



## I. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: JACOB JUDD

**A. NEW MEETING PLACE:** Before introducing our speaker, Dr. Barbara Bowen, President of the PSC, the Chairman welcomed the well-attended meeting of the Retirees Chapter to the PSC's new Union Hall at 61 Broadway, 16<sup>th</sup> floor. In spacious and well lit surroundings, it will provide us with a regular place for our annual meetings. Since these are new facilities, it is incumbent upon us to maintain it in pristine conditions. He urges the members to remember to place paper goods, or any waste items, in the proper receptacles.

The Chairman wishes to thank Jim Perlstein for providing the following summary of President Bowen's remarks.

## **B. "THE STATE OF THE UNION":**

Addressing the first Retiree Chapter meeting of the 2006-07 year, PSC President Barbara Bowen welcomed the members to the new union headquarters at 61 Broadway. She spoke of the exciting possibilities for the space, on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> floors, which includes a union hall as well as offices for the staff and a home for the PSC Welfare Fund. The PSC now has more open, naturally lit square feet for less money than it had at its former office in midtown. She expressed the hope that members would feel a sense of ownership and would use the new space extensively.

## **Retirees Thanked**

President Bowen thanked the retirees for their stalwart support in the recently-concluded contract fight, for their lobbying efforts in Albany and at City Hall, and for their success in rallying support for public higher education and for CUNY in particular.

With regard to the contract settlement, Bowen pointed to the lump-sum payment that the union negotiated, which restored the deficit in the Welfare Fund, and the 20% per year enhancement to the Fund as particularly satisfying aspects of the final agreement. She added that enhancing the dental plan would now be a first order of business for the Welfare Fund. "We're outliving our teeth", she remarked, acknowledging members' concerns about dental benefits. She also reminded retirees that the PSC would be making a strong recommendation to the Board of the Welfare Fund to make the retiree

representative on the Board a full voting member for the first time.

Turning to the broader question of the union's prospects in the current political moment, President Bowen observed that workers' rights, once taken for granted, faced attack across the board. As an example, she asked whether it was really coincidental that at precisely the time the Mayor called for the scaling back and further tiering of city pensions, the *Times* ran a series on public pensions as a threat to fiscal stability.

### **Bargaining Coalition**

But, Bowen insisted, there are ways for organized labor and the PSC to respond. Some twenty-odd members of the Municipal Labor Committee, the PSC among them, have formed a coalition to defeat the Mayor's practice of "pattern bargaining". In pattern bargaining, the City sits down and reaches an agreement with a union, preferably a large one, most in need of a quick settlement. The City then declares that agreement "the pattern" and pressures other municipal unions to conform. This unprecedented effort of municipal unions to bargain in concert has already resulted, Bowen asserted, in significantly improving the package offered to DC 37, the largest municipal union, itself outside the coalition. The City clearly sees coalition bargaining as a powerful threat. And given the unions' past history of factionalism and penchant to "go-it-alone" this new effort at coalition holds the promise of better and quicker settlements for all concerned.

Closer to home, President Bowen explained that the PSC is engaged in a union-wide "Listening Campaign" in

order to get a more precise handle on member concerns and draw on member ideas as to how to move forward. The listening campaign is seen by the leadership as a critical part of the PSC's strategic planning, in the union's effort to chart its future direction and to most efficiently use its resources.

## **II. ALLIANCE FOR RETIRED AMERICANS CONVENTION: WASHINGTON, D.C., SEPTEMBER 5-8, 2006**

**Francine Brewer**, a member of the Executive Committee of the Retirees Chapter, attended the Convention and submitted the following Report. Francine will expand on the work of the ARA in a future article which will appear in the *Clarion*.



**Background:** The Alliance for Retired Americans (ARA) was started in January 2001 by a national coalition of AFL-CIO affiliated unions and community-based organizations. PSC retirees belong to the ARA because the AFT pays dues for each of its retirees to the ARA. Our retirees are also members of the New York State ARA (NYSARA) and the New York City ARA (NYCARA). ARA has 3.6 million members. There are 1200 local chapters in 27 states. Five states have their own Executive Directors including New York (Michael Burgess, NYSARA). Some 25,000 people receive the Friday Alert e-newsletter.

Purpose of the Convention: The ARA convention had three purposes: (1) to educate and mobilize delegates about the problems retirees face in the political/electoral sphere (e.g. continuing efforts to privatize Social Security, Medicare Part D, pensions etc.); (2) to elect ARA officers; and (3), to involve more community groups in the ARA. The first purpose was fulfilled in various ways (see below). George Kourpias and Reuben Burks were reelected as President and Secretary-Treasurer to satisfy the second purpose, and 5 new community-based Board Members were elected to partially fulfill the third purpose. (Delegates were also involved in break-out sessions to plan how to involve more community groups).

### **Educating and Mobilizing Delegates**

Varied activities took place to educate and mobilize delegates.

**1. Speakers:** A wide range of excellent speakers addressed the General Sessions and responded to vigorous questioning by delegates. The speakers included Congress members John Dingell (D. MI) and Pete Stark (D. CA), Edward McElroy (AFT President), Ed Coyle (ARA Executive Director), Phyllis Borzi (pension expert), Ron Pollack (Families U.S.A.), Jeff Lewis (Heinz Family Philanthropies), Mark Shields, columnist, and others. We also heard assessments of the prospects of Democratic candidates for governors, and for the Senate and the House of Representatives made by organizations charged with electing such candidates in many races around the country.

**2. Visits to Capitol Hill:** Delegates attended a Rally at the Capitol to hear

Sen. Harry Reid, Rep. Nancy Pelosi, Sen. Menendez and others take the “Golden Pledge” to oppose privatization of Social Security and express their support for the program.

A large delegation from New York went to see Sen. Schumer to discuss his position on key issues. Two staff members told us that he opposes the privatization of Social Security, supports drug reimportation and favors a Medicare-run drug program. Although he favors Universal Health Care, he is not doing anything to further the adoption of such a program. His main effort in this area is to try to offer small businesses tax credits so they can purchase health insurance for their employees.

Sen. Clinton did not respond to requests to meet with her or a member of her staff.

I joined others from my Congressional district and met with a senior aide to Congressman Rangel. He supports ARA’s positions on all issues of concern to retirees.

**3. Debated and Passed Resolutions:** Many resolutions were discussed, some were amended and some were referred back to the ARA for further deliberation. Resolutions on Medicare, Medicare Part D, Pension and Retirement Savings, Retiree Health Care, Social Security and Universal Health Care (among others) were adopted.

**4. President Kourpias** asked ARA members to volunteer to live in key Congressional districts during the last 4 to 6 weeks of the electoral campaign. Expenses would be paid by ARA.

Contact information was given out. The ARA will concentrate its efforts in Ohio, Florida, Pennsylvania and Minnesota. Organizers have been sent to those four states.

**5.** I want to thank Retirees Chapter Chair, Jack Judd, and the PSC for sponsoring me as a delegate to the convention. I was able to identify our union publicly on many occasions when I spoke at the General Sessions, especially regarding universal health care. My comments were well received and, hopefully, served to educate delegates about UHC.

### III. RETIREE CHAPTER CALENDAR OF EVENTS: NOVEMBER, 2006—JUNE, 2007



**November 6:** Larry Morgan and Estelle Giammusso - Welfare Fund Programs

**December 4:** Frank Stella (AFT) - Analyzing the Election Results

**January 8:** Luncheon at John Jay College - Speaker: Anthony Wildman (NYSUT)/ Academic Bill of Rights

**February 5:** Tami Gold (Hunter College) - Documentary Film: Oaxaca, Mexico

**March 5:** Clarissa Weiss (PSC) - Your Pensions

**April 9:** Francine Brewer (Retiree) - Prospects For Health Care Reform

**May 7:** John Pittman - Race and Class at CUNY

**June 11:** Luncheon at John Jay College

### IV. INFORMATION FOR NEW RETIREES:

A number of new retirees have asked if a pamphlet could be made available to new retirees that would answer some basic questions regarding Welfare Fund benefits, pension payments, spousal coverage, etc. The need for such a brochure or pamphlet may have become more necessary with the absence of the annual pre-retirement session which was not held last year. A pre-retirement conference will be scheduled in the springtime. To provide aid to those already retired, a committee has been created under the direction of Clarissa Gilbert Weiss, PSC Director of Pension and Welfare Benefits, to prepare such a document. We will alert you as to when it will be made available, and in what form it will take.

### V. A HOME SAFETY MESSAGE:

The following important message was submitted by Ezra Seltzer, a member of the Executive Committee of the Retirees Chapter. The chairman wishes to add that he well remembers attending joint funerals for the parents of a close friend, two wonderful people who were victims



of this silent killer. It is well worth taking heed.

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is an acutely toxic gas made more hazardous because it is colorless, odorless and tasteless. There are no warning properties, and unanticipated overexposure to this highly dangerous gas readily occurs. According to the U.S. Products Safety Commission, this poisonous gas kills nearly three hundred people in their homes each year.

Carbon monoxide is produced by fuel-burning appliances and equipment in our homes. If you have heating, cooking or power equipment that uses fuel such as oil, natural gas, coal, wood, propane, gasoline, etc., then your house is at risk for potential carbon monoxide poisoning. Homes with attached garages are also at risk because vehicles left running in the garage can cause carbon monoxide to seep into the house.

Carbon monoxide is a chemical asphyxiant that exerts its effects by combining preferentially with hemoglobin, the oxygen-transport pigment in the blood, thereby excluding oxygen. Toxic effects are evident within minutes.

Symptoms of exposure to CO at 500 to 1000 parts per million (ppm) include headache, palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, weakness, confusion and nausea. Be careful-early symptoms of CO poisoning can be similar to those of the flu. Loss of consciousness and death may result from exposure to concentrations of 4000 ppm and higher. High concentrations may be rapidly fatal without producing significant warning symptoms.

Exposure to this gas may aggravate heart and artery disease and may cause chest pains in individuals with preexisting heart disease. Pregnant women are more susceptible to the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning.

In the event of a release of carbon monoxide, evacuate the area immediately. Remove exposed individuals to an uncontaminated area and seek immediate emergency help-usually by your local fire department or 911. Keep victims warm, quiet and at rest, and provide assisted respiration if breathing has stopped.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can be prevented by proper care and use of household equipment. Smoke alarms and CO alarms have different functions. **YOU NEED BOTH TYPES.**

Combination CO and smoke alarms are available.

#### **VI. A SPELLING CORRECTION:**

The last issue of the Newsletter carried an obituary notice for Alphonso Pinkney, in which were included some suggested donation sites. Among them was Meharry Medical College. Please note the corrected spelling of Meharry Medical College.

## VII. THE KAPLAN REPORT

Attached in this Newsletter is Chairman Emeritus Larry Kaplan's Report on Global Warming. It is very timely.

### **GLOBAL WARMING: A TICKING TIME BOMB**

According to Former Vice-President, Al Gore, "Humanity is sitting right on a ticking time bomb. If the vast majority of the world's scientists are right, we have just ten years to avert a major catastrophe that could send our entire planet into a tail-spin of epic destruction involving extreme weather, floods, droughts, epidemics and killer heat waves beyond anything we have ever experienced."

Some of these disasters have already occurred and can be attributed to what we call Global Warming.

**What is Global Warming?** A layer of atmosphere around the earth is a protective cover which enables a free flow of thermal radiation between the sun and the earth, maintaining the earth's temperature at a stable level. However, the combustion of oil/gasoline, coal and natural gas by the earth's population creates high levels of carbon dioxide and other pollutants. Known as "greenhouse gases," this air pollution gets trapped in the earth's protective cover which prevents the free flow of thermal radiation.

The interruption of the natural process between sun and earth has had dire effects: the earth's surface, atmosphere and seas are warming; ocean currents are slowing; the polar ice caps are melting at a fast rate; spring's coming

ever sooner; rainfall patterns are changing; and the ability of the earth to self-regulate its temperature is disappearing. This process of change is called "Global Warming," and, if not stopped, will ultimately destroy the Earth as home for human beings.

**The Kyoto Protocol:** The nations of the world were invited to meet in Kyoto, Japan, in December 1997 to solve the problem of Global Warming. A treaty was completed in July 2001 which seeks to reduce emissions of heat-trapping gases. The goal is to bring gas emissions down 5.2 percent below their level in 1990. The treaty set a target date of 2012. So far, 156 nations have adopted the treaty, but not the United States.

### **What should the government do?**

The problem cannot be ignored. It's imperative that we face the scientific facts and take preventive action. The steps that should be taken include the following:

#### ***1. Halt greenhouse gas emissions.***

The President and the Congress should take a leadership role in approving legislation to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide, caused by combustion of fossil fuels, coal-burning electric power plants should be required to meet the legal restrictions of the Clean Air Act.

#### ***2. Tax windfall profits of the large oil companies.***

Since George Bush became President in 2001, the top five oil companies in the U.S. have made record profits of \$342 billion with Exxon/Mobil leading the way with profits of \$118 billion. A windfall profits tax

should be recommended and approved by Congress.

**3. Eliminate subsidies for large oil and gas companies.** The Energy Act of 2005 offers a \$2 billion tax subsidy to oil and gas companies which do not require Federal financial support at this time. This subsidy should be rescinded.

**4. Provide funds for research and investment.** Government revenues should be used to fund research in alternative, renewable energy fuels, such as ethanol, biodiesel fuel, hydrogen fuel, solar energy and many others that show promise. In addition, investments should be made to subsidize the expansion of mass transit.

#### **What should the American automotive industry do?**

**1. Raise fuel efficiency of cars:** The American automobile industry has fallen behind. Japanese automakers now lead American automakers in sales. American carmakers should design an auto engine which can offer the efficiency of 40 miles per gallon. Such an achievement would immediately eliminate the problem of U.S. dependence on Mideast oil.

**2. Undertake a massive research program:** The auto industry should undertake the development of new lines of cars which minimize the use of fossil fuels, such as:

- a. Flex-fuel cars that use 85% ethanol and 15% gasoline.
- b. Hybrid cars that use electricity and gasoline.
- c. Electric cars that are battery controlled.

- d. Diesel cars that use biodiesel fuels.
- e. Hydrogen cars that use fuel cells.

**What should individuals do?** Simple steps applied by everyone nationally would result in a vast conservation program.

**1. Change a light.** Replace one regular light bulb with a compact fluorescent light bulb.

**2. Drive less.** Walk, bike or take mass transit.

**3. Recycle more.** Recycle about half of your household waste.

**4. Check your tires.** Keeping your tires inflated properly can improve gas mileage.

**5. Use less hot water.** Install a low flow showerhead.

**6. Cut down on garbage.** By avoiding products with a lot of packaging, you can reduce garbage volume.

**7. Adjust your thermostat.** Move the thermostat down 2 degrees in the winter and up 2 degrees in the summer.

**8. Plant a tree.** A single tree will absorb large quantities of carbon dioxide.

**Conclusion:** To become more informed about Global Warming and how to stop it, see Al Gore's documentary movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and read his book of the same title. The movie and book bring together research of top scientists around the world as well as photographs, charts and other illustrations to document the reality of Global Warming. The information sounds a warning bell for action before it's too late.