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Academic Year 2013-2014

Retirees Newsletter

Professional Staff Congress
Jack Judd, Editor psc-cuny.org/retirees

I. THE MARCH MONTHLY

MEETING: Monday, March 3, 1-3 PM, PSC Union Hall, 16th floor, 61 Broadway. The focus of the meeting is **pensions**.

Our pensions are in good shape. But that is not the case for the majority of working people in the United States. There has been a “crime wave” of “pension theft,” to quote our featured speaker, both in the private and public sectors. We’ll look at the big picture as well as the nuts and bolts of our own pensions.



The meeting will be divided into two parts. Part 1 - Pension Theft and the Urgency of Defending and Expanding Pensions for All Working People. Speaker: Mark Brenner,

Labor Notes. Part 2 - Jared Herst, PSC coordinator of pensions and benefits, and representatives from TRS and TIAA will be available for small group consultations during the second hour of the meeting.

The Executive Committee will meet Monday, March 3, at 10:30 AM at the PSC offices, 15th floor. Those interested are welcome to attend.

PORGY & BESS RETROSPECTIVE AT FEBRUARY CHAPTER

MEETING: *A hardy band of retirees braved the cold and snow to attend the February 3 meeting. The meeting began with greetings from PSC President Barbara Bowen who praised the ongoing activities of this PSC chapter. We then turned to our guest speaker, Ellen Noonan. Her remarks have been summarized for us by Jim Perlstein, the former chapter chairman.*

“The Strange Career of Porgy and Bess: Race, Culture and America’s Most Famous Opera”

Ellen Noonan, from CUNY’s American Social History Project, spoke to the February chapter meeting of the PSC retirees about

her book on George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess." A cultural historian, Noonan placed the evolution of the piece—from novel to play to opera in its various incarnations over the years—in the context of shifting racial attitudes, racial power relations and the exigencies of the nation's foreign policy.

Why, she wondered, did "Porgy and Bess" persist as theater when it had long ago been uncoupled from its music, which persisted not only as operatic set pieces but as part of pop and jazz repertory as well, and when its story depicts, however sympathetically, a dated, stereotypically "pre-modern" people, cut off from the outside world?



Noonan recounted its origin as a DuBose Heyward novel, entitled "Porgy," published in 1925, and its reinvention as a Heyward play co-authored with his wife Dorothy and produced by the Theater Guild in 1927, to its musical form as a Gershwin-Heyward opera in 1935. She described the opera's revival in

1941, the U.S. State Department-sponsored tours of 1952-56, the Houston Grand Opera revival of 1976, its Radio City Music Hall production in 1983, and the revivals of the last several years.

But the heart of her talk was her analysis of shifts in emphases in production values as the years went by. There have been shifts from portrayals of racial stereotypes to portrayals of universal archetypes, from the piece as grand opera to one of musical entertainment and back again. And she placed these shifts against the background of evolving race relations and, post-1945, the Cold War.

The emergence of the internet and the consequent accessibility of small archives and local newspapers made it possible for Noonan to assess the diversity of regional, class and racial responses to different productions of "Porgy and Bess." She noted particularly the ongoing tension within the Black community—both performers and audiences—between appreciation of the visibility and employment it provided Black artists, and discomfort with the image of Black life it projected.

A lively session of questions and comments followed Dr. Noonan's talk.

ANNUAL FLORIDA BRANCH LUNCHEON: Congratulations to Peter Hoberman and Paul Levitz (Florida co-chairs), Norma Van Felix (Florida treasurer) and other Florida members whose organizing skills and hard work resulted in another

successful annual luncheon seminar of the Florida Branch of the Retirees Chapter.

Approximately seventy PSC retirees gathered at the Lakeside Terrace in Boca Raton on Monday, February 3 to interact with presenters who addressed issues ranging from the nuts and bolts of pensions and benefits to calls for action to defend the safety net.



PSC Treasurer Michael Fabricant reported on the state of our union and the political and economic context for contract negotiations; Jared Herst (PSC coordinator of pension & health benefits), Donna Costa (associate director of the Welfare Fund) and Ray Schmierer (TIAA) spoke about pensions and benefits. Finally, John Hyland (representing the Retirees Chapter Executive Committee) and Tom Murphy (UFT Retiree Chapter chair) explored coalition work with other Florida AFT retirees on defense of the safety net and other political issues.

Work has already started on next year's luncheon, scheduled for February 9, 2015. (Attention snow

birds: See the notice below and provide us with your winter address so that we can include you in the mailing for next year's luncheon.)

SNOW BIRDS: A MATTER OF COMMUNICATION: It has come to our attention that some retirees who move south during the cold weather do not notify the PSC office of their winter addresses. If you are in this group, please make sure to contact Diana Rosato at the PSC office, 212-354-1252, or to drosato@pscmail.org.

NYSUT AWARDS SOLIDARITY GRANT TO SOCIAL SAFETY NET WORKING GROUP: A \$25,000 grant will allow the Social Safety Net Working Group to extend the outreach efforts that it has been doing locally to a statewide audience through our state affiliate, the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). The group, mainly a Retirees Chapter initiative but open to all PSC members, has been at work since the beginning of 2011. Its aim is to raise awareness of the threats to the social safety net and to encourage active participation in its defense. The grant will allow the group to develop new materials, revise and re-print its existing brochure, and train activists elsewhere in New York State.

LABOR GOES TO THE MOVIES: HANNAH ARENDT (GERMANY, VON TROTTA, 2012): The next showing of the PSC series "Labor Goes to the Movies" is *Hannah Arendt* on Friday, March 14, 6 p.m., PSC Union Hall, 16th floor, 61 Broadway.

Director Margarethe von Trotta is joined by actor Barbara Sukowa (now of Brooklyn) in a narrative feature about the German Jewish philosopher's work. The focus of the documentary is on Arendt's witnessing and writing about the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann and the furor surrounding her book about the trial-famously subtitled "The Banality of Evil."



Featuring an award-winning performance by Sukowa as Arendt and footage of the Eichmann trial, the film thrillingly dramatizes "the life of the mind," bringing the philosophical issues into sharp relief and revealing their political import today. It is indeed "an action movie, though of a more than usually dialectical type. Its climax...provides a stirring reminder that the labor of figuring out the world is necessary, difficult and sometimes genuinely heroic" (A.O. Scott, NY Times).

Doors open at 6 p.m. A discussion will follow the film. Light refreshments provided.

The theme for LGTM this academic year is "Work." The link to a PDF of a poster with a full calendar of 2013-14 screenings is:

<http://tinyurl.com/LaborGoes>

Comments and suggestions for Newsletter items may be sent to: JJUDD18@OPTONLINE.NET.