

MARCH 2023



Academic Year 2022-23 No. 5

psc-cuny.org/retirees.org

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE

PSC ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP STEPS IT UP THIS SPRING

Nancy Romer, Brooklyn and
Eileen Moran, Queens

This spring the PSC Environmental Justice Working Group (EJWG) has exciting plans for a few innovative projects both inside and outside the classroom at CUNY. Two projects in which we hope to engage both faculty and students inside our classrooms involve waste audits and environmental and sustainability curricula. Outside the classroom, the EJWG will continue our engagement with environmental justice coalitions in NYC, NYS and with our union affiliates. A survey of our committee members at the end of the fall semester helped set these priorities.

EJWG's Climate Lessons in CUNY Classrooms

Our committee has sought to develop projects that faculty in Environmental Studies can do in their classes with students. The EJWG hopes to engage students in waste audits this spring to learn how to minimize waste, eliminate single-use plastics, and press for composting and recycling. We will follow up and work with CUNY administration around waste audits beginning with two or three campuses this spring.



Unfortunately, COVID sidelined much of EJWG's agenda to work with student committees and **NYPIRG** (NY Public Interest Research Group) on plastics and more sustainable food service when most classes and meetings were pushed online. When COVID struck, CUNY Central was in the process of contracting with food service vendors about cutting waste, and even now those services are not yet back on many campuses. Several faculty are also committed to developing inter-disciplinary curricula to address environmental and sustainability challenges. This will be a longer-term project in coordination with faculty senate groups.

EJWG Building Coalitions in NYS and NYC to Move the Climate Agenda

EJWG members represent the committee in several City and State environmental groups, and report back or bring action recommendations in support of legislation or funding. At the State level, we work with **NY Renews** and **Climate Can't Wait**, both coalitions committed to moving the State's climate agenda. Cryptocurrency has been stopped in NYS, and last year the Environmental Bond Act was passed. Now the NYS Climate Action Council, with environmental representatives on board, including **NY Renews**, is pressing to implement—that is, fund—the landmark **Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act**, which was passed three years ago.

EJWG Pushes to Pass Legislation

EJWG has also advanced the **Build Public Renewables Act** as private utilities are slow to transition to renewable energy. PSC passed a resolution in support of expanding public power that won unanimous support at NYSUT, and it will be on this year's legislative agenda.

Again, NYC with PSC and other labor and coalition support, passed the **Dirty Buildings Bill (Local Law 97 – LL97)**. Now we support its implementation, which should dramatically reduce carbon emissions from large buildings – the main source of greenhouse gases in NYC. However, the Real Estate Board of NY (REBNY), with close ties to Mayor Adams, has been fighting its implementation tooth and nail. Many older city-owned buildings like CUNY's also need to meet the standards set by Local Law 97 for the sake of our students, faculty and staff, as well as the surrounding communities. Our committee members

have testified and lobbied for stricter enforcement and minimized carbon trades, which are a total sham.

EJWG Digs Composting



In coalition with **350.org** and other environmental justice groups, EJWG has pushed for and is glad to see that composting with curbside pick-up will resume. In Queens, it will return at the end of March and be phased in throughout the city over 20 months on a voluntary basis. Experts insist that composting needs to be mandatory to be effective, and substantial public education needs to be part of its implementation. Compostable food waste makes up 35% of the City's trash, as the City must otherwise truck its excess waste further and further to landfills, where it will produce methane gas.

EJWG Working Within Our Union Affiliates

AFT has established a climate committee and EJWG is engaged with other locals to promote a much more robust commitment to transform our workplaces and make our schools and colleges greener in day-to-day practices.

Most recently EJWG co-chairs met with faculty and staff representatives of United University Professions (UUP),

the union of SUNY faculty and staff, to consider state legislation mandating sustainability staff for all SUNY and CUNY campuses. Luke Elliot-Negri, chair of the PSC Legislative Committee, has been in touch with UUP to discuss the potential for PSC and UUP collaboration on sustainability legislation, including added staffing.

EJWG Joins for a Third Act



A national effort spearheaded by Bill McKibben specifically appeals to seniors to use their post-retirement time to help save the planet. Several EJWG members have already expressed interest, and others are most welcome. Over the past year, we have been targeting banks and other financial institutions funding climate chaos. **On March 21, Third Act** will picket banks here in NYC and all across the country. To find out more, go to <https://thirdact.org>. (Also see the Third Act article on page 5.)

Want to Help Save the Planet?

Interested in participating with the PSC Environmental Justice Working Group? The next meeting of **EJWG is Wed., March 15 at 5PM, on Zoom**. If you're interested, please email retirees@pscmail.org with "EJ" in the subject line to receive the Zoom link.

RETIREE CHAPTER TACKLES CLIMATE CHANGE

Uda Bradford, KCC

Two speakers, **Ann Reynolds** and **Len Rodberg**, presented a variety of approaches that are being utilized in New York to diminish the negative impacts of climate change. Ann Reynolds is the executive director of The Alliance for Clean Energy New York, and a member of the **New York State Climate Action Council**, which prepares recommendations to meet the state's energy and climate-action goals. Len Rodberg is professor emeritus and former chair of the Urban Studies Department at Queens College. He is the co-director of **Community Studies of New York** and a climate-change activist.

New York State Has a Plan

Ann Reynolds, the first presenter, described her agency's board as being half for-profit and half not-for-profit. It is involved with wind energy, solar power, energy storage, hydroelectricity, electric vehicles, and all forms of renewable energy.

The context for the Alliance for Clean Energy's work are the sources of greenhouse gases in New York. The Agency assesses several interactive contributions to climate change, such as emissions from transportation, heating and cooling buildings, waste, refrigeration, and agriculture. There are no operating coal plants in New York and the demand for electrification continues to increase. As New York's climate leadership works toward its goal of reducing emissions by 80% in 2040, there are many challenges to consider. These include the percentages of reliance on wind, solar and nu-

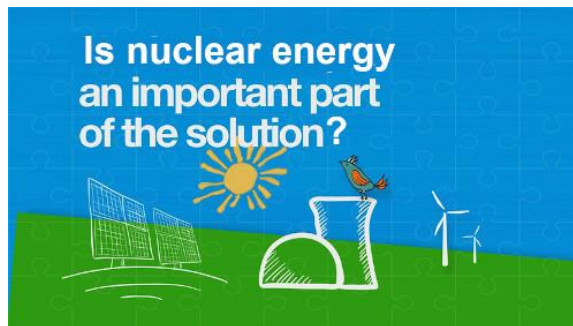
clear power, while also addressing climate justice issues such as leakage from power plants, business relocations, and public health impacts.

The NYS Plan anticipates both health and economic benefits. Reynolds reported that doing nothing to combat climate change would cost the State \$115 billion, while the net benefits of the Plan would amount to \$115-130 billion.

Currently, the plan is to meet intermediate targets by 2030. That process will include public comments and assessments of impacts on disadvantaged communities, as well as analyses of barriers and opportunities that are relevant to all sectors. Issues such as assessing the amount of renewable energy needed and how to manage costs continue to require careful analyses.

The Nuclear Option

Len Rodberg clarified the continuing challenges involved in addressing climate change and the need to reassess the contributions of nuclear energy. Examples include the millions of solar panels that will be needed by 2050, or the impact of weather-related occurrences such as insufficient wind or sunlight and recurrent hurricanes. He proposed that in order to power the entire society, 20% of power should be derived from nuclear sources. There are currently three nuclear-power plants in NYS. They are clean and relatively inexpensive to operate. He advised that the level of radiation involved is not high enough to be harmful due in part to the fact that we are protected by our DNA and its repair mechanisms.



Len Rodberg offered to lead three one-hour workshops to address the questions that were raised about the need to increase the utilization of nuclear power in our planning, and he emphasized the urgency of the issue because current deadlines are not likely to be met.

If you missed the February 6 chapter meeting, you can view a video of it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cEQG1nI9Ak>

Health care update—PSC proposal holding firm.

Dean Hubbard, PSC executive director, confirmed that retirees from across the City continue to be successful in preventing the changes in Administrative Code 12-126 by the City Council, which Mayor Adams would use to force all City retirees into Medicare Advantage or pay at least \$191 per month to stay on their present Senior Care. The PSC's alternative proposal to utilize City reserves to fund depleted programs for three fiscal years is being discussed. The adoption of this proposal would allow more time for additional analyses and for negotiation with others, including unions, for alternatives to Medicare Advantage. The PSC proposal is gaining traction, although the Progressive Caucus in the City Council has not yet endorsed it. If and when the City Council is fully on board, we will need to turn our attention

and activism to the Mayor, who seems intent on proceeding despite increasing opposition from City retirees and actives.

Health care updates continue to be available on the PSC Website at <https://psc-cuny.org/retirees>. If you are interested in joining the Social Safety Net committee which has been re-researching and strategizing next steps in this ongoing battle the next meeting is March 15 at 10:00 on zoom. Email us at retirees@pscmail.org with **Safety Net** in the subject line.



THIRD ACT

Cecelia McCall, Baruch College,
former Secretary of the PSC



The term “third act” is usually associated with the final act of a play. But, in this case, it is the name of an activist organization that Bill McKibben—environmentalist, long-time activist about climate warming and founder of **350.Org**.—has formed just for us activist retirees and wise elders. Third Act has a three-fold agenda: pressuring public utilities, cross-generational communication, and tracking and reacting to legislation about voting rights.

PSC’s Environmental Justice Working Group (EJWG) is affiliated with the NYC chapter, which, like all other chapters, is preparing for a National Day of Action to stop dirty banks, “**break up with your bank day**” on March 21 (3/21/23).

On 3/21/23, Third Act chapters across the country, along with the **Sierra Club**, now chaired by Ben Jealous, former president of the NAACP, will hold activities targeting Citi, Chase, Wells Fargo and Bank of America, the four major banks that fund the fossil fuel industry. Chapters will stage actions and take scissors to their credit cards at these banks. Some may even commit civil disobedience.

Third Act believes it can shut down the fossil fuel industry by eliminating the sources of their funding, which are banks that may hold your savings and other investments. Ben Jealous made the connection between banks funding the sources of pollution and their long, dirty history of redlining neighborhoods to block African American access to mortgages and home ownership – the latter the primary source of wealth for a majority of Americans.

NYC Third Act will target JP Morgan Chase with a festive rally at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza (47th St., between 1st and 2nd Aves.), beginning at 10:30 AM and followed by a march to Chase’s headquarters, where there will be a credit card-cutting ceremony. The rally will feature bands, balloons, placards, banners and Rev. Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping Choir. (You may have seen them perform at the Public Theatre.)

If the weather that we have been experiencing thus far is prologue to March's climate, **3/21/23** will be a glorious day for us to be making "good trouble" in NYC. Come out and join your EJWG colleagues. **See you at 10:30 AM, March 21st at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza.**



ART, BUTTERFLIES & SOCIAL CHANGE

Marcia Newfield

Although Valentine's Day is over, there are March opportunities to celebrate love.

What's Going On? Songs of Social Change is running at the **92nd Street Y** for only a few days at the end of March. Black songwriters and artists from Nina Simone to Marvin Gaye have produced songs of protest and cries for racial justice that have been the catalyst for social change. They are being celebrated in a production by outstanding artists. Warren Adams, co-founder of the Black Theatre Coalition, conceived and directs this show with Michael O. Mitchell (MJ: *The Musical*; *Amateur Night at the Apollo*). Familiar songs of protest such as *Redemption Song* (Bob Marley), *I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to be Free* (Nina Simone), *What's Going On?* (Marvin Gaye), and *Freedom* (Pharrell

Williams) became anthems for generations. They are presented by Broadway artists in performances that blend music, dance, poetry, and visual art. *March 25-27th. Times: Fri & Mon 7:30 PM; Sun 2 PM. Call 212-415-5500. Tickets start at \$35.*

LOVE at the Park Avenue Armory on 67th and Park Ave. (across the street from Hunter College) has been brought over from the UK National Theater, where it drew raves: "The National Theatre's play of the year — and then some." According to *The New York Times*, "This is naturalistic theater at its best ... an occasion for beauty and transcendence." Writer and director Alexander Zeldin created this work after a years-long process of community collaboration and immersion, personal interviews, and first-hand accounts of the welfare system. Several families are brought together in a shelter in the lead-up to Christmas. Played with the house lights up and audience members seated amongst the company, the audience is invited to bear witness to survival under these circumstances. Relevant, to say the least, to our times. *643 Park Ave. Through March 25th. Tickets from \$30.*

EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO has three innovative exhibitions: **Juan Francisco Elso: Por América.** Elso (1956-1988), part of the first generation of artists born and educated in post-revolutionary Cuba, gained international recognition in the 80s. Based in Havana, he created sculptures mostly using natural, organic materials, examining the complex forms of contemporary Cuban, Caribbean, and Latin American identities, as inflected by the cultural influences of indigenous traditions, Afro-Caribbean religious beliefs,

as well as the traumas of colonial oppression. El Museo places his work alongside a multigenerational group of artists active in the Caribbean, and throughout North, South and Central America. **Reynier Leyva Novo: Methuselah** is a digital artwork by the Cuban-born and Houston-based artist that virtually reproduces the transnational migratory journey of a single monarch butterfly, tracking its travel from southern Canada across the United States to Mexico. **DOMESTICANX** brings together a group of intergenerational artists whose practices address the private sphere through works related to healing, spirituality, decoration, and the home. Curated by Susanna V. Temkin, the show is inspired by the concept of “domesticana,” first theorized by artist, scholar, and critic Amalia Mesa-Bains in the 1990s. *104 St. & Fifth Ave., Thurs-Sun, through March 26th.*

LETTER TO TURNING THE PAGE

I was one of nearly 300 PSC retirees who attended the special chapter meeting on January 23, dedicated to the Medicare Advantage struggle. In the Q&A, retiree Len Rodberg, who has studied Medicare Advantage intensively, mentioned his article in *Common Dreams*, “Medicare Dis-Advantage: Shortchanging the Patients While Enriching the Insurer,” which I recommend: <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2022/08/30/medicare-dis-advantage-shortchanging-patients-while-enriching-insurer>

The arithmetic Len lays out is clear: In a NYC budget of over \$100 billion, the Mayor and the MLC want to save \$600 million a year by cutting the *entire*

amount the City currently pays for Senior Care. Today, the City pays \$2,107 to provide GHI Senior Care for each of the 257,000 retirees and their dependents. If the MA plan goes through, the City will not pay a penny. Whatever MA company is selected will receive more than \$3 billion from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). On average, MA companies allocate 14% of that for overhead (a third for profit, the rest for high executive salaries, advertising and administrative costs). So, Aetna or another company will have \$10,691 to spend on health care for each member, *24% less than the \$14,060 now being spent on our Medicare plus Senior Care.*

So, the MLC is right in saying that the federal government will pay the cost of an MA plan. It just leaves out the crucial part about having 24% less to spend on our care! Which entails paying doctors less than Medicare rates, burying them in paperwork to discourage and delay care (which means some will not accept MA), and using pre-authorization to deny specialist services.

-Glenn Kissack, Hunter
Campus Schools



A NEW BOOK GROUP

Next Fall our PSC Retirees chapter will be reading *Four Hundred Souls*, edited by Ibram X. Kendi & Keisha N Blain (*One World*, 2021).

This compelling volume brings together essays, narratives and poetry encompassing a community-based history of African America from 1619-2019.



The editors, well-known themselves, have asked major authors and scholars to tell this history from the perspective of those who lived it and studied it. *Time* magazine calls this best seller:

An impressive and illuminating collection that rejects Blackness in America as a singular experience and instead illustrates the range of Black experiences and voices.

The history most of us learned in school began with the Pilgrims in 1624, but the four-hundred-years struggle of African American oppression is frequently ignored. This rich compendium is eye opening in showing us the struggles of Africans and African Americans in building their own lives, culture, and freedom.

We will be discussing the book over the Fall 2023 semester and possibly continuing the next Spring. Please look at the book and/or read reviews about it so that you can plan to join this book group. This group is growing out of the Anti-Racism Committee of the Retirees chapter.

If you would like to join the reading and discussion group, please email us at retirees@pscmail.org with “Reading” in the subject line. Please tell us by May 15th so that we can plan for the Fall.



UPCOMING DATES

The Next Chapter meeting is **Monday, March 6th** at the usual 1:00 PM time on Zoom. You will receive an email with the information on how to register. (If you do not receive the Zoom link, email us at retirees@pscmail.org.)

This month the topic is Contingent Faculty Changes in U.S. Higher Education with speakers Glenn Colby, senior research officer, AAUP; Barbara Bowen, former PSC president, and Lynne Turner, PSC vice-president for part-time personnel.

March 14 from 10 AM -12 PM the Social Safety Net Committee meets on Zoom.

March 15 at 5:00 PM the Environmental Justice Working Group meets on Zoom.

March 21 at 10:30 AM Third-Act march on the banks.



What's Happening with Retiree Healthcare
<https://psc-cuny.org/whats-happening-retiree-healthcare/>

Paying Your Dues Online
<https://psc-cuny.org/retireedues/>

Changing Your Contact Information
<https://psc-cuny.org/form/psc-membership-update-form-retirees/>

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

Reading issues of *Turning the Page*
<https://psc-cuny.org/retirees-chapter-news-letters/>

And for very important health benefit questions PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund
<http://psccunywf.org/>

TURNING THE PAGE is back in print, and of course available online.



We are interested in hearing from you and very eager to encourage more articles, stories, and art from members. Consider topics that might be of interest to others, such as:

- plays and movies you have seen
- inexpensive trips you have taken
- books you have written
- short poems you write
- letters to the editors

And of course, your comments about the issues that we retirees are facing. Please write us at retirees@pscmail.org with "**Newsletter**" in the subject line.

The ***Turning the Page*** editorial committee is made up of Michael Frank, Joan Greenbaum, Dave Kotelchuck and Diane Menna.

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