

OCTOBER 2017



Joan Greenbaum, Editor

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psc-cuny.org/retirees

October Upcoming Events

CHAPTER MEETING: MON., OCT. 2.

We'll be convening at 1 PM in the PSC Union Hall (61 Broadway/16th floor) to assess election and ballot issues -- The upcoming NYC City election, the 2018 state and midterm elections and the 2017 ballot initiative calling for a New York state constitutional convention.

Barry Kaufman, president of the NY State Alliance for Retired Americans, will explain why the labor movement is mobilizing for a **"no" vote on the constitutional convention.**

Bob Master, a founder of the Working Families Party of New York State and currently one of its co-chairs, will speak on labor and the 2017-18 election landscape. Master is legislative and political director for the Communications Workers of America in the Northeast.

Join us for discussion, light refreshments and the opportunity to renew ties with new, and not so new, retiree colleagues.

WALKING TOUR: HIDDEN HISTORIES BELOW NEW YORK

A walking tour of the Meat Packing District

OCT. 23 1:00-2:30 PM

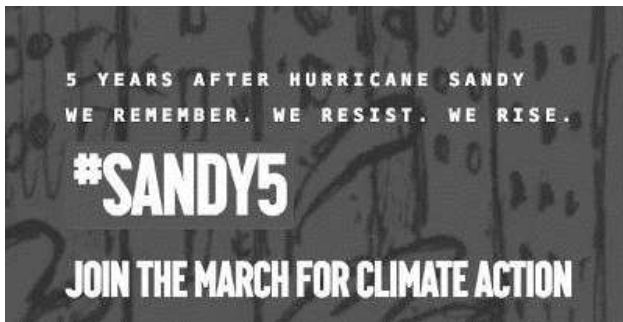
As a New Yorker, you have probably looked up at some fascinating building and wondered about its history, or even taken walking tours that point up at NY's history. This tour is different: instead of looking up we will be looking DOWN—down at New York's infrastructure as seen through manhole covers! The surface of these iron disks serves as both public art and as a window into a hidden history of our city. Some show the ways that cooling was piped into meat storage before individual refrigerators. Others show the different markings for the development of the city's water, sewer and electric services.

Michele Brody, an artist and a guide to the stories that lie beneath our feet, will lead this tour on Oct. 23 from 1:00-2:30 PM, starting at the triangular corner where Hudson and Ninth Avenues branch off below 14th Street in front of Dos Caminos restaurant and ending near the Whitney Museum. Email retirees@pscmail.org with "TOUR" in the subject line to reserve a place by Oct 13. Space is limited.

SUPER STORM SANDY'S FIFTH ANNIVERSARY, Oct. 28 & 29

After watching the nightmare of devastation from Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, we reflect on the Fifth Anniversary of Hurricane Sandy. The People's Climate Movement (PCM), a broad coalition of environmental, community and labor groups, is spearheading a family friendly rally and march on October 28 & 29. The anniversary is a time to acknowledge the

resilience of the most damaged communities and applaud the thousands of public workers who were in the forefront of emergency support and then recovery, including the transit workers who quickly restored most of the public transportation system. Some PSC members were also engaged as York and Queens College were drafted into the city's emergency response. The anniversary is also a time to connect the effects of Climate change to storms past and present.



The theme for the weekend of Oct 28 & 29 is WE REMEMBER, WE RISE, WE RESIST. While applauding the heroism of city workers and volunteers, this coalition for environmental justice highlights what still must be done. Five years later, we still must push local goals such as moving displaced Sandy survivors back into their homes and disinvesting public pension funds from fossil fuels. Moving forward, we must also push the City and State to hasten their transitions to renewable energy. At the current rate of governmental action even modest environmental targets will not be met.

Now, at the time of this writing, we watch friends and family in Florida and Houston facing the loss of homes, businesses and infrastructure. Hurricane Irma destroyed the homes of people on islands in the Caribbean, and brought about the evacuation of millions of people in Florida, leaving flood waters and unprecedented damage to the electrical grid. Harvey's flooding in Houston left behind a vast array

of toxins released into their air, land, and water. Both tragedies unfortunately point to how much needs to be done to link climate change to the warming of waters and the related intensity of storms. They also have to energize us in fighting against deregulation such as Trump's executive order eliminating Obama-era restrictions on building infrastructure in flood plains. If nothing else, Houston, with its enormous reliance on the petrochemical industry and lack of building codes, is a terrible reminder that growth and jobs without health and safety limits has a long term human toll.

Details about the fifth anniversary of Super Storm Sandy activities on October 28 & 29 will be available at the October chapter meeting. The PSC has an Environmental Justice Working Group co-chaired by Eileen Moran, of the Retiree chapter, and Ross Pinkerton, of the Hunter Campus Schools chapter. If you are interested in participating in the working group and/or the anniversary, email Eileen Moran at eileenmoran7@gmail.com.

Eileen Moran, Retiree, Queens

The Month That Was; THE STATE OF THE UNIONS

Presentations to the PSC Retirees Chapter meeting on September 11, 2017

The State of the Union - President Barbara Bowen

Barbara began by thanking the Retiree Chapter for its activity and growing member participation. She also thanked Irwin Yellowitz for his long and effective role on the NYSUT Retiree Council as he steps down from that position. And she thanked Jim Perlstein for his many years as co-chair of the PSC Solidarity Committee, "being there" as the face and voice of the PSC at so many events, rallies, coalitions, and campaigns, especially at the NYC Central Labor Council Delegates body, promoting a

broader, deeper, and more progressive labor movement. Jim has resigned as co-chair and will continue as a key activist. The chapter supported Barbara's words of appreciation with strong applause.

Barbara then laid out the PSC's agenda for this year, describing it as unique, given the convergence of mostly "bad things":

- Attacks on unions from far-right groups rooted in racist attempts to divide the working class.
- Union struggles (1) to protect public goods and services (day care, schools and universities, sustainable environment, social safety net, among others) and (2) against the transfer of wealth from the poor and middle class to the wealthy.

She focused particularly on the *Janus v. AFSCME* Supreme Court case to abolish fair share/agency fee payments to unions. A decision in favor of *Janus* would diminish union resources and our capacity to promote worker justice and counter bogus "right to work" (for less) laws. The struggle *against* *Janus* is also a struggle *for* the building of a stronger union culture and an identification with the labor movement and the whole working class. Retirees are called to play an important role in the PSC drive to increase membership by speaking up the union on visits to campuses.

The PSC is also in motion preparing for and engaging in contract negotiations. Retirees are connected to the contract campaign through the negotiated contributions to the Welfare Fund and through our allegiance to the mission of CUNY.

Another key component of this year's conjuncture is our opposition to the national regime's attacks on our students and the communities CUNY serves: perpetual wars, decimation of the social safety net, and the undercutting of the social conditions for the

realization of our students' aspirations (especially for undocumented students). We are fortunate to be members of an organization that is willing and able to make the fight collectively and forcefully. We are not stranded and lost, as many individuals feel; we have each other.



The usual lively discussion followed Barbara's presentation, focusing on topics such as a millionaires' tax to fund CUNY, support for immigrants, membership of part-time faculty and staff in the union in face of the loss of agency fee/fair share payments, and visibility of the PSC and its issues in the Labor Day Parade.

This annual "inaugural" presentation and discussion was well received by the chapter, enabling us to see what we face as a union and how we can participate in building our power.

State of the Unions - Stephanie Luce

A PSC activist, associate professor and chair of labor studies at CUNY's Murphy Institute, Stephanie Luce expanded our thinking beyond the PSC to the labor movement at the city, state and national levels. She and Professor Ruth Milkman produce an annual report on the current and developing conditions of organized labor. The report is rich in data based on census information and interviews, and analysis of trends. It is available on the Murphy Institute's website.

Key areas in the report include union density (the proportion of the workforce that is unionized), demographics of union membership, differences in the public and

private sectors, analysis of union membership according to categories of education, gender, race and ethnicity, immigration status, industry and occupation, and agency fee.

While many of the trends detailed in the report are ominous, there are positive developments in social justice unionism. The "Fight for Fifteen" (\$15 minimum wage) has ignited powerful organizing and resistance to income inequality. It is a campaign that resonates world-wide.



The discussion that followed Stephanie's PowerPoint included questions and comments on concession bargaining and the rise in inequality. It touched on agency fees and collective bargaining, younger workers, precarious jobs, the absence of a strong left to confront capitalism, the extensive funding of the right, solidarity and activism as measures of union strength, workers centers as an important new form of organizing, cooperatives and the development of a solidarity economy, and even the union's response to identity theft.

Both presentations provided important information, analysis, and encouragement for active, participatory unionism in the PSC and beyond. The discussions were wide-ranging and stimulating. Thanks to Barbara and Stephanie, and a dynamic membership. Retirees rock! Join us.

John Hyland, Retiree, LaGuardia

UPCOMING CHAPTER PROGRAMS

- **Monday, November 6** – The End of Open Admissions at CUNY and its Effects on Black and Latino students. Speakers: Stephen Steinberg, Distinguished Professor, Queens College; Ricardo Gabriel, Ph.D. Candidate in Sociology, CUNY Graduate Center (Student mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s leading to open admissions and its roll back in the 1990s); and Maureen Pierce-Anyon, Minority Counselor, Queens College, author of a study on Black students at Queens College from the 1960s to the present.
- **Monday, December 4**—Just Deserts: Food politics and Environmental Justice (speakers to be announced).

Current Events

WHAT KIND OF A HEALTH CARE SYSTEM DO WE WANT?

-Dave Kotelchuck, Retiree, Hunter

As we await new attempts by the GOP to replace the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), what kind of a health care system do we want going forward?

Currently the public policy debate about improving health care in the U.S. focuses on providing health insurance for all. The two major approaches are "Single Payer" and "Medicare for All." Many believe these two approaches are the same, but they are not, and their differences may be consequential as both approaches gain public support.

The Single Payer approach is best summed up by the Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP), a non-governmental organization:

"We propose to replace the ACA with a publicly financed National Health Program

(NHP) that would fully cover medical care for all Americans, while lowering costs by eliminating the profit-driven private insurance industry with its massive overhead. Hospitals, nursing homes, and other provider facilities would be nonprofit, and paid global operating budgets rather than fees for each service. Physicians could opt to be paid on a fee-for-service basis, but with fees adjusted to better reward primary care providers, or by salaries in facilities paid by global budgets.” Source: <http://www.pnhp.org/nhi>

The Medicare for All approach is often advocated as basically the same as Single Payer, but more politically acceptable as a successful program that people are familiar with. But unlike Single Payer, Medicare as it’s now structured provides an important role for private profit-making insurance companies. Privately run Medicare Advantage programs provide all required services and some elective services like dental and optical care to persons who elect to join them. Also private insurance companies can sell supplemental Medicare insurance policies to individuals for the 20 percent of costs not now covered.

Will any new Medicare-for-All bill eliminate these roles for private insurance? Americans are looking at this as the 2017 version of Medicare for All is introduced in the Senate by Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and more than a dozen co-sponsors. [At the time of writing, this bill was just announced; the details are not yet known.] In the House, Rep. Conyers of Michigan has promised to introduce similar legislation.



Will states be able to opt out of participation in the new Medicare for All? In the 2013 versions of the Sanders/Conyers Health Care for All Act, both the Senate and House bills allowed state opt-outs from their provisions, after which states could contract with private insurers and health-care companies to deliver care – under lax state regulation.

Finally, a major issue both for Single Payer and Medicare for All: *How would either approach address the transition from the present crazy-quilt health insurance system to a universal system covering all Americans?* As of 2016, half the U.S. population is covered by health plans offered at their place of work. How would these be incorporated into a universal, government-regulated or government-run system? And how long would this transition take? These are tough questions that will have to be addressed soon.

But, *Turning the Page* readers, with all these issues to consider, this is an exciting period for all of us who support health care as a human right. For the past seven years, since Obamacare expanded health care coverage for 20 million more Americans, it has been under constant attack by the GOP—and came within one vote of repeal this year. Since then, for the first time in decades, a national debate about universal

health care coverage has entered the political mainstream with majority support among Americans and major political support by Democratic Party leaders. As ever, crisis brings opportunity along with danger. Even as the GOP still threatens to repeal ACA, the campaign for health care for all breathes new life.

EQUIFAX DATA BREACH

Beware of identity theft!

Beware of credit monitoring companies!



There are three major consumer credit reporting agencies: Equifax, Experian and Transunion. All three have information, which in the wrong hands, would jeopardize your financial security and your privacy.

God forbid that identity thieves have access to your social security number, driver's license information, credit card and banking accounts, and other vital data.

But that is exactly what happened when one of the three major consumer credit reporting agencies, Equifax, revealed on September 7 that digital thieves had hacked company data from May to July, gaining access to the sensitive information of about 143 million American consumers.

As reported in multiple media outlets, computer experts expressed disbelief at

Equifax's lax digital security. Fueling even more consumer outrage, Equifax executives reportedly sold \$2 million in company stock just days before the breach was announced (when of course the stock value went south).

Historically, there has been little and weak federal oversight of credit reporting agencies. Banks and other financial institutions are subject to far stricter regulatory regimens (and even those could be much more robust).

I can warn you from experience, as a victim of identity theft, that you want to do everything possible to avoid this trauma (including the exasperation of dealing with the Equifax, Experian and Transunion bureaucracies).

What to do? *Consumer Reports* has good advice on what to do in the wake of the Equifax security breach. It has information on how to check if your data was stolen and how to place a credit freeze on your files. Faced with huge blowback, Equifax has agreed to waive fees for credit freezes for those whose data has been compromised. Protect your identity! Check out the *Consumer Reports* advice at <https://tinyurl.com/BreachAdvice>

Bill Friedheim, Retiree, BMCC

IRMA AID. Our thoughts and good wishes go out to our Florida colleagues in the wake of hurricane Irma.

The New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), our state affiliate, provided small grants of assistance to Sandy victims five years ago. Many PSC members whose homes were damaged at that time applied for assistance. NYSUT is now offering similar assistance to Irma victims.

PSC retirees are automatically eligible to apply for these grants by virtue of their membership in the union. For information

on how to apply (including application forms), go to:

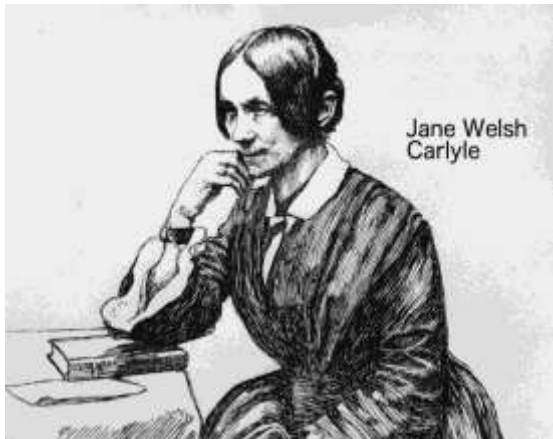
<https://www.nysut.org/resources/special-resources-sites/disaster-relief/apply-for-relief>

If you have any questions, contact the NYSUT Accounting Department: (518) 213-6000 Ext. 6252 or (800) 342-9810.

BOOK CORNER

Jane Welsh Carlyle and Her Victorian World: A Story of Love, Work, Marriage, and Friendship

-Review by Bill Friedheim, Retiree, BMCC



Jane Welsh Carlyle was a voluminous letter-writer—a deft and brilliant practitioner of the genre, according to Virginia Woolf.

Kathy Chamberlain, a dear colleague and PSC retiree, has mined the letters of Jane Carlyle and those with whom she corresponded, particularly her husband, the Victorian author, Thomas Carlyle.

The book seamlessly transports the reader in time and place to Victorian England from 1843 to 1849 as Jane Carlyle navigates midlife tensions of marriage, gender and (to a lesser extent) class. She moves in a world of mid-nineteenth century luminaries—among others Dickens, Tennyson, Thackeray, Emerson, Mazzini, and of course, her complicated and often prickly husband, Thomas.

The British poet and satirist, Samuel Butler, quipped: “It was very good of God to let Carlyle and Mrs. Carlyle marry one another, and so make only two people miserable and not four.” Kathy Chamberlain has a much more nuanced view of what was a complex marriage and a particularly complex woman. It is Jane Carlyle, with her luminous wit, personal turmoil and multi-layered identity whose story and Victorian world comes to life in page after page of this rich and evocative study.

Chamberlain is a beautiful writer. Praised by British reviewers (the *Times*, the *Economist*, the *Spectator*, et. Al.), the book is now available here in the States (Overlook).

Two Sisters of Coyoacán

-Review by Joan Greenbaum, Retiree, LAGCC

Roberta Satow, a retired Brooklyn College professor, brings us a fascinating historical novel, *Two Sisters of Coyoacán*. The novel begins in Brownsville—which had the largest population of Jews in New York City in the 1930s. Many of them supported the overthrow of the Czarist regime in 1917.

The novel is based on a little-known aspect of Leon Trotsky's assassination. The narrative is told from the perspectives of Lilly and Gertie Abramovitz, two Jewish sisters from Brooklyn, who unknowingly facilitated the assassination. Through her college professor, Marxist philosopher Sidney Hook, Lilly is invited to be John Dewey's assistant and accompanies him to Coyoacán, Mexico for the proceedings of the Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials.

Lilly remains in Coyoacán after Dewey leaves and becomes Trotsky's English

secretary, while her sister Gertie goes to Paris to assist Frida Kahlo in her exhibition. The novel brings to life the conflicts of the artistic, intellectual and political world of New York, Paris and Mexico in the 1930s.

Two Sisters of Coyoacán follows the life of two sisters who unknowingly become entangled in a plot conceived by Stalin to eliminate a powerful enemy. What happens to these two well-meaning young women from Brooklyn when Trotsky is assassinated?

The book is available through Amazon and other booksellers; please see the website: www.twosistersofcoyoacan.com

And in other Retiree News:

Peter Ranis, retiree from York whose book we reviewed last year [*Cooperatives Confront Capitalism: Challenging the Neoliberal Economy* (London: Zed Books, 2016)] has given several presentations including the keynote address at the Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation, May 30-June 2, 2017 on "The Alienated Working Class and the Trump Phenomenon."

EDITOR'S NOTE:

If you have written a new book, or participated in an art show, or given a talk, and want to share it with us, please write to retirees@pscmail.org. If space prevails, we would be glad to include it. Likewise with your story of how you became engaged in the union.



-Anne Friedman, retiree, BMCC

In the late 90s, Bill Friedheim, then the BMCC PSC chapter chair, asked me to run as a delegate. Born a red diaper baby who grew to be active in the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement and the women's movement, I guess it was time to do some union work. As a student on City College picket lines to support open admissions, later as a young teacher at a junior high school in the South Bronx and particularly as a professor in BMCC's Developmental Skills department during the era of the Schmidt Report and Giuliani's attacks on community colleges, it was natural for me to join a group that would fight for my profession and for my students.

Beginning in 2000, I served as PSC Community College Vice President. In that capacity, I participated in five rounds of contract negotiations. Those 15 years were a highlight of my career, organizing with a brilliant set of leaders and activists and in the process making life-long friends who always had my back. My days at the PSC complemented my work at the UFS. Where the Senate had limited power, the union could step in. Most memorable for me was the fight against the Board of Trustees' Pathways proposal when labor had governance's back. For its vision of social unionism, its passion and its bottomless commitment to fight for what is right I am sticking with my union.