

NOVEMBER 2018



Joan Greenbaum, Editor

Academic Year 2018-9 No. 3

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

---

**MONDAY, NOV. 5, 1-3 PM  
NEO-LIBERALISM AND K-16  
EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF  
TRUMP/DEVOS.**

Neo-liberalism is a much bandied about term. We've asked our speakers to define it with precision and put K-16 education in the context of neo-liberalism, past, present and prospective. Where is neo-liberalism headed in the age of Trump and DeVos? How do we build resistance and alternatives?

**Mike Fabricant** and **Michelle Fine**, who have collaborated on two relevant books, will explore the subject. Mike is a professor at the Hunter College School of Social Work and past first vice president of the PSC. Michelle is a member of the doctoral faculty and distinguished professor at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Discussion will follow. As usual, light refreshments will be provided. **PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th Floor, 1-3 PM.** □

**SUNDAY, NOV. 11, 2-4 PM, LOWER  
EAST SIDE WALKING TOUR**

We have invited Steve Levine to repeat his walking tour. Meet at Katz's Delicatessen 205 E. Houston St. Closest subway stations are the Second Ave. F train station and the Delancey St. station of the F, M, J and Z lines.

The tour will explore landmarks of the old Jewish neighborhood, including the *Jewish Daily Forward*, the Educational Alliance, the University and Henry Street Settlement Houses, the Bialystoker Synagogue, Streit's Matzoh Factory and the Tenement Museum. We will make a nosh stop at the Yonah Schimmel Knish Bakery. We will note changes in the neighborhood over the years, like the development of Hispanic and Chinese communities and the gentrification that has made the area a magnet for the young and hip.

**This is by reservation only.** Please RSVP to [sleberstein@gmail.com](mailto:sleberstein@gmail.com) with your mobile phone number and email address so we can contact you in case of a change due to weather, etc.



□

**MONDAY, DEC. 3, 1-3 PM. THE  
MIDTERM ELECTONS: A POST  
MORTEM.**

The mid-term elections on November 6 will determine who will control the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate and the NY State Senate. In addition, there are key

aces in many other states and big questions about voter turnout, suppression and hacking. 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's campaign manager for Cynthia Nixon and Jumaane Williams in the September primary. □

### SAVE THE DATE: WINTER LUNCHEON

**MONDAY, JANUARY 7.** 12:30 PM at the Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Avenue. □

## OCT. CHAPTER MEETING: LABOR AND ELECTORAL POLITICS

*-Steve Leberstein, retiree,  
Center for Worker Education*

Long a question confronting the labor movement, and workers generally, the issue of workers' stake in electoral politics and in the coming election drew a spirited, if not optimistic, response on the part of the four speakers at the October 4<sup>th</sup> chapter meeting. The panel included **Judy Sheridan Gonzalez**, president of the NYS Nurses Association, **Steve London**, past first vice president and former head of legislative affairs of the PSC, and **Michael Kinnucan**, Democratic Socialists of America. **Penny Lewis**, PSC vice president for senior colleges, opened with a brief historical framework for the discussion.

Penny Lewis noted that labor has had an

uncertain relationship with established political parties, and has seldom tried to create a labor party. She summarized the current situation of how labor relates to the electoral system in one word: "disappointing."

Not until the New Deal era and the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) with the tacit support of the Communist Party in 1935, did the AFL begin to ally itself with the Democratic Party. In 1936 needle trades locals and others founded the American Labor Party, which successfully supported Vito Marcantonio for Congress and Fiorello LaGuardia for Mayor. The American Labor Party also supported Henry Wallace for President in 1948.

When NY City Council elections were held on the basis of proportional representation, two Communist Party members were elected, Peter Cacchione in 1941 and Benjamin Davis in 1943. Much later, Tony Mazzochi of the Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers (OCAW) created Labor Party Advocates in 1989 and an independent Labor Party in 1996, but fears of "spoiling" a Democratic victory put an end to the effort.



For Penny, the question remains how unions can put a labor agenda back into electoral politics, support independent candidates, and create "labor relevance" for other constituencies.

The question she posed led to a spirited but

inconclusive response from the three other speakers. Steve London, long-time PSC first vice president, summarized his answer in one word: “challenging.” He noted that the current “neo-liberal regime” creates a zero-sum game for support of public institutions like CUNY, since the basis of neo-liberalism is dismantling public institutions for private firms. But, he said, the rise of social movements on both left and right challenge the dominant regime of austerity leading to some wins and electoral victories on the local level. Steve gave a negative example of SEIU Local 1199’s president, George Gresham, boasting that his union has “permanent interests,” and so has “no permanent friends.” Such an approach, Steve said, is not class-based and results in transactional politics, leading each group to expect to have to carry out individual transactions with the governor. According to these transactions, the result for the PSC, as for other public-sector unions lobbying for an adequate budget in Albany, is “if we win something, another union loses.”

# INSIDE OUT

Steve London sees the path forward for progressive unions as an “inside/outside strategy,” pursuing our own needs, but also supporting outside groups as in the way that the PSC has helped to launch the CUNY Rising Alliance. Steve argued that with coalition building and member support,

the PSC has managed to do “pretty well for our members” and even win some structural changes.

**Judy Sheridan Gonzalez**, president of NYS Nurses Association and a registered nurse at Montefiore, began her remarks lamenting that ours is an age of cynicism. Yet she told us what she tells her members: “we must refuse to fight over the crumbs when we baked the pie.”

She remarked how NYSNA, formerly an elitist union, began to transform itself when its members realized that unions fight for their members’ needs. “In a newly progressive union leadership, before we even won office we were united in opposition, training stewards in every department” she said, continuing that “the lesson now that we’ve won is to keep members engaged on issues even when they might not agree on everything, continuing to organize on those issues that are important to our communities. In that way, members feel their power collectively by building their strength internally.”

**Michael Kinnukan** is a Democratic Socialists of America activist, a member of its Electoral Working Group, and served as deputy campaign manager for Julia Salazar’s primary campaign in Brooklyn. He lamented that politics today breeds cynicism, especially as the state Democratic Party has worked to maintain Republican control of the State Senate. But the lesson for the party is that a state-wide working class organization is necessary and that nothing can be accomplished without organized labor.

To move on, he voiced the need for a labor party while acknowledging that the Working Families Party could represent a progressive alternative despite its inevitable transactional politics. [Editor’s note: the WFP since has endorsed Cuomo.]

The question that Michael asked was on a lot of members’ lips: How can the WFP

maintain itself as a progressive alternative? Steve London, who is on the WFP State Committee, suggested that keeping the Working Families Party alive leaves a viable arena for promoting other issues.

We were, as usual, an engaged audience. Many voiced agreement about the regrettable state of electoral politics for labor, while also reporting on their efforts in support of democratic candidates for the NY Senate and in local Congressional elections. [<http://www.psc-cuny.org/psc-endorsements-2018>.] □

## VOTER SUPPRESSION IN NY STATE

*-Bill Friedheim & Joan Greenbaum*



YES, voter suppression in NY State! Raise the issue of voter suppression and the states that usually come to mind are Georgia, Kansas, Texas, North Carolina – but not NY. Think again. In the 2016 presidential election, New York ranked 41<sup>st</sup> in voter turnout. Only 26% of registered voters cast ballots in last year’s NYC mayoral election. The main reason: New York does not make voting easy.

Voter suppression in NY is not overt. There are few dog whistles for voter ID or

politically motivated schemes to move polling places out of minority districts. Rather the problem is antiquated voting laws. A Republican controlled state Senate refuses to modernize voting laws and a Democratic governor, despite his rhetorical promises, declines to use any political capital to change them.

Case in point: New York does NOT allow early voting. Thirty-seven states do. In New York, most enrolled voters work on Election Day, a reality that diminishes turnout. Early voting broadens political participation.

Case in point: New York, unlike several other states, does not allow “no excuse” absentee ballots. Requests for absentee ballots must be completed on a paper application and either mailed or delivered in person. It seems that the computer age has bypassed the NY Board of Elections, which does not facilitate online requests.

Case in point: New York does not, as do several other states, have same-day registration.

Case in point: Forty-nine states have either an open primary system or permit voters to switch their party affiliation closer to Election Day. Not New York. In the recent September primary for state legislative and executive offices, the deadline for changing party affiliation was October 13, 2017, exactly *eleven months before* the election. The result: 3.6 million registered but unaffiliated voters could not participate in the primary.

Case in point: New York has not joined 12 path-breaking states that have instituted automatic registration. In these states, government takes responsibility for registering all citizens eligible to vote, leading to a surge in turnout.

Bringing the issue home to the city, 400,000 New York City voters recently received a letter from the Mayor’s office stating that

they were “marked as an inactive voter,” telling them that they had to immediately confirm their address to the Board of Elections or re-register to vote and cast a provisional ballot. As it turns out, the data for the letters came from a firm called Civis Analytics, which bought the voter data from the BOE at the request of the Mayor’s office. While deBlasio’s office claims that the letters were sent to “encourage voting,” at least 30,000 of those letters were incorrect. According to the *New York Times* (11/17), “400,000 New Yorkers were told their voter registrations were inactive.” Civis Analytics and such companies buy voter data from election boards. Shades of Facebook and Cambridge Analytica anyone?

How do we make voting relatively seamless for New Yorkers, particularly working people? After November 6<sup>th</sup>, we must put this question front and center, particularly if the Democrats control the state executive branch and both houses of the legislature.

□

## VOTE NOVEMBER 6

For PSC endorsements, go to:

[psc-cuny.org/psc-endorsements-2018](http://psc-cuny.org/psc-endorsements-2018)

## ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

With the alarming news from the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) report released by the United Nations on October 7th, we are presenting two examples of ways that groups can influence climate change. The UN report documents the speeding up of climate change, which has also been hastened by the Trump Administration’s Environmental Protection Agency. In the following articles, two PSC retirees present important developments breaking in the fight against climate change. The first is an update in the fight for divestment/ re-investment,

nationally as well as here in New York. The second discusses Project Drawdown, as presented in a forum by the environmental group 350.org on September 24<sup>th</sup>.



Picket signs at climate rally in wake of the UN report

## DIVESTING FROM FOSSIL FUELS/ RE-INVESTING IN CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

*-Nancy Romer, retiree Brooklyn College &  
Eileen Moran, Queens College*

### Divesting of Public Pension Funds:

The two largest NYC public pension funds—NYCERS and TRS—have decided to embark on the process of divesting their fossil fuel holdings; this will be implemented over a few years. Meanwhile, Mayor deBlasio and the mayor of London have been campaigning broadly to divest all municipal funds from fossil fuels. At the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco, Sept 12-14<sup>th</sup>, deBlasio pushed other mayors and governors to follow suit. The mayor of San Francisco is now talking divestment, too. At the Global Climate Action Summit, there were three specific sessions on topics to help government agencies to divest: moving money for individual investors; fiduciary responsibility, and litigation against fossil fuel corporations.

California has just passed a law that defines climate-related financial risk and requires pension funds to take these risks into account for all their investments. This could pave the way for even more divestment of public pension funds. Of course that will still require a major effort to make it happen.



**DIVEST  
NOW**  
FOSSIL FREE

A recent report from *Corporate Knights, the Magazine for Clean Capitalism* ([corporateknights.com](http://corporateknights.com)), a research organization with a focus on market and government policy effects on climate change, demonstrates how New York State pension funds lost a potential \$22 million dollars over the last ten years due to their holdings in fossil fuel stocks. That's a loss of over \$19,000 per member! The PSC Environmental Justice Working Group and others are now sharing these new details with pension fund trustees, elected officials, and the public.

### **Re-Investment in Renewable Energy and Other Climate Solutions**

Just days after the last big People's Climate Movement demonstration, "Rise for Climate, Jobs & Justice" here in New York on Sept 6th, deBlasio announced the City's intention to re-invest the \$4 billion divested from fossil fuels stocks into stocks advancing "climate solutions," especially renewable energy.

Unfortunately calls for fossil fuel divestment by the New York *State pensions* have not been heeded by the State Comptroller, Thomas DiNapoli. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report cited above demands that we not only get out of fossil fuels, but also address the related consequences that delaying action will have

on our access to clean air, water, and agricultural production. The future of decent human life, and potentially *any* human life, on Earth depends on our actions now. Please join us.

The **PSC Environmental Justice Working Group's next meeting is Nov. 12, at 6PM** at PSC. Email [eileenmoran7@gmail.com](mailto:eileenmoran7@gmail.com) if you are interested in attending or learning more about our work.

**Post cards addressed to Comptroller DiNapoli urging the State to get out of fossil fuels** will be distributed at the Retiree Chapter meeting on Monday, November 5.

□

### **CHANGING CLIMATE CHANGE**

-Doris Hart, retiree BMCC

"We can still reverse global warming, not just slow it down." These words were spoken by Bill McKibben, founder of the worldwide environmental group [350.org](http://350.org), at a panel he moderated on Project Drawdown September 24<sup>th</sup> ([www.drawdown.org/](http://www.drawdown.org/)).

More than 800 concerned people showed up at Ethical Culture in Manhattan to hear six panelists discuss actions needed to slow global warming.

Dr. Katherine Wilkinson, vice president of communication and engagement at Project Drawdown, presented a number of possibilities. She stressed that foremost was the necessity of people to turn to a plant-rich diet. This would improve health and cut down on the enormous amount of food waste that occurs today.

Chad Frischmann, vice president and research director of Project Drawdown, pointed out that much data indicates that we can grow enough food for plant-rich diets to feed the entire world. This can be done without cutting down forests or clearing more land. Much of the food will be

produced by farmers of small holdings.

However, Dr. Wilkinson noted that women with small farms who have the same number of acres as men produce less food than men. This is because these women have less access to resources. The women need to have equal access.

Some other solutions she noted, in addition to rooftop solar panels, would be green roofs, which would cool buildings in hot weather and cut down on air-conditioning. Also key are wind turbines to reduce the use of fossil fuel. Family planning by choice, not chance, and access to contraception are also necessary.

Karen Washington, an urban farmer and food justice advocate, noted that she has worked with Bronx neighborhoods to turn empty lots into community gardens and she leads workshops on food growing and food justice all over the city.

Lauren Zullo, director of sustainability at Jonathan Rose Companies, spoke about building green, affordable housing. Currently they are building 100% affordable housing on a full block in East Harlem. They are using thick insulation so less energy is needed for heating. There will be three community gardens. They find that community gardens bring tenants together to produce healthy food.

Project Drawdown has compiled 100 possible solutions for reducing global warming researched by more than 60 researchers on six continents. Their data is included in Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming, published in 2017. Project Drawdown is working with educators, NGOs, businesses, investors, artists and engaged citizens worldwide to reduce global warming. □

Members of the PSC Environmental Justice Working Group add the following note: There are differences of analysis

concerning the possibility of reversing climate change. Naomi Klein's article, for example, counters the *NY Times Magazine's* full issue on Climate Change (Aug. 1, 2018). Here's her piece in The Intercept: <https://theintercept.com/2018/08/03/climate-change-new-york-times-magazine/>. □

## NEO-LIBERALISM IN BLOOM

*-Eileen Moran, retiree Queens College*

As a preamble to the November chapter meeting on neo-liberalism and its central attack on public institutions such as CUNY, readers may find useful this review of the book *Democracy in Chains*. The book follows the history of James Buchanan, an economist who became associated with the right-wing assault on *all* public institutions, which he labeled neo-liberalism.



**Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America** Nancy MacLean (Penguin 2017)

MacLean's history of the rise of the radical right in the U.S. is built on her accidental discovery of the papers of James McGill Buchanan, a Southern economist and father of neo-liberalism in the U.S. and abroad. MacLean connects the dots that link Buchanan's academic work to the growth of the radical right and the libertarian takeover of the Republican Party, but with strong influence in both major

parties.

Trained at the Chicago School of Economics, Buchanan avoided its number crunching focus in favor of a theory that valued personal liberty in economic transactions above all else. Then, taxes, especially on the federal level, were considered an attack on personal freedom, forcing the wealthy to pay for public goods they did not approve of. Buchanan viewed all of government's taxing capacity essentially as theft and understood at a deeper level that his view of economic freedom was completely incompatible with democratic governance.

As an academic in Virginia, a state politically dominated by the Byrd dynasty, Buchanan was at ease with a long tradition of voter suppression and white minority rule that ensured government was safely in the hands of the propertied elite. His ideas have roots in the works of South Carolina Senator and slavery advocate John C. Calhoun, who is often called the "Marx of the Master Class."

The Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs Board of Education* energized Buchanan and others to create ways to obstruct incursions by the federal government on their liberties, i.e. their ability to resist desegregation and remain in control, economically and politically.



Initially seen as a marginal economist, his ideas were later embraced by the billionaire Koch brothers, happy to fund and expand his work to serve a libertarian vision designed to dramatically redirect federal and state governments to serve the wealthy and corporate interests.

In tracing Buchanan's academic career, as he and his associates developed centers and even a law school, MacLean shows how, through stealth and deception, the radical right's power grew in spite of its inherently anti-democratic methods.

At the University of Virginia and later at George Mason University, Buchanan and his followers opposed all manner of public goods—public expenditure for schools, colleges, roads, public health, and safety-net programs like Social Security and Medicare. They also opposed unions because unions sought to protect workers' health and safety, negotiate wage increases and supported the expansion of public goods and services.

Social movements for civil rights and the legislation designed to support racial and gender equity, consumer and environmental protection, and the war on poverty were all considered, by Buchanan, to be direct assaults on property rights.

A major contribution to the right's revolution was Buchanan's analytic focus on remaking law to block majority rule. As an adviser to Pinochet's Chilean dictatorship, he helped rewrite Chile's constitution to insure minority rule by requiring super majorities to change conservative policies. Privatization quickly destroyed Chile's social security system after a market crash, and it took decades to restore it. Today, Chile still faces huge obstacles to implement popular legislation due to the super majorities required to enact laws.

Some city and state legislatures in the U.S. that have adapted model bills from the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) face similar obstacles when tax increases require a two-thirds vote. Minority rule is also evident when cities are blocked from raising the local minimum wage because a conservative, Republican state legislature overrules their right to do so. The contradictions are

obvious. The preference for local control is quickly abandoned to protect corporate interests.



ALEC is richly funded by oil & energy companies

The radical libertarian vision, funded by the Koch brothers and other conservative interests, supported an assortment of think tanks aimed at institutional overhaul of courts and state legislatures, offering training and re-education to legislators and prospective judges. With the exception of ALEC's role in developing "model" bills for states across the country, much of this multi-pronged stealth campaign to implement a neo-liberal agenda was *not* apparent. The assortment of corporate-funded, conservative think tanks in some universities went from being staffed by academics to being run by political operatives. MacLean argues that universities have masked their complicity in the promotion of a corporate agenda.

As a result, hundreds of state legislators and forty percent of current federal judges have been treated to a Koch-based curriculum at a university institute like those created by Buchanan.

To ensure minority rule, in their view, voting rights had to be suppressed. ALEC effectively promoted model legislation to

restrict the franchise, too, often targeting people of color, in spite of ongoing court challenges.

The success of this anti-democratic, neo-liberal agenda is evident in the erosion of public services and public works as states across the country neglect their roads and bridges and starve schools, colleges, health and other services. Are the teachers' strikes of the last year the beginning of a rejection of austerity and an attempt to protect some public goods?

## RETIREE CHAPTER ELECTIONS

**April Chapter Election:** In April 2019, 17 PSC chapters will hold elections, including the retirees. Members will elect a Retiree Executive Council for a three-year term – Chapter Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, four Officers At Large, six\* Delegates to the PSC DA, five\* Alternate Delegates and a Representative to the Welfare Fund Advisory Board.

Here are the dates for declaring candidacy, petitioning and the balloting:

- 1/11/19 - Deadline for filing Declaration of Candidacy form
- 2/1/19 - Pre-printed nominating petitions available
- 3/4/19 - Nominating petitions due
- 4/1/19 - Ballots mailed
- 4/30/19 - Ballots due
- 5/1/19 - Ballots counted

The PSC constitution stipulates that to vote, one must be a member of the chapter "at least four (4) months prior to the date for the mailing of ballot," which would be December 1. Eligibility to run, as determined by the PSC constitution, **is open to all members "in good standing** of the appropriate chapter for at least one (1) year at the time of nomination to said office," which in this case means membership as of March 4, 2018.

Full information on elections is available at [psc-cuny.org/about-us/elections-committee](http://psc-cuny.org/about-us/elections-committee).

\*The number of delegates and alternates might change based on a formula in the PSC constitution (article VIII, section 2f) as reflected by the chapter membership count as of October 31. In addition, the chapter chair, by virtue of his/her position, sits on the DA, as do the two retiree representatives elected last April to a three-year term on the PSC Executive Council. □

### **Special Election for Alternate Delegate**

At our October 1<sup>st</sup> meeting, chapter members nominated two candidates for a single open Alternate Delegate seat to the DA, Bob Cermele and Glenn Kissack. The PSC Election Committee will conduct an election by mail ballot to determine who will fill out the remainder of the term (until early May, 2019) for this one Alternate Delegate seat. □

## **FRANCINE BREWER**



Our dear, beloved colleague and long-time officer of the Retirees' Chapter, Francine Brewer, died peacefully in her sleep on Wednesday October 17<sup>th</sup>. We will pay tribute to her at our November 5<sup>th</sup> chapter meeting and in the next issue of *Turning the Page*. □