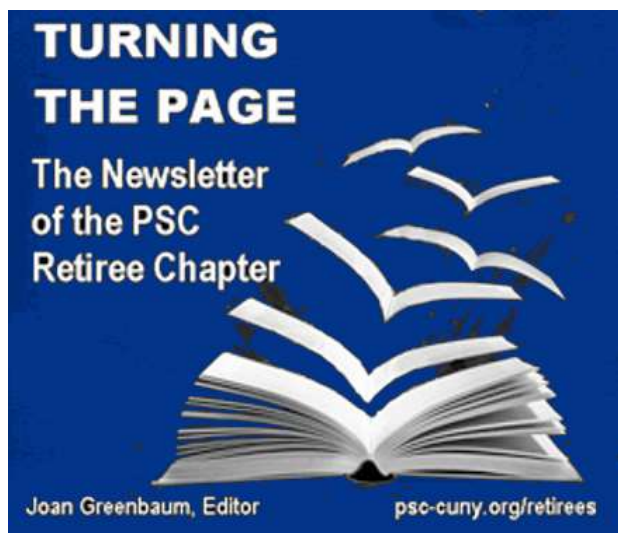


OCTOBER 2020



Academic Year 2020-21 No. 1

psc-cuny.org/retirees.org

VIRTUAL CHAPTER MEETING, MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1 - 3 PM. With analysis, discussion and debate, we'll focus on what may be the most important elections our lives, the **2020 presidential and state elections.**

To seed the discussion, we have put together a panel of CUNY and labor colleagues.

- **Susan Kang:** Associate Professor of Political Science, John Jay College: author of *Human Rights and Labor Solidarity: Trade Unions in the Global Economy*; and a leader and activist in successful NYS and congressional campaigns to elect progressive candidates to office.
- **Sochie Nnaemeka:** Executive Director, NYS Working Families Party with a rich history as an organizer for labor, advocacy and community groups and as a leader against austerity politics in both the state and the city.
- **Ed Ott:** Former Executive Director of the NYC Central Labor Council; co-editor *New Labor in New York: Precarious Workers and the Future of the Labor Movement*; Distinguished Lecturer, Joseph S Murphy Institute for Worker Education (now SLU)

- **James Steele:** Distinguished Lecturer at the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies where he has taught courses on "Democracy and Power;" former executive staffer for congressmen and elected city leaders; longtime political consultant.

NEW YORK STATE ABSENTEE BALLOT. All NYS registered voters can request an absentee ballot (using "temporary illness"/risk of coronavirus as an excuse). To apply, go to <https://absenteeballot.elections.ny.gov/>.

CONTRIBUTE
TO PSC/CUNY
COPE!



The backdrop for the 2020 election is ominous: A pandemic exacerbated by a political and economic crisis that threatens the very fabric of our everyday lives. The crisis – and the election – are also an existential moment for CUNY, the institution to which we devoted much of our adult, professional lives.

We have a lot of work to do before and after the election if we are to protect the livelihoods of our union brothers and sisters and preserve CUNY's mission to educate "the children of the whole people."

Political mobilization in defense of our union, university – and yes, nation – costs money. That's why we're asking you to give, and give generously, to PSC/CUNY-COPE, our union's political action fund.

Look for a letter in your mail from the chapter asking you to contribute. Please respond. **The retirees have always led PSC chapters in COPE contributions. Let's add to that precedent! Let's multiply our contributions.**



PHONE BANKING IN BATTLEGROUND STATES. A number of retirees phone banked for the 2020 election to battleground states in mid-September. Starting September 29, phone banking to battleground states will happen twice-a-week until Election Day. Directions to sign up for one or multiple sessions will be on the PSC website at <https://www.psc-cuny.org/>.

HAVING DIFFICULTY PAYING YOUR RETIREE DUES? For tips on paying your dues online (or the old fashioned way, by check through the U.S. Mail) go to: <https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees#DUES>

WHEN IT RAINS, IT POURS: A VIRTUAL STORM AT OUR 8/31 CHAPTER MEETING. Monday, August 31, was a sunny day, but it poured a virtual rainstorm. The link for our retiree meeting was invalidated when Zoom, unbeknownst to us, changed the PSC account settings over the weekend. Hundreds of retirees got an error message when they tried to enter the virtual meeting. We moved quickly, but it was thirty minutes before we could send out a new Zoom link. Some eighty hardy souls joined the meeting, but hundreds more never had the opportunity.

Those who joined the meeting sung its praises – “terrific speakers/important information.” Barbara Bowen, three-chapter chairs, and Stephanie Luce, from the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies updated us on the state of the PSC and the larger labor movement in this period of crisis. **Here’s the good news: The meeting was recorded.** To

view, go to <https://tinyurl.com/retirees831>. Click the arrow to play.

FROM the PSC WELFARE FUND:

IRMAA reimbursements for calendar year 2019 will be sent out in October 2020 as planned.

ENROLLMENT AND CHANGE PERIOD FOR HEALTH AND DENTAL PLANS. Retirees may change coverage or add dependents to health insurance plans and Welfare Fund dental plans during the November 1-30 biannual change period. For details, visit the Welfare Fund website at: <https://tinyurl.com/NovChangeOver>

IMPORTANT LINKS:

Retiree Chapter:
<https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees>
 Health & Safety Watchdogs
<https://www.psc-cuny.org/about-us/environmental-health-and-safety>
 Welfare Fund
<http://psccunywf.org/>

SOME REMEMBRANCES ON THE PASSING OF JOHN LEWIS

David Kotelchuck, Hunter College

John Lewis, congressman, civil rights leader and former chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), passed away on July 17, 2020. If, like his spiritual father Martin Luther King, Jr., he had not yet seen the Promised Land, he had in the last days of his life seen the opening of a new front in the battle for justice for all. He gave it his blessing, passing the torch on to a new generation of 21st Century civil-rights activists.

Many accomplishments of John’s life have already been well described by others, so there is little this writer could add. For me, John’s passing brings back remembrances of working together in 1962-63, when he was chairman of the Nashville chapter of SNCC, just before he became SNCC’s national chairman. John was

22 years old then and I was in my first year as a faculty member in physics at Vanderbilt University. Having grown up in Jim-Crow Baltimore, participated in civil-rights demonstrations and been inspired by the sit-in movement, I joined and worked with the Nashville SNCC chapter.



March in Nashville, 1963. Author is in the back of the line.

The Nashville civil-rights movement had hit its pinnacle in April 1960 when on the steps of City Hall the student activists compelled Mayor Ben West publicly to back down and denounce the segregation of lunch counters in the city, after which the lunch counters in two major downtown department stores integrated. By Summer 1962, as the sit-in movement swept across the South, all the other Nashville leaders were gone – including Diane Nash, James Bevel, Marion Berry, Bernard Lafayette, and James Lawson – leaving John to continue the fight in the city.

John led the local SNCC chapter in weekly protest demonstrations against segregated downtown restaurants and cafeterias. He was a straight-ahead, single-minded leader and never let our apparent lack of progress slow down the pace of protest. In Spring 1963, after months with little to show for our efforts, John

decided to call on Nashville's high school students to join us. Then holy hell threatened to break loose as racist, white high-school students counter-demonstrated, threatening violence. Fearful City Fathers quickly stepped in and ended segregation in the city's downtown restaurants. In the next year, 1964, after the famous March on Washington and President Kennedy's assassination, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act outlawing segregation in all public facilities.

John was truly, as others have pointed out, a humble person. Throughout the year I worked with him, he never mentioned being among the first Freedom Riders, nearly losing his life at a way station in Rock Hill, South Carolina. In the public eye, other student civil-rights leaders, many of them better educated and most having grown up in the North, outshone John. But he had an intense determination borne of growing up in Troy, Alabama. In later life he said in a memoir: "Growing up, my family and community were loving and accepting, but the world was full of so much hate. There was no NAACP chapter in my community – the organization was banned in Alabama – so there was no activist community I could engage with to validate my deep sense of frustration and agitation. Most of the people around me, including my parents, did not believe it was constructive to complain about the unfairness of our way of life. They knew it was not right, but they could not see a way to change it. I could not figure a way out either, especially as a child, but in the center of my being I never stopped looking for one." ("Across That Bridge," p.71) Through the non-violent protest movement in Nashville he found the way forward.

Few would dispute the selfless courage with which he led. He describes the source of that courage in remembering the Selma-to-Montgomery March of 1965: "Consider how you would feel if your life required you to face what you fear the most every day. Ultimately, if you survive the test, you would discover that what you feared actually had no power over you, no power to harm you at all. The freedom you would feel would be so beautiful, so

uplifting, so invigorating. People ask me, 'How could you be arrested forty times in the movement, never press charges and never fight or strike back?' When people ask these questions, they perceive that I was being abused, when in reality I was being freed. By the time I was standing on Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, I had no fear of physical harm or death. So when people ask me how I managed my fear in that moment, I can truthfully say I was not afraid." (*op.cit.*, pp.33-4)

John Lewis, rest in peace. And to paraphrase Lincoln's words of a century and a half ago: It is for us the living to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which John and others have thus far nobly advanced.

AUSTERITY IS NOT NEW

Irwin Yellowitz, retired, CCNY



PSC rally and iconic Daily News headline during the seventies NYC fiscal crisis.

History never repeats itself, but knowledge of the past is always instructive as we make tough choices in the present. The current crisis in CUNY reminds us that the PSC has faced other tough times, and it has reacted with militancy to lessen the damage. These past crises are similar to the current one in that they are based on financial shortfalls for CUNY that are fed by an austerity approach to the funding of public services. This underfunding is then exacerbated by some disastrous fiscal event that endangers the University's ability to educate our students. In each case, PSC resisted the efforts of CUNY's

managers to meet a financial crisis by cutting staff and faculty, reducing the quality of education, and even dismembering the University.

We did not always win in every respect, but without the efforts of the PSC the impact on CUNY would have been so much worse. The most dangerous crisis to hit CUNY was the fiscal collapse in New York City in 1975-1976. A perfect storm of events led to the end of free tuition; calls for massive cuts to faculty and staff; proposed major reductions of essential educational services, such as libraries; a projected payless furlough for faculty and staff; a plan for the closing of several colleges, including Hostos, John Jay and Medgar Evers; and several proposals to break up CUNY, with four senior colleges – Brooklyn, City, Hunter and Queens – moving to the State University of New York.

The PSC resisted all these attacks. The union reached out to New York State politicians for new money for CUNY, with the invaluable help of our state affiliate, the New York State United Teachers; gained support from the public by placing dramatic ads in the newspapers; mobilized faculty and staff through demonstrations and rallies; cooperated closely with students; and made it clear to CUNY's management that the union would never acquiesce to the proposed austerity measures.

Ultimately the PSC's efforts brought in new money from New York State that ended the crisis beginning in 1977. New York State increased its support for the senior colleges from fifty percent to one hundred percent over several years, and also provided more funds for the community colleges. Even though there were some losses, CUNY was not dismembered, the quality of education was not destroyed, and the University lived on to grow through the 1980s.

In the 1990s, a combination of factors, including a crucial decision by New York State to reduce taxes on upper-income persons, led to another crisis. Again, CUNY management responded not by seeking new public funding,

but by retrenchment of faculty and staff, cuts to educational services, and dramatic increases in tuition.



Clarion headline from 1996

The PSC once more carried on a concerted campaign of resistance. The union pressured politicians, with the help of the New York State United Teachers, went to the courts, again reached out to the public via newspaper and radio ads, cooperated with students through their organizations, and held major rallies. CUNY survived even though we lost many senior faculty and staff, who took retirement initiatives designed to reduce CUNY's personnel costs without layoffs. In addition, and with significant impact on the future, CUNY began in earnest to shift teaching and professional duties from full-time faculty and staff to part-time, contingent personnel. The objective was to respond to the chronic underfunding of the University by replacing employees who earned full-time salaries and received fringe benefits, such as health care and pensions, with part-time employees who were paid exploitive wages and lacked essential benefits. This trend has only intensified over time.

Austerity continues to this moment as CUNY is chronically underfunded. We need new sources of money, such as the millionaires tax, but we also need a CUNY management that looks to using CARES Act funds rather than cutting faculty positions – in this case adjuncts. CUNY management's behavior is not new, and the PSC is resisting today as it has in the past, with a tremendous range of action and

activities. This summer alone, "A summer of struggle," the PSC has had virtual demonstrations, car caravans, press conferences and testimony to pressure for more funding. The emphasis now is on getting Cuomo to overturn his objections to taxing the ultra-wealthy, as well as making campuses safe for faculty, staff and students, and of course saving jobs and stopping further cuts.

Governor Cuomo: Can 'Mr. Austerity' Rise to CUNY's COVID-19 Challenge?

Eileen Moran, Queens College

Before COVID-19 struck, Governor Cuomo consistently imposed austerity on NYS, savaging public higher education budgets, demonizing teachers as special interests, imposing draconian pension reforms in Tier 6, and systematically cutting public services. Public higher education has been a special target of Cuomo. We have seen tuition rise to cover more and more of CUNY's and SUNY's operating budgets so NYS could get away with paying less and less. But raising tuition isn't enough. CUNY also relies on exploiting adjuncts and ignoring its deteriorating buildings. Austerity at CUNY dilutes and devalues our students' experiences in and out of class—with fewer resources for libraries, laboratories, and even soap for our washrooms. That was before COVID-19 struck.



Now Cuomo, the consummate political animal, is responding to public pressure that threatens his reputation with voters. He still wants to be seen as a progressive while imposing austerity on the public sector. But because of the huge outcry from a group called Strong Economy For All, which includes the PSC, CUNY Rising, NYSUT and others, the Governor's opposition

to taxes on the richest New Yorkers has begun to crack. This coalition combined with the dire fiscal consequences COVID-19 has had on NY's budget, may now force him to consider options he previously dismissed.

That's where PSC members come in: Please tell the Governor that New York's one-percent must pay their fair share of taxes on the billions of dollars of profits they have reaped during this crisis. Send Governor Cuomo a letter now at www.psc-cuny.org/tax-rich.

As a candidate in 2010, Cuomo was outspoken about "Cleaning up Albany" and tackling tax loopholes like the much maligned "carried interest." Before he took office, in the aftermath of the 2008 meltdown, NYS had imposed a millionaire's tax to get the State through that fiscal crisis. However, once in office, Cuomo was prepared to cancel this tax entirely, but instead renewed a watered-down version that was sold as a tax cut. It amounted to a quite modest tax reduction for the middle class but a significantly better tax cut for the 1%.

As a result, his campaign coffers have reaped huge benefits, Ten million dollars so far has come in from members of New York's financial and securities industry as he has opposed any revenue increases, from the carried interest loophole, to the stock transfer tax, to even a higher tax on capital gains. These are all increases currently on the NYS Democratic legislature's agenda.

In a July 31 *Guardian* article, Michael Kink of the Strong Economy for All Coalition said the Governor's opposition to progressive taxation showed warped priorities in the COVID-19 era. Now that the Democrats hold both houses of the legislature they are discussing a billionaires tax that could raise \$5.5 billion. Key lawmakers are insisting that the NYS stop rebating the \$13 billion from the stock transfer tax. The Stock Transfer Tax began in 1905 and is still on the books, but since 1981, under Governor Carey, the State income from this tax has been rebated back to Wall St. In the past, Gov. Cuomo has tried to repeal this tax completely. Now as the one-percent mobilizes in Albany,

the Governor repeats their talking points, claiming these wealthy persons will just leave the State if they are asked to pay more – but research does not support this.

The Governor needs to feel much more pressure from us. Please be sure to weigh in and share a link to the PSC website with your friends and family, but especially with the CUNY alumni\ alumnae in your networks. Governor Cuomo must be moved. Please send him a letter now. Visit www.psc-cuny.org/tax-rich.

HOW COVID CUTS HAVE AFFECTED ADJUNCTS

*Marcia Newfield, past Vice President for PSC
Part-timers*



SAY "NO" TO COVID CUTS

"I guess I'll be eating a lot of peanut butter from now on," said one adjunct who was due for a three-year appointment but was told that he wouldn't be hired again. No reasons were given, despite his having good observations and being hired for the summer. "I don't appreciate the way I have been treated." He declined to file a grievance.

Others of the over 2500 non-reappointed adjuncts do not feel the luxury of choice. Unemployment carried them for a while; now they are seeking whatever jobs they can find. One person, over 50-years-old, took a census job that involved climbing stairs in buildings in

Washington Heights. She has an ill, at-risk spouse at home and had to cut her hours on her Census job because of requirements to work in soup kitchens. This is an adjunct with 15 years of service to CUNY and several published books.

These stories could go on and on, with the main threads being the loss of income and health insurance and the feelings of being discounted and disrespected. "Why? Why? When I have done good work, when I care about my students and they appreciate me."



Dave Sanders

Many full-time faculty who had close contact with these adjuncts were reluctant to be the facilitators of their suffering. In May, at Brooklyn College, twenty-seven chairs signed a statement of objection to CUNY's mandated cuts and increases of class size (in some cases from 22 to 36 students): "The fiscal challenges we face are real but calling for mass layoffs of adjunct faculty and reductions in course offerings is the cruelest way to address them. It shows a failure of imagination, as well as of moral courage." The original number of three-year non-reappointed adjuncts slated to lose health insurance at Brooklyn College was fifty-two; it is now down to single digits. Of course, behind every digit is a disoriented and depressed human being.

Twelve CSI department chairs made similar efforts to retain adjuncts and as of now, no three-year appointees have been let go. Activists are in negotiation with the college president regarding class size. Contrary to

expectations of a five-percent decrease in enrollment, CSI enrollment has increased one percent.

Adjuncts have also mounted resistance on their own, as well as blending into the broader PSC efforts. At the Hunter College Silberman School of Social Work, adjunct field supervisors are negotiating for fewer advisees; at LaGuardia, long-time teachers in TELC (Teaching English Language Center), a Continuing Education program that prepares students for college entry, received support from 264 colleagues who asked the college to continue the program despite current deficits since it is a vital bridge to learning.

In other schools, the efforts ran the spectrum from silos of consideration to blanket layoffs of PSC members with 3-year appointments. Adjuncts and other faculty were mandated to take online training of many hours with or without assurance of course assignment for \$500 stipends, which few have as yet received. This too is an area of contention and grievance.

Meanwhile many teaching and non-teaching adjuncts scramble to get some kind of health insurance, although more than one person I spoke to said she couldn't afford anything but "staying healthy." The PSC leadership is trying to extend health insurance and is also pushing to ensure safety for those who are told to return to campus. The fight for CUNY's preservation and sustainability goes on from lobbying the legislature to member-to-member and community conversations. Everyone is encouraged to keep in touch by frequently checking the PSC website (www.psc-cuny.org) to find out what's going on and how they can help.

As we forge onward, we honor the eleven part-timers whom we know have lost their lives during this period: *Mark Blum, Thomas Burgess, Georgianna Glose, Donald Hoffman, Jay Jankelewicz, David Nocera, Melody Reed, Yves Roseus, Darlene H Saulter, Joel Slatzky, and Jose Tusiani.*

CUNY STUDY OF UNIONS

A recently released report from the **City University of New York's School of Labor and Urban Studies** found that more than one in five union members were furloughed, laid off or contracted the coronavirus during the height of the COVID-19 crisis, illustrating how the pandemic has exacerbated challenges faced by the labor movement.

The School of Labor and Urban Studies' Ruth Milkman, a distinguished professor of Sociology, and Stephanie Luce, a professor of Labor Studies, collected data from 20 public- and private-sector unions in the city to determine how many of their members lost employment or became sick during the pandemic.



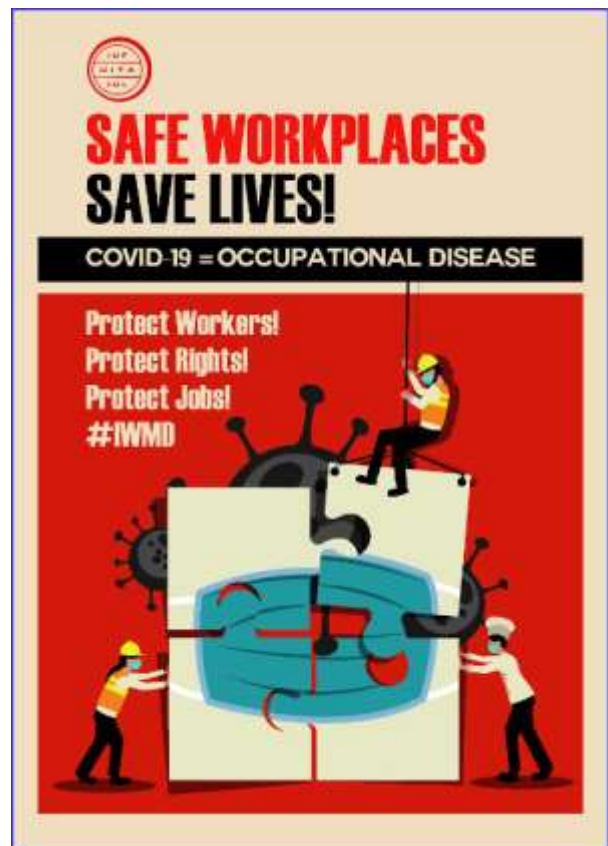
Ruth Milkman

'Devastating' in Some Jobs The report, which was issued ahead of Labor Day, found that although unionized workers were less likely to die from COVID-19 than non-unionized employees, the impact on some unionized sectors was "devastating," both in terms of layoffs and high rates of exposure to COVID-19, particularly in industries that provided essential services.

Not surprisingly, the New York State Nurses Association saw the highest number of COVID-

19 cases among those highlighted in the study, with 6,808 of its 27,000 members testing positive for coronavirus, and 29 dying from it. Local 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union saw 110 of its members die from COVID-19, with the researchers cautioning that these numbers were likely higher due to limited testing during the beginning of the pandemic.

Among the Amalgamated Transportation Union's 14,723 members, about 12,000 were furloughed. More than 21,000 of the Taxi Workers Alliance's 24,000 members were unable to work, while 13,000 of UNITE HERE Local 100's restaurant and bar staff were placed on furlough or laid off.



International unions demanding that COVID-19 be designated an occupational disease

The labor movement has faced many challenges over the past several years, including declining membership and the 2018 *Janus* decision, which determined that public-employee unions could no longer collect agency-fee payments from non-members.

Link Unions to Safety Although 70 percent of public-sector workers in the city belonged to a union, the rate of union membership in the private-sector—while double that of the national average—has declined significantly over the past few years. Among private-sector workers across the city between January 2019 and June 2020, 13.1 percent belonged to a union, compared to 6.3 percent nationally. That’s down from 17 percent three years ago.

The pandemic has highlighted why such a decline was harmful, the report suggested. Ms. Milkman and Ms. Luce highlighted cases where non-unionized staff had little job protection after voicing safety concerns, such as the firing of an Amazon worker on Staten Island who called for personal protective equipment back in March.

Charlene Obernauer, the executive director of the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health, argued that union job sites generally provided more protections for workers during the crisis.

“Unions provide workers with a structure to file complaints and grievances. Unions also protect workers and their ability to assert their rights on the job, and provide training for workers to ensure they know what their rights are,” she told *The Chief*. “Non-union workplaces, for the most part, do not have these structures or protections in place.”

[Reported in *The Chief* by Crystal Lewis]

<https://tinyurl.com/MilkmanLuce>

WATCHDOGS RACE INTO ACTION: REOPENING CUNY BUILDINGS

Joan Greenbaum, LaGuardia CC

The PSC declared last summer “The CUNY Summer of Struggle” to push and publicize our campaign to “Save Lives, Save Jobs. Save CUNY!” “Saving Lives” was about ensuring that the CUNY administration had detailed plans for reopening campuses on August 26th. The administration did succeed in having

written plans for every campus the week of reopening, but those of us in service for a long time know that plans are only as good as the digital images they appear on. The real work began when members were called back to campus. Enter the Environmental Health and Safety Watchdogs, a cross-campus group of over 100 volunteers, many of whom had been meeting since last April to develop checklists to keep each campus “free of recognized hazards” as our contract states.

The volunteer Watchdogs are not, for the most part, experts in health and safety, but rather faculty and staff members ready to learn and watch out for the safety of those who were asked to return to their local campuses. In the best of times most of our colleges have crumbling buildings and areas with very poor ventilation. Reopening buildings after almost six months of closure presented health risks for our members. As Jacqueline Elliot, co-chair of the Watchdogs, said: “like many of us, our buildings have pre-existing conditions.”



This was apparent the first week when HEOs at Bronx Community College were called in to work in the Bursar’s office and found stuffy conditions in their fifth-floor offices. After calling for Building and Grounds to fix the situation, they instead found smoke coming out of the vents. National engineering standards call for HVAC systems to be run 24/7 for a week prior to occupancy. BCC’s written reopening plan stated that they would run and test ventilation systems in all buildings scheduled to be reopened.

The Environmental Health and Safety Watchdogs take our work very seriously. But there are 19 campuses and more than 500 buildings. While CUNY succeeded in closing all campuses when the governor ordered it, over fifty faculty and staff members lost their lives to COVID-19 last Spring. CUNY management is responsible for the health and safety of all employees, yet their ongoing track record as many of us remember is frustrating at best. It will take the active involvement of all faculty and staff to spot problem areas—hopefully before they become serious. During reopening week, staff at York College was told to come in to advise students—something the reopening plan made clear would be done online. When they arrived they found the tables too close to sit at and watched students walk around the tables and stand directly in front of them. At New York City Tech, some members came in to find no PPE available.

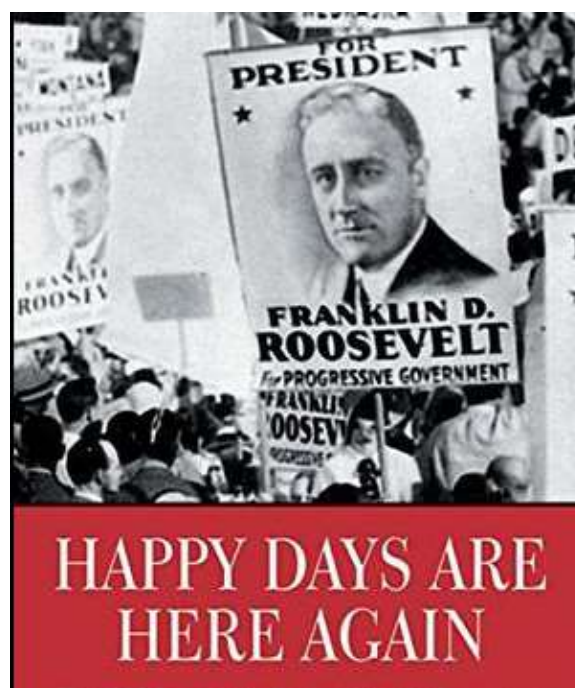
CUNY Central claims that 94 percent of faculty and staff will continue to work remotely. This varies, of course, by campus and department. Many science classes and health professions such as nursing and occupational therapy are being taught in classrooms. At some campuses, CLTs have been in labs since the Phase I reopening of research labs in June. Additionally, HEOs in a number of areas such as registration and bursars' offices have been told to report to campus despite the fact that CUNY lists these functions as being done online. And for all faculty and staff, working remotely has raised stress levels as the amount of work has increased and the multiple demands of home life make multitasking a fact of life. The firing and non rehiring of adjuncts has meant that class size has skyrocketed with math classes at CCNY reportedly capped at 75 students, and basic composition at many colleges in the 30s.

Jean Grassman, co-chair of the EHS Watchdogs and an industrial hygienist, has had her hands full warning about the need for evaluating ventilation systems. As research in the last few months has demonstrated, the virus is spread through the air, and indoor air needs to be refreshed on an ongoing basis.

Governor Cuomo announced a standard for malls that calls for 100 percent of outdoor air to be circulated through MERV 13 or higher filters to catch virus droplets and keep outdoor air moving. The State Department of Health did *not* make the standards for higher education as stringent. Education is the poor stepsister of commerce. The PSC EHS Watchdogs continue to meet to learn how to keep their eyes, ears and noses active in helping members on campus. It is not an easy job.

WAVING THE RED, WHITE AND BLUE: MUSIC FOR POLITICAL TIMES

Constance H. Gemson, LaGuardia CC



Happy Days Are Here Again will forever be linked with FDR and the 1932 national Democratic Convention. Despite hard times, hope seemed possible for a country struggling through the Great Depression. In 1962 Barbara Streisand recorded this song with sadness.

In 1992 at the Democratic Convention, Bill Clinton chose Fleetwood Mac's *Don't Stop*, a new generation's motto with rock and roll. Barack Obama connected with Stevie Wonder's *Signed, Sealed, Delivered (I'm Yours)*, which showed his enthusiasm for new voters and Black supporters. David Axelrod, his chief campaign manager, used this song as

his cell phone's ring tone whenever he received Obama's phone call.



Bruce Springsteen's 1984 *Born in the USA* was not a patriotic ode but a lament about working-class life. His tune and words were bleak rather than buoyant. Springsteen sang this song with a fierce energy and the words' meaning often was ignored. "Born in a dead man's town... down in the shadows of the penitentiary, out by the gas fires near the refinery. I'm ten years burning down the road." This was not an optimistic sentiment but waving the flag in defeat. When Ronald Reagan, not understanding the song's despair, began using it at the 1984 Republican National Convention, Springsteen ordered him to stop.

In 2020 Joe Biden used Springsteen's *Rise Up* as a background theme at the convention. The singer and his musician-wife, Patti Scialfa, appeared for a moment in a video. Both were in this Studs Terkel display of diverse citizens. John Legend sang *Glory* from the movie *Selma*. The lyrics, the mood, and the video showed the Black community's resilience.

Old-fashioned songs are not often highlighted at conventions. *My Country Tis of Thee* sounded dated but a last verse defined its political significance. Samuel Francis Smith, a student at Andover Theological Seminary, wrote the standard verses in 1834. In 1843 A.G. Duncan added these lyrics:

"My country tis of thee
Stronghold of slavery, of thee I sing.
Land where my fathers died,
Where men man's rights deride
From everywhere mountainside, thy
deeds shall ring."

Abolitionists routinely added this verse at the end of the song.

Irving Berlin's song *God Bless America* had an old-fashioned feeling. He fled from Russia with his family due to violent anti-Semitism and was forever grateful to live in the United States. Woody Guthrie was cynical about Berlin's depiction of America. He felt his *This Land is Your Land* better conveyed our country's spirit.

Yet Berlin was not mindless in his devotion to America. In 1933 he wrote *Supper Time* for the Broadway show *As Thousands Cheered*. This play served as a revue using songs that represented the different sections of the newspaper. For a somber newspaper heading, shown on stage, he included these words, "unknown Negro lynched by frenzied mob."

Accompanying it was *Supper Time*: "Supper time, I should set the table, cause it's supper time, Somehow I'm not able,' cause this man o 'mine, ain't comin' home no more." The song showed Ethel Water's devastation in dealing with her husband's lynching. How will she tell the children? This violent act is never mentioned. Audra McDonald, Ella Fitzgerald and Barbra Streisand—all have recorded *Supper Time*, but it is not well-known to the general public. Berlin was more complex than many of his peers imagined.

Phil Ochs used political events for inspiration. He saw his role as a singing journalist. In his ballad *Power and Glory*, he wrote of the United States, "she's only as rich as the poorest of her poor, only as a free as a padlocked prison door." In 1963 when he played at the Newport Folk Festival, this Guthrie-esque anthem was a major success.

Reflecting on these tunes with their core beliefs about America, I remember the words of Albert Camus: "I should like to love my country and still love justice."

collection, 2003- 2019, is online at:
www.joshbrownnyc.com/ldw.htm.

TURNING THE PAGE is a publication of the PSC Retirees chapter of the PSC-CUNY union. We welcome contributions from our several thousand members. Articles of special interest to retirees, short essays on things you are active with during this period of politics and plague, and your recent publications of interest. Current newsletter collective is made up of Bill Friedheim, Joan Greenbaum, Dave Kotelchuck and Michael Frank. Please write to us at retirees@pscmail.org, with 'Newsletter' in the subject line and visit the Retirees webpage <https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees>.

LIFE DURING WARTIME. Josh Brown, the retired director of the American Social History Project at the CUNY Graduate Center, has produced a series of weekly political illustrations, beginning in 2003 with the war in Iraq, called Life During Wartime. The entire



As we go to press:

GHI SENIORCARE PROBLEMS: The NYC Health Benefits Program is aware that some Retiree GHI claims are being mistakenly sent to Blue Cross and then rejected. The problem is in the process of being corrected. Members whose GHI claims have been rejected by Blue Cross are asked to resubmit the claims to GHI.

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