



Environmental Justice Working Group

psc-cuny.org/environmental-justice-committee

PSC Environmental Justice Working Group February 2021 Bulletin

PSC Members:

While there is much competition for your attention this month, ranging from a disappointing impeachment to the hoped for Federal stimulus and an expansion of the COVID vaccine program, the members of the PSC's EJWG urge you all to remember that while Climate Change and Environmental Justice do not often lend themselves to televised or social media "moments", they are nonetheless as crucial for the future of our families, our society, and the Labor movement as any activity listed above. Your fellow Union members have continued working with multiple peers, and this Bulletin is designed to keep you informed, and perhaps motivated, to join our efforts.

The PSC EJWG meets monthly, and its members regularly convene and participate with others as various "interest groups" to pursue specific goals and objectives. Here are brief descriptions of our recent efforts as well as links to additional information. If you have an interest in any of these issues, please contact either the individual convener, or Nancy Romer, (nancyromer@gmail.com) and she will share your contact information with the appropriate interest group.

CUNY Climate Coalition

In an effort to gain agreement from the CUNY Administration and the CUNY Trustees to focus on many of the issues listed below, The PSC has been working with the CUNY University Student Senate while supported by NYPIRG, and has formed the CUNY Climate Coalition. The new USS Chair has pledged her support and we are meeting biweekly with the USS Sustainability Committee to gain support by campus student government associations for resolutions on divestment, reducing plastics at CUNY and installing water bottle refilling stations, and supporting composting by dining service vendors and campus communities. For additional information contact Ron Spalter (ronspalter01@gmail.com)

Plastics

The group focused on reducing our use of plastics and working with the national organization [Beyond Plastics](#), will continue to advocate for passage of the "Skip the Straw" bill on the city level and the "Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act" on the federal level. Jane Selden will be attending the next Beyond Plastics meeting and will update us on additional plastics initiatives. Contact Jane for more info: janselo2000@yahoo.com

THRIVE

The Federal THRIVE agenda (the legislative enactment of the Green New Deal) is being organized by state; in NY State **NY Renews** is the lead organization. The AFT played a major role in the development of this state-by-state strategy, and the PSC EJWG is jumping in with as much participation and support as possible. These climate justice advances will make a huge difference in our ability to transition to 100% renewable energy, and launch a massive jobs program with union participation and environmental justice features. To learn more about THRIVE and how you can help contact nancyromer@gmail.com. If you want speakers to virtually visit your campuses or chapters to talk about THRIVE, please let Nancy know.

Retiree Groups

At the urging of PSC members, both COMRO (Council of Municipal Retiree Organizations) and the Long Island chapter of ARA (NYS Alliance for Retired Americans) have established Environmental Justice committees. In COMRO we're circulating information on EJ issues and organizations and events, and encouraging other unions who are represented at COMRO to start EJ groups. A next step is to develop EJ programs for COMRO monthly meetings. The LI ARA EJ group is slowly growing its membership, following the announcement of a utility scale wind power project off eastern LI (supported by the LI Federation of Labor seeing union jobs on the horizon), and preparing for a Spring Conference with an EJ theme. Contact John Hyland, lagsoc@aol.com, for more information.

PCM-NY

[Peoples Climate Movement-NY](#) is holding a "Climate Briefing" for all NYC candidates on Feb. 25 from noon to 1:15pm. We've discovered that many of the hundreds of City candidates don't know much about climate policy, so we'll be offering them a full tutorial. The initiating organizations are PCM-NY, PSC, We Act, Food & Water Watch, Climate Works 4 All, and the NY State Nurses Association. Please encourage your favorite candidates to come to this briefing. For more information contact nancyromer@gmail.com

Climate Works 4 All

[Climate Works 4 All](#) is holding a "Climate Policy Forum" for all mayoral candidates on March 18, at 6pm. We will be asking candidates for their positions on climate action in NYC. Please save the date! The PSC is represented on the planning committee. For additional information contact nancyromer@gmail.com

TIAA "Land Grabs" and Divestment

This interest group is expecting our resolution (linked below) to be supported by the PSC Delegate Assembly at its February meeting. When that occurs, we will reach out to campus PSC chapters to develop support among faculty and staff. The TIAA divest movement has gained momentum in recent months as the SUNY-United University Professors (UUP) passed a resolution calling on TIAA to divest its holding in fossil fuels, agribusiness (land grabs) and fossil fuel infrastructure; a similar resolution was passed by the SUNY New Paltz Faculty Senate in December. This is part of the Divest NY effort as well. Our EJWG interest group is actively engaged with a coalition of academic institutions and environmental justice organizations that shares information and tools for building local divestment initiatives. One recent bit of good news comes from Brazil, where courts have found that subsidiaries of Harvard and TIAA

violated the law in acquiring farmland there. Here are some useful links: <https://tiaa-divest.org/> and [Action Aid](#). For additional information contact Adam Koranyi (Adam.Koranyi@lehman.cuny.edu) or Mark Goldberg (markgberg@gmail.com)

Divestment from Fossil Fuels

[Divest NY Teachers](#) has made huge progress organizing to move our state-wide affiliate, NYSUT, to support fossil fuel divestment from the NY State Teachers Retirement System. Over 20 locals, including the PSC and SUNY-UUP, have passed the same resolution (authored by PSC members a number of years ago and used as a model resolution by the others) increasing the likelihood that it will be discussed and voted on at the spring NYSUT Representative Assembly. PSC's NYSUT reps will strongly work for passage. For more information contact Eileen Moran (eileenmoran7@gmail.com) or Nancy Romer (nancyromer@gmail.com). Note: Divest NY has morphed into "Divest NY Teachers" as we've already won agreement from NYS Comptroller DiNapoli to divest the NYS Common Retirement Fund from fossil fuel holdings following the example of the NYCTRS which has also announced its plans to divest.

Composting

The EJWG composting interest group continues to actively support the [SaveOurCompost Coalition's campaign](#) to prevent the Parks Department from evicting two of the city's major community compost non-profits: Big Reuse and the Lower East Side Ecology Center, from Parks operated land. This issue was the focus of a City Council Hearing on December 18th, where many city council members and an impressive number of climate crisis, environmental justice, composting and zero-waste organizations, as well as private citizens, voiced their opposition to the Parks Department's decision. As a member of Climate Works for All, SaveOurCompost is also advocating for prioritizing robust funding for composting in next year's city budget. Contact Jane Seldon at janselo2000@yahoo.com for more information.

NY Renews

The major focus of NYRENEWS, the statewide coalition of environmental, community and labor groups is lobbying the legislature to fund the implementation of the Climate and Community legislation passed in 2019.

It's advocacy includes asking supporters to meet with their state representatives to gain commitments to pass the Climate and Community Investment Act (CCIA) bills to make polluters pay, and to use their "toolkit" to write letters to the editor and submit them to local media. We ask that PSC and EJWG members participate in both efforts, and sign up for lobbying visits. While it may be hard to get letters accepted by the NYT, there are a host of community newspapers that state legislators follow closely where you might have better luck. We should use all the tools available to make CCIA law.

NYRENEWS is also supporting the "Stand With Shinnecock" in support of tribal sovereignty vs the NYS Dept of Transportation and Suffolk County, in their efforts to prevent the building of monuments on Shinnecock tribal lands. For additional information, contact Eileen Moran at eileenmoran7@gmail.com

Public Ownership of Electric Power Production

Additional information will be available in the coming months on revised “Public Power” state legislative bills and the expected lobbying that will accompany them. It is also notable that NYC Public Advocate Jumaane Williams and mayoral candidate Scott Stringer have announced goals for public utilities at the local level.

(see https://advocate.nyc.gov/static/assets/Municipal%20Grid%20Report_OPA.pdf and page 7 of <https://stringerformayor.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/StringerClimatePlan.pdf> for details). For additional information please contact interest group convener Ross Pinkerton at rosskspinkerton@gmail.com

Fossil Fuel Infrastructure:

Despite several notable wins at the national level under the new Biden administration and at the state level, there are still efforts to begin new pipelines and construct fossil fuel power plants. See <https://www.saneenergy.org>, <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/stop-the-gowanus-fracked-gas-powerplant-case-18-f-0758>, and <https://publicpower.nyc/stopnrgplant> for examples of infrastructure that should be blocked and opportunities to get involved and communicate with policymakers. For additional information, contact Ross Pinkerton at rosskspinkerton@gmail.com

The [Kingsborough Community College Urban Farm](#) is appropriately dormant for the winter, but the organizers are still demanding resources for their work and advancing a petition to accomplish its primary goal to address food insecurity by providing free, organic food to students. Learn more [here](#) or contact Uda Bradford at munroebradford@gmail.com.

Join us!!!

Ron Spalter, Editor