

JUNE 2023



Academic Year 2022-23 No. 8

psc-cuny.org/retirees

GETTING CLOSE TO THE WIRE

Joan Greenbaum, LaGuardia & GC

As we all know by now, June 30 is the last date to waive out of what is called the City of New York's Aetna Medicare Advantage Plan. Many hope that this date itself will be waived away and/or a lawsuit will stop the implementation of this privatized plan. The PSC voted against the MLC's approval of Medicare Advantage last summer and has garnered support with a coalition of unions that did so as well. So many of us have fought many battles up to this point and will continue to work with other groups fighting the City's effort to reduce the benefits we were promised when we retired.

That said, however, as a union representing over 3,000 retiree members (and countless numbers of retirees who may have forgotten to pay retiree dues), we are obliged to review our options. The City will no longer pay for Senior Care (the Emblem supplemental plan to traditional Medicare), and this plan will cease to exist. On September 1 all NYC retirees who are Medicare eligible will be moved to Medicare Advantage, except for those who either "opt out" into the NYC HIP VIP plan (a Medicare Advantage HMO, but only for those who

live in NYC and surrounding counties) or waive NYC retiree health coverage so they can continue to be covered by traditional Medicare. Estimated costs for Medigap policies to supplement Medicare, as Senior Care now does, will vary by state and other criteria. Not incidentally, waiving NYC coverage will also mean losing the Medicare Part B (& IRMAA, if applicable) reimbursement we receive annually from NYC.

These decisions are huge. Paying on one's own for a Medigap policy similar to current Senior Care (Medigap Plan G) in New York City will cost at least \$5,363 (including Part B premiums) per person/per year.

And there are other costs to consider, such as the possible loss of our Welfare-Fund benefits--drugs, dental, optical and hearing care, which the union is fighting to prevent. The PSC is still negotiating with CUNY to continue Welfare Fund benefits for those who waive NYC coverage. Clearly the City is spiking the deal to transfer almost all retirees to privatized Medicare Advantage.



Physically and emotionally the costs of these decisions may seem almost unbearable to many of us. For younger retirees who are in good health the situation may seem manageable for the time being. But for

those of us who have current health concerns and for the many who are octogenarians and older (we have over 20 members who are centenarians!), these seem like life and death decisions hanging in the balance. Questions that have been raised at our retiree meetings include: Will I be denied a needed procedure by Aetna? Will health benefits be seamless between August and September? What if I am already scheduled for a medical procedure or operation in early September? A drug I need is on a list requiring special approval; what will happen to me? And there are many, many more. These concerns cause anxiety and, for some, sleepless nights. There are no clear-cut answers at this time from Aetna or NYC. If you have specific questions about the coverage that will start on September 1st, call **Aetna at 855-648-0389**. Problems and questions about the transition should be addressed to the NYC **Office of Labor Relations (OLR) 212-306-7200**.

While the PSC website is not a panacea for all that ails us now, you can find basic information there which retirees need to know, some guidance about how to make a decision, links to authoritative information, and answers to some of the many questions that keep coming up. As union representatives learn more details on these important questions, the website will be updated. Please keep it bookmarked for reference and help older members who may not be able to access or understand it. psc-cuny.org/whats-happening-retiree-healthcare/

And talk to your friends and colleagues, particularly those who may be retiring this year and haven't been given these details. On a personal note, as I write this article, I have not yet decided what I am going to do; I'm at least waiting until I hear if we get to keep Welfare Fund benefits if we waive NYC coverage. We have until June 30th to decide and should make use of that time to learn as much as we can.

THE MEDIGAP ALPHABET

Bonnie Nelson, John Jay

One of the many confusing things about purchasing Medigap plans is the variation in how they cover the Medicare “gaps”—the medical costs that traditional Medicare does not pay, e.g., hospital and doctor deductibles, 365-day hospitalization, 20% of the cost for doctors' visits, etc. This is a quick primer for those of us thinking about waiving the City-of-New-York Aetna Plan. Medicare has standardized these plans into about a dozen different types, named by letters. Check out the chart on the Medicare website that shows the differences between the plans: www.medicare.gov/health-drug-plans/medigap/basics/compare-plan-benefits



Plan F has been the most popular Medigap plan because it offers comprehensive coverage; you pay your monthly premiums and you never receive another medical bill. Plan G pays for everything except the Part B deductible, which is \$226 in 2023—most likely lower than the difference in premiums between F and G. Plan G is also the plan most similar to our familiar Senior Care. Senior Care (along with the hospitalization rider) paid all Medicare gap costs except the Medicare Part B deductible plus \$50. Those retirees in good health who rarely visit the doctor might consider a high-deductible Part G plan. The difference in annual premiums for F and G might be more than, or not much less than the deductible, so the savings might be

considerable. Use www.medicare.gov/plan-compare to do your own comparison shopping.

A PEOPLE'S GUIDE TO NYC

Cecelia McCall, John Jay College

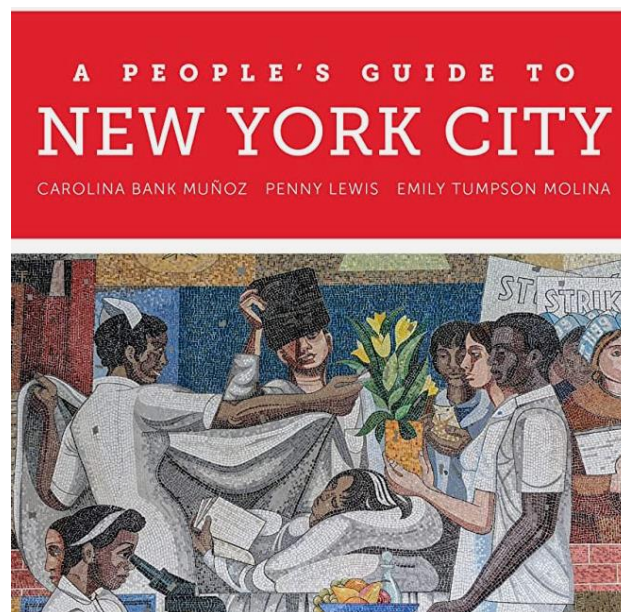
The May 1 Retiree Chapter Meeting opened with co-authors of *A People's Guide to New York City* **Penny Lewis** (CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies and PSC Secretary, third generation New Yorker and author of *Hard Hats, Hippies and Hawks: The Anti-Vietnam War Movement as Myth and Memory*), **Caroline Bank Munoz** (Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College and the Grad Center, as well as Brooklyn College Chapter Chair, who has authored three books, including the award-winning *Transnational Tortillas: Race, Gender and Shop-Floor Politics in Mexico and the United States*), and **Emily Tumpson Molina** (Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for the Study of Brooklyn at Brooklyn College).

The guide presents an alternative view of the City and is replete with the stories of working people and their resistance to power and oppression. It's about what to know, not just what to see.

Professor Munoz began by addressing the genesis of the book, which arose from her discovering *A People's Guide to LA*, which was about the Los Angeles she knew while growing up, a city of immigrants and struggles such as Justice for Janitors. She realized that the New York in which she lived was different from the one expected and experienced by visitors and guests. She asked Penny Lewis and Emily Molina to join her in developing a book with an urban focus.

Professor Lewis followed by saying they paid attention to the people's struggles that have shaped the City from the Colonial Era to present day, such as Black Lives Matter.

About a third of the guide focuses on Manhattan, the rest on the outer boroughs. The stories underscore the dynamic tensions that exist here—between public goods and private wealth, well developed but underfunded public structures, power and wealth, union density and a large network of underfunded social services. The guide depicts the diversity of people who have come to the City from all over the world, reveals tolerance juxtaposed to racial and ethnic division, as well as tensions between freedom and the state repression apparatus of police, surveillance, etc.



The presenters showed a range of images from the book that tell contrasting stories of existing and erased sites. Among the existing sites are Hostos Community College and the coalition formed to prevent its closing during the financial crisis of the 70s, as well as Jacob Riis Park, appropriated by the LGBTQ community.

Among the erased sites was the Wigwam Club, once in downtown Brooklyn, where there was a community of Mohawk people who had come to the City as iron workers to work on the Empire State Building.

The Guide includes a section on Thematic Tours like the No. 7 Train Tour, which gives

information about immigrants, and an Environmental Justice Tour.

The speakers concluded with a brief mention of an advisory board of academics and organizers who helped them develop a methodology for inclusion, taking into consideration the outer boroughs, privacy, emblematic and cluster sites in the outer boroughs.

RETIREES TOUR NYC'S CAPITALISM AND PROTEST WITH PENNY LEWIS

Robert Nelson, Graduate Center



Retirees Chapter members were treated on May 5 to a walking tour of the Financial District, unlike the standard tours offered visitors to our City. PSC Secretary **Penny Lewis**, who is also Professor of Labor Studies at the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies, guided us through the tangled streets of the southern tip of Manhattan, and the even more tangled 400-year history of struggle, explosive growth, and social and physical architecture of our city. Professor Lewis, co-author of *A People's Guide to New York City* with **Carolina Bank Munoz** and **Emily Tumpson Molina**, had presented the book to the monthly meeting of the Retirees Chapter with Professor Bank Munoz five days earlier.

Viewing many of the sites described in the section of the book entitled "Wall Street:

Capitalism and Protest Tour," retirees contemplated, among New York's many characters and stories, its original inhabitants, the Lenape people; Dutch fur traders; George Washington; slaves and their slave-holders at New York's slave market; immigrants and slum-dwellers of Five Points; John D. Rockefeller and the Standard Oil Company building; J.P. Morgan, his bank, and the Sacco and Vanzetti supporter who likely bombed it; and the "Fearless Girl" (a statue with a life of her own), face to face with the New York Stock Exchange.

The tour concluded at Fraunces Tavern, the site of Washington's farewell address, of a fatal 20th Century bombing by Puerto Rican nationalists, and the lunch site for the hungry retiree walkers.

The two fascinating hours showed off what this participant and CUNY alum love about CUNY faculty (and Penny in particular): a command of the subject, a refreshing view of history, an ability to weave themes from many historical events, an ability to engage an audience, and (in this case) an unexpected talent for tour-guiding.

A HISTORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

Mark Goldberg, Hunter, for EJWG

Why is it that sources of noxious and poisonous air and water pollution are overwhelmingly located near or in neighborhoods predominantly populated by poor and working class people? And, why are they inappropriately called Environmental Justice Communities? In a talk to the **Environmental Justice Working Group** at its April monthly meeting, **Rebecca Bratspies**, a CUNY Law School Professor and Director of the Center for Urban Environmental Reform, and an environmental activist, focused on the historical development of these communities. Beginning with a description of the basis of nuisance laws developed in

the mid-nineteenth century, Professor Bratspies led us deftly through the period of mass migration around the turn of the 20th century with its subsequent growth of squalid tenements, to the early 20th century zoning laws with their attendant redlining of significant parts of Brooklyn and Queens, to the building of highways justified by the FHA to keep poorer people and “inharmonious racial groups” in their place.

Given the virulent racism at play, it was not a great leap of policy to site the noxious and poisonous emitting facilities and freeways in and around these so-called Environmental Justice Communities. Citing recent legislation, such as NYS’s CLPCA (Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act) and growing environmental activism, Professor Bratspies ended on a note of hope that we will be seeing less environmental injustice thrust upon poor and working class people. Peppered with scintillating and amusing anecdotes of famous (or infamous) actors and noteworthy events, Professor Bratspies wove a fascinating web to help us understand why the underclasses and people of color suffer such environmental indignity. To learn more, we recommend Professor Bratspies’ co-authored book, *Environmental Justice: Law, Policy & Regulation, Third Edition*.



Rebecca Bratspies

And Some Justice on the Way

..... And talking about a note of hope, the NYS Legislature, as part of this year’s

budget, passed the Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA). The Act enables the New York Power Authority to close the state’s most polluting gas and oil-fired plants, build new renewable energy projects, while ensuring energy cost savings to poor and working class residents, and doing this with protection of workers’ rights and wages. Passage of BPRA was the result of grassroots organizing across the state. The PSC and EJWG were active supporters of this movement, and special thanks goes to the tireless activism of EJWG member **Professor Ashley Dawson**.

INTERNATIONAL ESSAYS

"THE AFTERNOON OF LIFE...A TIME OF LIBERTY" THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN FRANCE

Michael Frank, LaGuardia CC

As of this writing the conflict in France over increasing the retirement age from 62 to 64 is intensifying with no end in sight. President Emmanuel Macron's government claims that since the French are living longer, they must work longer in order to preserve the country's pension system. Opposing him are the eight labor federations which, in a rare move, have joined together to organize strikes and massive demonstrations that have rocked the country. Public opinion polls consistently show that the union movement enjoys the support of 65 percent of the population.

As I witnessed during my month-long stay in Paris during the early part of this fight, Macron exacerbated the conflict by ramming the change through Parliament, using a provision that allowed him to bypass a vote in the Assembly, a vote he feared losing. Although not illegal, the use of this measure was disapproved by 78% of those polled.

The highly charged political situation has created what some are calling a constitutional crisis, pitting the legitimacy of representative democracy against the legitimacy of the street and public opinion. Popular sentiment on Macron's style of governance was captured in graffiti: "We elect him, he decides, we shut up!" His approval rating has plummeted to 28%.

France has a long history of militant labor struggles going back to the French Revolution. One result of these struggles is universal social benefits such as health coverage and pensions. Gains that are society-wide become taken for granted as *rights* and are therefore difficult to claw back. A previous attempt at "pension reform" in 1995 produced strikes that paralyzed the country and forced the government to retreat.



The Afternoon of Life

Another outcome of French labor history and the more favorable balance of class forces is the distinct culture that surrounds work time and free time. Retirement is seen, according to one sociologist, as "the afternoon of life ... a time of liberty" and compensation for decades of work. The average French man enjoys 22 years of retirement in good health, the average French woman 26 years. And *by law*, workers are entitled to 30 days of annual leave. There is a strong attachment to this "French way of life." The unbridled "*capitalisme sauvage*" in the U.S. serves

the French as a negative model to be avoided. Betraying its class bias, the American press often refers to the French system as "generous." It would be more accurate and honest to describe the U.S. system as skimpy.

The pattern of universal benefits in France contrasts sharply with that in the United States, where much of the progress achieved by labor has been limited to the unionized sector of the workforce. Social welfare measures that are not generalized divide the population into a majority that must find their own solution and a minority that enjoys benefits not available to others, making it easy to depict this minority as a privileged stratum—for example Obama's characterization of some of the health coverage won by some unions as "Cadillac plans." Divisions like these that are made within the workforce help explain the low level of class solidarity in the U.S.

In France the strikes by transport workers, sanitation workers, and teachers have cut train service, reduced flights, piled up garbage on the streets and cancelled classes at high schools and universities. Protesters have blocked oil refineries, fuel and transport depots, ports and roads. Workers temporarily cut off electric service for selected members of the elite. Until recently the government refused to meet with union officials, even with a moderate leader who would like to negotiate a compromise. Its intransigence further escalated the conflict, as enraged youth set fires to the garbage in the streets.

All of the above creates obstacles to the kinds of neoliberal measures that were implemented in the U.S. and Britain when the labor movements were broken under Reagan and Thatcher. Yet Macron, despite his unpopularity as "the President of the rich," is committed to seeing the struggle to increase the retirement age through to the end. He has not minced words about his goal--and that of his class--

that the French must work longer and harder. But are the labor leaders equally committed to carrying their struggle to the end? Are they willing to *force* the government to abandon its project and rescind the law? Many believe this would require turning the one-day strikes into open-ended strikes and building toward a general strike that would cut into profits to such an extent that business itself would pressure the government to back down. Whatever the outcome of this epic conflict, it will have implications in other countries.

THE ARCTIC AS THE NEXT COLD WAR FRONTIER

Renate Bridenthal, Brooklyn College

The Arctic, up to now a largely peaceful zone harboring cooperative international scientific research, is swiftly becoming one of militarized power politics. Heavily armed nations surround the Arctic Ocean with its unstable environment of eroding shorelines, accessible natural resources and contested maritime passages. Actual hostilities could have broken out on February 10, 2023 when the U.S. military shot down an unidentified object over Alaska. Soon after, a U.S. fighter jet had brought down an alleged Chinese spy balloon over the Atlantic. The balloon over Alaska turned out to belong to an American hobby club, but a sense of menace was maintained.

Fact and Fiction

One way people become aware of impending conflicts is through the entertainment industry, which is important to the process of manufacturing consent. The Danish series, *Borgen—Power & Glory*, has done just that, revealing the growing importance of the Arctic as a “geopolitical hotspot in world politics.” *Borgen* takes up the topic of natural resources in the Arctic that roils up contention between the United States, Russia and China. It centers on Greenland, a Danish possession with an independence

movement that gains strength from the discovery of a vital resource. In the drama, that is oil. In reality, it is rare earths. In the drama, this creates tension for the Danish government, caught up in a great-power struggle between the U.S., China and Russia. In reality, Greenland is only one part of a looming conflict in the Arctic, not only about resources, but also about passage through the ocean that has become more navigable due to accelerated climate change.



The sinister presentation of China’s representative in *Borgen* creates the fear of China’s actual presence in the Arctic. Besides the question of Greenland, the navigability of the Arctic Ocean, due to its thawing, now greatly shortens China’s trade route with Europe and offers a backup to the Malacca Straits, which U.S. warships could blockade in case of a conflict. The growing closeness of China and Russia raises new questions about a shifting balance of power in the region. Russia’s northern border occupies over half the shoreline on the ocean. The North Sea Route, hugging the length of Russia’s northern border, offers a shipping lane for Chinese trade with Europe. For Russia, defense of its northern border is a prime security issue, but with the revival of Cold War tensions the U.S. and NATO consider its militarization a threat, and so they are remilitarizing as well. Finland has joined NATO and should Sweden do so as well, Russia would be confronted with a phalanx of opponents on the Arctic Council, which gov-

erns Arctic relations. It would thus be encircled in its north as well as in its west next to Europe by hostile forces.

Crucial Resources Cause Conflict

The Arctic is also crucial for its economic resources. It has oil and valuable minerals whose exploitation damages the local environment, impinges further on Indigenous lands, and contributes to global warming, which is accelerated by the melt of Arctic ice. Environmental issues and the lives of Indigenous peoples gain attention in this political whirlpool.

Both the Inuit peoples of the western Arctic and the Sami of the eastern Arctic have circumpolar organizations that have a seat and thus a voice, but not a vote, on the Arctic Council. The states that colonized them and in which they are now minorities are taking a greater interest in maintaining their loyalty and in acquiring their knowledge of Arctic conditions in case of conflicts.

The relatively peaceful days of the Arctic are over. An old adage warns “What happens in the Arctic, doesn’t stay in the Arctic.”

For a more detailed version with interlinked sources - pictures, graphs, and references.
<https://geopoliticeconomy.com/author/renate-bridenthal>

THE PASSING OF A UNIONIST

Jay Klokke passed away on April 8 at the age of 70 after a three-month struggle with cancer. Jay retired in 2020 after teaching ESL students for nearly thirty years in the Adult Learning Center at City Tech, winning a number of teaching awards and helping thousands of students to communicate in English and adapt to life in their new country. One of the original members of the organizing unit of the Research Foundation chapter at City Tech, Jay also served on the bargaining team for their first union contract with CUNY. Jay was a teacher, a

writer, a poet, a birdwatcher, a hiker, a unionist, and a sweet man. He will be missed.



Marcia Newfield, BMCC

Summer Pleasures

Not only does NY have endless opportunities to experience art, music, and theater year-round, but the summer also provides outdoor spaces at museums, where you can enjoy a repast and rest during excursions. Outstanding outdoor spaces include the Morgan Museum, the Met, Whitney, MOMA, NY Historical Society and Cooper Hewitt.

Museum of Modern Art (MOMA)

Georgia O’Keeffe: To See Takes Time—until August 12

Between 1915 and 1918, when she was in her twenties, O’Keeffe created a series of works in charcoal, pencil, watercolor, and pastel, producing progressions of bold lines, organic landscapes, and frank nudes. Some critics consider this work far superior to her lauded oil paintings.

Chosen Memories: Contemporary Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Gift and Beyond—until September 9

Featuring forty important artists who use history to explore their heritage, bringing together videos, photographs, paintings, and sculptures made over the past four decades, including Rosângela Rennó (Brazil), Alejandro Cesarco (Uruguay), Regina José Galindo (Guatemala), Mario García Torres (Mexico), Leandro Katz (Argentina), Suwon Lee (Venezuela), Gilda Mantilla (Peru),

Raimond Chaves (Colombia), and José Alejandro Restrepo (Colombia). From re-framing long histories of colonialism in the region and exploring the different ways in which artists revisit undervalued cultural heritages, to looking at the ways in which kinship and belonging are strengthened, the exhibition offers us new ways of looking at the past.

New York Historical Society

Kara Walker: Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated) — until June 11

A series of 15 prints based on the two-volume anthology published in 1866 and 1868. Walker's work comments on the omission of African Americans from this narrative and urges viewers to consider the persistence of violent caricature and stereotypes today. Walker enlarged select illustrations and then overlaid them with large stenciled figures. The silhouettes visually disrupt the scenes and suffuse them with scenarios evocative of the painful past left out of Harper's original images.

Under Cover: J.C. Leyendecker and American Masculinity—until August 13

J.C. Leyendecker (1874–1951) was a preeminent illustrator and commercial artist who depicted (and created) American visual culture in the first three decades of the 20th century through advertising campaigns and magazine covers. His work delves into the early politics of sexual identity, gender, and attitudes towards homosexuality.

Nature, Crisis, Consequence—until July 16

Artworks reflect on the social and cultural impact of the environmental crisis on different communities across America, ranging from the Hudson River pollution to the razing of homes and churches to clear land for Central Park, the environmental and human tolls of the transcontinental railroad, and current climate change.

Cooper Hewitt

Give Me A Sign: The Language of Symbols —until September 2, 2024

From the STOP sign to the laugh-cry emoji, symbols play a critical and ubiquitous role in everyday life. As communication tools designed to break language barriers, symbols instruct, protect, entertain, connect, and communicate beliefs. The exhibition marks the 50th anniversary of Henry Dreyfuss' *Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols*.

POETRY CORNER

Downsizing

Patricia Rosof, HCHS

*No more stuff
Enough enough!
Begone old tomes
for other homes.*

*Give me clean lines
no climbing vines
no messy piles
of books and files*

*Swab the decks
Paint the wrecks
Give away
all the stray
things and rings
bought on flings.*

*Let go—heave ho.
That stuff can grow
but No No No
it s got to go.*

Letters to the Editor



March 14, 2023

When I retired from teaching at LaGuardia Community College in 2015, one of the benefits that I especially welcomed was the promise that I would continue to have access to all the libraries of the City University. I pursued my research interests and made extensive use of this privilege for several years, even ordering books from all five boroughs to be delivered to and returned at Hunter library.

Then the pandemic struck. Impossible to believe, the libraries of our great public university closed as classes shifted to the internet. Once the CUNY libraries began to re-open, I found that new restrictions had been imposed on even setting foot on the university's campuses. But worse than that hassle was being told that retirees were only entitled to borrow from the campus where they had taught. That was not what I had been told on my retirement or what I had experienced before the pandemic. I spoke with LaGuardia's library staff, with its HR office, and even with the PSC's office, and everywhere I got the same, disappointing answer, as if my memory had been erased (something one worries about at my age). So I write to you, the CUNY retirees, via *Turning the Page*, to ask if I am the only one who remembers the promise of retiree borrowing privileges at all the libraries of CUNY.

If I am imagining all this, or if policies changed behind the screen of the pandemic, I would like to plead with the PSC, in this bargaining session, to ask for the

restoration of this very important perk for faculty retirees, a perk that costs the University nothing at all but is very dear to us, who still need and love books.

George D. Sussman, Professor Emeritus, LaGuardia Community College

No George, you are not imagining things. Unfortunately, the contractual right is limited to campus libraries (Article 27.6); however, as you say, allowing retirees University-wide access costs CUNY nothing and, in fact, adds to the academic prestige of the University when retirees continue to publish. It seems like a win-win for everyone. The Director of Contract Administration at the PSC has been made aware of the situation and is presently in communication with CUNY Central in an attempt to restore access for retirees to libraries across CUNY. [eds.]

HELP CUNY STUDENTS

The **Belle Zeller Scholarship Fund** urgently needs you. To support CUNY Students, go to <https://bellezeller.org/>

NEXT RETIREE CHAPTER MEETING, JUNE 5 MONDAY 1-3 PM

The entire meeting will be on Retiree Health Insurance.

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.