

SEPTEMBER 2019



Academic Year 2019-20 No. 1

psc-cuny.org/retirees

OPENING CHAPTER MEETING MONDAY, SEPT. 16, 1-3 PM

Are you ready to turn the page to September? Our September chapter meeting on the State of the Union(s) has been moved back a week to 9/16 to accommodate our speakers' schedules. **Barbara Bowen**, PSC President, will speak on the state of the PSC. **Stephanie Luce**, professor at the Graduate Center and the Murphy Institute, will join her, speaking on the state of the larger American union movement.

Join us for discussion, light refreshments and the opportunity to renew ties with new, and not-so-new, retiree colleagues. 1 – 3 PM, PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor, ■

MON. OCT. 7 CHAPTER MEETING



The robots aren't coming...but the tech workers are

Meredith Whittaker, one of the organizers of the Worldwide Google Walkout last November and cofounder of the AI Now Institute, will speak about the social implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Meredith is a distinguished research scientist at NYU and a long-time worker at Google, where she organized an effort to stop Google from a project named MAVEN (yes, maven!), which was using AI to weaponize drones. She has been busy testifying to various committees of Congress on problems such as facial recognition, privacy, security and discrimination. We are lucky to snatch her away from her extensive travel and speaking schedule. Among her useful activities is her connection with various networks of tech workers who are speaking out about unequal conditions in the industry and the projects they are working on. ■

UPCOMING EVENTS

FRIDAY, SEPT. 20 STUDENT STRIKE TO PRECEDE UN SUMMIT ON CLIMATE CRISIS



Youth groups are calling for a global student strike on Friday, September 20, just before the UN Summit meeting to address the climate and migration crises. The strike is to demand that governments immediately act to protect us all from the worsening effects of global warming. We are already experiencing severe droughts, forest fires, floods and storms. Greta Thunberg, the

Swedish student who has petitioned her own government's parliament every week for several years, has sailed to NY to address the NYC marchers. Students are asking us all to join them.

The People's Climate Movement-metro (PCM), a broad coalition of environmental, community and labor organizations, endorses the student strike and the midtown march to demand that the world's governments dramatically and immediately step up their efforts to avoid the disastrous consequences of climate change. World governments have failed to curb greenhouse gas emissions in spite of the commitments made in Paris in 2014.



The PSC Environmental Justice Working Group is working with PCM on outreach for the strike and other actions being planned during the week of September 20-27. Mild, ineffective, and unjust solutions are no longer excusable. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report in 2018, if global temperatures rise even another half degree, the results will be disastrous. Sixty-nine million more people could be exposed to flooding. 70% of coral reefs will die. The Institute of Economics and Peace reported that in 2017 alone natural disasters displaced 18 million people.

While led by youth, emphasizing our imperiled future, this march will be multigenerational; only through truly collective action can we deliver the systematic changes needed to save our present and our future. Adults have the voting power, but we all have a responsibility to make our voices heard. Young people ask us all to become more engaged, to mobilize our school, workplace, community, and our country.

Please save the date and join us on the afternoon of September 20 for the People's Climate Movement March. For more information about where and when to meet on September 20 or about the Environmental Justice Working Group (EJWG), email Eileen Moran, chair of the EJWG, at eileenmoran7@gmail.com ■

9/11 HEALTH CARE FOLLOW-UP SEPT. 16, 6-8 PM

On September 16 from 6-8 PM at Borough of Manhattan Community College Theater I, a free 9/11 Informational Seminar is scheduled to take place. Many retirees lived or worked in lower Manhattan and central Brooklyn following September 11th. People who were downtown on 9/11 or during the eight months following the attack and have developed illnesses such as cancer may be entitled to free health care and/or compensation.

All downtown residents, workers, students, and teachers are invited to come learn what their rights are and how to apply for:

- Free medical monitoring and treatment from the World Trade Center Health Program
- Compensation from the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund (recently extended 70 years)

The website to reserve free tickets is <http://tickets.tribecapac.org/FREE-911-informational-seminar>

Happy to answer any questions:
Hilary Walke, director of media at
Barasch & McGarry, www.wtclawyers.com

FINISHED BUSINESS!



DUES INCREASE. Members of the Retiree Chapter should have received an invoice this past week or so for annual dues for the 2019-20 academic year. The invoice reflects **the first dues increase (from \$71 to \$85) for retirees in more than two decades.** An announcement of the dues increase was sent to the Retiree Chapter email list on July 1 and again on August 19.

Calculating inflation, the \$71 in annual dues paid in 1999 is equivalent to \$109.14 in 2019 dollars. The modest dues jump is substantially less.

In an online poll on the PSC website, which retirees were invited to take in the December 2018 newsletter (with results reported in the February 2019 newsletter), an over-

whelming majority said they were OK with an increase to \$85. (The December 2018 and February 2019 issues of the newsletter are available at <https://psc-cuny.org/retirees-chapter-newsletters>.)

In addition, a new dues category has been established at \$40 annually, called "retired part-timer." Part-timers are greatly underrepresented in the chapter. A new dues category at a lower rate will help attract more. (If you retired as an adjunct, call the PSC at 212-354-1252 and ask for the membership department to adjust your dues from \$85 to \$40.)

At \$85, membership for full-timers in the Retiree Chapter is still a bargain, enriched by our monthly programs and January and June luncheons; and enriched by our advocacy for seniors, for public higher education and for CUNY. On top of that, you receive *Clarion* by mail as well as *Turning the Page*, our chapter's monthly newsletter. You also continue eligibility for any benefits that you receive through NYSUT, the PSC's state affiliate. And there's a menu of additional cultural and social activities: Walking tours, theater parties, a creative writing workshop, a movie group, and more. A bargain, indeed! ■

ONGOING BUSINESS

TRS UPDATE: More than 300 CUNY retirees in the NYC Teachers Retirement System (TRS) have not collected their full pension because the CUNY Payroll Office did not provide the accurate final salary history that TRS needs to calculate each individual's monthly payments.

We have some tentative, but important, news to report.

On August 6th, Debbie Bell (PSC Executive Director), Sharon Persinger (PSC Treasurer) and Bill Friedheim (Chair/PSC Retirees)

met with top leadership of the Teachers Retirement System (TRS): The Executive Director, the Deputy Director, the Director of the Office of Operations and the key staff person “massaging” the still incomplete data from CUNY.

While TRS has not yet received fully accurate data from CUNY payroll, TRS has enough information for enough retirees to provide a tentative timetable for resolving some of the issues.



Here’s what TRS said it hopes to do:

- Make the final adjustments for 229 full-time retirees (who received retroactive pay in January 2017 from the last contract) starting in September and concluding by the end of November. That number includes 127 full-timers from senior colleges and another 102 from community colleges, for a total of 229. That total covers all full-timers, including those who received hourly or adjunct pay at their college or unit in addition to their regular monthly salary. **It does not however include** full-timers who received adjunct or hourly pay at **MULTIPLE** colleges or units in addition to their regular salary.
- Make the final adjustment after November for 83 additional TRS members who (1) received retroactive pay as adjuncts or hourly wages or (2) received retroactive pay as full-

timers but who also adjuncted and/or received hourly wages at multiple colleges or CUNY units. These 83 are in addition to the 229 above being processed between September and November.

- Explore assigning two or three of their “member resource” staff to deal with the CUNY retirees who received retroactive pay from the last contract and are still waiting for their final pension determinations. We were adamant pushing for this, given complaints that CUNY retirees were often frustrated, receiving inconsistent and/or incomplete information when calling or visiting TRS. TRS seemed to commit to do this, but the union will follow up. At the least, TRS will train their member resource staff on the issues facing CUNY retirees.
- Provide the PSC with the names of all those affected by the above.

PSC has requested the names of all those affected in the different categories and will keep pressing for full restitution.

JOIN US: PSC WORKING GROUPS **What’s happening in our chapter?**

Environmental Justice:

This fall the PSC Environmental Justice Working Group will continue its work in coalitions to divest public pensions from fossil fuels, promote labor’s engagement with the climate crisis, support a Green New Deal, block the Williams pipeline along NY beaches, and support a just transition that protects workers and vulnerable communities as NY transitions to renewable energy. Contact Eileen Moran for more information: eileenmoran7@gmail.com. Please join us.

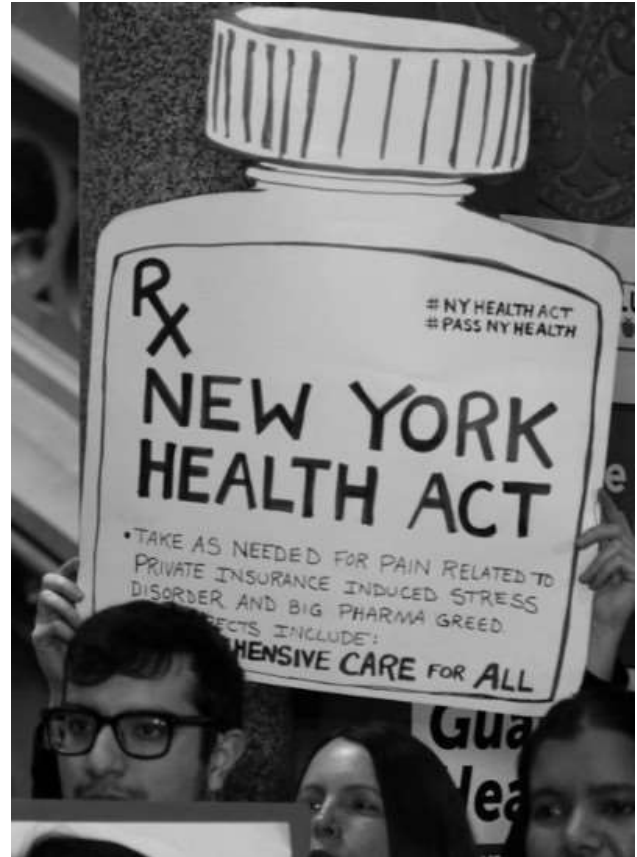
The next meeting is Monday, September 9, 5 – 7 PM at the PSC office.

Social Safety Committee:

The Social Safety Net Committee resumes its efforts this fall to defend and expand the various governmental programs which, along with our union contracts, protect our economic and health security. We're getting started early this semester: our first meeting was held on Wednesday, September 4th and the next is on Wednesday, October 2nd at the PSC, 15th floor, 61 Broadway.

Our focus this year is to promote federal and state legislation to secure Health Care for All. SSN Committee members went out last academic year tabling and leafleting at LaGuardia and NY City Tech, and we hope to go to all remaining CUNY campuses this year. Our current focus is on promotion and support for the New York Health Act (S.3577/A.5248), a/k/a the Gottfried-Rivera bill. This bill has passed in the NY Assembly for each of the last four years, and has strong support in the NYS Senate, now with its Democratic majority.

The Gottfried-Rivera bill is a so-called single-payer bill that will immediately upon implementation provide access to health care (medical, dental, optical, aural and long-term care) for all NY State residents – not just *most* residents or only *eventually* all by slowly lowering the age of Medicare eligibility. Under this bill all hospitals, clinics and medical offices will be paid through a NY Health Trust Fund. To cover the 1.25 million NY residents who now have no coverage at all and the millions more with inadequate coverage, the bill will establish new, graduated payroll taxes for all. [NOTE: While the PSC supports the NY Health Act as a “work in progress,” its support is conditional on modifications to protect previous union health-care gains (accommodations that the bill’s authors are seeking to build into the legislation).



The SSN Committee was established in 2011, initially as a committee of the Retirees Chapter and later as a PSC-wide committee, in response to the establishment of the so-called Simpson-Bowles Committee by the Obama Administration. Simpson-Bowles was charged with identifying policies "to improve the fiscal situation in the medium term and to achieve fiscal sustainability over the long run" – i.e., to plan for cutbacks in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid benefits.

In its early years the SSN Committee focused its efforts on defending and then expanding Social Security through publication of a union pamphlet, *Defending and Expanding the Social Safety Net: A Call to Action*, and speaking to unions and other groups across New York State. (Copies of the pamphlet are still available at no cost from the Retirees Chapter.) After the immediate attacks on Social Security were turned

back – the majority of Congressional Democrats now support *expansion* of Social Security benefits – the SSN Committee has shifted to its current focus to Health Care for All.

Retiree Chapter members are welcome and encouraged to participate in the SSN Committee, as are all PSC members. As we go out to table at all CUNY chapters, we need your help. Join us! ■

Quotable Quote:

"There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning." --Warren Buffet

SPECIAL FEATURE:



Ricardo Rosella's Hasty Departure

- Santiago Santana-Villafane,
Bronx EOC, Retired

Governor Ricardo Rosello's resignation in early August 2019 due to large scale public protests is a result of profound frustration that united disparate groups of Puerto Ricans into a formidable political force. The events of Hurricane Maria in 2017 caused the present situation to arise, but the root cause of this chapter of the Island's history began in 1898 when Spain ceded Puerto Rico to the United States as a result of the Spanish American War. America's Empire began a colonial experiment at the end of the Nineteenth Century. Now some 119 years later the beginning of the end of that empire may indeed be at hand in Puerto Rico. Women, Feminists, LGBT activists, men, some retirees and the generation of young Puerto Ricans attaining adulthood who want to remain in their birthplace joined ranks to deal with the failures of two

political parties that have shared power for decades. Rosello's pro-statehood New Progressive Party and the pro-commonwealth Popular Democratic Party constitute the two-party system, which has failed, in my opinion, to serve the evolving political needs of Puerto Rico.

Instead of continuing the divisive perennial debate about status for the Island as a state of the Union, a free nation, or an unincorporated territory of the United States, the protest turned attention to the widespread government corruption and cronyism: a 70 billion dollar public debt; a recession that dates back to 2007; the closure of more than 320 public schools; the loss of jobs because of two back-to-back hurricanes, and a tax haven for capital investors and part-time residents of the Island.

Women are the exception rather than the rule in Puerto Rican politics, and were singled out in Ricardo Rosello's misogynist comments to his inner circle in government that were revealed by investigative reporters. The resulting reaction was one of the flashpoints that motivated people from different groups to join the growing protest movement.

Women, single and married with families, are a prominent group in the forefront of this effort to end the politics of the past as represented by the two political parties. Onelia Perez Rivera is a women's rights organizer whose assessment of the ex-governor's resignation favored political change. Matt Meyer who writes for *Waging Nonviolence, People Powered News and Analysis*, quotes Perez Rivera: "This protest movement isn't headed by traditional leaders or by conventional left sectors. Young people are here, but also entire families have responded to the call with great creativity." Perez Rivera is respected for her accuracy and analysis. She is a leader in the empowerment association Centro Mujer

Barranquitas and was consulted by the originators of the protests because of her critique of the colonial and capitalist system that holds sway over Puerto Rico.



One of the young women moved to participate in the growing protests is Alexa Padilla, who is seventeen years old and traveled 40 miles one way by car frequently from Arecibo to the capital of San Juan with her father because of Rosello's incompetence and cronyism. Padilla and a friend read the leaked message about the ex-governor mocking victims of Hurricane Maria and using their cadavers to feed cattle. "I felt a fury I didn't know I could feel." Her deep frustration and anger were expressed by joining the protests near the governor's mansion, La Fortaleza.

Oscar Lopez Rivera, who is 76 and spent 35 years in a federal prison for supporting independence and lives in San Juan since winning clemency in 2017, has commented, "In our history, I don't think there has been a moment like this one." He elaborates further: "The demands Puerto Ricans are making ...go beyond the call for his resignation. Puerto Ricans want the house of corruption known as the Legislature to be cleaned out, [they want] the elimination of the Fiscal Control Board, and all public schools reopened."

In effect, Puerto Rico is at a crossroads in its history. The crucial involvement of women, gay rights activists like entertainer Ricky Martin, men, some retirees, and the younger generation who want to use the right to vote to bypass the traditional two-party political system, is a sea change for the Island's politics. Puerto Ricans are American citizens. If they live on the Island they can vote locally and in the primaries. However, if they reside on the mainland, they can vote in primaries and presidential elections. For those who chose to remain on the Island—some 3,200,000 people—political involvement can help to define their future. As one retiree who voted for Rossello said in a *NY Times* article:

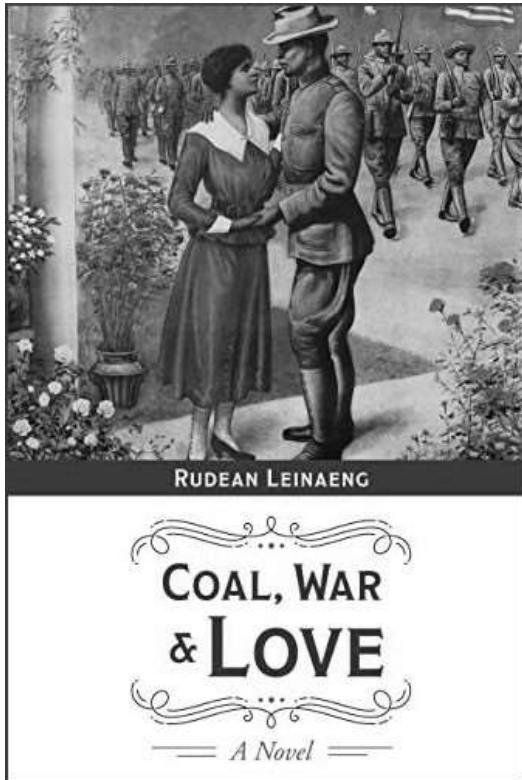
"The governor might have survived if he had taken care of the Island after the two hurricanes." He neglected the problem with electricity, the problem with water, the problem with getting money from the bank, the endless lines, a gasoline scarcity to fuel generators, and having to drink hot water because there was no ice. "It was really bad." Ms. Adorno, who used to be a loyal New Progressive voter, said, "Not anymore. In this moment...I have no party."

The struggle to overcome the legacy of a century of being a colony in the hidden empire that the United States has built through economic and military power awaits us. Let us be worthy of the challenge for our children and grandchildren who deserve nothing less. ■

RETIREE BOOKS

Coal, War & Love, A Novel by Rudean Leinaeng

- Cecelia McCall, Baruch, Retired



Everyone loves a love story is what first came to mind as I began Rudean Leinaeng's self-published novel, "*Coal, War & Love*." The novel is a work of historical fiction, set in early twentieth century New York. It is based on the real-life experiences of the author's grandparents, Albert Johnson and the woman he courted and married, Evelyn (Evie) Ashton.

Rudean Leinaeng, now retired, is a colleague who taught chemistry at Bronx Community College and a comrade with whom I worked in the Free South Africa Movement. So I was pleased to have the opportunity to read and review her first novel. The story is told in first person and the chapters alternate between Albert's voice and perspective and Evie's. The ex-

tensive use of dialogue follows one of Elmore Leonard's rules of writing fiction: "Try to leave out the parts that readers tend to skip," i.e. long descriptive paragraphs. But he says, "You never skip dialogue."

The narrative begins with Albert, a waiter on the ferry that plies the Hudson River between New York City and Albany, falling in love at first sight with Evie when he sees her in the ferry's cafeteria. She lives and works in Albany at the Peabody Collar Factory, but travels on the weekend ferry to her parents, who live in the black community of Weeksville, Brooklyn. The couple overcomes the initial objections of her family (Evie's father is a self-employed, successful plumber) to marrying a man of little education and limited prospects. The couple settles in Albany, where Albert is hired as a stoker in the boiler room of the New York State Capitol. Even though they would manage better with a second income, true to the patriarchal and authoritarian attitudes of the period, Albert demands that Evie not work and stay at home. The novel progresses through the years of their marriage, parenting and various familial issues, with them remaining devoted to each other; however, they do not seem to trust each other where money is concerned. Evie, an expert seamstress, secretly sews for well-to-do Albany matrons, but hides the additional income from her husband. He, in turn, does the same when he inherits several hundred dollars from his errant grandfather.

Albert and his Evie are separated when, in order to improve his chances of obtaining a better paying job, Albert enlists in the army, joining the all black 15th Regiment, later named the 369th Regiment of General "Blackjack" Pershing's 93rd Division. Nicknamed the Harlem Hell Fighters by the Germans, they were assigned to the French army, fought in the Argonne and were highly decorated. The description of the harrowing conditions of the WWI trenches and bat-

tle scenes are vivid and gripping. While her husband is overseas, Evie, the head of the household, earns her badge of independence, caring for their children and safeguarding them against the Spanish Flu, which is said to have killed more people world-wide than the Great War.

I found it fascinating to read about downtown Albany (Pearl St., Lark St.) of the early 1900s and the communities of Irish, Italian, Dutch, Polish, German and African Americans that were dispersed when Governor Nelson Rockefeller took a wrecking ball to their neighborhoods in order to build the current legislative complex, a mammoth eyesore. Overhead highways and ramps cut through the streets, leaving behind the remains of isolated tenements and ethnic restaurants. She writes about the Johnson children playing in Washington Park at the peak of State Street, where upper income people lived in stately homes and which has experienced a rebirth during the past several decades.

“Coal, love and War” is available on Amazon in paperback :
https://www.amazon.com/Coal-War-Love-Rudean-Leinaeng-ebook/dp/B07VCG6C54/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Coal,+love+and+War&qid=1567008039&s=books&sr=1-1 ■

Mindfulness and its Discontents: Education, Self and Social Transformation
Fernwood Press, 2019
David Forbes

This new book by David Forbes, School of Psychology, Counseling & Leadership, Brooklyn College, explores the ways that mindfulness has been misused in selling educational practices. Forbes argues that mindfulness, shorn of its Buddhist roots, has become “McMindfulness,” a packaged

neoliberal, late-stage capitalist strategy for self-promotion rather than for human development and social justice. ■

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>. Below is the latest in the series, a caricature of the President,



NOTE TO READERS:

Please let us know if you have a new book that you think would be of general interest to *Turning the Page* readers. Contact us at retirees@pscmail.org and put “book” in the subject line.

In our next two issues we would love to print an article or two in our *Reflections on Retirement* column, particularly from those of you in the just-retired Class of 2018-19! What are you up to and how are you managing this transition? ■