

OCTOBER 2022



Academic Year 2022-23 No. 2

psc-cuny.org/retirees.org

**VIRTUAL CHAPTER MEETING
MONDAY, OCTOBER 3
1-3PM**

**PART I: UPCOMING ELECTIONS-
MAKING A DIFFERENCE**



Speakers:

Prof. Susan Kang, John Jay.
Chairperson, Political Science; PSC
Executive Council, Senior College
Officer; NYCDSA member; occasional
commentator on NY 1; author, *Human
Rights and Labor Solidarity: Trade
Unions and the Global Economy*

Luke Elliot-Negri, PSC Legislative
Representative; PSC Executive Council,
University-wide Officer; writes
extensively on politics and the labor
movement; co-author: *Gains and
Losses: How Protestors Win and Lose*

Kate Pfordresher, recently retired PSC
Political and Policy Director; volunteer
for Working America, a non-profit
organization founded by the AFL-CIO
that is working to reach non-union
workers.

Peter Hogness, Past award-winning
editor *Clarion* (15 years); volunteer for
Seed the Vote, which supports
grassroots organizing in swing states.

Info on how you can support grassroots
groups in key states this fall—by
canvassing, phone banking, or
donating—is at seedthevote.org.

**PART II: UPDATE ON HEALTHCARE
CRISIS IN NYC**

As usual, you must register in advance
for this meeting:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAqfuGprj4tH9yQIRuC-7h-VJgt-KP2YxjE>

After registering, you will receive a
confirmation email containing
information about joining the meeting.
PLEASE SAVE THE CONFIRMATION.

NOTE ON MEMBERSHIP: Membership
dues notices were mailed out. If you
have not received a renewal notice in
the mail, please contact the PSC
Membership Department at 212 354-
1252.

Continuing members: You can return your dues envelope with a check or pay your dues online at <https://psc-cuny.org/retireedues/>

Please tell people you know who have recently retired or who are not getting PSC email or dues notices to JOIN US.

New members: <https://psc-cuny.org/about-us/retiree-membership/>

THE MONTH THAT WAS

SEPTEMBER 12: STATE OF THE UNIONS and THE YEAR TO COME

Nearly 200 people attended the Sept. 12th Retiree Chapter meeting to hear PSC President **James Davis**, Executive Director **Dean Hubbard**, prior Executive Director **Debbie Bell**, and our guest speaker, Distinguished Professor **Ruth Milkman** of the SLU (School of Labor & Urban Studies). Milkman has traditionally given us a State of the Unions address. She reported that New York State's public and private union sector density is double the national average, and there has been a spike in organizing activity. Although independent unions at Amazon and Starbucks have received the most attention, other new union locals have been created by workers in education, health care, and public administration. Nevertheless, the overall national union membership among 160,000 million workers has decreased. Assumed reasons are aggressive union busting in the private sector, as well as the *Janus Supreme Court* decision that gouged automatic union dues collection in the public sector. You can download the entire report with its illuminating charts: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/qc_pubs/716/.

Despite a Protect-the-Right-to-Organize (PRO) bill in both houses of Congress, Republican opposition makes it hard to achieve legislative victories. What must change is the public perception of the value of unions. Milkman is optimistic about the increasing popularity of unions among educated young people and sees resonance with the mood of the 1930s.



ECONOMIC OUTLOOK—CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF RECESSION

In his report of the challenges to and opportunities for the PSC, **James Davis** cited the economic outlook of expected budget gaps between available CUNY monies and those needed due to inflation, plus an overall decline in enrollment, particularly in community and comprehensive colleges. These, plus a chance of a recession will make for a tough contractual fight ahead.

However, Davis noted we have more community and political support than we ever had before, including students, community groups, and politicians in the form of CUNY Rising and a New Deal for CUNY campaign, a collaboration with UUP, and the recent AFT-AAUP affiliation. The solution to a contract victory is more member-to-member and public dialogue, again inspiring workers to realize how much they can gain by solidarity. Nine thousand members participated in the contract demand

survey, indicating increasing engagement.

The elephant in the room was not hidden—it is an attempt by the City to switch retiree health insurance to a privatized plan to save money. However, now the stakes have been raised because the City wants to accomplish this by changing the NYC Administrative Code to allow different health insurance plans for different groups—potentially affecting active workers as well. All but eleven unions of the one hundred two that constitute the Municipal Labor Council agreed to this plan. The PSC has been adamant in its opposition to this change, which is thoroughly documented on the PSC Retirees Chapter website. The City’s proposal for Medicare Advantage has been challenged legally and through public outcry at every stage since it was introduced in 2021.

The original carrier (Anthem/Emblem) has dropped out. Now supposedly Aetna is aiming at this pie. But any change in city law must go to the City Council for approval. Public hearings are required but have yet to be scheduled. No change in retiree health insurance is likely to happen before April or July 2023. Meanwhile, the status quo will remain. The PSC has its opposition plan on the website, which includes an **Act Now** letter to City Council members, plus group meetings with Council members and other organizing, as well as suggestions for alternatives such as the City self-insuring and, of course, health care for all. Read the PSC’s position on the NY Health Act at <https://bit.ly/3xhKbu1>

As you know this critical health care issue is full of surprises. Your source for up-to-date coverage and action is: psc-cuny.org/retirees □

REMEMBERING CAROL SMITH

Fran Geteles, CCNY



Carol Smith, a retiree and former counselor for students in the SEEK programs at City College and Baruch College, died suddenly on August 18, 2022, while swimming in a lake in upstate New York. Many of us in the CUNY community knew her as a colleague, a friend, and an ally.

She was already committed to fighting for social justice when she came to City College in the aftermath of the widely publicized shutdown of the school by Black and Puerto Rican students, who were fighting for more fair and equitable treatment of people of color within the University. She continued that struggle after joining the faculty.

As a counselor in SEEK, she struggled to make college opportunity real for underprivileged and often underprepared students. Many of those students became friends and she remained in contact with them after college.

She also worked very closely with student groups and other members of the faculty on other crucial justice issues, some local and some of international import. A few of these were: the fight against efforts to keep raising the cost of tuition at the University; the fight against the elimination of remedial courses in CUNY's senior colleges, which meant fewer students from our city's poorly funded schools could be accepted into those senior colleges; the fight to stop City College from closing its nursing program; the fight against apartheid in South Africa; support for the Cuban Revolution; and opposition to the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. She expressed her solidarity with the oppressed people of the world, especially those in Latin America. She lived in Chile during the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende. After it was overthrown by General Augusto Pinochet in a CIA-supported coup, she actively supported the solidarity movement in the United States. In the 1980s and 1990s she dedicated much of her political energy to solidarity with the struggles of the people of Central America, and more recently to the indigenous Mapuche people of Chile and Argentina. She traveled widely in Latin America. Good at making friends, she came away from these visits with new friendships, often with justice advocates from those countries. Those

friendships were often sustained over many years.

After retirement, she continued fighting as a member of the International Committee of the PSC and as a member of the Jewish Voice for Peace.



A button from the exhibit Carol curated

During her later years on the CCNY faculty and for several years after retirement, Carol studied the political activism on the CCNY campus in the 1930s and 40s, and curated an exhibit entitled "*Protest and Repression: The Struggle for Free Speech at CCNY, 1931-42.*" It graphically told the story of faculty and student struggles against militarism, social and economic injustice at home, and the threat of fascism abroad. Participants also fought to defend free speech on their campus. Sadly, in response, some students were expelled, and some faculty members fired. This exhibit was shown at the Graduate Center, City College and on several other CUNY campuses, as well as community centers in the city and various colleges around the United States. It can be seen online at

<https://virtualny.ashp.cuny.edu/gutter/pannels/panel1.html#>

She leaves her partner, Joe Esposito, her step-grandson, Marcello, and countless friends at CUNY, in New York, and around the world. Carol, we admire your dedication and all the wonderful work that resulted from it. And we will miss you. ☐

MORE ABOUT LABOR:

A NEW LABOR UPSURGE

*This article by **Stephanie Luce**, Professor in CUNY's School of Labor and Urban Studies, supplements recent labor developments. Stephanie is co-author with Ruth Milkman of the annual "State of the Unions" report. Ruth did not have time at our last chapter meeting to address this organizing.*

After decades of decline in labor organizing, the last few years have shown signs of life. While not yet a full upsurge, we are seeing several exciting trends emerging.

New organizing

Only a few years ago many labor organizers would have said it was impossible to unionize fast food or retail chains store-by-store. In the past, powerful companies like Walmart simply shut down a store if workers tried to unionize. Companies fired pro-union workers who had little recourse. But today we are amid a rapid wave of [union election victories](#) in these very kinds of workplaces, from Starbucks to REI to Chipotle and Amazon. There is still a long way to go to catch up to the rates of election victories in the past, but there

is a strong upward trend and a sense of momentum. Union staff report that they [can't keep up with demand](#), and workers have taken to training each other on how to form a union – such as the Starbucks and Amazon workers who have met other workers via social media and shared tips and support.



The new organizing is happening across the country. Despite a strong anti-union climate and regulation in the U.S. South, there is a [flurry of union activity](#), including Starbucks union elections, [Dollar Store strikes](#), and a new Worker Academy where [workers are training](#) one another in organizing.

Strikes and Protest

Cornell University has begun [tracking labor protests](#). Here too, we see an upward trend in the number of strikes and protests. There was a notable bump in the fall of 2021, referred to in the media as "Striketober." This was in part due to several notable contracts coming up around the same time. That strike activity could increase considerably next year as the UPS contract expires at the end of July 2023. As [CNN reported](#), "one of the largest strikes in history is brewing at UPS," as the company has about 350,000 drivers and package sorters.

The new president of the Teamsters union, which represents UPS, has

declared his intent to strike the company if needed. And he has pledged to support and work with Amazon workers, who may also need to consider striking to win recognition.

Union Revitalization

Along with the Teamsters, other unions are electing new leaders and rebuilding their unions - another indicator that the labor movement may be coming back to life. We've seen a rising number of new labor leaders that are more militant and willing to take more risks, such as those within the teachers' unions in Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Oakland, Seattle and elsewhere. More women and [people of color](#) are in leadership positions, building social movement and [racial justice unionism](#).

United Auto Workers reformers [won](#) a "one member, one vote" referendum in December 2021, after a series of corruption scandals within the union leadership. And the Communications Workers of America has been steadily building their internal [education programs](#), featuring a "Reversing Runaway Inequality" and "Fight Forward" human-rights trainings.

Worker Confidence and Public Support

Years of organizing, plus pent-up anger at the way front-line workers were treated during the pandemic and a tight labor market, have resulted in new terrain for workers. Workers are demanding better treatment and a union. And the public agrees! [Public support for unions](#) is at 71% - the highest it has been in almost 60 years. A decade ago there were only a handful of labor journalists; today labor journalism is thriving, and a whole new

crop of writers are covering worker issues for a variety of publications. And in fact, many of those young writers [are themselves unionizing](#).

Building the Upsurge

Labor upsurges tend to happen quickly and grow much larger than union staff can handle. This means that upsurges require a wide base of worker-led activity, which is already happening. Existing unions and union members can support this by creating member-to-member training programs like those at the [NewsGuild](#), [Raise Up the South](#), and the [Emergency Workers Organizing Committee](#).



Union members should look for spaces to connect with other workers to share organizing materials, as well as material and political support for their efforts. Despite the flaws of tools like Twitter and TikTok, they can be a great way for union members to connect and share information and resources. Organizations such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) offer a [variety of ways](#) to support new organizing. For example, [Chipotle workers](#) learned about Labor Notes organizing books through other rank-and-file union members in their local DSA chapter.

This is an exciting moment for the labor movement. New York [leads the nation](#) in

new organizing this past year. PSC members should be prepared for an active year ahead, from attending Starbucks “sip-ins,” to possible picket line support for UPS and Amazon workers, and more!

Healthcare

WHAT’S HAPPENING RIGHT NOW:

WHY IS THE CITY DOING THIS?

Some have indicated they don’t entirely understand what the MLC and the City have agreed to regarding health insurance for both active and retired public employees. Here’s an attempt to make it plain:

The City and the MLC want to change the city law (known as the “Administrative Code”) that says the city must provide free health insurance to active and retired employees and their dependents. The change would allow the City, with the approval of the MLC, to create different classes (or tiers) of workers for the purposes of giving them health insurance, and the City could then give different free health insurance plans to each class.

Right now, City law does not allow different plans. Once the change goes into effect, the City will change the plan for retirees to a Medicare Advantage plan from the current traditional Medicare plan. The City will be allowed to offer the traditional Medicare plan and charge a premium.

The City tried to institute such a change over the last year, but was blocked by a

judge’s ruling. The City has appealed, and the case will soon be heard.

The MLC voted to support the change in the law on Thursday, September 8. The change in the law must now come before the City Council, which must first hold two hearings about it before it votes. The City wants the hearings and the vote to be as soon as possible so that the legal case will be moot when the appeal is heard.

Right now, the class the City is aiming at is its retirees. But this change in the law allows the City and the MLC to designate other groups of workers in the future, such as active members.

WRITE YOUR CITY COUNCIL PERSON

You don’t need their direct email. Just use our **ACT NOW** website and either include the PSC letter or write your own comments. If you have already written, please ask others including active members to write. This is a fight for all.

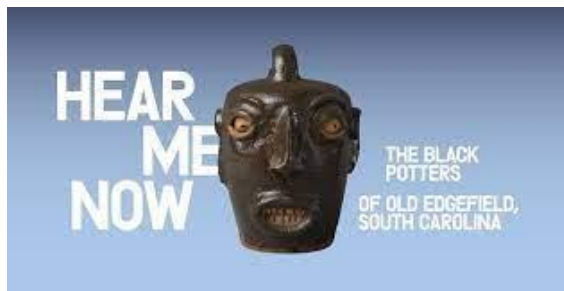
<https://psc-cuny.org/issues/act-now-to-protect-our-health-insurance/>



Marcia Newfield, BMCC

All forms of art contain clues as to the spiritual and material conditions of their

creators. Sometimes they are more explicit. Two current shows at the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** reveal mindsets in the 19th Century period before and after emancipation in two continents and two communities: South Carolina and Western Europe. It is one of many projects that the Museum is undertaking to “reassess and broaden the narratives it presents about the past and present.”



Hear Me Now: The Black Potters of Old Edgefield, South Carolina (through February 5) features work by African-American potters in an area that had rich clay deposits. It became the center of an industry before and after the Civil War. We think of enslaved labor in the 19th-century American South as critical to agriculture. However, it was also the backbone of the steel, turpentine, and pottery production (similarly coerced) that existed on an industrial scale. The exhibition presents over fifty ceramic objects that include enormous storage jars for milk, beef and other staples as well as vessels with faces carved on them (believed to have been made by slaves illegally transported after transatlantic slavery was officially banned from areas in Africa that specialized in these skills and materials).

The names on the vessels were usually those of the white owners of the property and were widely marketed.

One featured exception was the work of a literate potter and poet, Dave, who dared to break the laws of illiteracy and anonymity by writing his name with short verses and significant words on his vessels (Dave Drake after emancipation). Contemporary artists and scholars are continuing to research the area and artifacts.

Fictions of Emancipation (through March 23) is a small, though monumental exhibit based on a sculpture created in 1873 by celebrated French artist Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux. *Why Born Enslaved!* and other representations (endlessly reproduced by Carpeaux at the time and after 1925 when it came into the public domain) depict an anonymous African woman, with an exposed breast bound by rope and an expression of pain and apprehension, disgust, resistance (you choose). The other representations of antislavery and abolition, whether in blown glass, ceramic, earthenware or plaster, depict the emancipated slave in an abject, unclothed, or disheveled position, with chains abounding. An exception is *Forever Free* by Edmonia Lewis, a mixed-race African American and Native American woman, heavily supported by the abolitionist community. She completed her portrait of a couple commemorating the Thirteenth Amendment eradicating slavery. In the marble sculpture, the man holds up broken chains to symbolize their freedom. Two responses to the Carpeaux original by top-tier American artists, Kehinde Wiley and Kara Walker, turn the sculpture inside out. Wiley created a bust (from discarded sculptural materials) of a young Black man wearing a Lakers jersey, a comment on the commodification and

exploitation of Black athletes. Kara Walker also chose a plaster mold on which to imprint the contours of the enslaved model's image. Her work, *Negress*, is displayed in a corner on the ground, illuminated by a flickering candle. This is seen by one of the scholars who comments in the catalogue (*Carpeaux's Why Born Enslaved! Reconsidered*—well worth purchasing) as knocking it off its pedestal. □

ON THE LIGHTER SIDE:

ODE TO SOCKS

Joan Greenbaum, LaGuardia



They run off and hail ubers
Or cling to a new life in the dryer

with cotton strings dangling
they attach themselves to elastic
bands of underwear

They hide in the folds of that
top dresser drawer
And link toes with the hooks of bras

And most of all they do Not stay in pairs
Non monogamous they roam
Solo in the wider world.

---special thanks to Pablo Neruda
<https://poets.org/poem/ode-my-socks>

RETIREE CHAPTER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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RETIREE REPRESENTATIVES: PSC EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Marva Lilly* and Nancy Romer* are retiree members of the PSC Executive Council, serving terms of three years (2021-24).

*Anne Friedman, as chapter chair, and Marva Lilly and Nancy Romer, as members of the PSC Executive Council, are also DA delegates.

CHAIRMAN EMERITI

Bill Friedheim
Jacob Judd
Jim Perlstein
Irwin Yellowitz

KEY WEBSITE ADDRESSES:

PSC Retirees website

<https://psc-cuny.org/retirees/>

What's Happening with Retiree Healthcare

<https://psc-cuny.org/whats-happening-retiree-healthcare/>

Pay Your Dues online

<https://psc-cuny.org/retireedues/>

Change Your contact information

<https://psc-cuny.org/form/psc-membership-update-form-retirees/>

Join the Chapter

<https://psc-cuny.org/about-us/retiree-membership/>

Read the Chapter Newsletter <https://psc-cuny.org/retirees-chapter-newsletters/>

And very important for health benefit questions: **PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund**

<http://psccunywf.org/>

Reminder! Our Welfare Fund benefits provided by the PSC, including pharmacy, dental, vision and hearing benefits all remain the same regardless of the Medicare Advantage *mishegoss*.

TURNING THE PAGE is a publication of the Retirees chapter of PSC-CUNY, Local 2334 of NYSUT and the AFT.
