors to boycott the purchase of World Bank bonds until the Bank makes fundamental reversals in its policies.

The boycott campaign is underway in a number of countries. In the U.S., more than 40 institutional investors have joined: seven cities (including Cambridge), and several labor unions, churches, socially responsible investment houses, and foundations. The campaign in Cambridge started a little more than a year ago, on the initiative of BankBusters, an anti-corporate globalization group which focuses on the world bank and IMF. However, the success of the campaign was truly a coalition effort.

Of the 24 endorsing organizations (excluding BankBusters), we can count three labor organizations, two immigrant organizations, one church and one other faith-based social justice group, one political party, two women's organizations, two local businesses (a grocery store and an art gallery), two peace/international solidarity groups, one housing/tenants' rights organization, and one neighborhood group.

We did not expect these organizations to devote a significant share of their time to the boycott; rather, we asked them for specific contributions that they were in a position to make. We also collected more than 900 individual signatures on our petition.

When the resolution came up for a hearing in the City Council chamber, many of the endorsing groups sent representatives to testify in support. Strong statements from Carpenters Local 40, Jobs with Justice, Campaign on Contingent Work, National Lawyers Guild and other groups in the coalition, as well as by a few individual Cambridge residents, along with letters in support of the campaign from Alderman Don Richards of Milwaukee to all the Cambridge city councilors, played a big role in convincing the City Council to support the resolution.

The resolution passed by the city went beyond what we had asked them to pass; it called on the City Manager to investigate other ways for the city to oppose the World Bank, and it called on the Governor and the State Legislature to legislate

the boycott at the State level. The news of our success brought congratulatory messages from all over the country, and even from Haiti and South Africa.

Now, we are taking the campaign to Somerville.

Ideas for the Somerville campaign? Please contact us, or come to our meetings. Specifically, if you know of Somerville-based organizations who are likely to endorse the campaign, we would like your help in contacting them. Also, we need help with a visible public presence in Davis Square, Union Square, and other places in Somerville, to distribute literature and collect signatures on our petition.

To get involved with BankBusters, come to our meetings, 6 pm every Thursday, in the community room of the Central Square Harvest co-op, 581 Mass. Ave., Cambridge. Or contact us, as follows:

By phone 617-755-0795. By e-mail: nomfwb@yahoo.com. On the web: www.bankbusters.org.

The Case Against the IMF and World Bank (in a nutshell)

• *The IMF and World Bank are undemocratic institutions*—wealthy countries dominate the decision making process. The six countries of U.S., Canada, U.K., France, Germany and Japan control about 50% of the decision-making power in the IMF, and the U.S., with 18% of the vote, has effective veto power.

• *The IMF and World Bank are secretive institutions.* The contents of the IMF negotiations with borrower countries are not made available to the public, let alone being subject to public input.

• *The IMF and World Bank drain resources from poor countries.* According to *Fifty Years is Enough*, sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa) paid 2.5 billion more in debt servicing to the IMF and World Bank than it got in new long-term loans and credits from these institutions in 1996.

• *The IMF and World Bank promote corporate welfare.* IMF “rescue packages” bail out irresponsible private sector lenders, and socialize the debt of irresponsible private sector borrowers, as happened in the Asian economic crisis of 1997-1998. Working people in the borrowing countries are stuck with

repaying debts incurred by irresponsible speculative investors.

• *The IMF and World Bank hurt workers.* An IMF document openly states that the minimum wage established in Haiti in 1995 “falls well short of the real and U.S. dollar equivalent minimum wage of ten years ago, and should not affect the good prospects for the export sector.” Meanwhile, the Bank has blocked increasing the minimum wage to even 75 cents an hour, not even allowing it to keep pace with inflation; at the same time it opposes any subsidies by the Haitian government to the basic needs of life like food.

• *The IMF and World Bank hurt women.* According to the Women’s Environmental and Development Organization (WEDO), women’s unemployment exceeds 70% in Russia, Armenia, Bulgaria and Croatia, and exceeds 80% in the Ukraine, since the implementation of IMF-imposed Structural Adjustment Programs in these countries.

• *The IMF and World Bank hurt the environment.* In Chad and Cameroon, the Bank has approved a loan that would allow Exxon to build a 600-mile long oil pipeline

which will destroy hundreds of miles of rainforest and uproot tribal villages, while putting money in the pocket of corrupt military governments.

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—*BankBusters*

Grassroots Activism Wins Capital Gains Tax

By Harris Gruman

Massachusetts has seen a year of historic tax reform, the first major blow against the Republican crusade to cut taxes for the rich.

The work of thousands of grassroots community and labor volunteers culminated in victory on May 2nd with the State House of Representatives’ historic passage of a fair tax measure—eliminating the Capital Gains Tax Loophole as part of a \$1.2 billion tax package. 40% of these new tax dollars will be paid

by the richest 1% of income earners in the state, making it probably the most progressive tax increase passed in the United States since the Second World War!

This campaign has been coordinated by “Stop the Cuts!”—a coalition led by Neighbor to Neighbor, TEAM, AFSCME, SEIU, the AFL-CIO, Massachusetts Senior Action Council, and several other public sector unions and community groups. Formed in December, the

coalition has focused on stopping cuts to education, housing, and other human service programs by demanding at least \$1 billion in new taxes, with a strong emphasis on progressive sources of revenue like closing the capital gains loophole and freezing the income tax rollback.

In January the coalition organized meetings between legislators

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Gentrification and Its Discontents

The City in Mind

James Howard Kunstler

The Free Press, a division of Simon and Schuster, Inc. New York 2001

Reviewed by Shirley Kressel

James Howard Kunstler has provided, in his series of urban design books, excellent diagnoses of America's love-hate (mostly hate) relationship with cities. Now *The City in Mind* brings us an absorbing history of eight cities around the world. As always, his style is brutally honest, colorful, and insightful, and his description of the problem is so good that his conclusions are irresistible. Yet his prescription for the cure of urban malaise can be jarringly disappointing.

In the *Geography Of Nowhere*, he captures well the dumbing down of American architecture and planning; but in his follow-up book, *Home From Nowhere*, he applauds as the solution the New Urbanism, which is little more than a suburban face-lift, a sort of "community lite"

for suburbanites who can afford to live in "village" theme parks. One would expect this connoisseur of the phony and the faux facade to realize that zoning, per se, is neither the problem nor the solution, but merely a symptom of underlying values antithetical to genuine communal life. The problems in planning that he has identified are not an oversight or an error; they are the manifestation of a socio-economic strategy that is working very successfully for its relatively powerful beneficiaries—and that is why it is so widespread and resistant to change. The chapter on Boston in this book has a similar fundamental flaw.

Kunstler gives a brief history of the city's formative years and then its urban renewal experience, pointing out Boston's strong surviving residential base. He stumbles a bit in describing the open space designation for some of the land that will become available when the so-called Big Dig buries the Central Artery highway. He notes correctly that

public disillusionment with contemporary design has led to a reflexive popular preference for "open space"—i.e., unbuilt space, i.e., nothing at all—over any new development projects, which for the most part have indeed shown themselves to be worse than what preceded them, and often worse than nothing at all. However, in the Artery case, open space was legally mandated as an environmental mitigation to reduce the amount of traffic-generating development possible in this corridor, as a counterbalance to the additional traffic capacity that the new underground highway will create.

Of course, leaving precious urban space blank simply to reduce traffic is a misguided strategy; the right approach is to create dense, mixed-use transit-oriented development, with no parking—real urbanism, very different from New Urbanism. But Kunstler is apparently unaware of the even greater threat

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Cap Gains Tax, Continued from p. 7

and delegations of their constituents in 45 strategically chosen districts. These were followed in March and April by large public forums in Boston, Worcester, Fitchburg and New Bedford, where legislators heard testimony from constituents affected by the cuts about the need for increased capital gains and income taxes. At key phases in the campaign, volunteers went door-to-door and worked phone banks in the districts of targeted legislators to generate nearly 5000 constituent phone calls on closing the capital gains loophole.

The turning point in the campaign came at the series of Revenue Enhancement Hearings that House Leadership held in Lowell, Dartmouth, and Boston to gather constituent input on tax increases. Hundreds of community and labor

activists packed these hearings, consistently demanding that the Legislature tax capital gains the same as wages. Andi Mullin, Legislative Director of AFSCME Council 93, recalled that "when the first grassroots testifier told the Committee to tax capital gains the same as wages, the audience burst into enthusiastic applause. I saw the Committee recoil in surprise. By the Boston hearing, the Committee members were raising the issue themselves."

In 1994, the long-term capital gains tax rate was reduced to zero, exempting most profits on investments from any state tax at all. The state lost 3.3 billion dollars in revenue from this loophole, more than the entire current budget deficit. Reinstating the capital gains tax at the rate of other income will help restore budget cuts in the fairest and simplest way possible.

While the coalition expected to win the measure in the Senate, the bigger hurdle of passing it in the House was accomplished with a four-fifths majority, more than adequate to override the expected gubernatorial veto.

In addition to the progressivism and scale of the tax package, the Legislature, at the urging of TEAM and the Stop the Cuts coalition, decoupled the Massachusetts estate tax and corporate tax scale from the Federal. As a result, the state will save hundreds of millions in taxes that would have been lost due to the Bush tax cuts. This decoupling makes the overall tax reform even more progressive. We should all savor this remarkable victory!

Former Boston DSA Chair Harris Gruman is Director of Massachusetts Neighbor to Neighbor. (harris@n2nma.org)

looming over the space: its capture by the corporate abutting property owners for conversion to an open-air theme park and, in the longer term, a tax-free development land bank—a privatization move that would proceed largely at public expense, and part of the biggest land grab since the heyday of urban renewal.

An even greater misinterpretation of recent history appears in his description of the Seaport redevelopment plan. He credits the Boston Redevelopment Authority with a vision of neighborhood-building, a desire to do the "kind of true Urban renewal that never actually happened in the 60's and 70's because of the intrusions of abstract modernist methods." And he blames local politicians for obstructing the development of housing, fearing a change in their political base.

While it is true that local pols objected, for this reason, to the quantities of housing proposed in the BRA's plans, they needn't have feared. The BRA's vision of urban renewal includes even less housing than theirs and favors—with no interference from abstract modernists—an anywhere-escape of the huge office buildings, hotels, and retro baseball stadiums so profitable to the development interests it serves. The BRA, to the extent it has a will independent of the mayor's, also promoted, against all negative evidence on economic viability, the gigantic convention center that Kunstler describes with justified contempt, a project pushed by the tourism industry and by a mayor obsessed with the pursuit of the "world-class city," a relic of Boston's post-war inferiority complex. Kunstler actually seems to believe that the BRA intended, as indicated on the glossy planning reports, for "buildings to be based on existing Boston typologies with a 150-ft. height restriction, and sloped back from the water." First, Boston's historic scale is much smaller than this; also, the BRA has no qualms about tall towers at the water's edge.

But far more troubling than these factual errors is his discussion of City re-

talization, in particular, his view of gentrification. To "drive the poor from their homes so the better-off could live in them" is apparently the only logical way to "revive devalued City property." He runs through a tortured argument about the character and behavior of the "poorer classes," wherein he seems to say that they were better off in the good old days working as servants for their paternalistic betters—sort of the 20th-century version of the happy slaves—and that even the desperately poor urban slum dwellers could be grateful for public schools and other services that would help them get up by their bootstraps. He concludes that gentrification is a new problem invented by those who "perceive the condition of poverty as being static and intractable." He states: "The battle against gentrification ends up being a quixotic effort to keep the poor literally in their physical place."

Yet despite his acknowledgment that Boston, like most American cities, has "missed two or three generations of residential building, necessitating an artificial commodity called 'affordable housing,'" he shows little sympathy for the rights of the poor to have a physical place. Perhaps, he thinks, they can be "relegated" to suburbs, "the slums of the future," trading places, perforce, with wealthy suburbanites rediscovering the joys of the city (and, he doesn't mention, the astounding returns on investment in its cheapened real estate). "Not all the neighborhoods of Boston will regenerate at the same time . . . Some will remain less desirable and be places that the poor will live. The question remains whether these poor will aspire to become something other than poor, and whether our culture will support those aspirations."

Having thus fairly well blamed the poor for their poverty, and examined not at all the growing wealth gap and the well-documented declining economic mobility that have characterized "our culture"—late 20th century, post-communism American capitalism—he wraps up his argument that gentrification is the engine of renewal—that re-

talization consists of upgrading of property and not necessarily of people. "The anti-gentrification forces overlook the salient characteristic of cities: that they are dynamic organisms continually undergoing cycles of change, of decay and renewal. To demand an end to these processes would result in the death of the City. The anti-gentrification movement, therefore, is against the well-being and the future of the City."

He goes on to celebrate the new urban renewal playing out in Boston and Cambridge—slums, rundown neighborhoods, now "vibrant" with half-million-dollar houses, bistros, cafes, etc. There is no recognition of the social history of urban renewal: how the slums (working class neighborhoods) and their dwellers (working families, many of them blacks imported to depress white wages in the soon to be moribund factories) got that way, or where they've been packed off to when they can't afford to stay. Or how displacement by gentrification was (and is) the deliberate strategy of urban renewal agencies like the BRA, to "bring back the middle class" and increase property values and tax bases by catering to suburbanites, as visitors, shoppers, and "urban pioneers" settling neighborhoods where mortgage and rehab loans were redlined away from poor, usually black inhabitants. There is no comment about the dangers in the decline of economic diversity in neighborhood after upscaled, homogenized, yuppified/empty-nestered neighborhood; about the same shattering of communities by neutron-bomb urban renewal (eliminate the people, leave the buildings standing) as happened during the earlier demolition derby urban renewal. Or the decline of civic participation by a new class of wealthier residents who don't need to hold officials accountable for public services, since they can buy them privately. And there is no acknowledgement that Boston remains, even as its population has become majority non-white, one of the most race- (and therefore class-) segregated cities in the country.

It's an easy mistake to make for the average observer—obviously, well-kept tree-lined streets, well-maintained homes, nice shops and cafes, safety and comfort look like a step in the right direction. Obviously, vibrant is better than rundown. It seems ungrateful to question this urban renaissance in terms of

overall social well-being. But Kunstler is not the average observer. It is disappointing once again to see him find solutions in physical form and images, and to ignore the values, the much more complicated dynamics of race and class, that shape Boston today, just as they have historically. He seems content

for only part of the populace—the deserving part—to live in the kind of well-designed, urbane world he teaches us so well to value.

Shirley Kressel is co-founder of the Alliance for Boston Neighborhoods (Shirley.kressel@verizon.net).

DSA Awards Night

Last June 13 Boston DSA's 25th annual Debs–Thomas–Bernstein Awards were presented to State Representatives Pat Jehlen and Anne Paulsen, Co-Chairs of the Progressive Legislators Group. Both honorees gave humorous accounts of life at the Statehouse, reflecting on the many good causes they had fought for and sometimes won. Pat Jehlen remembered her family voting for Norman Thomas, as she accepted the award named after him. Anne Paulsen joked with Jim St. George about her leadership of the “Bicycle Caucus”; she also reported that she had just come across some compelling anti-war (WWI) speeches of Gene Debs in the Statehouse archives, of all places.

Since this was the 25th anniversary of these awards, Ellen Feingold, the earliest known recipient (1979), was

asked to sketch in some of the past. Describing herself as a product of two traditions, “Jewish atheism” and democratic socialism, Ellen reminisced about being recruited into the civil rights movement by Julie Bernstein after WWII, and how this evolved into lifelong work on housing.

Thanks to everyone who helped make this evening a success, including Barbara Ackermann of MASS-CARE, Jim St. George of TEAM, and longtime DSAers Fran and Jake Schlitt for their eloquent introductions; Rep. Frank Smizik, pinch-hitting for wife Julie as M.C.; Marcia Peters and David Karaus, who again lent us their beautiful Jamaica Plain home; and Congressmen Mike Capuano and Jim McGovern, Senator John Kerry, and last year's awardee Dessima Williams, who sent greetings.

2002 Debs–Thomas–Bernstein Awards

June 13, 2002

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