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Academic Year

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2014-2015

RETIREES NEWSLETTER

Professional Staff Congress
Jack Judd, Editor
psc-cuny.org/retirees

MAY 4 CHAPTER PROGRAM - FIGHTING RETIREMENT

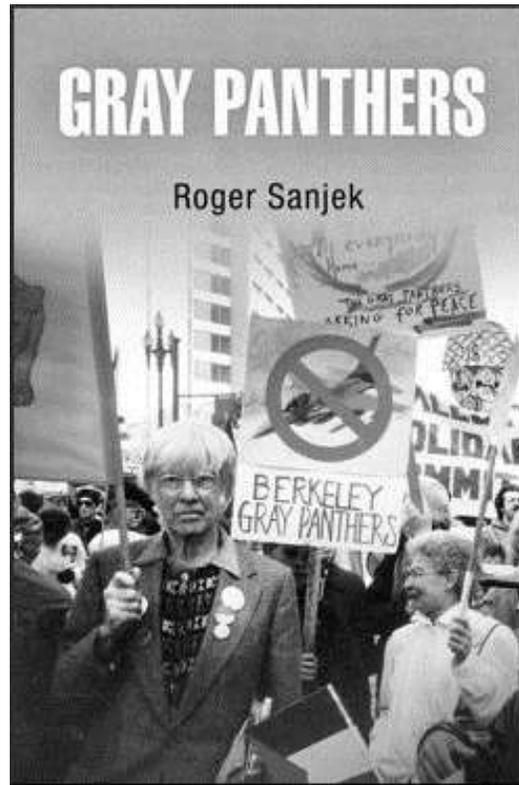
INSECURITY: As attacks on pensions, Social Security and Medicare escalate, millions of Americans face the prospect of retirement without financial security. Our two speakers are leading voices against retirement insecurity:

Mark Hannay, founder of the No Bad Grand Bargain Coalition and director of the Metro New York Health Care for All Campaign, a citywide coalition of community groups and labor unions that advocates for universal health care.

Roger Sanjek, retired professor of anthropology at Queens College, author of *The Gray Panthers* (U. of Pennsylvania Press, 2009) and member of both NYS Senior Action and the PSC Retirees Chapter.

We meet at 61 Broadway, 16th floor, in PSC Union Hall, 1– 3 PM. Doors open at 12:45 PM with edibles and coffee.

The Executive Committee meets at 10:30 AM in the PSC’s Justice Room, 15th floor. Executive Committee meetings are open to members.



Gray Panthers by Roger Sanjek

THE ANNUAL JUNE LUNCHEON - A CONVERSATION ABOUT

GENTRIFICATION: The June 8th luncheon will feature Leonard Quart, professor emeritus of Cinema (CSI and The Graduate Center). He will engage us in a conversation about gentrification.

New York City has one of the highest rates of income inequality in the nation. Large portions of neighborhoods like Williamsburg, Long Island City and the East Village have been gentrified, turned into upper-middle-class oases, and big money has taken over large pieces of Manhattan where even the upper middle class has been priced out. Clearly, there's a human cost to gentrification, but in some cases the restored buildings and new businesses will help revive the city and neighborhood's economic life.



Anti-gentrification mural in Oakland, CA

Professor Quart, a cultural and film critic writing in both academic and popular media, will look at the complexity of gentrification through its treatment in film and the mass media, as well as through a political, social and economic lens. His aim is to pose questions for what should be a lively discussion.

An invitation and reservation form is included for those who receive the newsletter by U.S. Mail. Those receiving the newsletter by email, can view and print the invitation/reservation form at tinyurl.com/Luncheon060815. Send your luncheon checks and completed reservation form to the PSC (address and event details are on the invitation).

The luncheon is Monday, June 8 at 12:30 PM in the second floor faculty dining commons of John Jay's New Building, 899 Tenth Avenue. The best entrance of the New Building for the luncheon is on 11th Avenue between 58th & 59th Streets. Preceding the luncheon, there will be a coffee hour in the faculty lounge at 10:30 AM, followed by a report and discussion reviewing the activities and outreach of the chapter over the past year.

REPORT ON THE APRIL CHAPTER MEETING:

The following summary of remarks delivered at the April 6 chapter meeting was prepared by Joel Berger, chapter vice-chairman.

Can The Labor Movement Be Revived?

Two contrasting, but frequently reinforcing, views of the American labor movement enlivened the April chapter meeting. Speaking separately, and then fielding a variety of questions from the audience together, Irwin Yellowitz and Bill Fletcher demonstrated their knowledge and their ability to analyze complex issues facing working people today.

Prof. Yellowitz, a former Retiree Chapter chair who taught at CCNY, traced the growth and decline of organized labor in the private sector from 1900 until 2014. Looking at percentages of union membership year by year, he noted that, "Union density in the private sector in the United States is more like a roller coaster than a highway." The percentage in 1900 was 6.5%, and in 2014 it was 6.6%. An early peak

year was in 1920 when 19.2% of private-sector workers were unionized; then there was a decline through the next 15 years, followed by a marked upswing in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. A high of 35.1% of all private-sector workers were unionized in 1955. After the 1980s, the decline was rapid; and today the number is almost identical to that in 1900.

Yellowitz analyzed these numbers putting them in historical perspective. He demonstrated how the great depression, the New Deal and World War II affected unionization. He stated, "The labor movement has grown in periods of crisis." No crises shaped the country after 1960 the way that the wars and depression did. Globalization and technological advances depressed the numbers of unionized workers not only in the United States, but also worldwide. In addition, "The lack of a political force to fight off attacks from the right," has weakened the American labor movement. He believes that, "If we have another crisis, there's no question that the labor movement would grow." (The financial crisis of 2006 may have had the potential to drive an upswing in private-sector unionization, but it did not burgeon into something substantial.)

Today, the labor movement must look to organize new sectors such as immigrant workers, service workers and part-time workers. Organized labor must see itself as a representative of all workers, and support increases in the minimum wage and expanded health insurance for all. Schisms within labor must be healed, and the movement must ally itself with other

"politically congenial groups." Working with environmental groups, youth groups and women's groups can help build a strong political left.

Finally, Professor Yellowitz then concluded by stating, "The labor movement has to take the lead in reconciling white, male workers with minority workers."



1932 Labor Poster

A long-time labor activist and now a senior scholar at the Institute for Policy Studies, Bill Fletcher has served as education director and assistant to the president of the AFL-CIO. His answer to the question, "Can the Labor Movement be Revived?" is, "There is hope... under certain conditions...a labor movement can be revived."

Drawing upon his own personal and family history, he contrasted retirement plans and pensions for his parents with those of a divided workers' movement today. Workers without pensions get angry at those workers who have pensions (e.g. the public sector). Politicians like Scott Walker exploit these divisions.

The problem of building a new labor movement reminded Fletcher of passengers and a crew stranded in

the desert after their plane crashes in the film, "The Flight of the Phoenix." Unable to repair the plane, they build an entirely new one out of parts from the wreckage. Fletcher likened the situation in the film to the labor movement today, believing that, reforming the labor movement "is not going to happen." Continuing the metaphor he said, "The plane crashed. It is stuck in the sand. Pieces of it have broken off. The plane that crashed in the sand will not reemerge. The conditions are not there. What will emerge is a different plane." Fletcher believes, "We must create something new."

He believes that there were crises that could have reinvigorated the labor movement, but that labor leadership is too preoccupied with their own personal survival issues, and are often in thrall of certain political leaders. "We need leaders who are going to say to elected officials, "We are no longer going to tolerate the same rhetoric." Now, he said, "we are actually in the fight of our lives." Calling for greater activity by the rank and file and transformation on the part of leadership, Fletcher pointed to a few rays of hope. The Chicago Teachers strike was successful because the union made the strike about the kids. Organizations like Jobs for Justice, the National Domestic Workers, and Fight for 15, among other groups, are building parts of a new labor movement.



Fight for 15 Campaign Poster

Unions across the country are responding to social justice issues and working-class issues. Fletcher believes, "The elements are there, which is why the situation is not hopeless. The challenge is to get them to cascade."

FOR IRMAA PARTICIPANTS:

Reimbursement checks for the year 2013 are now being distributed. If you applied and did not receive your 2013 IRMAA reimbursement by the first week in May, contact Yvonne Rodriguez, university deputy director of employee benefits at 646-313-8231 or by email at

yvonne.rodriguez@cuny.edu.

The official form to apply for reimbursements for the year 2014 is now available at:

tinyurl.com/IRMAA2014

EDITOR'S RECOMMENDED READING ON THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET:

"Where Government Excels," Paul Krugman, *New York Times*, April 10, 2015. On the web at:

tinyurl.com/WhereGvtExcels

COMPTROLLER SCOTT STRINGER: BILLIONS IN PENSION FUND FEES PAID TO WALL STREET HAVE FAILED TO PROVIDE VALUE TO TAXPAYERS. New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer released an analysis by his office showing that Wall Street money managers failed to provide value to the City's pension funds over the last 10 years, even as they raked in billions of dollars in fees.

The [analysis](#) found that high fees and failures to hit performance objectives have cost the pension system some \$2.5 billion in lost value over the past decade. (Excerpted from Comptroller Stringer's April 9 news release.)



As a result of the analysis, Stringer announced that the City will overhaul how it engages its external managers to better align fees paid to the value created for Fund beneficiaries.

To read the analysis, go to: tinyurl.com/WallStFees

[The Retirees Chapter was ahead of the curve on this issue. In April of 2014, we devoted a whole chapter meeting to an analysis by Connie Razza and Tony Perlstein of the

Center for Popular Democracy on how our public pension funds could save hundreds of millions of dollars by switching to in-house financial management. We need to support the Comptroller on his proposed reforms—and hold his feet to the fire.]

REDISCOVERY AND RETIREMENT: A RETIREE WRITES ABOUT KEEPING PHYSICALLY ALERT AND ACTIVE

Retirement on Two Wheels: The Joys of Bicycling

By Jim Levine

I have been engaged in bicycle riding much of my life, but once I reached adulthood this activity was limited by the time constraints of my pursuit of higher education, subsequent career obligations, and long-term family responsibilities. I retired from CUNY in 2010 after having served 21 years on the faculty of Brooklyn College followed by 17 years at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Finding myself having lots of free time, I took the luxury of engaging in bicycling more passionately and more extensively than had previously been feasible. In fact, last year at the age of 72, I biked 4,340 miles, mainly in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Long Island.



So why is this pastime so joyous to me? Perhaps, first and foremost, it has enabled me to stay physically fit without putting undue stress on my body. In earlier years, I biked a good bit in mountainous Vermont, but now I choose terrain that is less taxing. A few hills are fine, but long stretches of flat roads are glorious for those of us who are at a somewhat advanced age.

Yet another virtue of bicycling during retirement is that it is relatively cheap. I have spent a good bit of money over the years on replacing parts and purchasing accessories for my bicycle, but none of these expenditures breaks the bank. I just bought two new top-of-the-line tires for \$130. Compare that with the expense of four good tires for a car. Money aside, bicycling continues to give me the chance to travel in a wide variety of scenic and scintillating environments. I bike up the greenway on the west side of Manhattan, marveling at both the city's electrifying skyline and the shimmering waters of the adjacent Hudson River. My journeys to Long Island take me to the peaceful suburbs of western Suffolk County, to the pristine vineyards of the North Fork, and to the Atlantic Ocean dramatically pounding the shore near Montauk. Even my occasional trek to Coney Island including a stop for a hot dog at Nathans is gratifying,

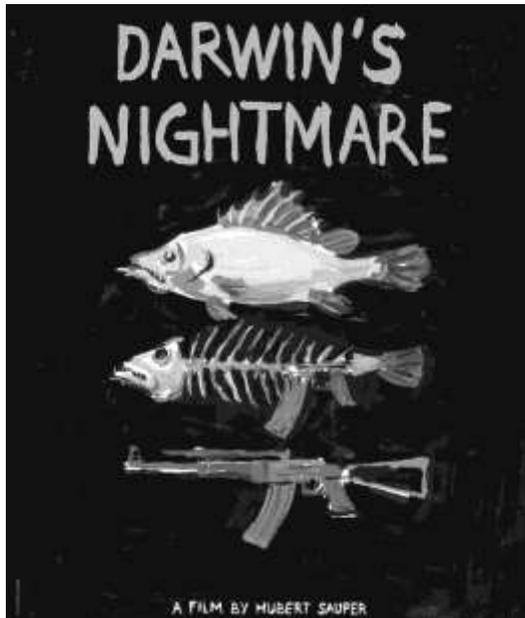
giving me a poignant feeling about yesteryear. I am endlessly discovering new routes and points of interest.

Last, but certainly not least, bicycling has enabled me to meet a wide range of people during the course of my travels. It is a pleasure to run into strangers with whom one can have casual conversation when seeking directions or recommendations about local eateries. On the relatively few occasions when I have had mechanical breakdowns or biking accidents, I have encountered very helpful people who truly renew my faith in humanity. While these interactions are fleeting, they are nonetheless quite gratifying.



Earlier in my life, I bicycled during summer vacations to far-off terrain in England, France, Nova Scotia, Quebec and several distant places in the United States. I am now content to ride closer to home with the serenity that retirement can provide—no musing about publication deadlines, no stacks of term papers awaiting grading, and no stresses from college politics. The freedom to just live for the moment is incredibly enriching. Retiring on two wheels, while so different from teaching students and doing research, is every bit as satisfying.

**LABOR GOES TO THE MOVIES:
DARWIN'S NIGHTMARE**



[This year's Labor Goes to the Movies film series presents a group of films—documentary and fiction—that take the threat of apocalypse as their premise. The threat of global climate change has given apocalyptic scenarios more mainstream girth, but filmmakers have been documenting and imagining man-made end times for years. The featured films depict nuclear confrontation, resource wars, tampering with ecological balance, or nature's metaphysical revenge. They are meant to stimulate discussion about options for future actions.]

This 2004 documentary, the first film by Hubert Sauper, explores the catastrophic ecological and economic consequences of the introduction by Europeans of the predatory Nile perch into Lake Victoria, Tanzania. The neocolonialist inequalities are compounded by the devastation of

the lake ecosystem as well as the native fishing economy, even as the perch are commercially harvested for sale in European supermarkets.

Other elements captured in the film include international gun-running and the scourge of AIDS. Nominated for an Academy Award, and the winner of numerous other awards, the film presents in stark images the nexus of military, economic, and ecological forces convulsing one African region. Door opens at 6 PM. Friday, May 8, PSC Union Hall, 16th Floor, 61 Broadway.

A discussion will follow the film. Light refreshments provided.