

DECEMBER 2018



Academic Year 2018-9 No. 4

psc-cuny.org/retirees



The House of Representatives flipped. So did the NY State Senate, as well as a number of governorships and state houses. Republicans increased their majority in the US Senate. There were notable progressive victories and defeats. By gender, race and ethnicity, the House of Representatives and state legislatures became more diverse. Health care, immigration and voter suppression were big issues in a polarized and at times racially charged election. By a two-to-one margin, a Florida referendum restored voting rights to ex-felons. In a mid-term election full of contradiction and possibilities, what does it all mean?

We've asked three young activists and astute observers of the changing political

landscape to (1) do a post-mortem and (2) look to the future. Two are CUNY political scientists and members of the PSC Legislation Committee. **Susan Kang** teaches at John Jay, is a co-founder of No IDC New York and helped spearhead the NYS electoral work of Democratic Socialists of America. **Geoff Kurtz** is chapter chair of the PSC at BMCC and has written widely on liberalism, social democracy and the politics of protest. Susan and Geoff will be joined by **Ava Benezra**, the Working Families Party campaign manager for Cynthia Nixon and Jumaane Williams in the September primary.

Discussion will follow. Light refreshments.
Monday, Dec. 3, PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th Floor, 1-3 PM. □

ANNUAL WINTER LUNCHEON: MON., JANUARY 7, 12:30 PM, GRADUATE CENTER – BENJAMIN HETT, SPEAKER

Whither Democracy? In his highly acclaimed new book, **Benjamin Carter Hett** concludes with this sentence: "We who come later have one advantage over them [Germans in 1933]: we have their example before us." Hett, who is professor of history at Hunter College and The CUNY Graduate Center, has written a compelling study of the rise of Hitler and downfall of the Weimar Republic, *The Death of Democracy*. It's a book of particular interest to our members not only as retired academics, but as active citizens of contemporary America. The United States, which in many respects is profoundly different from pre-Nazi Germany, is nonetheless framed by similar themes (nationalism, partisan polarization, political propaganda, demonization of the "other," attacks on a free press, a larger-than-life political leader, etc.). As our luncheon speaker, Hett has a richly textured story to tell about a topic that is both timely and important.

Thanks to Joan Greenbaum and Andrea

Mon., Jan. 7

@ Grad Center



Vásquez, the PSC's first vice president, we have secured space at a new luncheon venue—The CUNY Graduate Center. It's more convenient to mass transit and affordable, as we'll be charging \$26 per person. Space is limited, so make your reservations early. A reservation form is available on the web at psc-cuny.org/2018WinterLuncheon or on the last page of this newsletter. **CUNY Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Avenue at 34th Street, Ninth Floor, 12:30 – 2:30 PM** □

NOVEMBER CHAPTER MEETING: NEOLIBERALISM REVEALED

-John Hyland, retiree LaGuardia CC

The November Retirees Chapter meeting featured presentations by **Mike Fabricant** and **Michelle Fine** on "Neoliberalism and Education in the Age of Trump and DeVos." Mike is the chair of the PSC Legislative Committee, a former PSC treasurer and first vice-president, and a professor in the Hunter School of Social Work. **Michelle Fine** is distinguished professor of Psychology at The Graduate Center, co-author of two books with Mike, and a union and community activist. Both presentations were rich and challenging and led to another lively discussion session.

Mike Fabricant described neoliberalism as the promotion and practice of the privatization, monetization/capitalization of

public services and goods, using a business model of managing austerity, through reducing taxes on the rich. The whole process is based on market ideology. Neoliberalism involves a severely diminished role for government—deregulation on steroids—with disinvestment in public services, particularly public higher education.

These policies have taken place through the weakening of the power of the working class manifested in attacks on labor unions and other progressive organizations. In higher education this process affects testing, assignments, reliance on technology and online instruction. It is also forces colleges toward a uniform curriculum (e.g. Pathways in CUNY). Graduation and retention rates have become the measure of success, using streamlined programs to achieve quicker graduation. Cuts in funding are balanced by raising student tuition and exploiting part-time, contingent faculty. This, of course, results in faculty and staff working longer and harder. Studies of CUNY have shown that there is a hierarchy by race and class with fewer faculty of color and women in the higher ranks.

The new "educational reform" movement stresses globalization of universities and encourages online and for-profit education. A recent World Economic Forum in Davos listed higher education as the third most attractive field for investment. Growing student debt and sharpening financial stratification among higher education institutions (elite schools—state universities—community colleges) are features of these trends.

Mike ended his presentation with two points of hope. One hopeful ray of light, he argued, was Bernie Sanders' campaign which brought the issues of student debt and tuition-free college education to national attention. Secondly, the focus on higher education spurred organizing

campaigns such as the PSC's 7K for Adjuncts campaign and the formation of the CUNY Rising Alliance, making adequate funding for public higher education more visible and mobilizing new energy around education in New York. CUNY management has not been willing to ask for increased funding, or to lead any fight against metric-based education. The PSC and its labor, community, and student allies can and must lead. Our participation, as retirees, can play an important role.

Michelle Fine's presentation focused on K-12 education. Her work in this area finds that a diminished role of government leads to dangerous consequences that realign the role of public schools. She documents the ways that state governments contribute to the militarization of schools and the criminalization of students, especially students of color. Giving examples from New York and New Jersey, she discussed the increased use of discipline and police presence resulting in student arrests.

In the case of CUNY, when the State disinvests, the institution becomes more vulnerable to private interests—thus the Koch brothers gain entrée into Baruch programs. Corporate, FBI, and military partnerships have been forged there as well.

In K-12, charter schools constitute a wedge to destroy public education and teachers' unions. The testing industry is very interested in the greater profits available when frequent and high stakes testing dominates student assessment and teacher evaluations. The testing system then influences the textbook industry and curriculum development, which in turn impacts teaching methods and preparation. Police presence and approaches to disciplinary problems (including random searches) can and do morph into criminalizing of students, in some cases even in the early grades.

The future of education according to the neoliberal playbook mean vouchers for non-public schools, including those of religious organizations, changing the allocation of educational resources. Milwaukee and Newark (approaching 50% charter schools) are prime examples. The newest neoliberal educational trend is called "personalized learning" and comes out of the work of Google and Microsoft. Both are selling online systems that monitor blood pressure and heart beat and relate them to the test taking experience, leading to psychological programs to address any learning or test-taking problems that surface.



There are, however, reasons to be hopeful. Michelle pointed to the organizing opportunities presented by these conditions, and the actual work of the teachers 1) on the strikes in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, and other states, and 2) running for office. This year saw the highest number of teachers engaged in electoral races. Here in New York City, there is more activity in changing the high school application process, as well as arguing for more holistic assessment of students. Teacher unions (AFT, NEA) are moving in the direction of social justice unionism, broadening and deepening their vision.

Overall, Michelle presented neoliberalism as a force to turn educational institutions on all levels into profit-making businesses,

based on the logic of the market, a different logic from that of the public, common good.

The Q&A / discussion part of the meeting explored many important aspects of the topic. Many participants in the discussion expressed their thanks to Mike and Michelle for the coherence and insightfulness of their presentations. Summarizing the exchanges, I would highlight some of the key points:

- Higher education is a public good beyond the bottom-line thinking of corporate capitalism.
- The part-time/adjunct/contingent restructuring of faculty and staff is central to the divide and conquer strategies of a neoliberal agenda. So fights like 7K for Adjuncts are important for overcoming those strategies.
- Neoliberalism entails a "fire sale" of public assets driven by the current crisis of capitalism in its search for new areas of profits.
- Pressure needs to be applied to the leadership of individual colleges—presidents and deans—to further PSC campaigns to combat austerity and its political-economic parent, neoliberalism. □

NY HEALTH ACT: MYTHS & FACTS

The New York Health Act (NYHA) is suddenly in play now that Democrats have flipped the New York State Senate. Democrats will have a commanding 15- to 17-seat majority, and Gustavo Rivera, the key Senate sponsor of the bill, will chair that chamber's health committee. The Assembly has already overwhelmingly passed NYHA.

This does not mean that NYHA will immediately become law, but rather that the next stage will be an extended one of committee hearings and negotiations with affected parties. Labor needs to be at the table to ensure that its members have all the benefits they now enjoy—and more.

The changed political reality also means that well-financed and organized opponents of NYHA will sink millions of dollars into a campaign to demonize and undercut it.

Given the opposition, we thought it important to publish myths and facts compiled by the Campaign for New York Health (nyhcampaign.org/)



MYTH: The NY Health Act will end Medicare as we know it.

FACT: The NY Health Act will greatly improve benefits for Medicare beneficiaries by covering vision, dental, hearing, and long-term care, while lowering cost by getting rid of copays, deductibles, and cost-sharing. You will have free choice of doctors, hospitals and other providers. The NY Health Act will not reduce any benefit or right currently available through Medicare, but it will strengthen access to care for Medicare beneficiaries, and guarantee health care for the rest of us, too.

MYTH: The NY Health Act will quadruple your taxes.

FACT: Studies show that 90% or more of New Yorkers will actually pay *less* in NY Health taxes than they do now for

premiums, deductibles, copays and out-of-pocket costs for health care and prescription drugs.

MYTH: The NY Health Act will cause large job losses.

FACT: The savings from NY Health will put money back in people's pockets—including employers—and actually create 200,000 new jobs. People in jobs that are no longer needed in health plan and health care provider administration will take new jobs, aided by NY Health funds that can pay for re-training and transitioning, in a healthier NY economy stimulated by the savings of NY Health.

MYTH: The NY Health Act is bad for business.

FACT: Today, businesses are burdened by rising health care costs and health insurance paperwork. Many small businesses can't provide insurance because of its cost, and lose good workers to employers that offer health benefits. The NY Health Act is simple. It will ensure predictable costs, which are necessary for businesses to thrive and for workers to stay healthy.

MYTH: The NY Health Act can't work if we don't get federal waivers for Medicare and Medicaid.

FACT: Even without federal waivers, New York can incorporate Medicaid, wrap around Medicare, and provide truly universal health care to all state residents at less cost than now. Federal waivers would help the system run more smoothly—for us and for the federal government—but they are not necessary for the system to work.

MYTH: The NY Health Act will cut payments to doctors and hospitals.

FACT: There are sufficient savings in the NY Health act that provider reimbursement rates can be raised so that they can

actually see greater take-home pay. A majority of doctors now favor a plan like the NY Health Act because they are so frustrated with the current system. It will statutorily guarantee reasonable and adequate payment rates, and save providers billions in reduced administrative costs.

MYTH: The NY Health Act is government-run health care.

FACT: With the NY Health Act, you and the health care providers you choose are responsible for your health care. The NY Health Act just pays the bill. Medicare—an enormously popular program—is not “government run health care,” and neither is the NY Health Act. But today, insurance companies largely run our health care—for their benefit.

MYTH: Employer-provided insurance is better than the NY Health Act.

FACT: The benefits of the NY Health Act are more generous and more certain than any private or public plan that currently exists. People who currently receive health insurance from their employer will have the peace of mind knowing that high quality, affordable health care will be there for them whether they have a job, move to a new job, or lose their job. Every year, more money goes to skyrocketing costs of health insurance—a burden on employers, employees, and unions. With the NY Health Act, almost all of us will keep more money in every paycheck and get better access to health care.

MYTH: Government programs aren't very good. This will be second-class care.

FACT: What's not good is getting health coverage from companies that make money by getting in the way of the health care your doctor should be providing. The NY Health Act has statutory guarantees of comprehensive benefits, complete choice of providers, no out-of-pocket charges, and

reasonable and adequate payment to providers. People with wealth and influence—including every legislator and the governor—will be in the same plan as the rest of us. They will make sure that their coverage is as good as can be, and the rest of us—and our doctors and hospitals—will be in the same plan with them.

CUNY PAYROLL STIFFS TRS PENSION BENEFITS

Are you a retiree who is a member of the NYC Teachers Retirement System (TRS)? If you retired before 2017, did you work at CUNY at any time during the years covered by the 2010 – 2017 PSC-CUNY contract? Were you owed back pay? Are you still waiting for TRS to recalculate your monthly retirement payments based on the back pay?

TRS is a defined benefit plan. Benefits are based on salary history, age, years of employment, and other factors. Before TRS can calculate your monthly pension payments, the CUNY Payroll Office must provide that final “salary history” so that it includes any back pay owed through the 4/20/17 salary increase, if applicable.

Contract ratification happened over two years ago. To date, CUNY Payroll has not provided usable and accurate “salary history” data to TRS. PSC leadership has pushed CUNY management, but has not been informed that a data file acceptable to TRS has been submitted. CUNY’S INACTION IS UNACCEPTABLE.

Stand with us at the December 3rd Board Hearing! We need to shame CUNY. Join us when we testify at the December 3rd Board of Trustees hearing, 4:30 pm at Baruch, in the Vertical Campus (55 Lexington Avenue, enter on 25th Street, Room 14-220).

Does this affect you? Would you be willing to testify? When testifying, the Board of Trustees allots each speaker three minutes. To testify, you must sign-up by 4:30 pm on Friday, November 30th. We need to bring lots of people to the hearing, even if you do not testify. We’ll be holding signs in the audience.

We have created a form on the PSC website. Tell us if you are one of the TRS retirees affected by this. If you are ready to attend and/or testify, you can indicate such on the form at psc-cuny.org/TRSpayments. If testifying, we’ll sign you up with the Board before the November 30th deadline.

RETIREE CHAPTER ELECTIONS

April Chapter Elections: Retirees will hold an election in April 2019 for chapter officers. For full details, including the positions up for election, eligibility to run, and key dates for declaring candidacy, circulating petitions and voting, scroll to the bottom of the Retirees home page at: psc-cuny.org/about-us/retirees

Special Election for Alternate Delegate. You should be receiving a mail-in ballot for an Alternate Delegate to serve out a term until May. There are two candidates for the single open Alternate Delegate seat to the Delegate Assembly: Bob Cermele and Glenn Kissack. Candidate statements are available at: psc-cuny.org/RetireeADElection



While we are on the topic of receiving mail—please look for the Vote Cope envelope that was already mailed to Retiree members. All of the political work that the PSC does here in NYC and in Albany is dependent on the contributions we make (this work does *not* come out of dues).

In this last election, Vote Cope funds enabled retirees and active members to pound hundreds of miles of pavement and make thousands of phone calls. And we won key races that we fought for. Thank you for your efforts but, of course, Vote Cope needs funds to gear up for work in Albany this winter and spring.

Difficult races that the PSC targeted in New York City were won by our candidates: John Liu in NY Senate District 11 in Queens and Max Rose for Congressional District 11 in Staten Island and Brooklyn. (Max is the son of BMCC faculty member Lisa Rose.) Andrew Gounardes, our candidate in NY Senate District 22 in Brooklyn, is also expected to prevail. A recount in his race against Martin Golden is still ongoing. □

RETIREE DUES SURVEY

As you know, dues for Retiree memberships are paid once a year in the fall, unlike the paycheck dues which were automatically deducted when we were employed at CUNY. Our annual Retiree dues of \$71 has not increased in more than 20 years.

The Retirees chapter is *considering* a possible dues increase. This would require a change in the PSC Constitution and could not take place before 2019-20. Please take 30 seconds to fill out and online survey at: psc-cuny.org/RetireeDuesSurvey

SINGING HARD TIMES: WORKING LIFE IN FIVE SONGS

--Constance H. Gemson,
Retiree LaGuardia CC

Hearing and enjoying subway musicians, I realized they often choose popular songs their unknown listeners may know. Certain songs influenced my generation and the generations before me. Subway

performers often chose popular songs, romantic, lustful or forever sad. The following five songs from different decades resonated with me. Each showed a different world of work. The lyrics still were important, though they are not the themes that are now popular. Through these tunes, I recalled the special time, place and mood of the composer and the singers.



Merle Travis's *Sixteen Tons* grim coal miners' song was recorded in 1946. He listened to his family and included their thoughts. Travis used his brother John's phrase, "Sixteen tons and what do you get, another day older and deeper in debt." Merle's father often said, "I can't die, I owe my soul to the company store." Merle's song differed from the dreamy ballads so popular during that time. His tune seemed like a dirge. Tennessee Ernie Ford's somber version hit number one on the *Billboard* chart in 1955. Frankie Lane's interpretation was released only in Western Europe. Perhaps the theme was too grim for the American market. Ford's despair was clear to all, even if they had never met a coal miner.

Elvis Presley sang *Sixteen Tons* in concerts, but never included it on a record. The Weavers, known for their activism and

compelling harmonies, recorded the tune as well. But Ford's mournful despair was missing from their version. Tom Jones chose *Sixteen Tons* for his album, *The Green, Green Grass of Home*. Johnny Cash highlighted this somber ballad in *Johnny Cash is Coming to Town*. In 2015, Ford's version was included in the National Registry of the Library of Congress.

Allen Reynolds, a song writer and producer from Arkansas, wrote the forlorn words of the Vogues' 1965 hit ***Five O' Clock World***. The upbeat tune disguised the despairing lyrics which stated "Up every morning just to keep my job, gotta find my way through the hustling mob."

A brief interlude of freedom began with "A long-haired girl who waits, I know to ease my troubled mind. In the shelter of her arms, everything's okay. She talks and the world keeps slippin' away. And I know I can go on, when every other reason is gone." Her dreams were invisible.

To the singer, work is controlled, directed and managed by someone else. I loved the tune's rhythm, the cheerful melody, but missed the message of the harsh demands of work.



I relished **Dolly Parton's** spirit and spunk. She wrote the angry tune and lyrics in **9 to 5**. Unlike the male leads of *Sixteen Tons* and *Five O' Clock World*, Dolly sang with passion—"Working nine to five what a way to make a living. Barely gettin' by. It's all

takin' and no givin.' They just use your mind. And they never give you credit. It's enough to drive you crazy if you let it."

This popular 1981 song was featured in the movie: *9 to 5*. Sheena Easton, from Scotland, released a song with the same title, just months before Parton's hit. For the US market, Easton's title changed to *Morning Train: 9 to 5*. Unlike Parton's theme, she showed a woman waiting endlessly yet hopefully for her working spouse to come home.

Tracy Chapman examined work differently. In her 1988 debut album, she became famous with her wistful song, ***Fast Car***. "You got a fast car. I need a ticket to anywhere. Anywhere is better." Chapman told about a checkout girl in a convenience store. Both the singer and her partner lived in a shelter. What were her plans for "something better?" Realism ruled. Her fictional father had a history of drinking: "He lives with the bottle that's the way it is." Drinking was also important to her companion who spent most of the time at a bar. In this song, Chapman believed in a fast car to arrange for a getaway. These bleak words made a hopeful future elusive. In reality, Chapman graduated from Tufts University in 1987. She performed at Nelson Mandela's seventieth birthday party. Her music expressed an African- American feminist viewpoint.

Many songs dealt with job themes, yet, now this topic fades from the current scene. New tunes emphasized fantasy, dreams and desires, with less concentration on work and its discontents. By listening to music on our individual playlists, we miss collective sharing and solidarity of group gatherings.

After seeing the show, "Woody Sez: The Life and Music of Woody Guthrie," I realized his music still shapes the world today. With his simple melodies, and forceful words, Guthrie described the dustbowl country

roads and city days of the Great Depression. His phrases were memorable. He wrote about deportees and how they were being sent back to the Mexican border. His timely topics continue to be present today.

His underlying question is still important, how can we own our power? □

FRANCINE BREWER



As we reported last month our colleague and long-time officer of the Retirees Chapter, Francine Brewer, died peacefully in her sleep on Wednesday, October 17. Here are two tributes to her from members:

-Irwin Yellowitz, City College. Francine was a longtime activist in the PSC Retirees Chapter and in the NYSUT Retiree Councils. She was a warm and caring person, who gave fully of her time to advance the needs of retirees. Francine was many things, but above all she was dependable and genuine. You knew she would do what she said she would do, and she was there when you needed her support and effort. Francine was also a genuine person: when she spoke it was from conviction and reflected her inherent honesty. Francine was never pompous. When she gave several talks at Retirees Chapter meetings on one of her major interests—food and nutrition—she always began by saying she was not the food police, and then she gave sound advice on diet. Francine was a person you looked

forward to meeting at any event, and I will miss her very much.

-Dave Kotelchuck, Hunter College. Fran Brewer was a fighter, a loving fighter. She was hardworking, caring, committed and always there in the fight for social justice. I have only known her for about 20 years. During that period she was active as an officer of the NYC chapter of NYSARA (NY State Association of Retired Americans), a valued member of the Executive Committee of the PSC Retirees Chapter, and recently was elected First Vice-President of Retiree Council 37-38 of NY State United Teachers (NYSUT).

I was recently honored to be invited and attend a party on September 30 organized by her, with help from family and friends. She had lost an enormous amount of weight, her skin was pale, but her mind was sharp as ever. Instead of a funeral (which we later found she had no intention of having), she decided to hold a party with family and friends to share thoughts and memories among all of us, but especially of her many friendships, her wise counseling of younger generations in her family, and her contributions to the never-ending fight for justice for all.

We in the Retirees Chapter of the PSC will miss her, her dedication and her warm smile. □

Editor's note: We look forward to seeing you at the December meeting and at the January 7th luncheon at The Graduate Center. As always, please write to us with items of interest and ideas you might like to write for *Turning the Page*.

retirees@pscmail.org

**WINTER LUNCHEON, MONDAY, JANUARY 7 @ 12:30 PM
CUNY GRADUATE CENTER / 9th FLOOR
365 FIFTH AVE. @ 34th ST.**

Speaker: Benjamin Carter Hett

MENU: Choose one entrée per person

- ◆ Grilled Sirloin Steak, Crispy Mushrooms, Roasted Shallots
- ◆ Roasted Salmon, Braised Fennel, Orange, Dill
- ◆ Sautéed Chicken Breast, Ponzu, Winter Radish
- ◆ Grilled Tofu, Crispy Mushrooms, Roasted Shallots

All choices come with:

Rolls & Artisan Breads

Quinoa, Green Beans, Toasted Pistachios, Parsley

Grilled Green and White Asparagus, Lemon Zest, Olive Oil

Savoy Spinach Salad, Grape Tomatoes, Cucumber Shredded Carrot,
Balsamic Vinaigrette

And Assorted Miniature Tarts, Assorted Beverages (*Soda & Water*)
Coffee (*Regular & Decaf*), Tea, Condiments

\$26 per person. To make a reservation, please complete and mail a check payable to **Professional Staff Congress** before Dec 17th. Mail to PSC-CUNY/ 15th floor/ 61 Broadway/ New York NY 10006.
ATT: Retiree Luncheon.

Name(s) _____ Number of places: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State/ZIP _____

Entrée choice (s): [] Beef [] Chicken [] Salmon [] Vegetarian

If you eat kosher food, email us at retirees@pscmail.org to make arrangements.