

**TURNING
THE PAGE**

The Newsletter
of the PSC
Retiree Chapter



JUNE 2024

Academic Year 2023-24, No. 5

CONTENTS

“Medicare (Dis)Advantage National Roundup” by Joan Greenbaum

“Unionists Discuss The MLC, Medicare Advantage and Union Democracy”
by David Kotelchuck

“Academic Freedom Under Assault at CUNY and Beyond” by Eileen Moran

“Pension and Pizza” by Diane Menna

“Oppenheimer: My Reflections on the Physicists After World War II” by David Kotelchuck

CHAPTER MEETINGS RECAP

“Breaking Through the Hype of AI” by Cecelia McCall and Joan Greenbaum (March)

“The Future is Now” by Marva Lilly (April)

“Noise, Noise, Noise” by Irwin Yellowitz (May)

CULTURE CORNER

“Losing Liz” a Poem by Stuart Ewen

“Summer 2024: Museum Exhibits” by Marcia Newfield

COMMUNITY BOARD

Book Announcements

Writing Group Invitation

Call for Submissions

OUR MEDICARE IS SAVED! JUDGE FRANK'S RULING IS UPHELD!

Retirees won again! On May 21, the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court upheld the August 2023 ruling issued by Judge Lyle Frank on the suit brought by the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees. Frank's ruling blocked the Adams administration from forcing the city's 250,000 municipal retirees out of traditional Medicare and into a Medicare Advantage plan. This was the so-called "nuclear option" suit. The appellate division's ruling was unanimous, unusually long, and strongly worded. (to read it for yourself go to <http://iapps.courts.state.ny.us>). Nevertheless, the city has vowed to appeal to the NYS Court of Appeals, which will choose whether or not to accept the appeal.

MEDICARE (DIS)ADVANTAGE: NATIONAL ROUNDUP by JOAN GREENBAUM

What is Happening Nationally that Affects Our Health Care Fight?

As you probably have heard by now, the NYS Appellate Court recently ruled unanimously in our favor. Thankfully we remain on Medicare. But many states and cities have succumbed to the marketing avalanche from private insurers to transfer workers into various Medicare (Dis)advantage plans. Indeed, in New York City all active city employees are about to be "offered" an Aetna plan which the city claims could save it up to \$1 billion. Just two years ago, it was the Aetna plan with its prior authorizations that we retirees rejected. Here is a roundup of some of the bad and good actions happening around this issue. And stay tuned for a similar digest of what may be in the works for Social Security.



Photo: Erik McGregor

Physicians for a National Health Program and other groups have been organizing for single-payer health insurance. As they struggle to keep up with the time management and cost demands of private insurance companies, they are also organizing doctors. These movements are gaining strength. (PNHP newsletter).



The New York Times article, “**Insurers Reap Hidden Fees by Slashing Payments. You May Get the Bill**” (4/7/24) explained that a little-known data firm helps private health insurers make more when they pay less for an out-of-network claim. Patients can be on the hook for the difference. We know from experience — something we retirees have plenty of — that out-of-network costs arise as doctors switch in and out of insurance companies. What is new information is the fact that the insurers hire a data company to bump up the fees.

Private insurance companies are consolidating and the profits of the seven largest reached \$70.7 billion last year. As hospitals use their capital to buyout other hospitals, insurance companies have been buying up pharmaceutical and other health care firms. CVS/Aetna has the third largest profit. (*Health Care un-covered: WendellPotter@substack.com*).

MedPac, an independent congressional agency established in 1997, reports that Medicare Advantage (MA) spent 22% more than if enrollees had been in traditional Medicare. This is a wake-up call to Congress to stop the stampede by employers to switch workers out of traditional Medicare. (MedPac 2024 report, via Barbara Caress, PSC consultant).

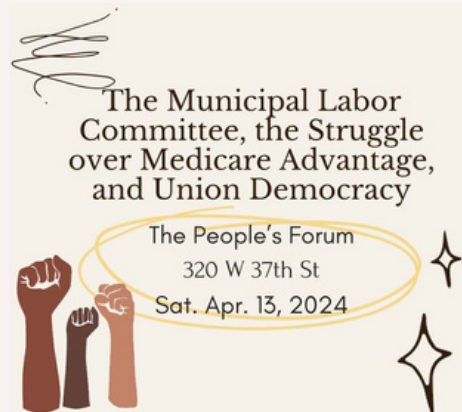
A bi-partisan group of 40 Republicans and 21 Democrats led by Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) signed a letter endorsing Medicare Advantage, which enrolls 32 million Americans. (*Work-Bites*, Bob Hennelly, 2/7/24) (Many retirees wrote to Schumer opposing this endorsement.)

Delaware Retirees Health Care Group recommended that the state stay with traditional Medicare. “Bottom line, we want our retirees and our current employees and our future hires to come into a sustainable, really well-funded, quality health-care system,” Delaware Lieutenant Governor Bethany Hall-Long said. The recommendations made to the Governor, General Assembly and State Employee Benefits Committee, include taking Medicare Advantage plans off of the table for retiree health-care coverage. The state’s attempted implementation of Medicare Advantage led to a court case filed by state retirees and the group, Retirees Investing in Social Equity Delaware, which was upheld by the Delaware Superior Court in October 2022. Retirees banded together after the move was announced, pushing back on the plan for its 2,030 pre-authorizations, provider network limitations, the process and added fees that are not part of the current plan. (Delaware Department of Human Resources, 1/31/24)

For up-to-date PSC news on retiree health care, go to: <https://psc-cuny.org/retirees>.

UNIONISTS DISCUSS THE MLC, MEDICARE ADVANTAGE, AND UNION DEMOCRACY

by DAVID KOTELCHUCK



In the first forum of its kind since Medicare Advantage was proposed for retired municipal union employees, over 100 members from many of the affected unions got together to discuss and critique the role of the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) in promoting the Medicare Advantage (MA) plan. “**The Municipal Labor Committee, Medicare Advantage and Union Democracy**” was held on April 13 at The People’s Forum in Manhattan. (Forty of the registered attendants were PSC members.)

The five panelists at the forum were **Ray Markey (DC 37)**, **Julie Schwartzberg (DC 37)**, **Marianne Pizzatola (NYCOPSR, the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees)**, **Evie Rich (PSC)** and **Robert Cuffee (DC 37)**. **John Hyland (PSC)** was Master of Ceremonies.

PSC retiree member **Michael Frank** led off the panel discussion with a series of questions:

1. Why are the Municipal Labor Committee's negotiations with the city confidential?
2. Why are the MLC's inner workings opaque even to the majority of its own members, and even to its own steering committee?
3. More consequentially, why do union members not have the right to vote on what the MLC has negotiated, ostensibly on their behalf?
4. Why did the MLC sign off on the 2014 and 2018 concessionary agreements with the city that require \$600 million in health-care "savings" every year, continuing indefinitely, in exchange for wage increases that barely reach the rate of inflation?
5. Why does the MLC prefer to make concessions on health coverage for union members rather than support the New York Health Act, which would remove health care from the bargaining table and make it a *right* for all residents of New York State?
6. Why does the MLC support the privatization of Medicare; that is, the switch to Medicare Advantage?
7. Why does the MLC have no perspective for mobilizing labor's ranks and bringing the collective power of public sector workers to bear on its negotiations with the city?
8. Why has the MLC ceded the basic defensive function of unions to act as a bulwark against management offensives?

Ray Markey, a retired DC 37 leader and a former union rep to the MLC, gave a first-person account of the role of the MLC in the aftermath of the NYC fiscal crisis in 1975. He saw the united union opposition to the layoffs at the beginning of the crisis, led by the UFT and DC 37, as “a time of hope” when “we had some power.” In the end, though, Markey said that union leaders, fearing the power of the banks more than that of its union members, became “more responsive to the public” than its union members. He asserted that the MLC followed suit and has not changed since then. He called the MLC “a cover for givebacks.”

Julie Schwartzberg, a 50-year activist in DC 37 and a founder of the Cross-union Retirees Organizing Committee (CROC), talked about her group as “the action faction.” She showed videos of the organization’s many demonstrations in NYC, as well as in Washington, DC, Tennessee, Delaware, and California. (She also noted that CROC now welcomes all interested parties as members, not just retirees.)

Marianne Pizzatola, is a retired EMT unionist and chairperson of NYCOPSR, the organization that has filed the lawsuits that have so far stopped the city from implementing Medicare Advantage. The MLC, when it was created in 1966, was meant to be a move toward one big union of municipal employees to leverage the power of labor, she noted. But it was established with weighted voting, so that two large unions, the UFT and DC 37, would dominate MLC voting. But more importantly, retirees don’t vote in the MLC even though their health care and lives are affected by MLC decisions. And when the MLC calls a vote, she noted, union leaders should take this back to their members for consideration, but often don’t. “Actives and retirees need to understand what’s coming for them,” she said.

Evie Rich, a PSC retiree, former UFT member, and a trailblazer for 70 years, began her talk with a clarion call: “In the premier city of the U.S. and perhaps the world, we are fighting the fight of our lives. We are here today to save Medicare from private profit-making investors. As retirees, what are we going to do? What can we do?” She went on: “As retirees, we are a very complicated group. Some of us don’t know about this fight at all; some of us know about it and don’t care; others will say, ‘So long as I have my Medicare, I don’t care about other people.’ And then, there is us.” We must identify unions, she said, that oppose us or have not stood up, and “we will build a grassroots movement” in these unions. And this will be a difficult struggle. But as Frederick Douglass said, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.” and “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.” Welcome to the fight.

Robert Cuffee, an active DC 37 social service employee and a self-identified “revolutionary socialist,” said that “most of our members don’t know about the MLC.” And most union leaders, he asserted, “collaborate with city managers.” In struggling to change this, “between striking and nothing, there is a lot you can do.” He ended with a question for the audience: “Does anyone have a good idea how we should change the MLC?”

A lengthy question-and-answer period followed, with many suggestions for moving forward, from building a Facebook group to encourage connectivity, to further supporting NYCOPSR lawsuits, to supporting the NY

Health Act, to running union opposition slates, etc. There were no group decisions, but as Master of Ceremonies John Hyland concluded, “We can’t accomplish everything in one meeting. There will be other meetings.”

We may be retired, but we don’t live under a rock. We hear the news and as academics, we read our share of social and political analysis about what is going on in the Middle East and American-Israeli relations. We may not be on our campuses anymore, but we hear from colleagues about the tensions, protests, even physical altercations, and encampments on our campuses related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But we might not know about what — if anything — our union is doing or not doing in response to the protests, actions by CUNY and college administrations, or NYPD interventions on our campuses. The editors of TTP have asked Eileen Moran, retiree from the Queens College Michael Harrington Center, to provide our readers with some facts and context to help keep us informed about PSC actions related to campus protests.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM UNDER ASSAULT AT CUNY AND BEYOND

by EILEEN MORAN

After Hamas’ horrific October 7 attack that killed over 1,200 people and took 250 Israeli hostages, much of the U.S. and the international community were strongly supportive of Israel. Inside Israel, criticism of Netanyahu subsided in spite of his legal problems and his anti-democratic attempt to erode the power of the judiciary.

Since October 7, families of the hostages have increased their criticism both of the Israeli government’s failure to heed the warnings to prevent the attack and to honestly pursue a ceasefire that could bring the hostages home.

Over the last seven months, Israel’s international standing and support have been substantially eroded. No one can deny the difficulty of destroying Hamas’ capacity to attack Israel as it operates in underground tunnels throughout Gaza. Still the Israeli Defense Forces’ blanket-bombing campaign throughout Gaza, reducing homes, schools, and hospitals to rubble, has made most of Gaza uninhabitable. Those displaced, now subsisting in tents without food, water, or medicine, face famine as Netanyahu continues to block the delivery of humanitarian aid. Palestinians’ plight under Israeli control before October 7, including Israel’s tolerance of settler vigilante violence and harassment, had stirred little outcry internationally or in Israel. But now this broad but avoidable humanitarian crisis has led to global condemnation including a UN expert calling these actions genocidal, and the International Criminal Court calling for arrests of both Hamas and Israeli leadership.

It is in this context that encampments and protests emerged on campuses across the country and here in New

York at Columbia, City College and NYU. Last fall the PSC, along with over 200 other unions, signed on to calls for a ceasefire and a safe return of the hostages. Similar calls came from progressive Democrats in Congress and humanitarian groups across the globe.

Even before NYC police were called to Columbia and City College to break up the encampments and their peaceful protests, the PSC had strongly pressed the CUNY Chancellor and CUNY administration to stand up for academic freedom and to not interfere with students' right to protest peacefully.

But that is not what happened. The City College President and CUNY Chancellor called in the NYC police, outfitted in riot gear, to violently break up the protests on and off the campus, arresting hundreds of students, faculty, and staff and charging City College protesters with felonies for occupying a campus building. Again, the PSC objected to summoning the police on campus and demanded that City College and the CUNY Chancellor not discipline students for their peaceful protests. Some PSC members also submitted a resolution to the Delegate Assembly (DA) in April calling for the PSC to endorse the five demands being made by the students at the City College encampment.

According to PSC policy, the resolution would be voted on at the next meeting to allow delegates as representatives of their chapters to consider members' opinions. Even before the submission of the resolution, there had been wide discussion on the DA listserv. Delegates asked how we could not take a stand given the moral gravity of the situation and others wondered why we should, as a local union, take on such a fraught, complex foreign policy issue, dividing our members, with no positive impact on alleviating the misery being experienced in Gaza or by families of the hostages. The many weeks of debate on the DA listserv showed how much disagreement there was among members. Given the dire situation, a sufficient number of delegates requested an emergency DA be called to consider the resolution and several similar resolutions. Over two-thirds of the delegates voted to not discuss the resolution at that emergency meeting but instead leave it on the agenda of the May DA meeting as scheduled.

President James Davis explained the EC's recommendation in an email to delegates. ([Read it here](#)).

The PSC had already acted to protect academic freedom and the rights of students, faculty, and staff to protest without facing disciplinary action. Since the PSC has a policy that opposes academic boycotts, it could not support the students' demand to join BDS (Boycott, Divest, Sanction) nor other demands that were not PSC policy and had not been approved by the membership. At the May 23 DA, the resolution to endorse the students' demands failed by a vote of 114 to 40.

PENSION AND PIZZA

by DIANE MENNA

What is the best thing about being retired? No student papers, teaching observations, or performance reviews? No department chairs, deans or supervisors? No classes, work schedules, or meetings? No! The best thing about being retired is collecting a pension.

But what if you worked for 30 or 40 years or more, you put in for retirement, and you discover there is something wrong with your pension? Not so good, right? In fact, pretty horrible. That has happened to many of us who have or are trying to retire right now. PSC Contract Enforcement Coordinator Greg Douros has well over 100 members, both full- and part-time, who are having problems with their pensions right now. That's not counting those of us who have had problems over the past decades.

What kind of problems? Well, what if you went to retire, and you discovered that your campus was not making the necessary deductions or no deductions at all? What if you are an adjunct teaching on multiple campuses or a full-timer with an additional course and you discover Human Resources failed to deduct from those wages? What do you do then? Who is responsible? YOU ARE, as many of you may know all too well.

If you are a member of TRS (Teachers' Retirement System), you are liable for any missing deductions and must pay the interest (around 5% a year) which you would have earned if CUNY had done its job correctly. If you are a member of TIAA (Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association), you lose the value of the market gains and dividends you would have accrued.

This is outrageous, you say! There ought to be a law. Last year, enough was enough. After trying to work with CUNY to correct this decades-old problem, costing some individual members thousands and sometimes tens of thousands of dollars, the PSC filed a lawsuit last year against CUNY. What is the PSC specifically demanding? That CUNY fix its pension system by establishing a centralized system to properly deduct and submit pension contributions and records in a timely manner to TRS and TIAA. That CUNY conduct an independent audit to identify any PSC member, who in the last ten years, has been adversely affected by CUNY's failures mentioned in the lawsuit. That CUNY make whole any PSC members adversely affected by CUNY's pension failures listed in the lawsuit, including the interest that members owe on missed contributions to the pension system through no fault of their own.

But we know how long lawsuits can sit in the courts waiting for justice. What can we do now to prevent such situations from starting and growing? The PSC Pension Committee embarked on a multiphase campaign to educate and activate our members. This spring semester we have been holding "Pension and Pizza"

events to make our active members know of potential problems, check their paystubs, and ensure CUNY is making the correct deductions. We also tell them what to do if CUNY is not doing things properly. So far, events have occurred at Lehman, Medgar Evers, City College, Queens, City Tech, and at John Jay with HEOs. We have plans to continue these events next semester.

What is a “Pension and Pizza” campus event? First, Greg shows a PowerPoint presentation explaining how to recognize problems with your pension deductions and how to deal with them. He answers questions, and then we all eat pizza. Some of these events are in-person, some are only on Zoom and some are hybrid. If you are online, pizza is virtual.



If you have a colleague or family member who is still active, please remind them to check their paystubs to make sure CUNY is deducting the correct amount. Information can be found on the PSC website at: <https://psc-cuny.org/pensions-lawsuit-faqs>. If you know a PSC chapter chair or chapter executive committee member who wants to hold a “Pension and Pizza” event or if you know someone who has a pension problem, they can contact Greg at gdouros@pscmail.org.

Bon Appetite!

OPPENHEIMER: MY REFLECTIONS ON THE PHYSICISTS AFTER WORLD WAR II by DAVID KOTELCHUCK

*Recently I had an opportunity to view the film *Oppenheimer* for a second time. The movie and Jonathan Buchsbaum’s fine review of it in the February/March issue of TTP brought back memories of my years as a graduate student in physics at Cornell University, from 1956 to 1962. There I had a window on the thoughts and feelings of many of these physicists. It may be of interest to others to learn about some of these recollections, though it was things that I witnessed as a graduate student, not as a confidant.*



Once the German government surrendered to the Allies in April 1945 and was no longer able to build an atomic bomb, the physicists who were building the U.S. bomb were of sharply differing opinions about using it to attack Japan and its people. These scientists were the only U.S. civilians outside of government who knew about the bomb. And within the government, literally only a handful of persons knew about the Manhattan Project, which produced the bomb. Harry S. Truman, then the U.S. President, did not know of the existence of the bomb until *after* he assumed the presidency (Reference 1).

At this time, the end of WWII seemed near. Japan was without allies and had no known nuclear program. Many of the atomic scientists were unalterably opposed to dropping atomic bombs on Japan, understanding its human costs. Others proposed giving warnings, such as exploding a bomb in or over the ocean near Japan, to demonstrate its destructive power. One scientist, Leo Szilard, circulated a petition in July 1945, signed by 70 others, opposing use of the bomb unless and until the Japanese government was given prior warning and informed about the allied peace terms. However, Truman later decided that the U.S. should drop the bomb absent any warning, primarily to save U.S. military lives (Reference 2). The first bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945 and the second on August 9, killing an estimated 150,000 persons (Reference 3).

These events left a deep sense of pain and guilt among many who built the bomb. Soon some of these physicists sprang into action. Within four months, on December 10, 1945, they produced a newsletter for public consumption, *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists of Chicago*. By June 1947, it became a monthly magazine, called *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* or BAS (Reference 4), and introduced the famous Five Minutes to Midnight, Doomsday Clock.

The Cornell University Physics Department

Dr. Hans Bethe, played in the film by Gustaf Skarsgård, was the highly respected director of the Theoretical Division of the Manhattan Project. He returned to Cornell University after the war, and he was soon joined by many others of similar mind about the use of the bomb and controlling the future of atomic energy. Among them were Dr. Philip Morrison and Dr. Robert Wilson, director of Cornell's Electron Synchrotron, then under construction. (Bethe was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1967.)

The first issue of the BAS magazine carried a full-page ad by the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists, chaired by Albert Einstein. Hans Bethe was one of seven board members. In its opening statement, the committee noted, "If war breaks out, atomic bombs will be used, and they will surely destroy our civilization. There is no solution to this problem except international control of atomic energy and, ultimately, the elimination of war" (Reference 5).

I was lucky enough to be accepted as a graduate student in high-energy physics at Cornell in 1956, attracted both by the exciting science being undertaken there and by the social values expressed by many on the faculty. Dr. Bethe was a superb teacher and gentlemanly with his students, responding politely and respectfully even to

sophomoric questions from some of us in his quantum mechanics class, never rolling his eyes or otherwise expressing disdain. Occasionally he would give a university-wide talk on the status of nuclear weapons and potential agreements about their use. (Surprisingly, at least to me, he left campus from time to time to continue secret work for the U.S. government, which was then seeking to develop the H-bomb) (Reference 6).

During my matriculation at Cornell, the health effects of testing atomic bombs in the atmosphere became a worldwide public issue. In 1961, Cornell faculty and students from many departments, as well as townspeople, threw our political energies behind Professor Harrop Freeman, a faculty member running for Congress in the Democratic primary as a “peace” candidate, calling for an end to nuclear testing in the atmosphere. The get-out-the-vote in the NY counties around Cornell was spearheaded by a group largely of chemistry, physics and math graduate students, myself included. We surprised everyone with our strong showing, losing narrowly by 600 votes in the district. Later, in 1963, the U.S., UK and USSR signed a Partial Test Ban Treaty, ending atmospheric testing — a most welcome development.

During the period from 1957 to 2007, Cornell faculty also participated in the series of Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. My thesis advisor, Professor Jay Orear, joined and helped plan several of these between 1958 to 1964.

I left Cornell in 1962 after completing my doctoral work, guided like others with a sound model of how we might incorporate our future work as scientists with our responsibilities as citizens to deal with the social consequences and implications of our research.

The Community of Atomic Scientists After the Bomb

J. Robert Oppenheimer returned to Princeton after WWII, turning down offers from many other major academic institutions. While he clung to his strongly held opinions that atomic energy must be internationally controlled to avoid a catastrophic world war, he largely held back from public expression of his views — limiting them to the confines of the physics community. As shown in the movie *Oppenheimer*, when his security clearance was challenged and canceled during the Red Scare of the 1950s, his response was tepid. We don’t know now, and possibly never will, why he did not more strongly defend himself and his WWII accomplishments for the United States.



Katelyn Ryu / The Daily Princetonian

But hundreds of colleagues who worked with him on the bomb, such as those at Cornell, organized themselves into a powerful political force. In the last issue of the BAS magazine (Nov/Dec 1998), its masthead listed 42 sponsors and 21 more who had passed away by then: a body of Nobelists and many other leading atomic

physicists during the latter half of the 20th century (Reference 7). Notably absent from the list is Edward Teller. The magazine remains online to this day.

On the international front by 2007, the Pugwash International Conferences on Science and World Affairs had attracted over 4,000 individual leaders from many different fields seeking arms control and “a world free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction” (Reference 8). In 1995, the Pugwash Conference was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Its conferences continue.

The film *Oppenheimer* covers the scientific origins of atomic energy, the development of the atomic bomb, and its use against Japan and its people in WWII. The pain and guilt among so many of those who constructed the bomb helped spawn a worldwide movement against its use and that of other atomic weapons. I am honored to have been at Cornell and participated modestly in arms-control efforts then and since. Hopefully, *Oppenheimer* has helped open our eyes further to the horrors of nuclear war, and it highlights the continuing need to reign in government threats, explicit and implicit, to the use of such weapons in the future.

References

1. Rhodes, Richard, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (Simon and Schuster, 1986) Touchstone (paperback) Edition, 1988, p.617. (NOTE: Much of the historical background for this article is drawn from this magisterial, Pulitzer Prize-winning book.)
2. However, in later years, many Cold War historians have asserted that considerations regarding the impending Cold War with the Soviet Union played a significant role in Truman’s decision. See, for example, Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (Simon and Schuster, 1965).
3. One of the most serious failings of the movie *Oppenheimer*, in my opinion, was its failure to show the gruesome wounds created by the bombs on human beings, forcing us as a people to face and come to terms with a tragedy we had inflicted on others, even during a just war.
4. *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* remained in print until September 1990 after which it has remained an online publication. For back issues, [go here](#). Back issues: tinyurl.com/bulletin-of-atomic-scientists
5. *Ibid.*, Vol.3, No. 6 (June, 1947) back of cover page.
6. In a [2014 interview](#), after her husband’s death, Rose Bethe recalled, “he hoped that his research would prove that it [the H-bomb] was impossible to create.” Unfortunately, this did not turn out to be the case. Meanwhile, in the public domain, Bethe argued against development of the H-bomb as a priority of U.S. government policy. (Source: <https://ahf.nuclearmuseum.org/manhattan-project-spotlight-hans-and-rose-bethe/>)
7. tinyurl.com/bulletin-of-atomic-scientists
8. <https://pugwash.org/> The first conference was held in Pugwash, Nova Scotia.

CHAPTER MEETINGS RECAP: BREAKING THROUGH THE HYPE ABOUT AI

by CECELIA MCCALL & JOAN GREENBAUM

The oracles of AI prophesize only in the extremes. This bifurcated hype runs something like this: Artificial Intelligence will save us with brilliant breakthroughs in science and medicine, as well as creating a whole raft of new jobs. OR: AI will take away not just the boring jobs but those higher skilled and creative positions as well. It is a statue to the wrong god: of science run amok and technologies ruling us.

At our March 5 chapter meeting, we had real experts talk about “Breaking through the Hype of AI.” **Sarah Myers West, managing director of AI Now Institute, and Meredith Whittaker, president of Signal Foundation,** spoke to us about the origin and history of America’s love of technology and the next new thing. And now, of course the next new thing is spinning myths about artificial intelligence. Meredith Whittaker explained that the hype makes us doubt our own ability to examine and understand what the technologies do. “The term AI dates from 1956 when John McCarthy used the phrase in applying for grant money,” she said. After which, he became known as “the father of AI.” Since then, AI has been used as a marketing term and applied to many different types of technological applications.



Sarah Myers West,
AI Now

Meredith Whittaker,
Signal Foundation

Weak or no regulation about what “big tech” firms do dates back to the 1990s when industrial jobs were being shipped offshore, and President Bill Clinton’s policies called for building up a new “hi-tech” industry. Whittaker characterized this new “hi-tech” strategy as a way for Democrats to avoid losing the former blue-collar working class. The idea was to develop the U.S. into a technological juggernaut, focusing on the internet and new applications through hi-tech. In this way, the U.S. set the standards on website names and uses, as well as establishing the “business model” for advertising and ownership of applications, now simply called “apps.” With no regulation, the privatization of internet spaces has resulted in surveillance and the collection of personal data—the opposite of its earlier hype as the free “Internet Superhighway.”

Sarah West said that there is little independent research about AI. The majority of academic research has been determined by big-tech companies because they have the labs. The current moment is one in which we experience anxiety and a departure from previous technology. AI systems have been invisible to most people, but

now through generative systems such as ChatGPT, people can see results but still have no clue as to how the results are generated. AI is used where there are existing power asymmetries. At the meeting, article co-author Joan Greenbaum, who has been in the industry since the 1960s and was a consultant at AI Now, stated that even old computer programs used algorithms for decision-making such as for the racist policies on “red lining.” What is even more dangerous is that now we cannot peek inside these giant AI systems.

Now groups within and outside this industry are organizing for “responsible AI” and control over the process of generating systems. For Meredith Whittaker, the military applications of big tech became her impetus to do labor organizing. She was one of the leaders of the worldwide walkout of Google workers a few years ago. She and many thousands in that industry are concerned about the algorithmic use of targeting civilian populations. This is something that is not new, but we all need to keep our eyes on these actors by reading articles and supporting the tech labor organizing that is going on as workers who create these systems try to wrestle some control from big-tech companies.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

by MARVA LILLY

As we age, our living and care arrangements may change. What should we know?

Our own **Jim Cohen, professor emeritus at John Jay College of Criminal Justice** and a member of the PSC Standing Committee on Pensions, has been researching over the past two years the living and care arrangements for seniors. Jim made an extensive presentation on the subject to an anxious virtual audience at our Retirees Chapter meeting in April.



Jim began by detailing the possible arrangements for senior living care. The first option is to stay at home and age in place, living with children or relatives or living in a planned retirement community or in a naturally occurring retirement community, called a NORC. The second is to live in a continuing care or life-plan retirement community, of which there are 43 in New York State. Another option is a senior residence or adult home with independent living across the spectrum. Next is an assisted living facility (ALF), where most residents live in small apartments. And finally there is a memory care facility, which can be a stand-alone or dedicated facility.

Jim also showed some slides of the facilities. One such residence is RiverWalk at RiverSpring Living, located in the Hebrew Home in Riverdale. RiverWalk has seniors from ages 80 to 100 years old. Affordable housing is available for seniors who want to age in place. Alma Rangel Gardens, located on 137th Street in Harlem, provides independent and assisted living.

Of course, another big issue is cost. Jim discussed the ways we may pay for these living arrangements, among them: life insurance, long-term insurance, and medicare. Medicaid pays for home health aides but not for rent.

In conclusion, Jim noted that the average age for seniors is increasing, and that serving seniors has become a growing business. Questions from members illustrated their interest and concern, as we all will face these decisions some day for ourselves and our loved ones.

Another health care topic at this meeting was an announcement from Mike Foley, of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund, that TruHearing is replacing HearUSA for hearing aids, which will benefit our members. Mike answered questions on hearing, vision, and dental benefits. He encouraged anyone with questions to contact him at the Welfare Fund at 212-354-5230 ext. 1318 or mfoley@pscunywf.org.

NOISE, NOISE, NOISE

by IRWIN YELLOWITZ

We live in a world of noise. As our speaker, **Professor Emerita Arline Bronzaft**, stressed at our May chapter meeting, New York City residents face noise from transportation, be it in the subway, the whine of electric scooters and bikes, or souped-up car engines; from construction, both demolition and rebuilding; from unwanted intrusions by neighbors, including loud music, shouting in hallways, and footsteps on uncarpeted floors. Members pointed out other noise, from barking dogs, ambulances, other emergency vehicles, and, for suburban residents, lawn-service equipment. It is an overwhelming list, and Professor Bronzaft emphasized, noise is not just a nuisance but often a serious health issue that demands our attention.

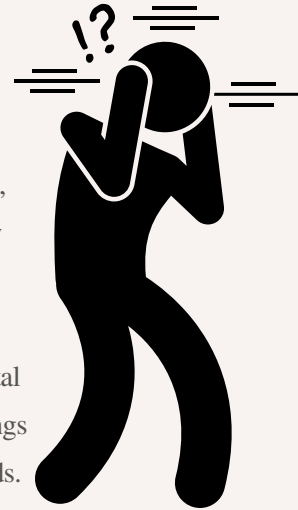
Arline Bronzaft is retired from Lehman College. She also taught at Hunter College. Professor Bronzaft has studied and written about noise from early on in her career. She taught the subject and advocated for change throughout her lifetime. She believes research on noise is the first necessary step, but it must be followed by action. As she succinctly put it: “We have the data, but we don’t have the action.”

When we combine study and action, we can achieve results. And that’s what happened with her initial work on noise pollution in Washington Heights and its negative effect on learning in the neighborhood schools. However, too often study or complaints lead nowhere. She gave as an example that complaints about noise are a major reason for calls to the 311 service, but there is no response.

Noise was a federal government concern, beginning with the Nixon Administration in the 1970s. However, pressure from industries that objected to such regulation by the Environmental Protection Agency led

President Ronald Reagan to close the Office of Noise Abatement. Despite efforts by Congress to restore the office, this has not happened. The result is that there is no national body working to make the public aware of the need for noise control and no regulation of environmental noise at the federal level. Responsibility thus falls on states and local governments, with the predictable range of laws and regulations. In fact, much of the recent research on noise pollution has been done in other nations because funding for such studies in the United States is hard to find. However, people are affected by noise in similar ways, no matter where they live. So this recent research from abroad is valid for this country.

New York City has primary responsibility for noise abatement within the five boroughs, and there are codes that go back to the 1930s, with a major revision in the 1970s and a later update in 2008. These codes define noise pollution as a health issue, stipulate areas in which we should limit loud sounds, and include penalties for violations. Unfortunately, New York City has not done much to enforce these codes as the many calls to 311 amply illustrates.



Responsibility for enforcement is divided between the city's Department of Environmental Protection and the Police Department, with significant responsibility in apartment buildings left to the landlords. This creates a situation of minimal enforcement for existing standards.

Although most noise pollution originates outside the affected person, some can be self-generated. In response to a question, Professor Bronzaft stressed the danger of overly loud music, which can damage hearing in a permanent way. Convincing people and even musical theater producers that good does not mean loud is not easy.

Is there a solution for noise pollution? Clearly no easy one. Professor Bronzaft did stress that organization is essential to any successful response. She mentioned GrowNYC as a site for receiving complaints, and she responded several times to issues raised by members that any progress comes from an organized effort by those affected. They have to study and publicize the sources and impacts of noise pollution and then work with politicians and community groups — especially with New York City Council members — to put pressure for change on those who generate the noise pollution.

Another important step we all can take is to show respect and concern for each other by controlling noise to the extent we can. This requires no government action, but simply the best efforts from each of us.

She offered some examples where less noise was compatible with efficient and even improved operations. Without data generation, followed by organizing and publicity, noise pollution problems are unlikely to change, and they may in fact grow worse. Professor Bronzaft offered her personal help to those fighting noise pollution, which continues her lifetime of efforts to study and combat the damage that noise does to all of us.

CULTURE CORNER

LOSING LIZ by STUART EWEN

I am a molecule floating in the infinite reaches of space.
My thoughts are the phantoms of neural circuitry, wired by nature an eon ago.

After Darwin all preceding ideas became irrelevant.
Life is an algorithm, an unremarkable set of instructions.
Or so I am told by Stephen Pinker.

But when I am me, none of this matters.
It all feels so trivial, so empty.
My loss of you runs through me like tidal waves.
My thoughts of you are larger than the periodic tables of certainty.
I will carry your smiles with me, from the first to the last, for the rest of my days.

SUMMER 2024: MUSEUM EXHIBITS by MARCIA NEWFIELD

As usual, there is a plethora of choices in the New York City museum world. An effort to expose yourself to the unfamiliar is a vitamin for the soul. It can expand your vision and open your heart. Although only one exhibition per museum is mentioned below, there are several exhibits to enjoy at each.

“We Are Each Other,” Sonya Clark | Museum of Art & Design (Until September 22)

Highlighting thirty years of art making dedicated to the Black experience in America, this is the first comprehensive survey of the communal art projects that form the heart of the artist’s pioneering creative practice. Accompanied by a selection of Clark’s photographs, prints, and sculpture, the exhibition features five of Clark’s large-scale, collaborative projects, including her barrier-breaking The Hair Craft Project (2014) and the ongoing performance, Unraveling.



Shirley Chisholm at 100: Changing the Face of Democracy | Museum of the City of New York



(Opens June 14 and runs for at least six months)

The first major museum exhibition on the life and legacy of this pathbreaking politician and New Yorker. The first Black woman elected to Congress and the first woman to run for president on a major party ticket, Chisholm emerged from a unique constellation of New York networks. Set against the broader landscape of New York politics, Caribbean communities, and Black women’s activism, this exhibition explores Shirley Chisholm’s life, from her early years in Brooklyn and Barbados to her lasting impact on U.S. politics. Follow Chisholm’s political career from her 1964 election to the New York State Legislature, her 1968 election to Congress, and 1972 run for president. Many of the issues she focused on are still critical to our survival.

Jenny Holzer: Light Line | Guggenheim Museum (Until September 29)

We’ve all seen flashes of Jenny Holzer’s verbal tidbits in unexpected places: bridges, buildings, street corners. Here’s an opportunity to see them all together in a stunning array on the six ramps of the museum with a display of scrolling texts, featuring selections from her iconic series, such as Truisms and Inflammatory Essays. In addition to the LED sign, the exhibition features a selection of Holzer’s works from the 1970s to the present day, including paintings, works on paper, and stone pieces.



Metropolitan Museum (Until October 27)



It wouldn’t be summer without a visit to the Met roof where this year’s commissioned sculptures are displayed, Abetare, is by Kosovar artist, Petrit Halilaj. Observe the NYC skyline while you have a libation and gear up for the long lines to the latest fashion exhibit: Sleeping Beauties, Reawakening Fashion (until September 2). It features 250 garments and accessories that cover four centuries of innovation and imagination.

Crafting Modernity: Design in Latin America, 1940–1980 | MOMA (Until September 22)

This exhibition presents sometimes conflicting visions of modernity proposed by designers of home environments in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela, between 1940 and 1980. For some, design was an evolution of local and indigenous craft traditions, leading to an approach that combined centuries-old artisanal techniques with machine-based methods. For others, design responded to market conditions and local tastes, and it was based on available technologies and industrial processes.



COMMUNITY BOARD

With this issue, we are launching our new *Turning The Page (TTP) Community Board* column, a digital bulletin board with announcements of things of interest to our chapter members. We plan to include posts on new books or publications written by our members, the formation of new clubs or member groups (such as our new Writing Club), events, courses, demonstrations and actions of interest to our members.

So...if you have anything of interest you'd like to post, please send an email to retirees@psccmail.org with the subject heading "**TTP Community Board.**" We are also still interested in suggestions for articles, poems, reviews, etc.

BOOK ANNOUNCEMENTS

***Our Time is Up* (IP Books, 2024) | by Roberta Shaw**

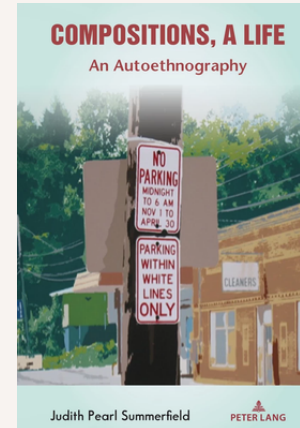
Retired professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center.

The novel is about Rose Winer who is having panic attacks about a man climbing in the window and raping her. Returning to New York from Berkeley, where free love is rampant, she hopes that sleeping in her parents' house will make her feel safe. When that doesn't work, she begins psychoanalysis. Through her turbulent relationship with her analyst, Joan Wiseman, Rose's life is changed forever. She is transformed from a wounded, angry and insecure girl to a happily married psychoanalyst and university professor. But when her mother has a stroke and Joan gets cancer, all of Rose's progress is put to the test.

***Compositions, A Life: An Autoethnography* (Peter Lang, 2024)**

by **Judith Summerfield**, Professor Emerita, Queens College.

The book is the story of Judith Summerfield's life and the varied worlds in which she has lived. Told by a master storyteller, who is also a scholar of narrative and a teacher of writing and literature, the book embraces a meta-textual approach. Summerfield focuses on ethnographic elements of language, family, culture, and history, beginning with her childhood in a coal mining town in southwestern Pennsylvania, with a storytelling father who survived the Russian Revolution in Ukraine and with an American-born mother who insisted she learn "proper" English usage. She chronicles her education during the feminist, civil rights, and cultural revolutions of the last century, and she critically self-examines her years of teaching and leadership at the City University of New York.



WRITING GROUP INVITATION

Marvin Weinbaum, a fellow retiree from LaGuardia and John Jay, is inviting members with an interest in creative writing, including memoir, essay, journaling, fiction, travelogue, etc. to form a writing group. He anticipates a social component to the meetings as well even though meetings will be held on Zoom. With each get-together, there will be an opportunity to read aloud for those who wish to do so. Marvin is open to any and all suggestions. For now, he encourages you to express your curiosity and/or interest by contacting him at marvin.weinbaum@gmail.com.

CALL FOR TTP ARTICLES

The editors of TTP are soliciting story proposals by retirees on recalling **Personal Remembrances** that impacted their lives and may be of interest to others or remembrances of other teachers and mentors who made contributions that shaped their lives and/or otherwise did things not well known that are worth noting and remembering. As a group, we retirees probably have a trove of great stories that are worth remembering and sharing with others. Send your proposals to retirees@psccmail.org with "proposals for TTP" in the subject line.

The **TURNING THE PAGE**, June 2024 editorial committee is made up of Diane Menna, Marianne Pita, Joan Greenbaum, Dave Kotelchuck, and Mike Frank. Graphic design: by Amanda Magalhaes.

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