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psc-cuny.org/retirees

RETIREE CHAPTER MEETING REPORTS

STATE OF THE UNIONS: NATIONAL AND LOCAL – SEPTEMBER 11, 2023

BY BOB NELSON

Over 200 retiree members attended this year's initial meeting of the PSC Retirees Chapter on September 11. Anne Friedman, Chapter Chair, offered a welcome to all, and introduced our invited speakers:

James Davis, PSC President, and Ruth Milkman, Distinguished Professor at the School of Labor and Urban Studies and the Graduate Center.

Dean Hubbard (PSC Executive Director) and Debbie Bell (retired PSC Executive Director) updated the chapter on the Medicare Advantage issue. The court's permanent injunction requires the City to continue to pay for supplemental Medicare (Senior Care). NYC has appealed, and PSC is interested in filing an *amicus* brief supporting the lower court's decision. Judge Frank ruled that

Local Law 12-126 as written requires the City to pay for Senior Care, so PSC believes no further legislation is necessary. No one knows what the schedule is for the appeal, but it's a safe guess that no change in our health coverage will occur in 2023.

James Davis discussed the State of the PSC. He reported that the City has asked for proposals for new health-care plans for in-service employees, with the goal of saving \$1 billion. Very few details of the proposals have been shared by the Municipal Labor Council. The PSC will expand the membership of the health-care strategy group to address these changes.

Last year, with help of the City Council we fought off the worst of Adams' budget cuts, but he is pushing them again. We are collaborating with "The People's Plan," an umbrella group aiming to improve city services. And in the midst of all this, PSC has been negotiating a new contract with CUNY. This fall the PSC added 300 new members, but we could be doing better.

Anne Friedman described our chapter and its many plans, activities, and goals. Unusual for labor unions, ours is a full-fledged PSC chapter with about 3,000 retired members, a large roster of active committees, a newsletter, a rich website, monthly meetings on topics of interest, book groups, walking tours, significant participation in the major committees of the union, liaison with retiree organizations and advocacy groups, and delegates and voting rights. The chapter has been in the thick of the Medicare fight and is looking to broaden the struggle nationally.



Screenshots of James Davis and Ruth Milkman from Sept. 11, 2023.

Ruth Milkman's description of the state of the U.S. labor movement brought both bad and good news. The long-term decline in private-sector union density continues. While news about organizing is good, the numbers are not large enough to move the needle on density. Unlike REI and Starbucks, in sectors where it's harder to replace workers (journalists, museum workers, nurses, interns, grad workers/adjuncts), organizing has been more successful. But in NYC, public sector union membership dipped beginning in 2020.

Ruth concluded that without serious labor-law reform to reduce management resistance and roll back union-busting tactics, organizing will continue to languish.

LESSONS FROM THE 2022 ELECTIONS: RELEVANCE FOR 2024 - OCTOBER 2, 2023 BY EILEEN MORAN

At our Oct 2 Chapter meeting, Anne Friedman, Retiree Chapter Chair, introduced the speakers. The first speaker was **John Tarleton, Editor of the *Independent* and host of the *Independent Newshour on WBAI***. PSC members know John, who worked on the *Clarion* as the paper went on to win many labor-journalism awards. John opened by acknowledging how impressed he was by the PSC's balancing a strong, consistent left commitment with savvy practice that advanced members' and students' interests to an extent that few unions do.

John cited several factors to account for the NYS Democratic Party's failures in 2022, which gave the leadership of the U.S. House to Republicans. Since 2016, Sanders's presidential races facilitated and grew the emerging left within the NYS Democratic Party with progressives effectively winning seats in the State

Legislature and the U.S. House.

In John's analysis, cronyism and incompetence marked the NYS Democratic Party's failure, including by NYS Party Chair Jay Jacobs, viewing left Democratic challengers as a bigger threat than Republicans. They essentially misunderstood the opportunity that these younger activists presented, John said, as they still embraced a neoliberal austerity, heavily dependent on the donor class. Yet Democratic majorities in the State Legislature were facilitated by those Sanders-inspired insurgents.

John explained how a number of threads led to these House losses, including its poor messaging and blundering leadership, exemplified by National Democratic Campaign Committee Chair (DCCC) Sean Patrick Maloney's arrogance and selfishness. After NYS redistricting, he abandoned his own district and ran in the neighboring Hudson Valley Congressional district, forcing out freshman Representative Mondaire Jones. Republicans took both seats in November.



Screenshots of John Tarleton and Nicki Richardson from Oct. 2, 2023.

The Democratic Party is fraught with contradictions, concerned with the interests of tenants, real estate developers, corporations, and workers. But rather than surrendering, John urges activists to see the Party as a site for struggle.

The upsurge of younger activists, from Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter and the burst of union organizing signals change. Unions need to look beyond their

immediate relationships with elected officials. For example, Elizabeth Crowley got union support while progressive Kristen Gonzalez was the better option. Instead, Party resources went to and through the old guard to Crowley's failed race. This Democratic Party reaction is essentially smothering its future in its crib.

The second speaker was **Nicki Richardson, Political Director of NYSUT**, our statewide affiliate. Before joining NYSUT, Nicki represented restaurant workers and is an experienced community and labor organizer. Nicki agreed with much of John's analysis but added comments about the Governor's lackluster campaign during 2022.

The third speaker, **Liz Stevenson, NYCCT, PSC VOTE-COPE Coordinator**, talked about Vote Cope. Liz reminded members that we have city elections this November that are important to the PSC. Also, there will be more redistricting due to a court decision. Liz reminded everyone that raising COPE funds are critical to building PSC's political power. It enables us to support coalitions, like CUNY Rising, as well as specific candidates. Only 3000 members do payroll deductions—a mere 10% of our members.

Liz pointed out that the relationships that the PSC built with the NYC Council were extremely effective in fighting attempts to change the administrative code to protect Retirees' health benefits. Now, both the Governor and Mayor are proposing cuts to CUNY, so legislators pushing back is part of what COPE accomplishes. NYSUT support for the New Deal for CUNY is also key. If you have questions or want to know how to contribute you can email Liz at liz.stevenson@gmail.com.

Screenshot of Liz Stevenson
from Oct. 2, 2023.



KNOW YOUR OFFICERS SERIES

JAMES DAVIS, PSC PRESIDENT BY IRWIN YELLOWITZ

The PSC has been fortunate to have presidents who have proven to be excellent leaders. Belle Zeller, Irwin Polishook and Barbara Bowen have played major roles in all that we have accomplished. I have been privileged to work with all the past presidents, and so I was eager to interview and write about James Davis, our current President, who was elected in 2021.

James served as Chapter Chair at Brooklyn College from 2015 until 2021, and has been a member of the PSC Executive Council since 2018. Thus, he brings solid experience to the challenging position of president.

James is a total academic. He has taught as an adjunct, as a full-time faculty member at a community college, and as an outstanding teacher at Brooklyn College where he won an Excellence in Teaching Award. James is a member of the English Department, and has published in his chosen field of American literature.

As part of his past activity, James has played an important role in the PSC's affiliate, the American Association of University Professors, serving on its National Council, as an officer of the Collective Bargaining Congress, and as an officer of the New York Conference. PSC has strongly supported AAUP since the union joined in 1981. James was encouraged by PSC leaders to become active in this group, which he gladly did because he views AAUP as a resolute defender of academic freedom, tenure and shared governance. These are all under constant attack, and James has worked in AAUP to defend these basic

elements of our profession.

Collectivity leads the way

I asked James why he wanted to be PSC president. He responded that he believes in unions since collective activity is necessary to achieve and maintain the type of university he values. He also admired the principled positions which the PSC has taken on many issues. Thus, it was natural for him to become involved in the PSC chapter at Brooklyn College. He credits his colleagues in that chapter for a culture that encouraged leadership opportunities for younger faculty. This allowed him to learn the skills needed to be an effective union leader.

I asked James about his leadership style as PSC president. He stressed that he believes in collective thinking. He recognizes that his colleagues in leadership, as well as on PSC staff, have much to contribute. He tries to develop policies that flow from collective interaction.

Goals within and without

I asked James about his goals as PSC President. He focused first on the need for a strong contract that will meet the needs of faculty and staff and also advance the New Deal for CUNY. Also, he sees it as critical to fight annually for a budget that enhances CUNY rather than simply maintaining it or contributing to its decline. This always has been a priority for the PSC, and James intends to keep it as such. In addition, he favors a return to free tuition, which would fit the needs of today's students as it did from the Nineteenth Century until 1976. James recognizes this will be difficult to achieve, but feels it still should be the PSC's goal.

James intends to address the two-tiered labor system in CUNY by gaining pay parity for adjuncts. Not only would this correct the exploitive salary structure for adjuncts, but it would encourage CUNY to use more full-time lines. Many current adjuncts would be eligible for these positions, given their knowledge and

experience. This change would reverse the long-term situation in which part-time teachers have increased greatly in number, and also revitalize the full-time faculty. As with all of James' goals, this one will be hard to achieve, but he knows that first you have to see the objective if you are ever to attain it.



James Davis picketing in front of the CUNY BOT hearing at LaGuardia Community College, May 2023 by Scott Heins

I thanked James for his strong support of the Retiree Chapter in its opposition to the current plan to move NYC retirees into a Medicare Advantage plan. The PSC has opposed this plan in the Municipal Labor Council. Our union also has informed our members about what is happening in outstanding fashion. James has spoken at many of our Retiree Chapter meetings, and he fully supports the PSC's intention to keep its retiree members fully aware of the latest developments and what they mean for us.

James believes that a universal health care system would be the best long-term solution for both retirees and in-service faculty and staff. It would take the profit-making insurance companies out of the picture, and also remove health-care costs from collective bargaining, thus increasing the resources available for salaries and other economic issues.

I wish James the very best as he leads our union and represents it to those outside the PSC.

LABOR ROUNDUP

TECH WORKERS ARE BUSY ORGANIZING — WHERE THE POWER IS

BY JOAN GREENBAUM

So often we think of tech workers as highly-paid professionals in glamorous jobs, with lots of time working from home and great food when they are at work. Think again, please. On Oct 7th, Labor Notes and rank-and-file tech workers held what they called an “Unconference” at NYU. It was a cold and rain-swept day, but you wouldn’t know it from the outpouring of energy from both those who work in technology jobs and tech-worker organizers. Yes, they were young, but they also were challenging the corporate elite at Google, Twitter, Kickstarter, The New York Times, and many smaller firms. And, they were doing it in creative ways linking the big companies with their formerly-outsourced contracting firms while challenging NLRB’s ruling on this dichotomy — and winning. They were also working with outside unions to sign up workers in different departments, different product divisions, and different locations within the larger firms, such as Alphabet (Google’s big brother). Very importantly, most were committed to “wall-to-wall” unionism, including everyone from the higher-paid tech workers to cafeteria workers and janitorial staff.

Labor Notes 2023 Tech Organizing Conference
October 07, 2023



Image from Labor Notes Conference registration
page: <https://labornotes.org/techcon2023>.

Tech workers, like the rest of the workforce, have seen programming work outsourced to other countries and the companies they work for downsized drastically. While we in academia may think that the march toward a part-time workforce is fairly new, it is a fact of life for tech workers. They are the original gig workers, many without contracts and most without job security.

The conference was organized with afternoon workshops led by people in the thick of it. Several spoke of being fired just as the union they helped to organize was coming to fruition. I was lucky to be invited as one of the keynote speakers. I talked about how the labor process is organized to divide workers so that management has more control over the workforce. I mentioned how tech work was indeed at the **nexus** of what these workers create and the products we use — products that take away others’ jobs as well as promote the potential evils of military and AI programs. I was overwhelmed by their knowledge of what they were doing and by their willingness to share experiences with me. I was reminded of a supposed quote by the bank robber Willie Sutton: When asked why he robbed banks, he answered “because that is where the money is.” Organizing the beating heart of the capitalist economy is indeed where the power is.

UNION SAVES THE DAY BY MARCI GOODMAN

This is a true story about our union saving the day.

Early on a Friday morning in late August, I was awakened by the notification sound from the phone on my night table. I saw that I’d received an email with the subject heading “College Now FY24 Allocation.”

Opening it, I quickly scanned the contents and realized that our allocation would be 30% less than what we had budgeted for, what we needed to run the program for the entire year. The withholding of fringe, something that had never been done in the more than two-decade history of CUNY College Now, was the cause that amounted to a drastic cut. Without intervention, we wouldn't be able to offer any College Now courses whatsoever in the spring semester at Queens College. Every other College Now program across CUNY was in the same exact situation.

Deans and Provosts and VPs from all the colleges scrambled to figure out how to approach this matter with CUNY Central. Apparently, navigating the chain of command hierarchy of CUNY Central can be tricky even for top-level administrators from the colleges. Many meetings were scheduled. Meanwhile, the CUNY K-16 Initiatives leadership kept insisting to anyone and everyone who asked that there was no change and nothing to see here. It was difficult to discern whether they were gaslighting us or just really didn't understand what they had wrought.

A week or so after receiving the aforementioned email, I bumped into our former PSC chapter chair on the bus. I told him what was happening with College Now, and he advised me to email the current chapter chair about it, which I did as soon as I got to the office. The chapter chair responded immediately, forwarding my email to all the chapter chairs CUNY-wide.

That same day, we had an in-person chapter meeting featuring one of the PSC's principal officers. After the meeting, I grabbed the opportunity to speak to her, and she assured me that she would look into the matter right away.

Chapter chairs got in touch with College Now directors CUNY-wide to confirm the contents of the email they'd been forwarded. Word was spreading. The

principal officers went straight to the top, to the Chancellor and two Executive Vice-Chancellors, all of whom insisted that there was no cut to College Now, that they knew nothing about this but that it had to be a mistake or misunderstanding, and that they would fix it.

And it did get fixed. Without taking responsibility or apologizing, the CUNY K-16 Initiatives leadership announced to College-Now directors that our full allocations would be restored, and shortly thereafter the CUNY Central budget office contacted the budget offices at all the colleges to make it official and, interestingly, to apologize. Let me be clear that it was one budget office apologizing to another budget office; it didn't extend further than that.

There's no high drama to this story; it's even a bit boring. But it illustrates how the union jumped right in and solved the problem while the administrators were all spinning their wheels, which makes this proud union member even prouder.

HOW MUCH DO YOU REALLY CARE?

**BY NANCY ROMER
AND EILEEN MORAN**

We all say we care about the environment. We all say we care about social justice. We may even engage in habits and good works that help to improve these areas of our lives individually and together. We have a way that you can (turning an old phrase less violent) feed two birds with one bread crumb. We want to leave a livable planet for future generations. Please join us, the EJWG, in our work.

What is the EJWG?

The PSC Environmental Justice Working Group (EJWG) has been focusing on CUNY as a site for decarbonization, climate education and community

improvement, as well as working with the larger state and local climate justice coalitions. We are so proud to be able to do this work to improve our lives now and the lives of all those generations after us.

To give you an idea, let us tell you some of our past work: The PSC had a fantastic turnout at the Sept. 17 March to End Fossil Fuels. We were big, beautiful and chanted our way through midtown Manhattan, along with 75,000 other climate activists. We helped to build the Labor contingent of the march and felt proud of our union as a leader in this work.



PSC marches for climate justice Sept 17, 2023 by Scott Heins

We played an important role in the passage of the groundbreaking NY State Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA). We got NYSUT to support the bill to dramatically expand public ownership of renewable energy and that ultimately won support from other unions and passed in the NY State legislature. We are being honored at an Align gala for our critical role in that success.

We helped start the American Federation of Teachers (our national affiliate) Environmental and Climate Justice Caucus, which will advance environmental policies and jumpstart the participation of locals in climate justice work in their workplaces and communities.

What is the EJWG engaged in now?

Come help us. Presently, we are working on getting CUNY to decarbonize the

campuses and make them more sustainable. We are working with Sustainability Councils on campuses where they exist.

We are working with the AFT Climate Coordinator to provide webinars for faculty, staff, students and administrators on how to access the massive funds in the federal Inflation Reduction Act, which aims to decarbonize schools and universities, along with myriad residential and business projects.

We are working with Third Act, a new group of people over 60 that focuses on climate and democracy as central issues facing us now. We've attended divestment demonstrations and other events supporting this dual focus.

Three important EJWG meetings past and future help us connect as scholars and activists with ongoing CUNY environmental and climate justice projects:

- **Wed., Oct. 18, 5-6:30 pm**, Ashley Dawson, CSI and Grad Center, spoke about creating a Climate Consortium utilizing faculty, staff and students implementing projects such as the BPRA (see above) and other decarbonization efforts.
- **Wed., Nov. 15, 5-6:30pm**, Mike Menser, Brooklyn College and Grad Center, will present on the new mega-project between CUNY and the NYC Environmental Justice Alliance, a grassroots frontline coalition that has been a central part of the climate movement in NYC and beyond. Mike will lead a discussion on how we can work together in coalition.
- **Date and time To Be Determined**, AFT Decarbonization Webinar. How CUNY and other public higher-education institutions can access federal funds to clean up our campuses and communities.

If you would like to join us for any of our meetings, even just to get to know us and our work, our meetings are on zoom, except for end-of-semester meetings/social events. This way we can involve the most members and still build the sense of community we all love. We are so grateful to PSC leadership and membership for ongoing support and participation. It is so gratifying to be part of a “social justice union” that sees the broader issues facing workers as important points of organizing. If you want to be a part of our EJWG and make a contribution to CUNY, NYC, NY State and the world, email nancyromer@gmail.com and we’ll put you into our google group so you can keep abreast of all of our activities.

CULTURE CORNER HOLIDAY SEASON 23/24 BY MARCIA NEWFIELD

Museums often save their best for the holiday season, counting on tourists and people with time off. Your appetite for stimulation and celebration will not be disappointed this year. In addition to the blockbuster Manet/Degas exhibits at the Met, Picasso at MOMA, and the year-long centennial at the Museum of the City of New York, we have these treats:

FRICK MADISON — Barkley L. Hendricks: Portraits at the Frick— until January 7.

Barkley L. Hendricks
(American, 1945–2017),
Lawdy Mama, 1969.



Using styles, modes, and materials inspired by Old Master European art, Barkley L. Hendricks (1945–2017)

revolutionized American portraiture. In 1966, during his first trip to Europe, he noted how limited the representation of Black figures was in the art he saw and how rarely the images of the few depicted were humanizing or personalized: “How many Black people... were part of any kind of visual information that didn’t deal with what I call the misery of my peeps?” Noting the prevalence of imagery that “deals with the hardship, slavery, and all the rest of it”—and not “denying any of this by any stretch of the imagination”—he sought to address instead the “beauty, grandeur, style” of Black people that had rarely been acknowledged in Western art. His work inspired some of the most prominent artists of today, a number of whom reflect on Hendricks’s legacy in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition.

WHITNEY — Henry Taylor: B Side — until January 28.

Surveying 30 years of Henry Taylor’s work in painting, sculpture and installation, the exhibition celebrates this Los Angeles artist, widely appreciated for his unique aesthetic, social vision and freewheeling experimentation. Taylor’s portraits and allegorical tableaux—populated by friends, family members, strangers on the street, athletic stars and entertainers — display flashes of familiarity in their seemingly brash compositions. The strands of Taylor’s practice display a deep observation of Black life in America at the turn of the century.



Henry Taylor, *the dress, ain't me*, 2011.

NEW MUSEUM — Judy Chicago: Herstory, Including “The City of Ladies,” Featuring the Work of 80+ Female Creators and Traditions Essential to Chicago’s Practice — until January 14.

Judy Chicago: Herstory traces the artist’s career across painting, sculpture, installation, drawing, textiles, photography, stained glass, needlework, and printmaking. On the Museum’s Fourth Floor, an installation features artworks and archival materials from more than eighty women artists. Titled after fifteenth century author Christine de Pisan’s “Le Livre de la Cité des Dames,” “The City of Ladies” continues Chicago’s work, claiming space for women in narratives that previously obscured or denied their contributions—much like her seminal work *The Dinner Party* (1974–79) in its attempt to create a history of important and often overlooked women.



Judy Chicago, *Immolation*, 1972.

THE MET FIFTH AVENUE — Art for the Millions: American Culture and Politics in the 1930s — until December 10.

The 1930s was a decade of political and social upheaval in the United States. Americans searched for their cultural identity during the Great Depression, a period marked by divisive politics, threats to democracy, and intensified social activism, including a powerful labor

movement. This exhibition explores how artists expressed political messages and ideologies through a range of media.



Man and Machine
Ida York Abelman (American, New York 1910–2002)
Published by WPA ca. 1939

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

November Retirees Chapter Meeting on Monday, November 6, 1–3 pm.

“Environmental Justice: Crises & Action.”
Rebecca Bratspies, CUNY Law School, Director, Center for Urban Environmental Reform & **Cecelia McCall**, PSC Environmental Justice Working Group liaison to Third Act.

WRITE FOR TURNING THE PAGE

We always invite members to write about issues of union concern in the places where they live, as well as national and or streaming events that others would like to go to. Please write us at retirees@psccmail.org with “**Newsletter**” in the subject line.

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

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