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Retirees Newsletter

Professional Staff Congress
Jack Judd, Editor

- I. **The next monthly meeting of the Retirees Chapter** will take place at 61 Broadway in the union hall on the 16th floor on Monday, November 4. Our meetings begin at 1 PM and usually end at 3 PM.

The topic: Our Benefits Package – and How We Defend It.



Speakers: PSC Welfare Fund Executive Director Larry Morgan will discuss our Welfare Fund Benefits, and other speakers associated with the Municipal Labor Coalition will talk about NYC health benefits now and in the future.

- II. **The following summary of remarks made by PSC Treasurer Michael Fabricant at the October chapter meeting** has been prepared by Joel Berger, acting chair of the retirees chapter:

How Austerity Politics is Changing Higher Education

Elaborating on some of the issues explored in his recent book, *The*

Changing Politics of Education, Mike Fabricant asserted that the current "austerity regimen" puts every part of the welfare state under attack. The PSC treasurer described how market principles are being applied not only to K-12 education, but also to higher education. The operating theory is for educators "to do more and more with less and less," as there will be no more resources forthcoming. What emerges is a reliance on measurement creating the "patina of science in order to legitimate [the austerity education]." More dangerous is the effort to move the nation's approach to public higher education from a focus on the collectivized public good to a highly individuated approach. This plays out in other sectors as well, most notably in healthcare. Instead of universal access to quality health care, we have, "You get what you can pay for—and if you can't pay for it, we create a service that, in effect, accords with what you are able to afford." The same holds true for education, and that leads to stratification on the basis of race and class.

The privatization and monetization of public services makes them more responsible to the corporate sector than to the elected representatives of the people. Charter schools are just one

example of this trend. The reliance on technology in education is another. It has led to a market economy view of technology as a labor saving device. Online learning in higher education—Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)—"are the next big thing." The MOOC movement promises that we can teach 20,000 students with one instructor. Every state is considering lifting restrictions on virtual schooling in K-12 education. In Florida, austerity budgets have left the State unable to meet mandated teacher to student ratios. Instead of pressing for more teachers, education officials approved higher teacher to student ratios for virtual learning courses, which are not subject to legislation.



Fabricant then described how a reliance on technology has led to an overreliance on testing and measurement. The conjunction between measuring of student competency in a college course and virtual learning, "opens the door to billions of dollars of federal student loan money that now can be distributed differently than it had been in the past." The for-profit Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) is the model of online, competency-based, virtual learning. At SNHU technology, metrics, and austerity are joined as curricula becomes "standardized, routinized, managed and centralized." At CUNY, we see an imposition of uniform curricula and a dilution of curricula under Pathways, and exploitation of labor through overreliance on adjuncts...



Metrics applied to graduation rates without funding to address the root causes of low graduation rates is leading to "a cheapening of curriculum." The driving force of austerity together with monetization turns "public services into sources of capital for private marketplace venture." Presently, higher education is looked upon as "the most under-capitalized part of the economy" by certain private investors. In K-12, there are for-profit charter schools, and similar efforts are underway in higher education. Although there is no evidence that charter schools are any better than public schools, as measured by standardized testing, movement toward charter schools continues as a way of both saving states money and privatizing higher education. In for-profit higher education, data indicates that their completion rates are "extraordinarily low." The for-profits are not more efficient based on any of the common measures. We are "transferring enormous sums of wealth to the private sector and declaring a particular part of the population increasingly disposable because public institutions are resource starved." "We have betrayed students who are poor and kids of color in our public schools in the poorest communities by not making the necessary, sufficient investments." It is a double betrayal when we take away the capacity to develop writing and math skills.

Public schools are being closed. Colleges are being consolidated. Austerity drives the conversation. The fight today must be about creating a "new

commons" and the reassembly of the welfare state, with strategic investments to reverse what austerity has created.

III. NEW YORK CITY RESIDENTS, VOTE ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 5



The PSC endorses Bill de Blasio for Mayor for his strategic vision for CUNY and his focus on ending economic inequality. The union also endorsed Letitia James for Public Advocate, Scott Stringer for Comptroller and 39 progressive candidates for City Council and borough president. Read more about all the endorsements at psc-cuny.org/endorsements2013.

IV. Labor Goes to the Movies Presents *Leviathan*—Nov. 8



Leviathan (France/UK/USA, Castaing-Taylor and Paravel, 2012)

The theme for LGTM this academic year is "Work." *Leviathan* explores the theme by recording the sounds and images of a commercial fishing boat off the coast of New Bedford, Massachusetts. Without a word of commentary, with virtually no audible dialogue, smothered under the unceasing roar of the machinery and the sea, the filmmakers shared the multiple lightweight cameras with the crew, capturing the intense sensorial experience of the work on the boat. Not only does the film withhold judgment on the activity of the boat and crew, but the filmmakers specifically wanted to allow no privileged status to the humans: "In typical cinema fiction or non-fiction humans occupy the pride of place. . . In our films I guess we always try to relativize the human and to make them be as, I think in reality we are, part of a much larger sphere of nature." "Visually ravishing, *Leviathan* is in every way sensational." – J. Hoberman.

Date: November 8
Time: 6:00pm
Location: PSC-CUNY Union Hall
61 Broadway, 16th floor.
Light food and drink provided.

For more info about Labor Goes to the Movies:
<http://www.psc-cuny.org/LaborMovies>

Contact the Editor, Jack Judd at: JJUDD18@OPTONLINE.NET , for any suggestions for topics to be included in the Newsletter, and for general inquiries.

RETIREE CHAPTER WEBSITE:
For more information about the chapter and its activities
as well as an archive of newsletters, go to <http://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees>.