

**DECEMBER 2019**



**Academic Year 2019-20 No. 4**

[psc-cuny.org/retirees.org](http://psc-cuny.org/retirees.org)

**CHAPTER MEETING,  
MONDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1-3PM  
Good and Welfare.**

**Donna Costa**, executive director of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund, and **Patrick Smith**, its communications director, will present the latest on Welfare Fund benefits and take questions. **Connie Gemson**, a long-time advocate on issues of senior healthcare and a member of the chapter's executive committee, will speak on "How to Be an Eldercare Advocate."

Join new and old colleagues in the PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16<sup>th</sup> floor (just below Wall and Rector Streets), 1-3 PM. Light refreshments will be served. ■

**WINTER LUNCHEON  
MONDAY, JANUARY 13, 12:30-2PM  
CUNY GRADUATE CENTER  
Building Political Power for the 2020  
Elections**

The 2020 elections loom large on the U.S. political landscape. Two speakers will initiate what promises to be a fascinating dis-

cussion. **Luke Elliott-Negri** is chair of the union's Graduate Center chapter and the PSC's VOTE COPE coordinator. He has rich experience in local and national political campaigns. **Peter Hogness** was editor of *Clarion* from 2001-2015 and is now an activist and leader in Water for Grassroots, a national organization building grassroots political power in swing states.

A **reservation form** is on the last page of this newsletter. **Space is limited. Reserve now.** ■

**FILM: CARE**



**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 6-8 PM**

Long-term care is one of the most urgent problems we all are facing. To address this issue the Social Safety Net Committee of our union chapter is presenting a film called *Care*. *Care* pulls back the curtain on the poignant and largely hidden work of in-home elder care. Directed by Deirde Fishel and produced by Tony Heriza, the film is beautifully shot and deeply moving. It reveals the deep bonds that form between paid care workers and elders while exposing the cracks in the U. S. care system.

Our city, state, and nation face an unprecedented elder boom. Every eight seconds, a baby boomer turns 65. The current population of New Yorkers aged 65 and older is estimated at over 2.9 million and is expected to approach 4.4 million by 2040. Together, we are creating even greater demand for caregiving and services like home

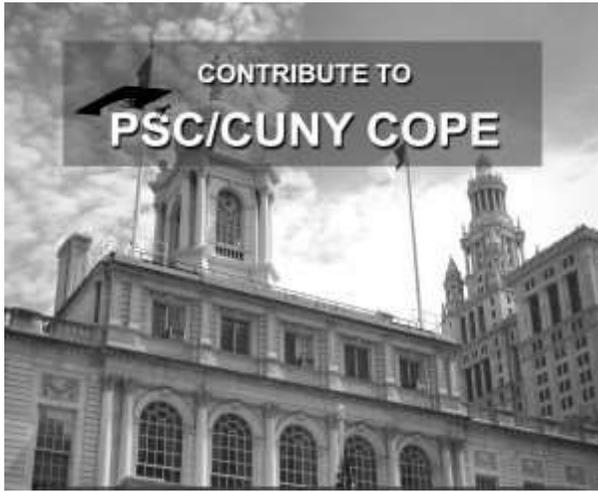
care that allow older adults and people with disabilities to age and live at home.

Yet our policies and programs have yet to catch up with our state's changing realities, and as a result, our families are struggling.

Come for the film and discussion about building an infrastructure to support long-term care services.

PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway 16<sup>th</sup> floor, **6-8 PM, December 11.** ■

**LOOK FOR THE VOTE COPE LETTER. Contribute to Help Us Make a Difference in the 2020 Elections.**



We enter a critical period between now and the pivotal 2020 presidential, congressional and state elections.

In the spring, there will be primary elections in advance of the November 2020 vote.

Between now and then, we need to build our strength at City Hall and in Albany and Washington. We need to elect representatives who will:

- increase public investment in higher education;
- defend and expand the safety net, (Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security);
- protect the environment;
- stand for economic and racial justice; and

- push back against the venal policies that have sown division and fear across the political landscape.

And more – much more.

We're in an era of dark politics, but also one full of promise, as Americans have become politically active and mobilized. Our union has also stepped up its political game.

The PSC's mobilization is funded by VOTE COPE, the political arm of our affiliate, the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT).

In the past, that mobilization helped flip the NYS Senate and elect a NYC Council much more attuned to the needs of CUNY, our faculty, our professional staff, our students and their communities.

Shortly, you will receive a letter in my name from NYSUT asking for a contribution to VOTE COPE. In the past, retirees have contributed generously to VOTE COPE, more than all the other PSC chapters combined.

A thin slice of the VOTE COPE money goes to NYSUT for statewide campaigns on behalf of CUNY and the PSC in Albany. But most comes back to the PSC for its political mobilizations – mobilizations that have become all the more important at this decisive political moment.

Look for the letter. Contribute generously to VOTE COPE.

*Bill Friedheim Chair/ PSC Retirees* ■

## **THE MONTH THAT WAS**

**NOVEMBER CHAPTER MEETING:  
Is U.S. Labor at an Existential Moment of Resurgence?**

-Eileen Moran, Retiree, Queens College

Panelists **Josh Freeman**, distinguished

professor of Labor History at CUNY, **Lois Weiner**, author of *Future Shock*, and Michelle Chen, writer for *The Nation* and *In These Times*, addressed this question.

**Freeman** sees evidence of new energy given the uptick in both conventional and unconventional strikes, including for example the Chicago teachers' demands for investment in affordable housing and tech workers walking out to protest sexual harassment and indirect support for ICE's detention facilities. The fight for \$15 essentially demanding doubling the federal minimum wage, won in many locations. Nevertheless, unions in the private sector are still experiencing membership declines, including in NYS and NYC. While Labor is no longer at the center of economic or political life as it had been in the post WWII era, he thinks that it is promising that Democratic hopefuls in the 2020 race are showing up to picket with strikers and including a call to grow unions in their platforms.

**Weiner** believes that the current climate presents serious challenges for workers, unions and the labor movement generally. She was highly critical of the U.S. labor leadership as, for the most part, not up to the task. The fastest growing jobs in the U.S. will be caregiving, food preparation, and nursing. Two of the three require only an eighth grade education.

The bipartisan neoliberal belief that education provides the passage out of poverty has unraveled after the 2008 recession. She argued that education cannot resolve the problem of capitalism's transformation of work. Nor can it solve our nation's dramatic and increasing inequality, which is exacerbating race and gender inequities. Labor was bamboozled, she said, and barely challenged the privatization of public goods.



Yet, the innovations of the red states' teachers strikes may seed a labor resurgence. Rank and file teachers, often in opposition to union leadership, struck. Largely women, they connected the needs of the working class more broadly to their lives outside of work with demands for counselors and housing. Weiner witnessed consciousness raising emerging within closed Facebook and Twitter groups of striking teachers. In the groups, the teachers radically critiqued the austerity imposed on teachers and schools by conservative leaders.

**Chen** focused on the future of work and the impact of technology, and saw bargaining for the common good as an elastic term. In spite of all the hype around contingency, now it's only about 10% of the workforce. Technology remains the employers' tool to increase control with growing state and workplace surveillance. Automation does eliminate some jobs while creating others, but certainly not on a 1 to 1 basis. Currently, the ratio of workers to machines is 70% to 30%. Expanding tech will move towards a 50-50% ratio of people to machines.

She reminded us that the global south's developing economies were built on neoliberal transfer of manufacturing and extracting natural resources. Artificial Intelligence (AI) will hit the poorest the hardest, she argued. The red state strikes expressed the degradation of work in schools with micromanaging and essential disrespect for "women's work," e.g. teaching and care taking. ■

## IN MEMORIUM

### Miriam Balmuth, PSC activist

Sadly, our good friend and union activist Miriam Balmuth died on September 27 at age 93, following a stroke. After retiring as professor of curriculum and teaching at Hunter College in 2003, Miriam served for almost two decades as a member of the Retirees Chapter Executive Committee, as well as a chapter delegate to the PSC Delegate Assembly and the NYSUT Retiree Council. Even into her 90s, Miriam regularly traveled to Albany to lobby for better funding for CUNY.

She was a proud alumna of the New York City public schools and a devoted supporter of public higher education. She earned an undergraduate degree from Brooklyn College, a Master's degree in education from City College and a PhD in educational psychology from New York University. She later headed the Master's in Literacy Program at Hunter. She was active for decades as a member of local Democratic Party clubs in NYC. She was also an avid hiker and activist in the Sierra Club and a world traveler who visited more than 100 nations. She lived a life full of adventure and activism. May she rest in peace. ■

## NEWS OF NOTE

### FLORIDA PROJECT ELECTORIAL ACTIONS FOR RETIREES

- John Hyland, Retiree,  
LaGuardia Community College

The 2020 presidential and congressional elections have enormous consequences for retirees and the nation. The well-being of retirees largely depends on four issues:

**Social Security, Medicare, pensions, and the environment.** There are political forces and social policies at stake in this election that will support or attack the health of the programs that address these issues.

PSC retiree representatives participated in a meeting with other NYC unions and a community-based organization, **Water for Grass Roots, to coordinate electoral efforts in Florida.** Other key unions represented at the meeting were: UFT, DC 37, UAW, SEIU Local 1199, TWU Local 100, CSEA, NYC chapter of the NYS Alliance of Retired Americans, and the NYC Central Labor Council. Many retirees of NYC unions have retired to Florida--tens of thousands--thanks to benefits negotiated and fought for by organized labor, including the PSC.

The labor movement, of which we are a part, has promoted safety net and environmental programs with varying degrees of effectiveness. There is now a project to increase the effectiveness of our efforts. The project is to inform and activate union retirees in Florida, a crucial state in the 2020 elections, in support of policies and programs and candidates that improve the conditions of Social Security, Medicare, pensions and the environment.

We will work with the labor movement, other senior and retiree organizations and community organizations in Florida in a mobilized and coordinated way to protect and improve our benefits and our planet against the powerful and moneyed forces that are working very hard to privatize, diminish or eliminate social programs and further exploit the planet.

You can help. We are trying to reach out to retirees in Florida to join the **Water for Grass Roots** effort. We have some contact information but not all. If you are a retiree who spends time in Florida please contact

us. And if you know retirees in Florida (full-time residents or "snow birds"), please enable us to reach out to them. Contact us at [retiree@pscmail.org](mailto:retiree@pscmail.org).

This is literally a life and death matter. Imagine your/our situation with diminished or eliminated Social Security, Medicare and pension benefits, on an ecologically damaged planet. Think of the future of our children and grandchildren. This collaboration of unions and community organizations is a very positive development. Let's make it work and keep moving forward. Join in! ■

### THE 2019 PSC CONTRACT SETTLEMENT: AN OPINION PIECE

-David Kotelchuck, Retiree, Hunter College

*The new union contract, known as a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), has gone out to active members for a vote. Retirees do not vote on the working conditions for active members, however it is useful to keep up with the issues. The following is a discussion of the debate surrounding the MOA.*

In response to criticism by Hillary Clinton on her Medicare for All plan, Democratic candidate Elizabeth Warren recently replied: "You don't get what you don't fight for. You know, you got to be willing to get out there and fight."

That quote, made in political context by Sen. Warren, also helps in this writer's opinion explain the heated and occasionally bitter disagreements between PSC members in discussing whether or not to approve the proposed 2019 PSC-CUNY labor contract.

All PSC activists and probably virtually all union members agree that adjunct faculty, graduate assistants and part-time CUNY employees are exploited, underpaid and mistreated by CUNY and deserve levels of

pay and benefits commensurate to full-time employees at CUNY. Where we disagree tactically is whether the PSC mounted a campaign commensurate with the goals which needed to be achieved – whether what has been negotiated is a significant gain for our members (and hence the MOA should be approved) or that too little has been achieved as a result of a weak contract campaign (and the contract should be rejected).



This writer agrees with the former, and believes that our proposed contract represents a signal gain for members of the PSC, both full-time and part-time. Let's now look back for a moment at the situation of part-time members both during this and the previous PSC administration (like many CUNY retirees I go back to both and this experience of more than two decades in the PSC strongly informs my position and that of many approving members today): Before the CUNY-wide PSC elections of 2000, the previous leadership of this local did not encourage and indeed discouraged union membership of CUNY adjuncts and graduate assistants. This attitude surprises many PSC members today, who were not at CUNY then. Why not sign up as many folks into the union as you can? Our previous leaders were serious persons, as are today's leaders, and this was not undertaken lightly. In fact, the earlier leaders believed that in discouraging adjunct and grad assistant membership they were acting in a principled way: They did not want to take hard-earned monies from underpaid and

exploited part-timers when they believed they could not deliver union benefits and services to these persons. In short, they weren't willing to fight for adjunct rights and benefits. But as they and so many other PSC members understood, adjuncts and grad assistants were the most underpaid and discriminated against of all CUNY employees in the PSC bargaining unit. For many PSC members this was unacceptable – what was the meaning of union solidarity if not to join with all among us, and especially the most exploited, to gain adequate pay and benefits?

This was the viewpoint of the new PSC leadership elected in 2000. Adjuncts and all part timers were to be welcomed into the union and we became committed as a union to fighting for their rights and those of all members. Since then, for almost two decades this union under its present leadership has fought during every contract negotiation for improved pay and working conditions for all members, with special attention to improvements for part-timers – and was pressed all of this time by adjuncts and grad assistants holding all PSC members' feet to the fire demanding justice.

But for all the commitment of the current union leadership and the contract demands for part-timers in every contract since 2000, CUNY management has strongly opposed each of these gains, settling them as a last item and then only after firm union resolve. Nevertheless the PSC has been able to win limited gains: a paid office hour, hundreds of conversion lines, health care benefits for many adjuncts and three-year contracts for some long-serving adjuncts. But we had not won a dramatic increase in adjunct pay during this period. Now with support and pressure by organized adjuncts and grad assistants and broader support among full-time members and retirees, the union in this round of negotiations put a demand for \$7K

salary per three-credit course first among its priorities.



What we achieved was an increase in base pay for a three-credit course from \$3,500 to \$5,500 while securing a full public-employee “pattern” salary increase of 2 percent per year for each bargaining unit member for each of the five years of this proposed contract. PSC officers have called this – and it is – the largest equity pay increase in funds for CUNY in all of its nearly two decades in current union leadership office. By adding the increased adjunct pay to the pattern increase to all members, we have implicitly broken the pattern and added millions to the overall base funding for CUNY for the future.

So has the union fought and kept fighting for the adjunct and grad students it represents? Yes, it has. But many of these members are not happy with this contract and plan to vote No on it. They argue correctly that the contract did not achieve \$7K per course and does not represent equality of either pay or benefits for them – they remain second-class CUNY employees. And this is true. They believe that the union did not fight hard enough for these demands and if it keeps fighting in this way in the future adjuncts and grad assistants will never achieve parity with full-timers.

On the contrary, I believe the vast majority of all PSC members remain committed to

continuing the struggle for justice for all, full-timers and part-timers. And with a five-year contract, we do not have to commence a new round of bargaining as we so often have had to do in the past. We now will have several years to focus on campus-based organizing and mobilization of our members.

The political situation we all face today in the U.S. is far different and holds more promise (despite Trump) than we faced in 2000, when our current union leadership was elected. There is a greater fight-back today among unions and other groups -- and more broadly among American progressives -- and so we have opportunities to secure the victories we have already won, as in this contract, and move forward in the ongoing struggle for justice for all.

*[NOTE: Turning the Page welcomes comments and other points of view about our proposed contract.] ■*

### **BELLE ZELLER SCHOLARSHIP LIVES ON**

-Manfred Philipp, Retiree, Lehman College

**The Belle Zeller Scholarship Trust Fund** was established in 1979 by the PSC to honor its founding president. Belle Zeller was Professor Emerita of Political Science at Brooklyn College, where she taught for over 40 years. While the Belle Zeller Fund is, following IRS regulations, an independent non-profit organization, it has had strong support from the PSC in the past, and the Fund looks forward to continuing that close relationship in the future. Belle Zeller scholarships are intended to honor the unique qualities of Belle Zeller: the combination of social commitment and scholarship. These scholarships are given each year to CUNY undergraduates, graduate students, and law school students. Belle Zeller Scholars receive an annual \$5000 stipend, paid on a semester basis.

Scholarships can be continued for several years. Community college recipients can continue to receive the scholarships at CUNY 4-year colleges.

357 Belle Zeller scholarships have been given since 1980. The funds come from private donations.



This year, Belle Zeller scholarships will be given to Andrea Black of QCC, Pooja Chopra of Hunter, Luke Elliott-Negri of the GC, Beauty Kolade of Lehman, Zachory Nowosadzki of CUNY Law, Farah Reynoso of Guttman Community College, Chelsea Rose of John Jay, and Grace Savoia-DiGregorio of BMCC.

The 2018 Scholarships went to Maya Hara-kawa of the GC, Annmarie Gajdos of Baruch, Shaffiou Assoumanou of Lehman, Reaa Ali of Queens, and Zvi Greenspan of KCC.

The Board of Trustees for the Fund is chaired by Jewel Escobar of City Tech and includes Satyanand Singh, vice chair, also at City Tech; Susan DiRaimo, secretary, of Lehman & CCNY (and part-time personnel officer for the PSC); Joel Berger of CSI; Sharon Persinger of BCC (and also PSC treasurer); and myself, former PSC chapter chair at Lehman College; and Emily Tai of QCC.

Irwin Yellowitz, treasurer of the Fund, was a member of the PSC Executive Council from

1973 to 1997. He served as Treasurer of the Professional Staff Congress from 1984 to 1997, and is an active member of our Retirees Chapter Executive Committee. Christina Drakes of New York City College of Technology is the Fund's coordinator.

The Fund offers internships at several CUNY campuses. Please contact Ms. Escobar at [BZScholarship@citytech.cuny.edu](mailto:BZScholarship@citytech.cuny.edu) if you know of students interested in this. All work, including that of the Fund's board, is done on a volunteer basis.

To support this worthwhile effort, please send your tax-deductible donations to the **Belle Zeller Scholarship Trust Fund**, c/o the Professional Staff Congress of CUNY, 61 Broadway NY, NY 10006, Attn: Sharon Persinger.

If donating via PayPal, please choose [BZScholarship@citytech.cuny.edu](mailto:BZScholarship@citytech.cuny.edu) as the recipient of the donation. PayPal asks about the purpose of the transfer. Please *do not* indicate that the donation is payment is for goods and services. Any other choice is fine. ■

## READERS WRITE

*The following, by **Adam Koranyi** appeared in the **Gotham Gazette** in response to Len Rodberg's article (reprinted in the November TTP) on nuclear power. Adam Koranyi is a retiree from Lehman College.*

I respectfully but fundamentally disagree with the op-ed article of Len Rodberg about keeping open the nuclear reactors in New York State. That article does not mention the greatest danger nuclear reactors present: the danger from nuclear waste. This waste has been accumulating around all the 415 nuclear energy plants of the world for nearly seventy years, and no satisfactory solution has been found to deal with it. It

has to be constantly watched; if it gets released in the environment, it starts its destructive work. In Chernobyl it caused large numbers of cancers that manifested themselves many years after the 1989 accident. Recently some waste got away at Fukushima as a result of a tornado. The amount of radiation in these places was small compared to what is present in the waste stored all over the world. Large amounts (even if released in only one place) will have worldwide catastrophic consequences. And the way things are going, with natural catastrophes increasing in number and power, with genocides, armed struggles, millions of would-be refugees, sudden political changes, the loss of control over nuclear waste at one place or another is almost certain to happen.

Rodberg said if we don't keep open the nuclear plants New York will not and cannot fulfill its clean energy plan. This may be true (even with the plants kept open). We have seen similar things before: In Kyoto, Canada undertook to cut its emissions by 6% over the period 1990-2012; instead, it increased them by 24%, then repudiated the Kyoto Protocol in 2011.



In 2007, the CUNY college where I taught made a ten-year environmental plan: One item was to use the huge southward sloping roof of the sports building for solar heating panels. 2017 came and went. Big repairs were made on the roof in question, but there are no solar panels on it. What this shows is that it is hard to do things in a hostile environment. As long as U.S. national policy does not fundamentally change, most

of the local environmental efforts are likely to fail. With a Green New Deal, a concentrated national effort with huge public investments and effective support for renewable energy, the New York plan will succeed.

Some might object that just as New York cannot do it without the national government, the USA cannot do it without worldwide cooperation. Quite true. But the only way to get international cooperation is to start with the Green New Deal. Then the competitors on the world scene, who are now in a mad rush not to stay behind in industrialization and development, can slow down and become open to agreements aimed at saving as much of the planet's environment as possible. ■

### Wasn't That a Time: When Folk Singers Were Feared

-Connie Gemson, Retiree,  
LaGuardia CC

Recently I saw a presentation at Tamiment Library at NYU about folk singers and their FBI files. It was presented by Aaron J. Leonard, who combined his background as author and historian in writing about the left in the United States and the suppression by the FBI. He is the co-author of the book *A Threat of the First Magnitude*, which details the role of FBI informants who "penetrated the upper reaches of such organizations as the Communist Party USA, the Black Panther Party... and other groups."

Leonard's new book, *The Folk Singers and the Bureau and The Suppression of the Communist Party, USA 1939-1956*, will be published in September 2020. By obtaining individual FBI files, he learned various code words to describe Communist Party affiliations written on these files. He described *People's Songs*, founded in 1945, which promoted songs of labor to the American

people. Leonard noted the different choices that faced many musicians of that time, such as Burl Ives, who named names at the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Leonard also noted how Woody Guthrie's "merchant marine papers were pulled for contributing to the *Daily Worker*." Blacklisting of the Weavers limited and almost destroyed their careers. Paul Robeson's career suffered because of his politics. The *Hollywood Ten* were writers. They were blacklisted rather than actors. Writers were perceived to be more dangerous during this fearful time. For a closing, Leonard led us in a rousing version of *If I Had a Hammer*. ■

**LIFE DURING WARTIME.** Josh Brown, the retired director of the American Social History Project at the Graduate Center, produced a series of weekly political illustrations, beginning in 2003 with the war in Iraq, called *Life During Wartime*. The entire collection, 2003-2019, is available at <http://www.joshbrownnyc.com/ldw.htm>. His latest is entitled "Three Little Stooges" (Sondland, Mulvaney and Giuliani).



**WINTER LUNCHEON, MONDAY, JANUARY 13 @ 12:30 PM  
CUNY GRADUATE CENTER / ROOM 9204-7  
365 FIFTH AVE. @ 34<sup>th</sup> ST.**

**Building Political Power for the 2020 Elections  
Speakers: Luke Elliott-Negri and Peter Hogness**

**MENU:** Choose one entrée per person

- ◆ Grilled Sirloin Steak, Crispy Mushrooms, Roasted Shallots
- ◆ Roasted Salmon, Braised Fennel, Orange, Dill
- ◆ Sautéed Chicken Breast, Ponzu, Winter Radish
- ◆ Grilled Tofu, Crispy Mushrooms, Roasted Shallots

**All choices come with:**

Rolls & Artisan Breads,

Savoy Spinach Salad, Grape Tomatoes, Cucumber Shredded Carrot,  
Balsamic Vinaigrette

Assorted Miniature Tarts

Assorted Beverages (*Soda & Water, Coffee--Regular & Decaf, Tea*)

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**\$26 per person.** To make a reservation, please complete and mail a check payable to **Professional Staff Congress**. Mail to PSC-CUNY/ 15<sup>th</sup> floor/ 61 Broadway/ New York, NY 10006. **ATT: Retiree Luncheon.** Please respond quickly **SPACE IS LIMITED.**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Number of places: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

**Entrée choice (s):** [ ] Beef [ ] Chicken [ ] Salmon [ ] Vegetarian

If you prefer kosher food, write "**kosher**" below the line for entrée choices and email us at [retirees@pscmail.org](mailto:retirees@pscmail.org) to make arrangements.