

MARCH 2019



Academic Year 2018-9 No. 6

psc-cuny.org/retirees

MONDAY, MARCH 4. GOOD AND WELFARE

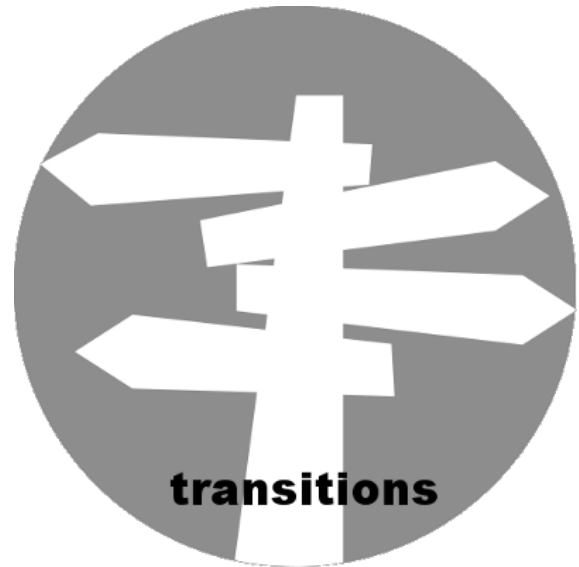
The focus of speakers at the meeting is the Good and Welfare of our chapter members on issues ranging from healthcare to Welfare Fund benefits to community resources for retirees.

Kathryn Haslanger, Chief Executive Officer of the Jewish Association Serving the Aging (JASA), is a prolific author on the subject of health care and aging. She will provide us a comprehensive overview of health care choices, delivery and planning for seniors in NYC.

Ron Bruno, who for sixteen years has been executive director of Morningside Gardens NORC (a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community), will talk about the NORC movement, resources, activities and outreach.

Donna Costa (Executive Director) and **Sandra Zaconeta** (Retirement Benefits Counselor) will update members on PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund benefits.

Discussion will follow. As usual, light refreshments will be provided. **PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th Floor, 1-3 PM.**



Following the meeting, a new PSC Retirees group called **Transitions** will be meeting. If you are concerned about health care options or alternatives for family members or friends, this group is intended to provide peer support and find ways to gather additional information. The first meeting will be **March 4th from 3-5 PM**. For more information contact Connie Gemson, retiree from LaGuardia Community College at chgemson@gmail.com

MONDAY, APRIL 1. GREATER GOTHAM

Speaker: Mike Wallace Professor Wallace is an American historian at the CUNY Graduate Center and John Jay College. He specializes in the history of New York City. In 1998 he coauthored *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, which won the **Pulitzer Prize in History**. He authored a second volume in the Gotham series in 2017, *Greater Gotham: A History of New York City from 1898 to 1919*. Mike says

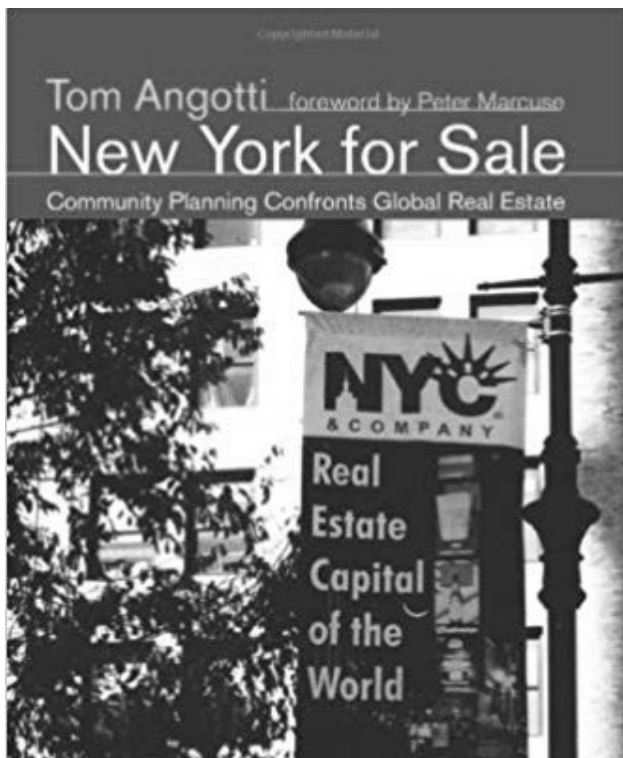
that he will whisk us through the latter's thousand-plus pages in half an hour flat!

SAVE THE DATE: LUNCHEON

June 10, 12:30 – 2:30 pm, CUNY Graduate Center. Speaker to be announced. Those of you who attended the January luncheon know that the menu was delicious and the space limited, so please remember to reserve your seat in May when the announcement appears in *Turning the Page*.

NEW YORK FOR SALE FEBRUARY CHAPTER MEETING

-Carol Montgomery, Retiree, LaGuardia CC



Members of the PSC-CUNY Retirees met at Union Hall to hear Tom Angotti speak about the NYC waterfront. His title was *NY Underwater: Housing and Development — Who Swims and Who Drowns?*

Tom Angotti, professor emeritus urban policy and planning at Hunter College and

the Graduate Center, engaged us with an energetic and well-researched case for long-term planning around the New York City waterfront, together with an explanation of the reasons why much of the development has been based on short-term planning and the interests of the real estate companies. Long-term planning is crucial because, as scientists agree, the climate is changing and the sea level is rising.

He divided his presentation into three sections: The first portion dealt with climate change. Hurricane Sandy wiped out large parts of the NYC waterfront and revealed that many of the affected areas were unprepared for the flooding. The effects were especially dire in low-income areas and communities of color. Many of these residents went without basic services for extended periods of time, leading to responses such as “Occupy Sandy.”

The second section was an historical account of the development of the waterfront, often the most valuable part of the city due to international trade and commerce. He noted that the indigenous people in the area did not have private ownership of the land. The Dutch and English developed shipping and small industries in the Manhattan waterfront areas. By the 1960s, with the rise of container shipping which requires “back up” space, not available in Manhattan, most shipping activity moved to Brooklyn and New Jersey.

In 1993 the city passed a “long-term” masterplan which consisted mainly of short term strategies. This plan made it possible for Battery Park City, using funds from the state, to become a model for future development, luxury waterfront housing on land-fill from the World Trade Center. The plan stipulates that a 25-foot band of land along the waterfront be open to the public and must be maintained by the landowners.

The last part of the talk was devoted to what has been occurring since Hurricane Sandy. Under Mayor Bloomberg, the city's building code was changed to require builders to adapt new buildings to a level twenty feet above Sandy's high water level marks. Real estate interests do not want to think about projections of sea-level rise in the long term, because it takes some 40 years to amortize waterfront investment. Additionally, they claim that it is not profitable for them to underwrite affordable housing in waterfront areas such as Red Hook and Sunset Park. Thus low and middle-income people are increasingly pushed back from waterfront areas, and, sadly, there is not much investment in the protection of public areas along the waterfront..

Professor Angotti concluded by acknowledging the powerful influence of the real estate interests and stressing importance of community planning. He called for an honest debate among various constituencies with the aim of arriving at "just solutions."

His compelling presentation ended with a lively question-and-answer period. One member asked about the Army Corp of Engineers survey which created a 100 year flood plain map. This map was never published as a result of pressure by the real estate industry. Another member asked about the development in the South Bronx which has resulted in waste facilities and trucking depots. These facilities have been a result of unfair zoning which residents and groups have begun to change. Angotti reiterated that zoning is what the city uses instead of an overall plan. Bloomberg let developers get the zoning they wanted and stifled community based planning and de Blasio has followed suit by up-zoning for tall buildings in midtown and waterfront areas like Long Island City. In the age of financialization of investments, Angotti said, even air rights and trading-in rights are for sale. The many questions showed that audience

members were involved in their local community issues as well as the political questions surrounding real estate development.

The speaker has written a number of books on urban planning including *New York for Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate* (with Robert Gottlieb).

GOP DAM(N) IN ALBANY BURSTS

-Dave Kotelchuck, retiree, Hunter College

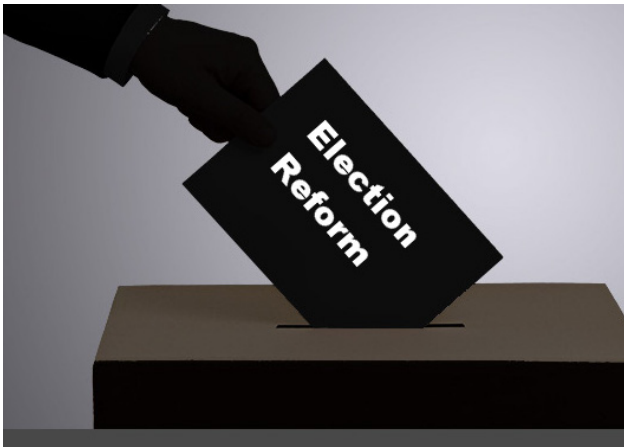


Let's not kid ourselves. Typically, our elections don't have consequences which affect our daily lives – but surely sometimes they do. Certainly the 2016 Presidential election did and also, of all things, the 2018 New York State legislative elections. The PSC worked hard and effectively this past Fall to oust GOP Senators and elephants-in-sheep's-clothing members of the IDC (Independent Democratic Caucus) – and we were successful.

Since taking office in January 2019, both the NYS Assembly and the newly Democratic NYS Senate lost no time in passing important bills that the Republican majority in the Senate had blocked for decades, often in *sotto voce* cooperation with Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo. So far this term, Democratic legislators have sent nine major bills to the Governor, which he has signed. These bills, long blocked by the Senate GOP, include the following:

Election Reform: Five separate bills, which allow early voting, starting 10 days before

state and federal election days; require the listing of names and investments in LLCs (Limited Liability Companies) which make political contributions; allow preregistration of 16- and 17-year-old voters-to-be; coordinate the dates of state and local primary elections (so we don't have two separate primary elections as we had last year); and eliminate re-registration for voters who move within NY State.



Reproductive Rights: Guarantees the rights of NYS residents to choose an abortion independent of the status of *Roe v. Wade*. This includes a limited right to so-called late-term abortions (after 24 weeks), as well as other provisions related to contraceptive needs.

LBGTQ Rights: Prohibits mental health professionals from engaging in efforts to change the sexual orientations of persons under the age of 18, under penalty of committing professional misconduct leading possibly to loss of licensure. Another bill signed by the Governor prohibits discrimination based on gender identity or expression and adds offenses regarding gender identity or expression to the State's hate-crimes statute.

The following have been passed by the Assembly and Senate and are awaiting the Governor's signature as of 2/9/19:

Child Victims Act: Provides that the statute of limitations for *criminal* prosecution of a sexual offense committed against a child shall not begin to run until the child turns 23 years of age. *Civil* actions brought for physical, psychological or other sexually-related injury may be brought by the victim up to age 55 years. The NYS Senate voted unanimously for the bill (including all [!] GOP Senators, even though their caucus blocked consideration of this bill since 2015). It passed in the Assembly by a vote of 103-3. *The Governor signed the bill on Feb. 14th.*

Dream Act: Provides funding for higher education loans and scholarship for undocumented students, such as NYS Dreamers. This bill is awaiting delivery to the Governor. The PSC, together with CUNY students have worked for this for years.

Teacher Evaluation (K-12): Repeals the state mandate that student test scores must be used in evaluations of public school teachers. Any use of such scores will now be the subject of local collective bargaining. The Governor has indicated he will sign it. The bill represents a major blow against standardized testing in public schools. It awaits delivery to the Governor.

And then from previous legislative sessions

Minimum wage Increase: On January 1, 2019 the \$15 minimum wage went into effect in New York City, although for firms with 10 or fewer employees the minimum only went up to \$13.50 until 12/31/19 when it will rise to \$15 per hour. In Long Island and Westchester it now stands at \$12/hour. The minimum will reach \$15 statewide in 2021.

Are we ready now to Let the Good Times Roll? Not at all!

Our public schools and colleges have fallen into disrepair. Our transit system is decrep-

it. New housing for low and middle income persons can't keep up with demand, and the state of public housing is shameful. Unemployment is down, but wages remain stagnant with too many workers stuck in low-wage, dead-end jobs. The economy in upstate New York remains in shambles. Problems of racism and sexism continue. We have made great progress in the NY State legislature this year, helped in part by our union efforts, but we are still *tan lejos de Dios*. A good, fully-funded PSC contract from Albany with \$7K per course for adjuncts would serve New Yorkers well.

THE REVENGE OF PATCO: WORKERS TRUMP TRUMP

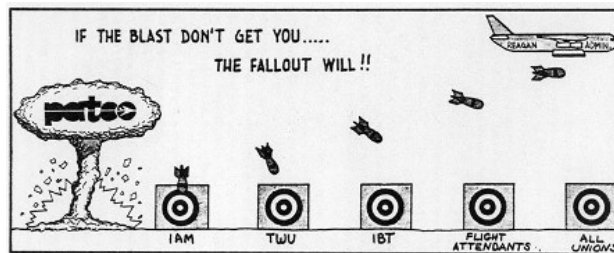
-Walter Daum, retiree, CCNY

In contrast to pundits who credited Trump's cave-in to the intransigence of Nancy Pelosi, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka hailed the efforts of labor in ending the month-long federal shutdown: "We flooded the halls and lit up the phones of Congress."

Yes, unionists lobbied Congress, rallied and were arrested. But far more decisive were the job actions by airline and airport workers. These, coupled with the unpopularity of Trump's anti-immigrant wall, enabled the Congressional Democrats to stand firm, this time.

In the final week of the shutdown, workers delivered a one-two punch. First, the air traffic controllers, working high-tension jobs amid chronic understaffing, were taking sick days in increasing numbers. There were also sickouts by airport security agents, whose lower wages made it even more necessary to find other work in the absence of paychecks. This was all without official coordination, given the tight legal restrictions on federal workers and the example of 1981, when Ronald Reagan broke

the controllers' union, PATCO, by firing 11,000 strikers.



A political cartoon from 1981 by fellow retiree, Josh Brown, the outgoing Director of the American Social History Project at the Graduate Center

This year on January 25, several airports were forced to ground flights. That opened the door for Sara Nelson, the head of the Association of Flight Attendants, AFA-CWA, to warn of job actions by her members – since airline safety was compromised by the shortage of working controllers. Attendants can refuse to fly if they are aware of unsafe conditions; and as private-sector employees, they are not subject to the harsh federal punishments. "We're mobilizing immediately," Nelson said. "If air traffic controllers can't do their jobs, we can't do ours." That afternoon, Trump caved.

Earlier that week Nelson had called on labor to organize a general strike in support of the unpaid federal workers. "What is the labor movement waiting for? Go back with the fierce urgency of NOW to talk with your locals and international unions about all workers joining together to end this shutdown with a general strike."

Such a statement by a labor leader was unprecedented. Needless to say, Trumka and other top AFL-CIO figures ignored it. In this case the job actions by a handful of sectors sufficed to bring the shutdown to an end. But Nelson's point remains valid. For one thing, the federal employees expect to get their back pay, but others laid off by the

shutdown will not. Labor has a responsibility to fight for them, too.

Ironically, the last time any union officials talked about a general strike was in 1981. Lane Kirkland, then president of the AFL-CIO, said he was flooded with wires, letters and postcards (remember those?) from unionists around the country calling for a general strike to support the PATCO strikers. "I would say I have never gotten as much mail on an issue in my life ... About 50 percent of those denounce me for not calling a general strike." (*Federal Times*, October 5, 1981.) The federation's failure to solidarize in 1981 set off decades of setbacks for labor. The role of the air traffic controllers today was appropriate revenge for the defeat of PATCO.

Moreover, labor's dormancy may be ending. Teachers across the country last year and now, as demonstrated by the new contract in Los Angeles, and hotel workers recently, have won gains by striking. Significantly, the majority of these strikers and many of their leaders have been women. The growing militancy points to a broadening understanding and confidence by working people in their social power. Unionized workers are a small fraction of the workforce today but can wield great leverage.

The Democrats stood firm in January but have already offered significant anti-immigrant concessions —massive funding for a "smart wall," enhanced border security, and more Border Patrol agents. These will do nothing to solve the real crisis on the Mexican border, the plight of thousands of asylum-seekers fleeing repression and violence in their home countries.

The crises on the border and at home are linked. It will take a massive organized response by workers and their unions to achieve justice. Sara Nelson, echoing Dr King, spoke of the fierce urgency that "all of

us" come together. In today's world especially "all" has to be understood internationally not just nationally.

THE ANGST OF THE 1%

-Michael Frank, retiree LaGuardia CC



The *New York Times* (1/22/19) reported on a bleak letter by the billionaire investor Seth Klarman that was circulated at the World Economic Forum in Davos. The letter warns about the coming financial crisis amid increased levels of social conflict. In 2017, Klarman took the unusual step of returning some of his fund to his clients saying he did not see enough good investment opportunities. He is concerned that, since the 2008 crisis, countries have taken on a level of debt that approaches or exceeds 100 percent of gross national product. "America," he writes, "will inevitably reach an inflection point whereupon a suddenly more skeptical debt market will refuse to continue to lend to us at rates we can afford. By the time such a crisis hits, it will likely be too late to get our house in order."

The business-as-usual attitude of investors who are taking on even more risk has Klarman worried. "Individuals, professional investors and financiers are prone to project their own recent experience into the future. So when adversity is absent, investors become complacent. They assume good times will continue, and they grow careless about risk, perceiving it through rose-colored lenses."

Despite his angst that things are heading toward an inevitable crisis, Klarman does not oppose continuing investment. He writes, " ... since the worst does not frequently happen, you cannot let the fear of a monster storm completely paralyze you." In other words he has no solution, no way out of the conundrum.

Compounding his fears about the next downturn is the social and political context in which it will occur. "Social cohesion is essential for those who have capital to invest....It can't be business as usual amid constant protests, riots, shutdowns and escalating social tensions....It is not hard to imagine worsening social unrest among a generation that is falling behind economically and feels betrayed by a massive national debt that was incurred without any obvious benefit to them."

Here Klarman is referring to the trillions of dollars in bailouts to the financial sector to staunch the 2008 crisis. Although this unprecedented state intervention was successful in avoiding a depression on the scale of the 1930s and the social upheavals of that era, it has resulted in a long period of slow growth and an enormous debt overhang. The only real cure for a capitalist crisis is the purging effects of a depression -- the devaluation of bloated assets, bankruptcies, extensive layoffs -- that create the conditions for a new upswing. By preventing this, the bailouts served only to buy time and kick the ball down the road.

The ultimate limits to capitalism lay not with its economic ratios but with the tolerance of working people for such a system. And the 1% know this.



MEMORIES OF BOOK STORES PAST: ENDICOTT BOOKSELLERS

-Constance H. Gemson, LaGuardia CC

Living on the Upper West Side of Manhattan for decades, bookstores were an essential feature of my life. I fondly recall Endicott Booksellers. The store's image was British and the store looked like it belonged in a London movie. Locals valued the Endicott poetry and New York City sections.

Before this book seller opened in 1981, the space was a rundown welfare hotel. Later, next door was Dean and DeLuca, an upscale food store. West Siders visited this world of high fashion food and some left to buy books rather than designer bread. The food store didn't last long on this site but the Endicott endured until 1995.

For Endicott readings, early birds sat on the delicate, red cushioned sofa, late comers were exiled to the stiff wooden chairs in back. Mary Gordon read stories of Catholic guilt and grace. Mary Morris told about her world-wide adventures. Tracy Kidder's book *Among School Children* explored youngsters' lives in Holyoke, Massachusetts. The store owners posted authors' quotes on parchment paper in the store window. I remember Vladimir Nabokov's words: "literature was not born when a boy came crying

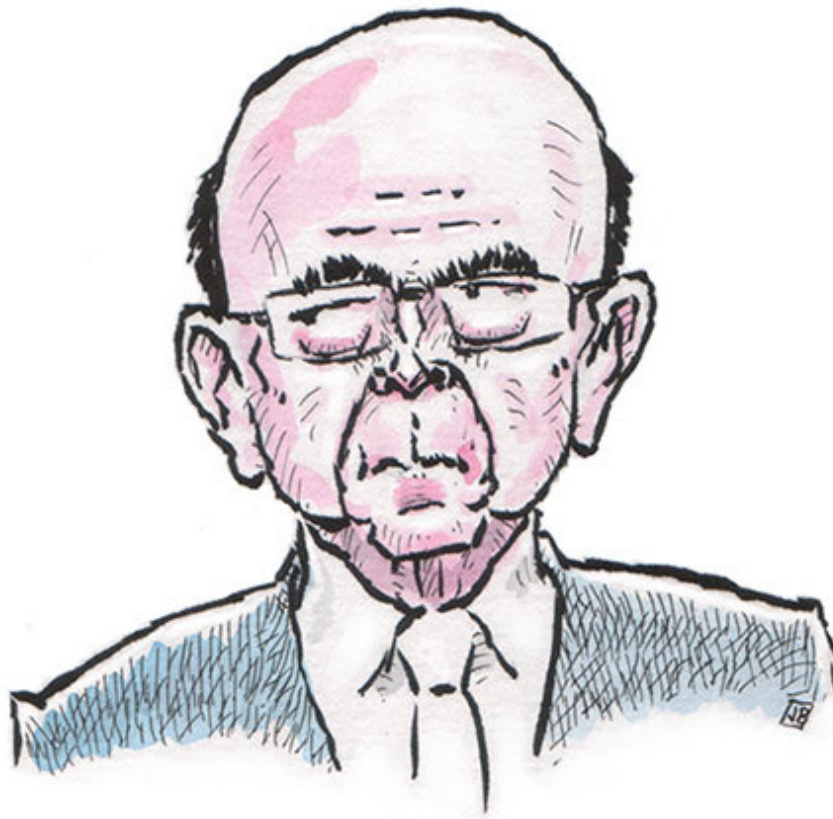
wolf, wolf, and there was a big gray wolf at his heels. Literature was born when a boy came crying wolf, wolf and there was not a wolf behind him. “

I asked the clerk for a copy and offered to pay. “I’ll see what I can do,” she said. A week later I received a free copy of the

parchment paper in the mail. I still treasure it and my memories of the Endicott.

Editor’s note: Readers are welcome to send in memories and thoughts about their neighborhoods. retirees@pscmail.org attention *Turning the Page*.

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross claimed that unpaid federal workers were facing a little liquidity crisis and went on to say that he didn’t understand why they were visiting food banks when they could be taking out loans.



Welcome, Josh Brown, who recently retired as Director of the American Social History Project/ Center for Media and Learning at the Graduate Center. Josh is also a political cartoonist, who agreed to provide illustrations for Turning the Page, starting with the caricature of Wilbur Ross, above, and the PATCO illustration on page 5. Josh 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/dw.htm>.