



February 2011 Issue 5
Academic Year 2010-2011

Retirees Newsletter

Professional Staff Congress
Jack Judd, Editor

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: JIM PERLSTEIN

I. The Assault on the Social Safety Net: Can We Gear Up to Fight Back?

We are in the midst of a man-made rather than a natural disaster. The need of Business to maximize short-term profit has resulted in a shift of jobs to low-wage parts of the globe, a frenzy of deregulation and tax reduction, and a turn from productive investment to financial speculation. Now the bubble has burst.

A salient aspect of the debacle has been a fiscal crisis, into which the states, New York included, have fallen. We have seen a generation's worth of tax cuts for business and the wealthy. With the onset of the Great Recession unemployment has risen and tax revenues have declined even further. Budgets are unsustainable. The states are going broke. And, since the Right has been more agile than the Left in refusing to let the crisis go to waste, a campaign to blame public services and public sector workers for all our troubles is already under full sail. If we cut deficits, the mantra goes, that is, if we cut services, cut jobs, cut wages and cut benefits, we'll be back on track. That our history offers no example of successfully cutting our way out

of economic crisis seems wholly beside the point to those who push this argument.

A systematic political and ideological campaign is underway to demonize the public sector and organized labor, and undercut our ability to fight back.

Health care and pension costs have become prime targets for both the Governor and the Mayor. Neither wants to be reminded that we earned both, that health coverage and retirement pensions are nothing more than deferred wages for a lifetime of service. We find ourselves on the defensive. And as we watch the pensions and benefits of private sector workers disappear, we too often embrace the lie that we are indeed an over-privileged elite, beneficiaries of a golden age now gone forever.

We need to rebuild our capacity to assert that the social safety net, for which we fought so hard, and for so long, is every worker's right. We need to be part of a collaborative effort to restore the social contract that put the safety net there in the first place.

As you know, the Retiree Chapter has created a Social Safety Net Working Group. It is about to launch a campaign of education and mobilization designed not only to defend, but to enhance, the social security system, defined-benefit pensions and comprehensive, affordable health care coverage for both active and retired workers. The PSC has embraced this effort. The union's Executive Council has voted unanimously to make the defense of the safety net a union-wide campaign. The PSC sees this struggle as cross-generational, as a common cause of active and retired members both.



Obviously, we will demand to raise revenue through progressive tax policies. But beyond that we will need to educate ourselves, our families, our colleagues, our friends and our neighbors about the safety net: its origins, its indispensability, its current condition and its future. We will begin at home, in our own chapter. We will prepare materials, distribute and explain them, hold neighborhood meetings and organize forums. We will reach out to campus chapters and student groups. We will partner with other unions and advocacy organizations in legislative and electoral

campaigns and, if it comes to that, in direct action.

We need the help of every one of you. If you want to participate please contact me or one of our campaign co-chairs, John Hyland and Steve Leberstein, by leaving a phone message with your own contact information at the PSC office, 212-354-1252. Better yet, Email that information to one or another of us:

jperlstein@bassmeadow.com;

jhyland38@gmail.com;

sleberstein@pscmail.org

II. State Budget Demands Call for Concerted PSC Action: At the February 7 Chapter meeting, the scheduled speaker, James Parrott, of the Fiscal Policy Institute, could not attend. Stepping in for Mr. Parrott, was Steve London, PSC's First Vice-President. His remarks are summarized here by the Chapter's Vice-Chairman, Joel Berger.

Steve London, First Vice President of the PSC, outlined the effects of the ongoing recession and its impact upon the New York State budget and funding for higher education at the February 7th Retiree Chapter meeting.

Stating that we have been experiencing "the most significant financial crisis of international capitalism since the Great Depression", London observed, "an earlier generation during the Great Depression saw education as a way out," and so Brooklyn College and two other CUNY campuses were built during that period. After World War II, the GI bill greatly expanded educational opportunity and "led to one of the greatest booms in labor productivity and prosperity in the decades that ensued."

Politicians today are following opposite policies, "what we see happening is a contraction"—not only in New York, but nationally." The policy framework in place

today is the same as the policy in place before the great Recession hit, with States pulling money out of public higher education.

In the last two years, CUNY has suffered \$200 million in cuts to the senior colleges, and the Governor is now proposing an additional \$95 million in cuts. In the community colleges the total cuts would be 25% over the last three years.

"We are facing an extraordinarily serious situation," London explained. "Political operatives" argue that "the special interests are raiding the treasury, and we have to control the special interests if we are going to solve the fiscal crisis."

In analyzing the situation, London sought to demonstrate how wealth has been transferred from the lower and middle classes to the upper class. "Nationally, the top 1% of wage earners control 24% of all income in the country." In New York State, the top 1% control 36%; and in New York City they control 44% of all income. "The last time there was this level of inequality was in 1929," London said. This inequality leads to instability throughout the whole society, as wealth is being increasingly concentrated.

The problem is that this wealth is not being invested. "Corporations are sitting on \$2 trillion of cash; banks, globally, are also sitting on another \$2 trillion - You have inequality and hoarding taking place at the same time." The consequence is high unemployment worldwide, and in New York, there is high unemployment and plenty of money not working to produce jobs. Budget gaps in the state have resulted from taxes being reduced for the wealthy over the past 20 years. As demands for services go up, and revenues go down, a budget gap in the New York State balloons to \$10 billion.

"The Governor, along with the dominant policy trend in the country, wants to balance the budget on the backs of the workers, on the backs of poor people, and not go after more revenue." London outlined a program to recapture revenue through progressive tax policies.

He decried the notion "that special interests - like unions are feeding at the trough." Politicians who now attack public sector workers are following "part of an overall strategy to undermine pensions, undermine state expenditures, and say that's the sector from where the sacrifice has to come from in order to solve the fiscal crisis, and not from those who have the money".

The union has a big task ahead - fighting these cuts in the short term, creating a counter-narrative and building coalitions to support progressive income tax policies. "We are making it clear that these cuts are irrational," London stated. The PSC will be lobbying in Albany, and educating the public as it campaigns to restore money to CUNY. All members of the Retirees Chapter are urged to join in this effort.



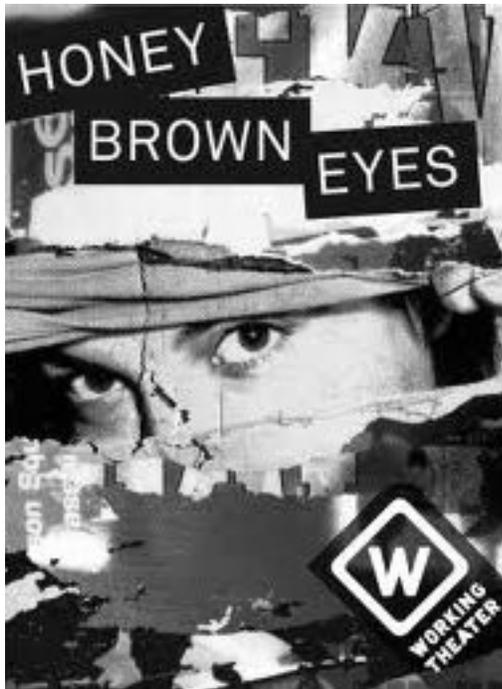
Go to psc-cuny.org to send an ACT NOW letter to your state legislators to restore CUNY funds.

III. January Luncheon. The January luncheon held at John Jay College found over 80 retirees in attendance. The luncheon was used as the occasion for the Retirees Chapter to honor Clarissa Gilbert

Weiss, who was retiring as the PSC Director of Pensions and Welfare Benefits. Just about every retiree has come in contact with Clarissa during her many years of service. There were laudatory comments made in her behalf and, in lieu of the usual plaque presentation, the announcement was made that she wished that those who desired to honor her make a donation to a favored charity, Citymeals-on-Wheels, 355 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017. The members of the Executive Council of the Retirees Chapter also presented Clarissa Weiss with a gift certificate for two at her favorite restaurant.

The entertainment sector of the luncheon found the Director of the Working Theater and the Author of the play, "Honey Brown Eyes," speak about the activities involved in choosing a play, and what work lies behind the creation of a stage production. A summary of their remarks was prepared by Joel Berger.

The Struggles of Ordinary People



Mark Plesent, Producing Artistic Director of the Working Theater and Stefanie Zdravec, author of "Honey Brown Eyes",

detailed the processes involved in creating vibrant theater to an appreciative chapter membership at the Annual Winter Luncheon. Stressing the mission of the Working Theater to produce high quality affordable theater for and about working people, Plesent described how a play is selected, and how a production team is assembled. "Honey Brown Eyes" was selected after Plesent read the play and "fell in love with it". The play depicts the chaos that war inflicts upon ordinary people. Ms. Zdravec, the author, spoke movingly about the struggle to survive during the Bosnian War. She came to playwrighting after experience as an actor. She focused on a brother and a sister, setting the play in two kitchens - one in Sarajevo, and the other in Visegrad. The drama of their daily lives engages the audience as it explores the ravages of war.

IV. Our December Guest Speaker Gains Unwanted Headlines:

A headline of January 22 in *The New York Times* read: "Glenn Beck's Focus Gives a Professor Notoriety." Professor Frances Fox Piven, the subject of the article, was our speaker at the December chapter meeting. Our previous Newsletter carried a detailed summary of her comments. It so happens, that at that meeting, an unknown person taped her remarks and sent them to Beck. Subsequently, Professor Piven's verbatim statements then appeared on Glenn Beck's blog. In view of those circumstances, the Executive Committee of the Retirees Chapter and the membership present at the February session adopted the following:

The PSC Retirees Chapter as a matter of policy, requests that no one record (audio and/or video) speakers at our Chapter meetings unless and until they receive written permission from the speaker(s) and the body. If such permission is granted, the group will obtain the name and contact information of the individual seeking to make a recording.

V. TIAA Sub-Committee: A newly constituted TIAA subcommittee of the Retirees Chapter is now under the co-direction of Judith Bronfman and Tom Gerson. The TIAA group will meet following the regular chapter session on March 7. They ask that if you have any questions or issues, contact either of them before March 7. Judith may be reached at:

jbronfman@verizon.net. Tom is at:
tigerson@earthlink.net

VII. This is a repeat request for **email addresses** from those retirees who are computer friendly. Sending the newsletter by email would reduce monthly mailing costs.

-----cut here-----

If you have not already done so, please print your information on the form below. Complete it and send to:

Professional Staff Congress
Attn: Membership Department
61 Broadway, 15th floor
New York, NY 10006

First Name: _____ Middle Initial: ____ Last Name: _____

Town/city: _____ State and Zip: _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

College that employed you: _____

Email address: _____ Date of retirement: _____