

**Joan Greenbaum, Editor**  
**Academic Year 2016-7 No. 8**

[psc-cuny.org/retirees](http://psc-cuny.org/retirees)

**APRIL 3<sup>rd</sup> CHAPTER MEETING, 1 – 3 pm, PSC Union Hall, 16<sup>th</sup> Floor, 61 Broadway. Theme: Health, welfare and wellbeing.**

**Speakers:**

- **Donna Costa**, Executive Director, PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund, speaking on and answering questions about the Fund's new benefit enhancements.
- **Jared Herst**, PSC Coordinator, Pensions and Benefits, reporting on latest news and issues about benefits.
- **Len Rodberg**, recently retired chair of the Department of Urban Studies at Queens College and nationally renowned advocate for healthcare reform, speaking on current attacks on

healthcare and safety net benefits--and the way forward.

Professor Rodberg's presentation will be followed by discussion and updates on our safety net campaign.

As always, we will provide light refreshments--coffee, tea, fruit, cheese and cookies.

**MAY 1<sup>st</sup> CHAPTER MEETING**



1 – 3 pm, PSC Union Hall, 16<sup>th</sup> Floor, 61 Broadway. **Theme: The surveillance state.** We'll examine government surveillance in the 1950s and contemporary New York.

**Speakers:**

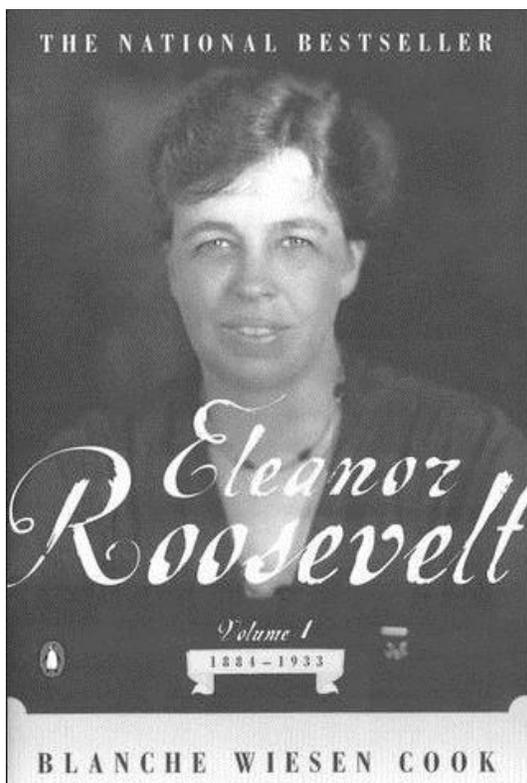
- **Dave Kotelchuck**, Hunter College (retired), author of *Abe and Julia*, on FBI surveillance of his family during the McCarthy period.
- **Alex Vitale**, Brooklyn College, on NYPD surveillance of Muslims, including CUNY students. Professor Vitale has written extensively on “broken windows” policing, protest policing and social movements.

As always, we will provide light refreshments--coffee, tea, fruit, cheese and cookies.

**JUNE 5<sup>th</sup> LUNCHEON**, 12 PM, PSC Union Hall, 16<sup>th</sup> Floor, 61 Broadway.

**Speaker: Blanche Wiesen Cook**, Distinguished Professor of History at John Jay College and the CUNY Graduate Center.

Professor Cook just published the third and final volume of her award-winning and critically acclaimed biography of Eleanor Roosevelt.



The venue has changed for this year's June luncheon. Because John Jay was not available, we'll be breaking bread at the PSC Union Hall.

We'll be providing a buffet luncheon with an excellent and more varied menu – and at lower cost.

We're limited to 100 seats, which means you should **MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS EARLY**. With a speaker like Dr. Cook, seats will go quickly. A reservation form accompanies the printed edition of this newsletter. If you are reading *Turning the Page* digitally, you can find the reservation form online at <https://tinyurl.com/June5Luncheon>

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **HAMILTON'S HEIGHTS TODAY: MONDAY, APRIL 24, 3:30-5 PM (PLUS DINNER)**

Join Alan Feigenberg and David Chapin for a rambling tour of what gentrification looks like in Hamilton's Heights. We will learn about the architecture and communities in the area around City College. Like Alan and David's successful architectural tour last year, we will follow the tour by breaking bread (or whatever you choose) at a local restaurant.

### **Meet at the corner of 145<sup>th</sup> Street and Amsterdam Avenue**

Directions and more information will be sent when you register. Please email [retirees@pscmail.org](mailto:retirees@pscmail.org) with "TOUR" in the subject line. This tour will be easy on the feet and accessible for those with wheelchairs or walkers, but please let us know if you have mobility limitations.

### **WORKING THEATER PRESENTS "BAMBOO IN BUSHWICK," APRIL 23.**

The PSC will be hosting a special group at a performance of the show on Sunday, April 23 at 2 PM at Urban Stages, 259 West 30<sup>th</sup> Street between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenues.

The play tackles the thorny issue of gentrification from several angles using comedy and magical realism to explore gentrification.

Reserve your seats now! Tickets for PSC members are \$25. Make your checks out to *Working Theater* and mail them to the PSC/ 61 Broadway/ NY 10006/ Attention: Steve Leberstein.

**BUSES TO PEOPLE'S CLIMATE MARCH, WASHINGTON D.C., APRIL 29.**



The PSC Environmental Justice Committee, formed last year and spearheaded by a number of retirees, encourages all members to sign up and join the April 29 march.

Learn more about the march and PSC's participation by reading Tom Angotti's article in the latest *Clarion* [<https://tinyurl.com/ClarionApril29>].

The PSC is sponsoring two buses for members at reduced cost. One will leave from lower Manhattan and the other from Brooklyn. To reserve a place and make your payment, go to <https://tinyurl.com/PSCbuses>

**RETIREES TAKE TO CITIFIELD REMATCH: METS VS. GIANTS, WEDNESDAY, MAY 10, 1 PM.** The Mets 2016 season ended with a playoff loss to the Giants. We plan to bring good luck to this game, as well as a good weather. We can buy a block of tickets probably in the \$25 range. Let us know if you will join us by writing to [retirees@pscmail.org](mailto:retirees@pscmail.org) with "METS" in the subject line. Reservations required.

**THE MONTH THAT WAS**

Our March Retirees Chapter meeting welcomed five award-winning women poets from CUNY. The subject of their readings was "Women's Words--Solidarity in Struggle." If you missed it, you missed some lively discussion of teaching and learning at various CUNY colleges, as well as the fascinating and often surprising ways that life experience influences (and sometimes doesn't) writing. The poets included: Meena Alexander (Hunter & Grad Center), Page Dougherty Delano (BMCC), Kimiko Hahn (Queens College), Joanna Sit (Medgar Evers) and Michelle Yasmine Valladares (City College).

Kimiko Hahn told us, among other things, that she is "constantly learning what students don't know" in figuring out how to teach. She also is intrigued by the *NY Times* Science section and likes to make science stories into real life; here is a short tempting example:

## A Bowl of Spaghetti

*Kimiko Hahn, Distinguished professor, Queens College*

“To find a connectome, or the mental makeup of a person,” researchers experimented with the neurons of a worm

then upgraded to mouse hoping “to unravel the millions of miles of wire in the [human] brain”

that they liken to “untangling a bowl of spaghetti”

of which I have an old photo: Rei in her high chair delicately picking out each strand to mash in her mouth.

Was she two? Was that sailor dress from Mother?  
Did I cook from scratch? If so, there was a carrot in the sauce

as Mother instructed and I’ll never forget  
since some strand determines infatuation as a daughter’s fate  
(*Brain Fever, 2014*)

## A NYS CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION: NO THANK YOU.

The Retiree Council of New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), of which the PSC is a member, met in Albany on March 7-8, following a successful two-day lobbying effort for restoration of funds for CUNY and SUNY. One of the key discussions at the Council meeting was the upcoming New York State vote on Nov. 7, 2017 on whether or not to have a state constitutional

convention. If this vote passes, all provisions of the NYS Constitution will be subject to change or elimination, including labor’s rights to organize, public employees’ pensions, the constitutional protection of tenure at state institutions of higher education, along with home rule for NY cities, environmental protections and the Forever Wild provision of public lands in upstate NY. *It’s all up for grabs, if there is a constitutional convention.*



NYSUT and the PSC strongly urge a “no” vote to reject holding this convention. For retirees this vote is especially important since the state constitution now guarantees that pension payments cannot be decreased during the lifetime of a retired public employee. A state constitutional convention could eliminate this provision and subject future and even current PSC retirees to pension cutbacks. During the past decade such changes have been enacted in many other states, such as Rhode Island, Illinois and soon, perhaps, New Jersey.

Most NYS voters, according to recent polls, are not yet aware that a statewide vote on such a convention is being held this year. NYSUT is currently working with the NYS AFL-CIO and the NYS Association of Retired Americans (NYSARA) to educate New Yorkers about the vote and urge them to vote “no.”

The convention is supported by the NYS Bar Association and many state and local political leaders (of course). Many good government groups also support a “yes” vote; they’re hoping for a “People’s Convention” that will finally enact ethics reform in Albany. But all past conventions in New York have featured pledges to enact ethics reforms, and New York remains one of the more corrupt state governments in the U.S., as evidenced by the steady stream of NYS legislators going to prison in recent years.

Other issues discussed at this Retirees Council meeting included the Republican “repeal and replacement” of the Affordable Care Act and the state of the NYS public employees’ Pension Fund, which remains in good health. Pension Fund Trustee David Keefe reported to the group that the Fund grew last year by \$3 billion dollars, even after \$7 billion in pension payouts. Keefe reported that the Fund is rated by pension experts as one of the top two or three such funds in the U.S.

Our PSC delegation to the State-wide Retirees Council included Irwin Yellowitz, leader of the PSC delegation, Francine Brewer, David

Kotelchuck, Cecelia McCall and Eileen Moran. A reminder to all: Say “No thank you to a constitutional convention.”

*Dave Kotelchuck, Retiree,  
Hunter College*

## **GLOBAL RESISTANCE IN THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY.**



The PSC International Committee's conference on March 3-4 drew 195 people to our union hall. The organizers brought together participants from South Africa, Mexico, Puerto Rico and, via Skype, from Turkey, as well as members of our union and faculty from NYU and the University of Colorado. One outstanding, if not surprising, finding was our common experience in the distortion of higher education by the current neoliberal version of capitalism and the forms of resistance to it.

The recurrent debate of class vs. identity politics surfaced in several panels, notably in the first one featuring presenters from South Africa and in the one on resisting racism, xenophobia and gender oppression. To overcome all these, there was general agreement on the

need for solidarity among unions – faculty, students, workers – and for alliances with other community groups.

Despite some pessimism at the alarming rate of privatization and austerity leaving many young people nearly hopeless about their future, and despite the dreadful experiences of adjuncts detailed in the panel featuring presenters from Mexico and Puerto Rico and well known to us at CUNY, positive experiences were also reported. For example, Oaxaca teachers work closely with indigenous communities to educate and to help preserve their languages. And organized resistance persists in South Africa among students and miners as well as in Turkey where academics and journalists have been singled out for persecution.

The concluding panel brought an historical dimension, pointing out that the end of the Soviet Union began the retreat of academic leftism and led to faculty de-politicization, which is mirrored in some of its scholarship.

*Renate Briendenthal, Retiree  
Brooklyn College*

**NEW YORK TIMES REPORTER SAYS “SOCIAL SECURITY IS BROKE.”**

Sheryl Gay Stolberg, the domestic affairs correspondent and Mid-Atlantic bureau chief for the *NY Times*, stated recently on Joshua Johnson’s radio program that “Social Security is broke.” I disagree. Our Social Safety Net Working Group disagrees.

The 2016 Social Security Trustees Report assesses the current and projected financial status of Social Security (and Medicare). The trustees state there is a \$2.8 trillion **surplus** in the two Social Security Trust Funds. They project that the Trust Funds’ reserves will be depleted by 2034. At that time Social Security will still be able to pay about ¾ of benefits through 2090.



There are remedies available to prevent the depletion of the Trust Funds. According to Nancy J. Altman and Eric R. Kingson, authors of *Social Security Works*, there are several ways to improve financing for Social Security: “Gradually eliminate the maximum taxable wage base” also known as “Scrap the Cap.” The cap is now \$127,200. “Introduce a dedicated (to Social Security) 10% marginal income tax on income of more than \$1 million and gradually, over twenty years, increase the Social Security contribution rate by 1% on employees, matched by their employers.” These and other proposed solutions would not only finance Social Security benefits, they would provide for the expansion of those benefits. Email Sheryl Gay Stolberg at [www.nytimes.com/by/sheryl-gay-stolberg](http://www.nytimes.com/by/sheryl-gay-stolberg) to comment on her mistaken

assertion that Social Security is broke.

*Francine Brewer, Retiree,  
LaGuardia CC*

### **TRYING TO GET INSIDE**

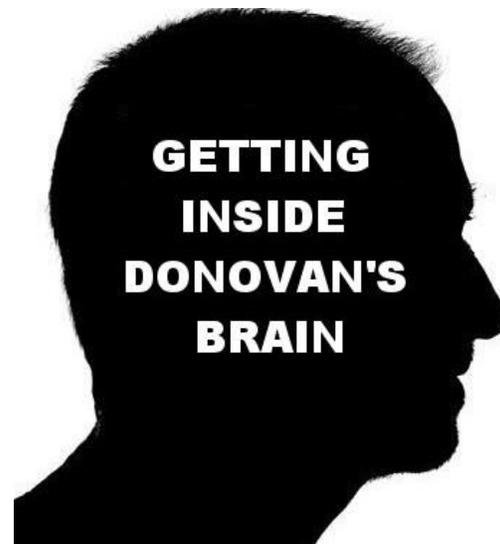
**DONOVAN'S BRAIN.** Caught up in the swirl of political activity generated by the PSC Social Safety Net Working Group, I made a concerted effort to meet with my Congressional Representative Dan Donovan (Republican).

Donovan, a native Staten Islander, was thrust into the national spotlight after declining to indict the officer who put Eric Garner in a chokehold. Elected to Congress in a special election after the resignation of Representative Michael Grimm, he has held the seat since 2015. Donovan told me that he comes from a working-class background and considers himself "a pro-labor Republican." He represents a congressional district that gave Trump 54% of its presidential vote.

He had previously stated that he would not hold any town hall meetings after participating in a forum sponsored by the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce that was disrupted by activists from the Bay Ridge section of his district, which includes all of Staten Island and the Bay Ridge, Dyker Heights, and Bensonhurst sections of Brooklyn. However, he was quoted in the local press that he would meet with constituents in his office. So, I set about to make an appointment and was able to meet with him.

My goal was to stress the opposition

of the PSC to any changes in *Medicare* including: NO vouchers, NO increase in age eligibility, and NO means testing. Pointing to our Safety Net Booklet, I showed him the graphics that illustrate why the PSC opposes changes in *Social Security*, including: NO privatization, NO raising of the retirement age, NO reducing the COLA, and NO means testing. In opposing any changes to Medicaid, I also argued against block grants to the states.



Donovan, along with three aides, listened attentively and responded in somewhat general terms. He pointed out that he was looking for solutions in terms of costs, and that states should have flexibility (a Republican position). However, he was definite in supporting social security without any changes. He also supported continuing certain features of the Affordable Care Act, including protecting those with pre-existing conditions and allowing those under 26 to be included on their parents' health care. He cited as evidence of his independent streak his vote as only one of two Republicans to vote

against a bill allowing those with mental deficiencies to purchase guns. I said that he probably has more in common with Democratic Rep. Joe Crowley of Queens than he does with Republican Louie Gohmert of Texas. He referred to his roots in Staten Island and his knowledge of the borough, as he argued that he represents the mainly working-class nature of his constituency. The meeting was cordial and conversational as we discussed the issues.

One of Representative Donovan's aides pointed out that NYSUT endorsed his candidacy for re-election. I said that we are expecting him to support issues important to the union and to all working people as the meeting ended. I was *'holding his feet to the fire,'* as we are doing with all of the state's congressional representatives.

*Joel Berger, Retiree  
College of Staten Island*

[Editor's Note: *As we go to press before the vote on the American Health Care Act, Congressman Donovan announces that he plans to vote "no."*]



**SAFETY NET CAMPAIGN:** The Retiree Chapter's Safety Net Campaign in defense of Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and the ACA is in full swing with hundreds of phone calls made, congressional offices visited and letters written. There will be an update at the April 3 chapter meeting. For more information, go to our campaign's web page at <http://psc-cuny.org/safetynetcampaign>.

**CUNY RISING AND A STUDENT BILL OF RIGHTS:** Jackie DiSalvo, retiree Baruch College, wrote an important piece on the CUNY Rising Alliance, a coalition of more than thirty community, student, labor and religious groups as well as the PSC. CUNY Rising, is promoting a Student Bill of Rights to "demand free, high quality education for all CUNY students." Because of space limitations, we could not include the article in this issue. But you can read it at [psc-cuny.org/cuny-rising-and-student-bill-rights](http://psc-cuny.org/cuny-rising-and-student-bill-rights).

**Editor's Note:** If you would like to see your name listed as a contributor to *Turning the Page*, email us at [retirees@pscmail.org](mailto:retirees@pscmail.org) with "**Newsletter**" in the subject line. There is so much going on at the union and in the world now. We are trying to 'dance as fast as we can,' keeping up with activities! See you on Monday, April 3rd, or before. Check the PSC website for meeting and activity dates.