



Academic Year 2023-24 No. 1

psc-cuny.org/retirees

WELCOME FROM OUR CHAPTER CHAIR, ANNE FRIEDMAN



Welcome to a new season as a member of our chapter. We hope that the summer has been a healthy one and that wherever you've been and with whomever you've shared these last few months, hopefully you are rejoining us feeling energized and rested.

Our chapter is unique in bringing together colleagues across all campuses and titles. We have members who were present at the founding of our union – over 50 years ago – and whose commitment to the PSC remains steadfast today. And we welcome those newly retired or on the cusp of being so.

Some things remain the same and some things change. Our steadfast and seasoned Chapter Executive Committee brings invaluable experience to support our leadership team.

As your Chapter Chair, along with our Vice-Chair Diane Menna and Secretary Bonnie Nelson, we bring over 100 years as CUNY activists and leaders, but with much to learn from all of you in our challenges going forward.

I retired as a full-time full professor from BMCC's Department of Linguistics and Academic Literacy. Prior to that I traveled around CUNY as an adjunct working at other community colleges. I've been privileged to hold leadership positions in my College, in the University Faculty Senate, and in state and national AAUP. An active PSC member for over 20 years, I spent 15 of these as PSC Vice-President for Community Colleges and as a Bargaining Team Member.

Going it alone doesn't work for me. Throughout all of my leadership positions, I've relied on a vast network of role models and advisors to guide and support me. Today, most important in doing this job, is working as a team with our other chapter officers:

Diane Menna retired after 34 years as an adjunct in the English Department at Queens College. She also served for six years as Director of the Tutoring Center as a Higher Education Associate. Diane's leadership in the PSC spans over 20 years. She served on various PSC HEO Committees at Queens College, as Grievance Counselor, Health and Safety Co-chair, Part-Time

Organizing Project Director, and on Contract Negotiation teams and the PSC Executive Council.



Bonnie Nelson and Diane Menna by Dave Sanders

Bonnie Nelson worked 37 years in the Library at John Jay College, functioning variously as reference librarian, systems librarian, Deputy Chief Librarian and Interim Chief Librarian, while advancing as a faculty member from Assistant to full Professor. She also served on the John Jay Chapter Executive Committee, both as a delegate to the DA and the Chapter's long-time Secretary. Bonnie is probably best known around the University as the University Faculty Senate's representative to the CUNY IT Steering Committee, where she tried valiantly and consistently to uphold the principles of faculty rights, academic freedom and freedom of information against the dark forces of bureaucracy.

Feel free to contact any or all of us at retirees@pscmail.org. And stay up-to-date by regularly checking our webpage at <https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees>.

HOW PROFITS ARE BAKED INTO MEDICARE ADVANTAGE PROGRAMS

BY DAVE KOTELCHUCK

Ever since passage of landmark social programs such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, GOP legislators and their private-sector allies have been seeking ways to get a piece of the action from the massive flow of dollars through each.

For example, in February 2005, right after

being sworn in for his second term, George W. Bush proposed to partially privatize Social Security. He withdrew this following a torrent of negative public reaction. But if he failed to privatize Social Security, he was more successful in helping private entrepreneurs get their claws into Medicare. In 2003, he signed a bill establishing Medicare Part D, which transferred earlier versions of so-called Medicare-Choice programs into the newly dubbed Medicare Advantage programs.

To juice the deal, the GOP majority in Congress built two new features into the Medicare Advantage (MA) programs to assure, as best they could, their profitability--and these have worked remarkably well for the corporations for which they were designed!

First, the federal government pays MA plans in advance a fixed (per capita) amount of money per enrollee, per year, establishing a basic incentive for MA plans to save money, since the plan pockets the difference between its costs and what it is paid by Medicare. Thus, it creates a fundamental conflict between the interests of the MA plan and those of the patient.

Secondly, Medicare initially paid MA plans a subsidy above what it paid for traditional Medicare, to encourage privatization. Over time, this subsidy has undergone many changes, as the government has attempted to reign in the excesses of the MA plans' pursuits of profit.

MA plans currently utilize two primary mechanisms to save money:

- **Denying care through pre-authorization.** A commonly used technique is denial of care through a process called "prior authorization" before a doctor can order expensive services. Aetna, which has been designated by the Mayor for all NYC public employee retirees, admits to a

14.4 percent denial rate (about 1 in 7) among those cases submitted for pre-authorization.

(<https://gothamist.com/news/aetna-reveals-health-care-denial-rates-in-medicare-advantage-court-case-for-nyc-retirees>)

- Offering narrow provider networks. MA plans negotiate the lowest possible rates with hospitals, physicians, and other providers. Thus, an enrollee may find out one day that their plan will no longer include networks through which they have traditionally received care. Similarly, an enrollee may find out one day that their long-standing physician has opted out of their MA plan because of its low rates and the bureaucracy involved.



Medicare Rally at City Hall by Scott Heins

The savings achieved by these methods go straight into corporate pockets, to be done with as the company decides. Some of these funds will be used for luring new Medicare enrollees into MA by offering them extra benefits—the “sizzle,” such as low/no premiums or co-pays, SilverSneakers gym benefits, transportation, or free meals following hospitalization. The rest goes into advertising, lobbying, high salaries for its officers and administrators, office expenses and profits to their shareholders—funds that could otherwise go into paying directly for retiree medical and health services through traditional Medicare. These bonuses alone will cost taxpayers \$12.8 billion in 2023, according to estimates published by the Kaiser Family Foundation on August 11, 2023.

Medicare has made many attempts to corral such profit-making and assure access and quality of care. But once profit-making incentives are in place, the government will never have the resources or authority to outwit the profit-making behavior of corporations. Instead, the government just plays a game of whack-a-mole.

For the healthy retiree who uses few medical services, MA may offer advantages. But as we age, most of us can count on greater and greater use of health system services. That’s when the MA opt-out rates begin to skyrocket.

But, in the big picture, do we need to spend our federal tax dollars to line the pockets of Wall Street and other corporate investors? No, we don’t!

THE STRIKE THAT WASN'T TEAMSTERS VS UPS

BY MICHAEL FRANK

Given all the talk coming from union leadership, many on the left were hoping that UPS (United Parcel Service) workers would strike and score a significant win that would shift the balance of class power in the United States. So, their disappointment was palpable when Teamster President Sean O’Brien announced that a tentative agreement with management had been reached without a strike. “What started with a bang ended with a fizzle,” quipped one commentator.

But was it indeed a fizzle? The agreement workers will vote on includes substantial wage increases: a \$2.75 per hour raise the first year and raises amounting to \$7.50 per hour for the remainder of the five-year contract. This is better than the Teamsters were able to achieve when they struck in 1997, under the leadership of then President Ron Carey.

That more was obtained under the

business unionist O'Brien without a strike, than under the reformer Carey with a strike, can be explained by the increase in organizing and worker struggles and by changes in the overall political climate during the two periods.



Image from teamster.org

The union this time mounted a year-long contract campaign, including practice picket lines that brought management back to the bargaining table. The campaign was not a carefully controlled, choreographed affair but allowed for rank-and-file initiative. These efforts were bolstered by the reform group, Teamsters for a Democratic Union. This utilization of left militancy was reminiscent of John L. Lewis's hiring of Communist organizers in the 1930s.

The contract completely eliminates the second tier of wages for drivers, a concession that was part of the 2018 contract, which was forced through by previous President James Hoffa after being rejected by the membership. Normally, it is rare to remove tiers through collective bargaining once they have been established.

Another important gain in this proposed contract is the elimination of a sixth day of mandatory overtime. However, the provision of daily forced-overtime remains in the contract, which creates 11- and 12-hour workdays.

So, the temporary agreement is far from being a fizzle, though the major issues of speedup, surveillance, micro-monitoring, harassment and threats from management are not addressed. It is much easier for large corporations like

the UPS, swimming in money, to make wage concessions after work value has been extracted than to loosen their control over the labor process before their profit is produced. UPS's oppressive work regime is an on-going source of anger at the company.

One worker put it this way: "The battle at UPS is about power. The company has gobs of money, and they have no problem throwing that money at a contract or at a grievance as long as they can maintain control."

Given what was obtained in this contract, some workers feel that even more could have been obtained if the union had struck. And an insightful worker said that a contract following a strike would have been experienced as something workers themselves had won while a contract without a strike is experienced as something delivered by the leadership.

Finally, a labor contract should be judged not only by what it includes and does not include, but by its effect on consciousness. Does it energize workers and raise their expectations? Does it increase self-confidence, solidarity and willingness to challenge management, both on the shop floor and in the next round of collective bargaining?

How this contract will affect these union workers remains to be seen.

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING

BY CECELIA MCCALL

The title, borrowed from the author Milan Kundera, sums up most aptly my feelings upon retiring several years ago from CUNY and from the position that I held as a PSC officer. I was exhausted and took a six-month hiatus from the Union and other involvement, saw a number of plays, museum exhibitions and traveled some until I realized that an

uncommitted life was not for me.

If you're newly retired or have been retired for a while, but are looking to become more engaged, then Third Act, a movement to grow awareness and support for fossil-free finance, has been expressly organized for senior action. Third Act is an offshoot of 350.org and the brain child of Bill McKibben, its co-founder and Executive Director. Its mission is the building of a caring community of people who take action.

The PSC's Environmental Justice Committee started working with the New York Chapter of Third Act early this Spring, joining their action against the big banks to demand that they stop funding fossil-fuel companies. Thus far, however, the banks are not listening and are continuing business as usual. In 2022, they poured more than \$673 billion into these destructive companies. Instead of curbing oil and gas production, Shell Oil is stepping up production while raising shareholders' dividends. Saudi Aramco's profit from oil production so far this year is \$30 billion.

The devastation that fossil-fuel emissions is wreaking has been in plain sight this summer with a proliferation of extreme weather events: the ocean temperature off the coast of Florida is higher than human body temperature with the result that coral reefs are dying; the wheat fields of Kansas have been described as a drought-scorched graveyard; earlier this season the smoke from Canadian wildfires was inhaled by New Yorkers; and there's no need to mention Maui.

When it comes to climate change policy, President Biden speaks with a forked tongue. Even though his Inflation Reduction Act, among other things, promises funding to help communities adapt to climate change, it also promotes offshore oil and gas exploration. And he is encouraging companies to produce more oil in order to control the price of gasoline.

Third Act's responses have been manifold, but include the March to End Fossil Fuels (in which the PSC has a contingent) with a kickoff date of September 17, a few days before the UN's Climate Ambition Summit. A longer-term project is to gain support for the Fossil Free Finance Act, recently introduced in Congress (S.1138). The Act would require banks to lower financing of greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030, and to stop all such financing by 2050. If you go to thirdact.org/act/support-fossil-free-finance-act, you will find additional information and a letter you can send to your congressperson, urging support and co-sponsorship.



Eileen Moran & Nancy Romer by Pat Arnow

So, if this short piece whets your appetite for taking action, consider Third Act (you only have to google it) or join the PSC's Environmental Justice Working Group, which meets monthly on zoom and is co-chaired by Nancy Romer and Eileen Moran.

BELLE ZELLER SCHOLARSHIP TURNS FORTY-FOUR BY SUSAN DIRAIMO

This year 2023 marks the forty-fourth year for one of CUNY's oldest and most prestigious pillars of student support, the Belle Zeller Scholarships. Established by the leadership of CUNY's Professional Staff Congress in 1979, the Belle Zeller Scholarships honor Dr. Belle Zeller, a professor of Political Science at Brooklyn College, who combined a career of pioneering scholarship on lobbying in American politics with a dedication to

CUNY's faculty, whose interests she served as a founder and first president of the Professional Staff Congress.

Over these many years, since the first scholarships were awarded in 1980, over 350 students have been recognized for upholding Dr. Zeller's legacy of academic excellence by earning grade-point-averages over 3.75 while maintaining volunteer commitments at their colleges, in their communities, and often abroad. Past recipients have included such noteworthy CUNY achievers as Joanne Waldstreicher (Brooklyn College, '81), now Chief Medical Officer at Johnson & Johnson; Cheryl Fish (PhD, CUNY Graduate Center), now a Professor of English at Borough of Manhattan Community College, and more recently Kamalpreet Chohan, a student at the CUNY Law School who advocates for immigrant communities.

CUNY's outstanding Belle Zeller Scholars are honored at the Belle Zeller Scholarship Trust's Annual Gala celebration, to be attended this year by CUNY Chancellor Felix Matos-Rodriguez and Prof. James Davis, PSC President. Our scholars come from CUNY's Associate- and Baccalaureate-granting institutions, as well as the CUNY Graduate Center where awardees receive a scholarship named after the late PSC President and Graduate Center Historian, Prof. Irwin Polishook. CUNY's Professional Schools also award scholarships named after former PSC President and Queens College Professor of English, Dr. Barbara Bowen.

The Gala is also an opportunity for the Belle Zeller Scholarship Trust to honor "Friends of CUNY" politicians and eminent public figures, whose support for CUNY has brought more prominence to CUNY's mission and helped our CUNY graduates to succeed. The night is also an opportunity for the Belle Zeller Scholarship Trust to confer its annual Lifetime Achievement Awards and the award for Distinguished Leadership in Education.

This year's Gala is also the very first in-person Gala celebration since the COVID-19 Pandemic. It will be held at John Jay College of Criminal Justice on the evening of Tuesday, September 12, 2023. This year's awardees are the Honorable Carl Heastie, Speaker of the New York State Assembly, and the Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins, New York State Senate Majority Leader. The Belle Zeller Scholarship Trust's award for Distinguished Leadership in Education will be bestowed upon Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers, while Lifetime Achievement Awards will be presented to Raymond Paretzky, a 1981 Belle Zeller Alumnus who attended both Queensborough Community College and Queens College before earning a Rhodes scholarship. He went on to a distinguished career as an attorney specializing in international law. Also former Vice-Chancellor Matthew Sapienza, now Chief Financial Officer for the American Council of Learned Societies, will receive a Lifetime Award.

Finally, Lifetime Achievement Awards this year go to two of our own union leaders and activists: Dr. Robert Cermele, Treasurer of the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund and retired Professor, New York City College of Technology, and Susan DiRaimo, Lecturer both at Lehman and City Colleges.



The Belle Zeller Scholarship Gala is an opportunity for all members of the CUNY faculty to come together to celebrate the very best of CUNY's traditions of learning and public engagement. Faculty interested in attending the Gala and/or supporting the scholarships are cordially invited to visit the website of the Belle Zeller Scholarship Trust.

CULTURE CORNER

BY MARCIA NEWFIELD

The Fall is always an exciting time in the museum world. This season is no exception. Not only are there numerous new exhibits, but there's a whole new wing of the American Natural History Museum and an important restoration at the Hispanic Society Museum. There's a sculptural fantasy world on the roof of the Met through October; interactive exhibits that bespeak the variety and spirit of New York at The Museum of the City of NY Centennial Celebration, and artifacts of women's work from the NY Historical Society.

Hispanic Society Museum. Their permanent exhibit in its elegant hall consists of fourteen stupendous paintings of Spanish life by Joaquin Sorolla, referred to as the "master of sunlight." This prolific painter, who has a museum devoted to his work in Madrid, was recruited to come to New York in 1911 by Milton Huntington, a founder of the Museum, to paint a vision of Spain. The fourteen panels radiate color and energy. After Sept 15, the museum will also feature "Anatomy of a Fresco," drawings by Jose Clemente Orozco made in preparation for his murals.



Hispanic Society of America from Wikimedia Commons

NY Historical Society. That objects tell a story is the guiding principle of this evocative exhibit of artifacts from their collection—a handcrafted wooden crib for a child of the wealthy; a photo of Dr. Mary Walker, a Civil War army surgeon who chose to wear male clothes, and an original Sojourner Truth advertisement for her lecture.

Women's work and tools reflect the zeitgeist. "Longing for him won't bring him back! Get a War job," which blasts out from a World War II poster.

The Gilder Center at the AMNH. The Richard Gilder wing of the American Museum of Natural History on Columbus Avenue, is finally complete, to much architectural acclaim for the design of the buildings and their relation to the adjoining park. The exhibits are equally adventurous—the insectarium that covers a long section of the main floor is a profound and ambitious experiment in education. For immersive exhibits, such as Butterflies Vivarium and Invisible Worlds, there is an extra charge.



NY Historical Society from Wikimedia Commons

Metropolitan Museum of Art. Cool off at the Met Museum's rooftop...a sculptural edifice by Los Angeles artist Lauren Halsey (on view through October 22) that places personal and public images from her South-Central LA neighborhood in an ancient context. Check out other new exhibits: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery, curated by a community collective, and Early Buddhist Art in India 200 BCE-400 CE.



Metropolitan Museum of Art from Creative Commons

Museum of the City of New York. The museum is celebrating its centennial by looking at the many ways New York has inspired storytelling. "This is NY: 100 Years of the City in Art and Pop Culture" is ambitious. There is an immersive film montage of movies set in the City, songs that feature each borough, a library of books to browse, photographs of "home" and "City of Faith," a special look at religious activism of Southasian-American and other communities that have faced profiling and surveillance.



Museum of the City of New York from Wikimedia Commons

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Retirees Chapter
Meetings this semester
will be held on zoom from
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM on
September 11, October 2,
November 6, and
December 4.

EDITORS' NOTE:

The ***Turning The Page***, our Retirees Chapter newsletter, will publish quarterly going forward. Two issues per semester, September/October and November/December, in the Fall semester and two, February/March and April/May, in the Spring semester. It will be available digitally on our website, the link will be included in email blasts to the membership, and a paper copy will be sent to home addresses as usual for those traditionalists among us. We encourage all to send contribution ideas to the Chapter email at retirees@pscmail.org. Perhaps a short article on health care, aging in place, union experiences, or just plain fun! If you are not getting emails from the Chapter, please go to <https://psc-cuny.org/form/psc-membership-update-form-retirees>.

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

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