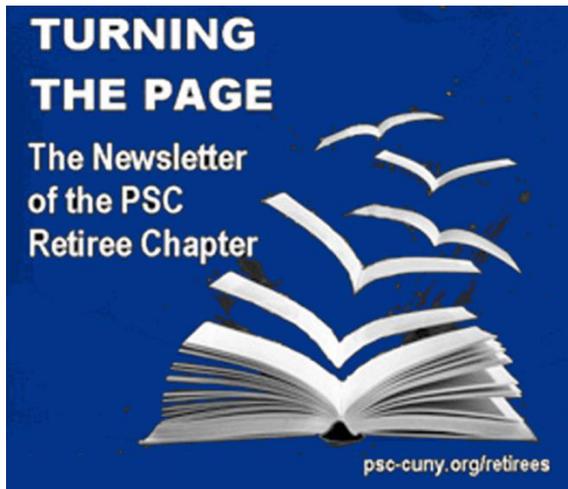


APRIL 2023



Academic Year 2022-23 No. 6

psc-cuny.org/retirees

CONTINGENT ISSUE

THE MONTH THAT WAS: CONFRONTING CONTINGENCY AND PROFIT CARE VS MEDI- CARE

Diane Menna, Queens College

The March 6th Retiree Chapter meeting took on the fundamental change in U.S. higher education from a full-time, tenured faculty to one increasingly dominated by contingent and part-time instructors, and how its continuing development affects all of us, including students. We also confronted, once again, the ups and downs of the battle to take away Medicare. [Editors' Note: This is a fast and furious fight. Please check in with the website and our email blasts to all retirees <https://psc-cuny.org/whats-happening-retiree-healthcare/>]

National Over-Reliance on Contingent Faculty

Glen Colby, senior research officer for the American Association of University Professors led off by presenting AAUP's report, co-produced with his colleague Ruben Guzman, that painted a national picture of colleges' and universities' increasing reliance on contingent faculty between 1985 and 2020. For example, as one graph showed, part-time faculty rose from approximately 33% to 48% while full-time faculty decreased from 39% to 23%. These figures spanned all institutional types from universities to associate colleges. In 2021, full- and part-time contingent faculty made up almost half of the faculty nationally.



The data also illustrated that women and under-represented minorities were more likely to hold contingent positions, i.e., part-time, or untenured. Graduate-student faculty, replacing full-time faculty, also increased nation-wide.

Colby provided the attendees with a taste of the AAUP interactive national database, which provides those interested with an invaluable tool for accessing this detailed information. The tool allows one to drill down using fill-in criteria to generate data, involving even particular CUNY colleges. <http://aaup.org/academic-workforce/>

Adjunctification of CUNY in a Larger Context

Barbra Bowen, immediate past PSC President (2000-2021), placed the crisis of increased contingency into the larger context of the City's and State's insistence on viewing resources as a zero-sum game. She remarked how the massive growth of adjunct faculty that grew out of the '70s fiscal crisis coincided, not coincidentally, with the explosion and democratization of the student body: more women, people of color, first-generation students. As Bowen bluntly contends, the reliance on contingent faculty was an "attempt to sabotage students' attempts to make political change."

Bowen and the PSC were not able to dismantle the mammoth CUNY system of exploitation of adjuncts, but they are proud of blows they struck at its foundations. For instance -- increased wages and paid office hours, health insurance for eligible adjuncts and graduate students, one-year and then three-year appointments. In the last few decades all occupations from tech workers to college employees, both public and private, have been pressed into this vise of controlling workers' pay and time. Chipping away at its base is imperative and impressive.

Lynne Turner, PSC vice president for part-time personnel, spoke about how the fight for a new contract intends to do more than chip away at the base. Turner reported that the rate of part-time members in the union is at 53%, recently declining as a percentage due to the pandemic, adjunct layoffs, and the Janus Supreme Court decision that took away agency-dues requirements. She

explained that contract demands recently compiled from the *entire* membership address many of the core issues of adjunct faculty: lack of opportunity, precarity, low wages, and lack of health insurance. (See *Bargaining for a New Vision*, in this issue.)

Uncertainty in Medicare Advantage Contract Stokes Anxiety



Dean Hubbard, PSC executive director, answered our outpouring of questions about the Municipal Labor Committee's (MLC) then-pending vote on the Aetna Medicare Advantage plan. The unfair nature of asking members of the MLC, of which the PSC is one, to vote on an unseen and unknown contract was glaringly obvious to all but the Mayor and MLC leadership. Questions that followed were fraught with worry and distress at the possibility of losing Senior Care and/or Welfare Fund benefits and/or IRMAA and Part B reimbursements. Since nothing is certain at this point, few sure answers were given at the meeting.

Since the March meeting, the MLC voted to approve Aetna's as the sole Medicare Advantage plan for all City retirees. The PSC and 14 other unions (made up of 25 locals) voted against it. See psc-cuny.org/retirees for the most recent updates on this nightmarish struggle, and the actions we are taking to turn the tide—once again. Those of us in this Retiree chapter have been in

many other struggles in our years at work. This one, where our essential health can be swallowed by for-profit care instead of Medicare, is one we as a union are ready to take on.

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PSC CONTRACT CAMPAIGN BEGINS ON DAY ONE—ON YOUR MARK, GET SET, DEMO

Robert Nelson, Graduate Center



The contract between the PSC and CUNY expired in February. With CUNY administration dragging its feet in coming to the bargaining table, the PSC commenced its campaign for a new contract at the very doorstep of the University in the early morning of February 27th. As administrators arrived at work at the central office, they were greeted by close to 500 members and supporters who rallied at the 42nd Street headquarters to demand that management begin bargaining without delay. At least a dozen retirees joined the crowd, chanting and cheering for speakers from the many sectors of the PSC. Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine spoke, along with representatives from NYS Nurses Association, the Central Labor Council, NYU's UAW local, and CUNY Rising. Past President Barbara Bowen reminded everyone how many unexpected victories the PSC achieved

in the last two decades, and current President James Davis urged the rally to join him lobbying the State legislature for a better budget. The rally was a wake-up call to CUNY that our members will not sit quietly for the usual delaying tactics. If you would like to join the next rally, keep an eye on the PSC website.

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BARGAINING FOR A NEW VISION

David Hatchett, Medgar Evers

The last three years have been ones of unprecedented upheaval and trauma for the City University of New York. The COVID-19 crisis forced the University into online instruction. Concurrent with this was a major decline in enrollment. There were massive layoffs of contingent faculty, while large numbers of full-time faculty retired. CLTs and HEOs were forced to work online and were given excessive work assignments. The "recovery" from COVID-19 has produced rates of inflation not seen since the 1970s. This has strained the finances of many already underpaid CUNY faculty and staff, whose salaries have been eroded by inflation. The PSC is tackling all these issues head-on in the upcoming contract negotiations (well, maybe we can't tackle the national rate of inflation!).

A Vision of Parity

The PSC's contract negotiation team has responded to these trying circumstances by adopting the adage that opportunity is the flip side of crisis. The COVID crisis and the "recovery" did not create new systemic problems. They simply highlighted long-standing ones.

By negotiating major raises for teaching adjuncts in the last contract and successfully campaigning for \$53 million in new state funding dedicated to full-time faculty hiring, the PSC has made it more expensive for CUNY to rely on adjunct labor and helped provide money for new faculty lines, leading to more full-time hires— more than 500 lines authorized this year alone. The next contract must maintain that goal, not just to meet the needs of teaching adjuncts, but also to incentivize the University to replenish the ranks of full-time faculty.

New full-time appointments must include professorial hires; the research that professors perform is vital to the classroom and the public good. Fostering research and scholarship has been a long-standing platform of the PSC; the union will seek to enhance support in these areas.

Although CUNY responded to the new dedicated funding and wage increase for part-time faculty gained in the last contract by hiring more than 500 full-time lecturers, many of them were not selected from CUNY's adjuncts. The bargaining team has responded to this with its demand that 600 adjuncts from the University's current pool of part-time faculty be given full-time lecturer positions.

The PSC's proposals for the next contract are intended to break the back of CUNY's employment structure that has resulted in most of its classes being taught by under-paid workers, precariously piecing different jobs together.

CUNY "was built on the backs of adjuncts and the shoulders of professional staff."



This contract could result in a CUNY that will be markedly different from the university system that has evolved since the 1970s. That system was built upon the backs of adjuncts and the shoulders of professional staff who were asked to do more with fewer workers.

Job Security A Must

The massive layoffs of adjuncts that took place CUNY-wide partly in response to the COVID crisis would be made much more difficult in the future by granting Certificates of Continuous Employment (CCEs) to adjuncts, which the bargaining team is demanding.

PSC demands also assure CUNY's other teaching titles and professional staff have more job security. Adjunct CLTs, CLIP Instructors and non-teaching adjuncts should be given CCEs as well. Demands for better job security also include HEOs and Research Professors.

Wages Are the Thing

The entire PSC bargaining unit has been hard-hit in the COVID era. As a result, the union's bargaining agenda includes across-the-board wage increases that address the rising costs of living.

At the same time, under the PSC's contract proposals, some of the wage inequities of CUNY professional staff and

full-time faculty will be rectified as well. Among such demands, CLTs, Continuing Education Teachers, CLIP and CUNY-Start Instructors should receive equity increases in addition to across-the-board salary increases. Promotions and reclassifications within professional staff titles should be accompanied by an automatic increase of at least one step on the new salary schedule.

It is a huge bargaining agenda, but faculty and staff and students are worthy of it, and members are ready and willing to go into action to fight for it. And while we take actions to help support their critical bargaining points, we need in-service members to come into battle with us for our health care. It's all the same fight!
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OPINION ON THE SAFETY OF NUCLEAR POWER (OR THE LACK THEREOF)

David Kotelchuck, Hunter College
School of Health Sciences

I was pleased to attend our Feb. 9 chapter meeting on climate change, in which Anne Reynolds discussed the NYS Climate Action Plan and our own Len Rodberg addressed the potential role of nuclear power in moving toward a non-fossil-fuel energy future. In advocating for more serious consideration of nuclear-power use, Len, I believe, seriously distorted the potential safety hazards of this energy source. As a public health professional for some decades (Len is, as well) I feel these distortions need to

be addressed publicly, and I am happy to do so here.

I take particular exception to the argument that nuclear power is safe. In one of his slides, he examines three accidents: Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima. The primary metric he focuses on in the slide is deaths. Deaths are certainly an important metric for any incident, but they are an inadequate metric for these nuclear accidents.

Let's Consider Chernobyl

An estimated 200,000 people were relocated after the 1986 accident. The then-Soviet government established an exclusion zone of radius 30 km (18.6 mi). The 187 communities once contained within it are now "essentially uninhabited." Only a few elderly people have returned to live out their lives in the zone, and children are forbidden to live there. Dislocated families are not expected ever to return---day tourists, though, are still welcome. Thyroid cancers among exposed children are well established. According to the International Atomic Energy Commission (IAEA), 1,800 cases of thyroid cancer among exposed children ages 0-14 have been documented.

<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/chernobyl/faqs>. While this pediatric cancer is curable in the vast majority of cases (the pediatric survival rate in the U.S. is greater than 95 percent), it is not a consequence that parents, even of surviving children, can shrug off like a childhood disease.

Meanwhile, as time goes on, epidemiological studies of adult clean-up workers from the former Soviet Union, now living in the independent countries on the

Russian borders, continue to record excess cancers of the mouth, larynx, and thyroid.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/?term=chernobyl+clean-up+workers>. In sum, the accident at Chernobyl has devastated a vast territory in the Ukraine and Belarus and made it unfit for human habitation. This is not evidence that despite accidents “nuclear is safe.”

Consider Fukushima

Len’s slide says, “No deaths from the accident.” This is not correct. It is true that no persons were killed by the tsunami and reactor explosion, but 2,000 people are estimated to have died in disaster-related deaths due to suicide, stress and interruption of medical care. <https://www.google.com/search?q=fukushima+disaster&og=&aqs=chrome.1.35i39i362l8.1938588228j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>. Here the government set up an exclusion zone of radius 20 km (12.4 mi), from which over 100,000 people were evacuated. It is now no longer available for ordinary habitation. Again, the area around the accident site is devastated. As for cancer incidence and cancer-related deaths, only 11 years have passed since the accident, too soon to detect a rise, if any, of many solid-tumor cancers among exposed adults. Thus, ongoing cancer research there has focused on childhood thyroid cancers.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8593570/>



And Three-Mile Island

Len’s slide about this says, “No deaths” and “negligible effect on the physical health of individuals.” Here the case for no excess deaths appears strongest. There have been several sound scientific studies on cancer-incidence and cancer-death rates in the region, and no statistically significant elevations in rates have been found. Also, there is no exclusion zone around the TMI facility—people live nearby—although there is a 2½ mile emergency-evacuation zone in case of another accident. However, despite the low excess levels of radioactivity around TMI, even these will cause excess cancer cases, according to the best collective judgement of the U.S. scientific community, summarized in the 2006 National Research Council Report, *“Health Risks from Exposures to Low Levels of Ionizing Radiation.”* The report concludes (p.15) that there is no threshold below which ionizing radiation is safe, and the harmful effects of this radiation increases linearly with dose. *Thus, low levels of radiation in excess of background are harmful at TMI and the other accident sites.*

A Final Comment

During his talk, Len spoke of the virtues of dispatchable, i.e., potentially transportable, small nuclear-reactor systems. *None exist in the U.S. at this time.* He

spoke of one being developed for installation in Wyoming by 2028. If we allocate another 3-5 years of delay for the almost inevitable fixes required for any brand-new system, and then another 5-10 years to ramp up to industrial production, such dispatchable small reactors might be ready for use in controlling climate change by about 2035-2040—not time enough to contribute much to achieving the UN goal of ending fossil-fuel use for energy worldwide by 2050. Our country urgently needs to undertake major steps *now* to head off climate change. Such developments in nuclear power won't help much.

[NOTE: Some U.S. scientists disagree with these 2006 BEIR VII findings, but until a new study is undertaken and completed, this is the best, most widely accepted model to assess health risks of low-level radiation.]

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RESPONSE TO DAVE KOTELCHUCK ON THE NEED FOR NUCLEAR AND THE SAFETY THEREOF

Leonard Rodberg, Queens College
Department of Urban Studies

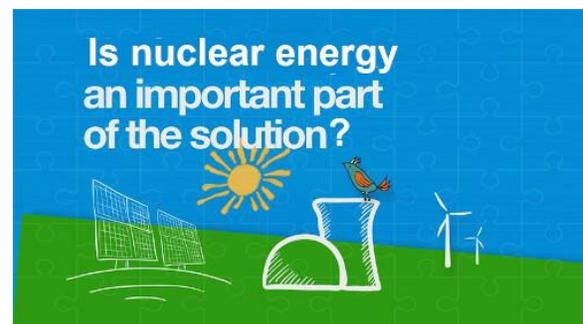
The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew.— A. Lincoln

I appreciate the opportunity to reply to Dave's comments on my Feb. 6 talk.

To address the dangers posed by climate change, we have to reduce--and eventually eliminate--the burning of fossil fuels. As I pointed out in my talk, the State's Climate Action Council (CAC)

has declared that “wind, water, and sunlight will power most of New York’s economy in 2050.” Unlike the 1970s, when we wanted to use renewable energy simply to reduce our spending on oil, today the State is asking solar and wind to supply all our energy needs. This is beyond what they can do. In fact, the CAC itself says we need a very large “zero-emission, dispatchable resource . . . like storage or nuclear power . . . to meet demand and maintain reliability.”

What does this mean? That we need an energy source which is always available and can fill in whenever the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow. That happens often, especially in the winter, and often for days at a time. (The Germans have a word for it: *Dunkelflaute* = dark doldrums). Storage—collections of giant batteries—can't do it without breaking the bank and the landscape—just imagine running Times Square on batteries. Nuclear power is the only non-carbon source that can do it. There is, in reality, no alternative to it. My colleagues and I at Nuclear New York www.nuclearny.org have recently published *Bright Future*, a policy brief which lays out a workable nuclear + renewables plan that would replace the CAC's unrealistic proposal. <https://www.nuclearny.org/bright-future>.



But is nuclear power safe to use? Most people are surprised to learn that, except around Chernobyl, where fewer than one hundred died, no one has ever been killed or even harmed by a nuclear power plant (and no one anywhere ever again would build a plant like that at Chernobyl with flammable carbon at its core). Most of Dave's examples of harm are causes, not by radiation, but by the *fear* of radiation. Evacuations were held which, in retrospect, were unwise and unwarranted. The levels of radiation never rose above the level of the background radiation that is around us all the time and everywhere—in the rocks, the buildings, the water, even in our bodies—eaten any bananas lately (Potassium-40)?

Dave asserts that “there is no threshold below which ionizing radiation is safe.” This assertion is false; it is contradicted by masses of evidence. The simplest is the recognition that there are areas around the globe (in Iran, India, China, Brazil) where unusual rock formations lead to levels of background radiation that are 50, even 100 times greater than those we normally encounter, and yet no higher incidence of cancer, or any other illness, is found in these areas. While the response to radiation at very high doses is, indeed, proportional to the dose, there is no evidence of harm at low doses. Residents of Denver, and airline pilots, are exposed all the time to more radiation than we are, and they are as healthy as we are. We take X-rays and CAT scans and are not harmed by them. Low-dose radiation is simply not the danger that has been portrayed since the 1950s. (For more on this, see “Low-dose radiation exposure

should not be feared” <https://physicstoday.scitation.org/doi/10.1063/PT.3.3037>

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Marcia Newfield, BMCC

FROM THE HERE AND NOW TO THE HEREAFTER

This month's selections cast a wide arc—from the historical to the contemporary to the post-future. Once again, I am focused on Manhattan. As Spring comes, I hope to venture more into the enrichments of the outer boroughs.

Museum of Modern Art (MOMA)

Architecture Now New York New Publics—now until July 29

Considering the City as an ecosystem, 12 projects for public-facing spaces across New York City envision a future in which architecture creates more accessible, sustainable, and equitable cities. Designs for waterfront parks, networks of public pools, local community gardens, and subway stations reimagine the uses of civic infrastructure, the sharing of private resources, and the potential for new technologies to create virtual spaces for political engagement. Models, sketches, drawings, and photographs are featured alongside full-scale architectural components, prototypes, and an augmented-reality installation. Each project is accompanied by a newly produced video that provides a glimpse into the daily uses of these architectures. Check out the fire hydrants!

Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET)

Celebrating the Year of the Rabbit—until Feb 24, 2024

A popular figure in literature and folklore, a rabbit is believed to inhabit the moon and assist the goddess Chang'e by preparing her elixir of immortality. This exhibition presents sixteen works illustrating how rabbits have been a prominent artistic subject since ancient times. Their earliest depictions are featured on damask, jade pendants and sacred ritual bronze vessels. Also on view are images of the zodiac animals in jade and ceramics that were meant to adorn people's bodies and homes as well as dispel harmful influences.

Cecily Brown: Death and the Maid —until Sept 24, 2023

The first full-fledged museum survey of Cecily Brown's work in New York since the London artist made the City her home in the 1900s and revived painting even as its obituaries were being written. Her sumptuous color, radical brushwork, and complex narratives attract considerable attention in the art world.

Juan de Pareja, Afro-Hispanic Painter—until July 16, 2023

The portrait of this artist by Diego Velázquez in 1650 became iconic. However, his own work has largely been ignored. Pareja was enslaved in Velázquez's studio for more than two decades. This exhibition is the first gathering of his paintings, including his self-portrait, and examines the role of enslaved artisanal labor and a multiracial society in the art and material culture of Spain's so-called "Golden Age." The research of Harlem Renaissance figure Arturo Schomburg

was vital to the recovery of Pareja's work.

Rubin Museum

Death Is Not the End—until January 14, 2024

A cross-cultural exhibition that explores notions of death and afterlife through the art of Tibetan Buddhism and Christianity. It brings together prints, oil paintings, bone ornaments, thangka paintings, sculptures, illuminated manuscripts, and ritual items spanning 12 centuries. The exhibition is organized around three major themes: the Human Condition [the shared understanding of our mortality in this world]; States In-Between [the concepts of limbo, purgatory, and bardo]; and (After)life [focusing on resurrection, ideas of transformation, and heaven].

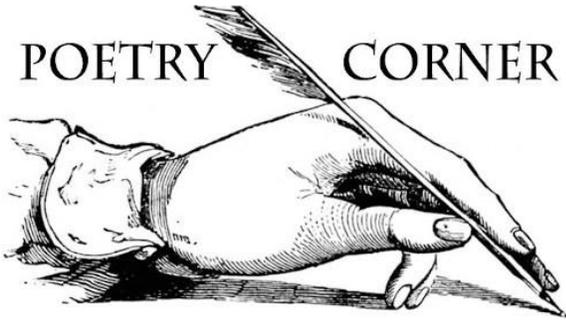
Symphony Space

Wall to Wall Women of Soul—one day only April 1, 3-11 p.m.

In order to get ready for the afterlife, it might behoove you to attend this free exploration of the women who have contributed to soul music's evolution, its influence on world music, hip-hop, modern R&B and afro-futurism. The music of the greats will include Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, and Mavis Staples. You can wander in anytime at this venue on 95th Street and Broadway. Sometimes there is a line. It will also be available online.

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POETRY CORNER



In Lieu of an Elegy

Jay Klokker, City Tech

Death has many doors: some bullet-
scarred,
some latched with a shoestring, some
welded shut,
some unhinged, some waiting to be
nudged
open by a pushbroom.

*

Are you okay?

So said the janitor

when he
surprised my father in the men's room
standing on one leg,
clutching the bent knee of the other leg
to his chest;

Yes, my father said, em-
barrassed to be
caught
perched like a flamingo, *I'm okay*—
and then, as he lowered his foot and
straightened up,
the pain of an almost burst appendix
came unpent.

*

I nearly died, my father said, and after
years
of practicing how to be okay with being
not okay
that's what he did.

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COMING SOON APRIL 3 CHAPTER MEETING CULTURAL VISIONS OF LABOR

Presentations at our monthly meeting at the usual time of 1-3 will include an unusual assortment from arts and labor education communities. We will of course go from this to the nuts and nuggets of our battle over health care.

American Labor Studies Center, Paul Cole

Labor Arts, Evie Rich

Labor Chorus, Robert Greenberg

New York Labor History Association, Irwin Yellowitz

Working Theater, Laura Carbonell Monarque

REMINDER

Please send us your name and contact information if you are interested in the book group reading *Four Hundred Souls*, edited by Kendi and Blain. We will begin in September. Contact David Kotelchuck at dkotelch@gmail.com

The *Turning the Page* editorial committee this month is made up of Joan Greenbaum, Dave Kotelchuck and Diane Menna; graphic design is by Bill Friedheim.

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