

SUBJECT TO SENATE APPROVAL

MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTIETH PLENARY SESSION  
OF THE UNIVERSITY FACULTY SENATE OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

December 15, 1987

Chair Wedeen called the session to order at 6:50 p.m. in Room 1800 at the Graduate School and University Center. Present were: Senators Bank, Baumrin, Baxter, Binder, Bleyman, Boylan, Buianouckas, B. Cohen, Cooper, Cravzow, Crump, Danziger, Depas, Donleavy, Galub, Greenbaum, Jaffe, Jiji, Karan, Lea, McCullers, Moyne, Muller, Oldham, Picken, Riley, Shaffer, Sheridan, Simor, Sohmer, Speidel, Stern, Trefousse, Washington, Wasser, Wurmfeld, Zades, and Zarin; Alternate Senators Geach, B. Ginsberg, Hill, Lundeen, Schuyler, Sessions, Suri, Thompson, Umolo, and Youkeles. Senators Grossman, Huang, Plissner, Vines, and J. Walter were excused. Senator Davidson attended for cocktails only. Attending also were Chancellor Murphy, UFS Executive Director Ellis and guests of the Senate Trustees Bernstein and Everett, President Proshansky (Graduate School) and Guest Speaker Professor Frances Fox Piven (Political Science, Graduate School). Professors V.T. Alexander and S. Nicolescu and Mr. Wurmfeld as guests of Senators Karan and Wurmfeld respectively.

I. Approval of the Proposed Tentative Agenda: Senator Wasser, Executive Committee Member, ex-officio and Trustee Emeritus (English, Staten Island), moved the tentative agenda as follows:

I'm not only going to move the agenda but I'm going to begin our annual dinner with a somewhat different tone than previous. Actually, I'm substituting for Gordon Lea whose biting humor and bravely worded missives to the Senate will not happen this time. So you're left with the sober-sided nature of myself. I'm going to utter about three sentences and those sentences will probably annoy three constituencies. But let me utter them anyway. I do speak out of some experience as an administrator and as a faculty trustee and long experience as a faculty member, and I'm troubled by what seems to be a slowly growing sense of alienation between, first, between faculty and central and local administration. This, I think has to do, this is the perception, it may be inaccurate, but perceptions are highly important - it has to do in a sense with what a number of senators talked about, that is the increasing number of, if you will, sort of professional administrators. We don't have that kind of easy rotation back and forth between the role as administrator and role as faculty. That's one thing that troubles me. The second thing that troubles me is a slowly growing sense of frustration between faculty and trustees with respect to a problem I think you know about. Again, the perception may not be accurate, but it's there, it's visible and it has to be dealt with, it seems to me. Well, if all these perceptions are visible and apparent to many here and many in the University, it seems to me that something is required to eliminate those perceptions. One, it seems to me, it's going to require, let's see how to put it, somewhat more sensitive response by administration to faculty concerns. It's going to have to involve, if you will, an increasing sense among trustees of what faculty concerns and faculty responsibilities with respect to curriculum are. And it's also going to have to involve an increasing awareness, if you will, knowledge, by faculty, of the basic concerns of this University. That's it. I move the tentative agenda.

Professor Wasser's motion was seconded and passed.

II. Approval of the Minutes of the 159th Plenary Session (November 17, 1987): Chair Wedeen then called for a motion to approve the minutes of the last session. The

minutes were approved with two corrections: p. 1. par. 4 l. 18: delete the last word; and p. 2, par. 5, l. 7 "State University of New York's".

Chair Wedeen said that now that the Senate was done with the introductory business part of the meeting, as all knew, this was the annual dinner meeting and for this meeting, the Senate members did more of what they liked. "We don't handle the usual governance issues," she said, "unless some come up at a particular time. But we invite a speaker or colleague among us to share his or her ideas, research. We usually have a rather enjoyable evening. But before we get to a part that we're waiting for later on, I'd like to introduce two people who don't need any introductions here. President Proshansky, who has always been our host- we run our Executive Committees in his building and those of our other committees, we have our dinners in this building, we use his telephones, we bother him [Nods from President Proshansky] and he's always been most gracious. So thank you for joining us tonight. And Trustee Everett, who needs very little introduction to anyone in this room, has taken the time to come in and just say hello to us this evening in a rather busy schedule just because she knew it was a special meeting and I'm really very grateful that she could be here.

Trustee Everett said she was glad to be present and, as Chair Wedeen said, she stopped in because she wanted to visit with some of the members and have an opportunity to say hello. She listened to Professor Wasser's words and had to get in a lick for the Trustees' team. In the end faculty and trustees were really one team. She thought that was what really needed to be conveyed. They had one common objective in the University and that was to turn out first-rate students. It's not for faculty, it's not for the Trustees, that's what the objective of the University is - it's for everyone. "It is a two way street," she said, "we're open to hear what you have to say, and we really listen seriously and with respect. I hope that you will listen to us seriously and with the same kind of respect because sharing our understandings will, I hope, produce the best benefits for the entire University, and so I'm glad to be here. Our ears are always open and we're ready to listen to you. And so with regard to the Task Force report [laughter; Chair Wedeen, "equal time"] I figure I'd better say it, right? The unspoken ... We really want to hear what you have to say. This is one of these situations where we would like to be one-upped. We want what you have to say to be better than what we said to you. We want you to think through seriously what the recommendations are and come back with something bigger and better than we ever thought about. Because you are the curriculum developers, you are the people who are on the line. You are the people who are going to be teaching. We are very anxiously waiting for your response and we will take it, I assure you, very, very seriously. Thanks alot." [Applause]

Chair Wedeen thanked Trustee Everett. We have invited Trustee Blanche Bernstein to give the greetings of the Board this evening, and those of you who have worked with her have learned, as I have, that she can be very easy and very demanding - easy, because she knows what she's doing, and it's clear and distinct; demanding, because she's an academic, and we know what that means. So with little to-do and no introduction really that you don't know yourselves, I'd like to have Blanche Bernstein come up please. [Applause].

III. Greetings from the Board of Trustees: Trustee Bernstein said that as always she was delighted to join the Senate at this annual dinner and to bring the members greetings from the Board of Trustees and to bring their appreciation for the enormous contribution the members made, as faculty, to The City University. "We are very proud of our distinguished faculty," she said, "and we want you to know that. As Chairman of the Academic Affairs Committee," she continued, "one of the things that I'm particularly concerned about and involved in, are the new degree programs, which

are suggested by the faculty in the various colleges throughout the system. I am aware of the fact that you are much concerned to develop new programs to meet the needs of students and to meet the needs of the City's and the region's changing economy. I know you are not going to stand still and I know that you will be as active in this field as you have in the past. So I say again that we appreciate the work that you're doing. We appreciate it perhaps much more than you know." Trustee Bernstein concluded, "And in this season, let me say to all of you, Happy Holidays, and a very Happy New Year for all of you." [Applause.]

V. Communications from the Chair: Chair Wedeen said that the Chair's remarks for the meeting as the Senate knew, and, as usual practice, most were written out and could be picked up if they had not been so far. There was just one item she wished to bring to the Senate's attention before the body got down to the more serious business of eating. There was meeting of the Senate's Council of Faculty Governance Heads (as defined in the Senate Charter) last Thursday at the Graduate School. Secretary of the Senate Riley joined with her - she chaired the meeting. The group has met sporadically through the years and this was the first time so many members appeared. Eleven of the colleges were represented. Two major items evolved from the discussion. One was the reaffirmation by the group of the AAUP, ACE, AGB statement of about twenty years ago concerning the faculty rights and prerogatives in a university or college's governance and the Council wished to go on record on this issue and the Council's statement would be distributed in writing with the minutes of the Senate's meeting. The other item is that the Council felt it was important for the various members of that body to learn from one another and therefore requested that there be a meeting - they said once a month - and we will start once a month. If we find that this is a bit too much meeting and there's no reason why subsequently it can't be changed, to go over those items and issues which the group felt to be of importance at that time on the various campuses. The Chair said that she just wanted to apprise the Senate of the group meeting, of the feeling of some of the members of it and to ask Senate members who thought they had something that they thought was larger than one institution to share it with the head of their particular governance at their institution to be shared with the entire Council.

"At this point," Chair Wedeen said, you may go about the business of eating. We will bother you a little later with very wonderful things".

VI. Chancellor's Report: Chair Wedeen said she was calling on the Chancellor to say a few words now. Chancellor Murphy said that he did not have any words. He either had a lot or he had nothing. He had come to hear Frances Fox Piven. Some Senators might know that Professor Piven had come to the University because she was increasingly dissatisfied with the kind of environment that Professor Wasser described earlier, that existed at Boston University. The tremendous division between administrators and faculty, the kind of life that faculty had to live in an environment in which they were humiliated by the president. Arbitrary and capricious power exercised over the faculty by a president of a university, one who had no real high regard and respect for the faculty such as exists here in The City University of New York. So I stand only to tell you that all of Professor Wasser's perceptions are false. And now I want you to relax, Henry, that we will show you due regard and respect and admiration for the position you have, and in the future it will not be necessary to warn us all of the growing gap between faculty and administrators. In any event, the Chancellor said, "I am teaching this semester, and I want you to know, it's the hardest thing I do all week". The Chancellor said he wanted to wish everybody a good year, that it had been a rough year like most of his and their years. "Next year," he concluded, "promises to be even more difficult. But then what would life be like in The City University if we couldn't look forward to travail, aggravation, misery and challenges, all of which we have to overcome. Have a good holiday and get a good rest, and I'll see you all next year as usual".

VI. Guest Speaker: Professor Frances Fox Piven (Political Science, Graduate School, "Why Americans Don't Vote"): Before welcoming Professor Piven Chair Wedeen said that since the Senate did not have Gordon Lea and his wit this evening, the Senate asked Professor Murphy (the Chancellor) to be the stand-up comic and thanked him. She then introduced Senator Muller (Economics, Graduate School) to introduce Professor Piven.

Professor Muller said:

Good evening all. Our guest speaker tonight is our colleague, Professor Frances Fox Piven of the Political Science Doctoral Program. She is a person who has made a unique contribution to public discussion in the United States through her stream of writings on the meaning of poverty, alienation, and powerlessness as a threat to a democratic system of government. She has influenced political life through her identification of the problem of low voter registration as a disenfranchisement of the poor, and her strategies for organizing to solve the problem. Professor Piven's double distinction as a scholar and advocate has been earned through her books, articles and talks, and her participation in numerous important organizations for public justice. She has combined insights from political science, economics, sociology, and history, to comprehend and explain social issues. Her work has been provocative and challenging, and has been widely discussed. Her book, Regulating the Poor, co-authored with Richard Cloward, received awards from the Society for the Study of Social Problems and the American Library Association in 1972. And her articles on voter registration won the Eugene V. Debs Foundation Award in 1986 for "published work which evidences social vision and commitment for social justice." Now, as scholars, we here can always gain from learning of the creative work of our colleagues in our own or other fields. As citizens, we can appreciate being informed and challenged on issues of great public concern. But particularly as members of our urban University, we are obliged to understand problems of those struggling with adversities and presenting their claims for delivery on the promises made by our leaders about the responsibilities of government to the people. Thus, we have a triple reason to welcome you, Dr. Piven, and to hear what you have to tell us tonight. (Applause)

Dr. Piven said:

Thank you, Charlotte. I am really very very glad to be here. The United States, the world's first democracy, has today the lowest rate of voter participation among democratic nations, with one exception. That exception is Switzerland and the reasons for the low turnout in Switzerland are quite unique. This pattern of low voter turnout in the United States is a pattern that is distinguished as throughout the twentieth century.

I want to talk about non-voting, or lower voter turn-out, in relation to what it has meant for the development of American electoral politics in the 20th century, and particularly how it accounts for the current disarray of the Democratic Party. The disarray that is now ordinarily attributed to defections among the traditional white working class, who were the classical New Deal Democrats. There's some truth to this analysis, to the idea that the Democratic Party is in trouble because its old constituents, the people who made the Democratic party something like a labor party in the 1930's have fragmented, have become disloyal, have turned to Reagan. But the far more important truth, the far more important Democratic problem, is that a very large number, and an enlarging number, the new working class of the people who work in the service sector, of minorities, of women, a large number of the people whose Democratic preferences are overwhelming, these people have become marginalized from the electoral system. And

increasingly so. Now, how is this come to be? The conditions which account for non-voting, for the disarray of the Democratic Party, and for the inability and unwillingness of the Democratic Party to recruit large numbers of low income people whose Democratic preferences are so strong into the electorate? The conditions which account for this are complex. They have their roots in very long-standing features of American electoral politics, about which most scholars who pay attention, agree. Although contemporary analysts of non-voting often ignore this history in favor of social-psychological explanations of why people don't vote, explanations which fasten, for example, on the relationship between low income, low education, various patterns of alienation, disaffection, and so on, all of which are said to account for non-voting. That's the low motivational theory of non-voting. In fact, the low voting by working people and by poor farmers in the United States dates only from the turn of the 20th century. Until then, and indeed beginning in the 1830's, when white working men in the United States won the vote, we had very high turn-out in the United States, averaging 75 per cent in the elections between 1838 and 1896. Moreover, during these decades, turn-out in sub-national and state elections, in mid-term elections, in local elections, was also very high and often even higher than it was in presidential elections. And also during this period there were no differences in turn-out by class and, indeed, even very little difference in turn-out by age. There was some truth, in other words, in the idea that the United States was the first democracy. But towards the end of the 19th century, during the very period when working class people and peasants in Europe were winning the vote, winning the right to vote, during this period, the franchise in the United States was restricted. There was, in fact, a kind of democratic counter-revolution. It unfolded slowly, precipitated in the 1870's, 1880's, by increasing alarm over enlarging numbers of immigrant workers in the city, by rising insurgency among industrial workers, by a radical farmers' movement that spread across the West and across the South, a farmers' movement that even mounted electoral challenges in the States, and finally in 1896 in the presidential contest. And, in response to this variety of developments or threats, there were a series of legal changes made in American electoral institutions. Now, we know about those legal changes made in American electoral institutions. Now we know about those legal changes when we think about the South. We know that after decades in which Southern whites trying to restore, reconstruct a feudal system based on intense, low-wage, docile labor after decades in which Southerners trying to essentially restore the slave system, used fraud and used force to try to lower Black voter turn-out, because to restore that system you needed to control state and local governments. You needed to control state and local governments because you needed to control the apparatus of terror in the South. That after decades of using these arrangements Southern whites turned to a legal system of disenfranchisement, partly because they were afraid of Federal intervention. Those legal arrangements for disenfranchisement in the South included poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and an elaborate voter registration that was difficult to get to - closed when working people could get away, and administered by hostile officials- would keep voter turn-out down among the less confident, less educated, and the poor.

But these legal changes that occurred in the South, and which drove turn-out down in the South, by the way, by 1924 to 19 per cent of the eligible electorate, also occurred in the North. Gradually, on the state and county level, literacy tests, poll taxes in many places, and spreading over the North a voter registration apparatus that worked very much like voter registration did in the South - hard to get to, never open when working people were able to get away, voter registration that closed six months before an election on the theory that it really was uncouth for people to want to register only because they were excited by the color and drama of an election campaign. These legal changes in the North created a kind of constrictive apparatus

which after the election of 1896 and the decline of party competition, worked together to drive turn-out down. I already said down to 19 per cent in the South; in the non-South turn-out dropped to about half, and it stayed there. And turn-out was lowest among those who were least well-off, less well-educated, and younger, with dramatic consequences for the development of American politics in the twentieth century.

Those consequences were evident in the New Deal realignment. Now, a lot of us were, in a sense, brought up to think of the New Deal Democratic Party as something like a labor party, something like a European labor party. But the developments of the turn of the century, the legal apparatus and the crushing of the party competition which together drove participation down, really had the effect of eliminating the conditions, the elementary condition, an available working class electorate, the elementary condition for a labor party, and that was evident also in the 1930's. The New Deal party created in the 1930's was beset by problems inherited from the late nineteenth century. It is true that there was an increase in turn-out, an increase in turn-out also encouraged by the programs which the New Deal administration created largely in response to these movements and to the electoral defections they threatened to cause. And an increase in turn-out that was finally a response to the way in which these new programs - like relief, WPA, PWA - made possible a re-invigoration of the local party apparatus and its recruitment capacities for the Democratic Party and also a re-invigoration of turn-out, an increase in turn-out, as a result of the fact that working class people finally, in 1935, won New Deal support for the right to organize, for the National Labor Relations Act, so that the unions became a kind of Democratic party apparatus to increase turn-out. But through all of this, through the movements, government responses which made the national government a palpable presence in the lives of ordinary people as it had never been before, and the reinvigoration of a party apparatus of big city organizations and unions that could actually recruit people, through all of this, the legal and procedural obstructions which were created in the late nineteenth century, persisted, so that the rise in turn-out which occurred in the 1930's was in fact modest. In the North, by 1940, turn-out was up only seven per cent over 1928, and, in the South, the New Deal, in effect, never penetrated. Turn-out increased one percent between 1928 and 1936, when turn-out in the South reached 25 per cent. These are all figures for presidential elections. The meaning of this, this constriction, this limitation on this something like a labor party that was created in the 1930's, the meaning of this cannot be, in a sense, overstated, because it meant that a Southern one-party system, built on extreme oligarchy, on massive disenfranchisement of all Blacks and on poor whites, gained great national power precisely because it had now become critical to the fortunes of a national party that was in power. So that New Deal programs, just as they worked to bolster big city Democratic organizations, also worked to bolster the state and local parties of the South, with the result that the South imposed telling limits on the New Deal coalition. The South exercised crippling power in the Congress where the Southern delegation, of course, by 1938, formed an alliance that was to last until about a year ago, with conservative Republicans, an alliance which blocked social welfare initiatives, an alliance which prevented the spread of unionization, which backed the anti-union laws of the Smith-Connally Act of 1943 and the Taft-Hartley Act, an alliance which ensured that a low-wage system would be sustained in the South, which continually, through the decades, undermined the efforts of Northern workers to win higher wages and to unionize. That regional competition was a continuing weakness and an increasing source of weakness for Northern workers. All of this was the legacy of 1896.

On the one hand, limited working class participation in the North resulting from the legal constrictions that had been created at the turn of the century, made the Democratic party critically dependent on the South. On the other hand, the

leverage that the South exercised weakened the ability - a South, by the way, which was also shaped by 1896 - weakened the ability of the national Democrats to strengthen labor support in the North and to strengthen the unions so that they could become a more vigorous recruiting apparatus. In any case, this New Deal accommodation, fragile, peculiar, distorted, was very short-lived. The very power that the South exercised in national government undermined the accommodation because the leverage of the South in the Congress meant a series of very important economic concessions to the South in agriculture, in infrastructure development, all of which led to a more capital-intensive agriculture, economic development, and industrialization, which made the serf-labor system of the South superfluous. That, in turn, led to the steady displacement of Blacks from the South, and, as they were displaced from the South, they became key blocs in the cities of the North. Key blocs about which a Harry Truman had to worry in 1948, especially when he was challenged from the left by Henry Wallace, or that Kennedy and Johnson later had to worry about. On the one hand, this dependence of national Democratic leaders on Black voters in the city created a kind of political environment which made civil rights victories possible in the South, including the emergence eventually of a mass electorate. The rise of a civil rights movement, the eventual enfranchisement of Blacks, tore apart the old Southern oligarchical Democratic party, the southern wing of the national Democratic party, both by enfranchising Blacks in the South and by accelerating the defections of white Southerners. So serious was this problem that by 1964 Johnson, the first Southern president since before the Civil War, won with 90 per cent of the Black vote and lost the Deep South. By 1976, a truly Southern president, Carter from Georgia, won a third of the white Southern vote. Only a third, and Mondale won only 25 per cent of the white Southern vote. What had happened is this: that the one-party South, resting on the disenfranchisement of Blacks and of most poor whites, had become history. The one-party South, created at the end of the nineteenth century, had collapsed, partly through the interventions forced by that politicization - the interventions by the Federal government which had enfranchised Blacks in the South. It was not a bad thing, of course, that the system of 1896 was destroyed, or, indeed, that the one-party South was destroyed. We got some sense of what it meant with the defeat of the Bork nomination just a few weeks ago. That was a symbol of the collapse of the one-party South and the Democratic strength that was based on one party and the disenfranchisement of Blacks and poor whites. Well, the loss of the South was crippling for the New Deal coalition. Notice how early it began to happen. In 1948, when Truman worried about those Blacks in the central city, made civil rights promises in the Democratic platform, four Southern states walked out. In 1952 and 1956, Adlai Stevenson tried to waffle, tried to straddle, talked about slow but gradual desegregation, I forget the expression he used. Only when it became clear that the white South could not be conciliated because of the civil rights movement were Democratic national leaders willing to move to, in a sense, grant the franchise to Blacks. But once they did that, they had to concede the loss of a one-party South and the votes that it gave Democratic presidents in four-year contests. Once the one-party South was lost, the North became more important. The New Deal Democratic party had to find some way of compensating for the lost support in the South by strengthening its base in the North. Instead, of course, the base in the North weakened. The main reason was the failure of the Democratic Party apparatus to respond to the continual recomposition of its working class constituency in the North. This problem has not yet been noticed. Almost all commentators pay attention instead to something else. Commentators both of the right and the left, I might say, love to talk about the problem of the defections among the old white working class. Now that is a true thing. There have been defections. In 1948, Truman was able to carry 75 percent of union members. By 1968, only 50 percent of union members voted for the Democratic ticket.

Let me take a moment on this terrible problem that everybody - Huntington, Edsel -

is so worried about. Because there are a lot of theories that have been spun to explain why those white working class voters are no longer Democrats. One set of theories talks about the long-term decline of parties, the long-run fragmentation of parties in the United States which is sometimes dated from the turn of the century, it's sometimes dated from the loss of the parties over control of presidential nominations, and sometimes dated from the debacle of the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, but wherever you date it from the idea is the historic pattern in which voters remained loyal to a party for a long period of time has simply fallen apart, and that in its place we see a kind of fragmentation and disarray. There's a second set of explanations which attributes now, not all the problems of the Democratic Party, because there are many others, one which I have already talked about, but attributes the disaffection of the old white working class to rising levels of conflict in our society. Two kinds of conflict are particularly important - you know what they are - what drove the white working class out of the Democratic Party, or at least what drove a lot of them out of the Democratic Party - well, race conflict. The race conflict of the South had to spread to the North. After all, that was where Blacks were moving, or being forced to move. The national Democratic leaders had to respond to rising demands from Northern Blacks, increasingly intense demands from Northern Blacks, because they were located in industrial states that were so critical, that carried very large numbers of electoral votes and that were so critical to presidential victories. So those responses by national Democratic leaders, becoming Lyndon Baines Johnson singing "We Shall Overcome", antagonized the white working class. That's the argument, right? You all know it. The second source of conflict always talked about is the New Politics - all those cause-oriented activists who began to take over the Democratic Party, beginning with the conflict over the war in South-East Asia. The Democratic Party, it's said, used to be a big tent, a kind of tumbly, cuddly circus, room for everybody, all kinds of people, but with the rise of these cause-oriented activists, everybody had to have a test, set a test, before they could get into the tent, about their position on imperialism, and their position on environmental pollution, and their position on affirmative action, and so forth and so forth. And these cause-oriented activists were often condemned as a new elite, an appellation I find outrageous, This was the elite in contrast to the regular party oligarchs and union leaders who they were offending. At any rate, the very familiar analysis is that all these cause-oriented activists who, by the way, tried to make an alliance, a very early alliance, with Blacks and Hispanics, antagonized the regulars, who had a sort of representative authority, antagonized the union leaders and the Democratic Party leaders. And they did, that's true. They did alienate the regulars. And they did alienate lots of the older white working-class voters. By 1972 the union Democratic vote was down to 40 per cent. Fifty per cent in '68, down to 40 per cent by 1972. Of course, there were other sources of disaffection, particularly as the 1970's wore on, and they have to be named. One surely was the fact that from 1973 on, wage levels fell steadily. Another surely was the fact that in 1977 the effort by the unions to get labor law reform through the Congress, which might have strengthened the unions for organizing campaigns in the Sun Belt or in the service sector, that effort failed, and it didn't get very strong support by the Democrats either. But still declining living conditions in the 1970's could hardly be called the Democrats' fault, if only because Democrats were not in power for part of this time. In a sense they were defined as no one's fault. The old Democratic promise of steadily improving living conditions was not being kept, and was not being kept because of changes in the international economy. But whatever the reasons, that basis for appealing to, for holding the working class, rang increasingly false. I think all of this is at least partly true. Certainly it is true that the old working class support eroded, and, indeed, had begun to erode as early as the 1950's. But while this was happening, there was a far more serious problem for the Democratic Party which received much less attention. And that was the decline in turn-out which began in the 1960's. It had been low to begin with, and it sunk even further. It sunk especially among poor people, and it sunk



specially in the North. At least in the South there was the civil rights conflict to goad people, to galvanize them into participating. In the South, at least there was the Voting Rights Act to prevent obstructions to voting. But in the North, voter turn-out began to decline in the 1960's and has been declining steadily among precisely those groups, those low income groups, lower class and poor working class groups whose Democratic preferences are overwhelming. Between 1952 and 1980 turn-out sank from 64 per cent in 1952 to 55 per cent in 1980. Outside of the South the drop was much more dramatic. From 71 per cent in 1952 to 57 per cent in 1980. This decline occurred primarily among the new working class, a new working class made up of minorities, women working in the service sector, a development which dated surely back to World War II, and a new working class which was not reached by the party apparatus, by the big city political organizations and by the unions who were unable or unwilling to reach out to enlist these new constituents. In that process voter registration played a key role. First, look at the unions. They were, it's easy to say, they were paralyzed by oligarchy, by a kind of internal stasis, but they were also crippled by the accommodations which permitted the Democratic Party to be held hostage to the South through the 1940's and the 1950's, which resulted in the failure of the Democratic Party also to deliver to the unions and to union membership on important social welfare gains, once the 1930's were over. The American working class, the unionized workers, for example, never got a health care system as every other advanced Western nation did. So the unions, it's true that they're old, they're fat, and so forth, but they were also paralyzed by the peculiar accommodations that the Democratic Party had made, beginning in the 1930's, which kept it hostage to the South and to an alliance between Republicans and Southern Democrats. Meanwhile, the big city political organizations were frozen. Frozen by ethnic conflict, race conflict, frozen by the fact that older groups in the cities had through the bureaucratization of municipal agencies in a sense sunk their stakes in the city government, engraven their claims on jobs, on services, and so on. Instead of trying to reach out to, which, of course, is the way in which this party apparatus is supposed to function, instead of trying to reach out to newcomers, to the enlarging numbers of Blacks who began to come to the cities in World War II, to reach out to the working class women who are populating service sector jobs or Hispanics, reach out to Hispanics, instead of trying to do any of this, big city mayors tried to use programs like urban renewal to halt the migration to the cities, to halt the recomposition of the working class. And they used not only urban renewal to destroy the neighborhoods of these people, but they used the voter registration apparatus that they had inherited from the late nineteenth century to make it difficult for the new groups to vote. As late as 1970, New York City was turning away one in five would-be voters because they failed to satisfy literacy requirements. Even today you really do have to be very clever to find out where to register to vote. It's done down in Varick Street, unless, of course, you're a student at City University, where everybody can register to vote. Or in the 1960's when national Democrats, trying to overcome this conflict, this paralysis in their local party organizations, created a series of programs that would, in a sense, reach over city government, bypass city government, and put services, and put services and jobs into the ghettos. The Great Society programs. Still, to this day, it is against the law for a legal services program to do anything that has to do with voter registration. It is against the law for a headstart program to do anything that has to do with voter registration, for a community action program to do anything that has to do with voter registration, and what the mayors got the federal government to do they also did themselves, because they controlled the voter registration apparatus, and they made sure that it was not relaxed to make it easier for the newcomers to join the electorate.

The existence of this voter registration apparatus interacts, by the way,

with the failure or the reluctance of the local parties to recruit, because if the local parties recruited, they could help people hurdle the apparatus. If the apparatus didn't exist, the voter registration didn't exist, then the local parties would be, in a certain sense, less necessary, less successful, in containing, restraining the size of the electorate and who participates in the electorate. Moreover, voter registration obstructions not only restrict the electorate and skew it, because they're really income tests, class tests. It has to do with whether you have the class confidence to confront a surly official, whether they can deal with a form that states it is a Class D felony to provide false information on the form. Who knows if the information is false? Who can understand the question? This kind of apparatus constantly reproduces a class skew, because some voters always die, new voters come of age. Some voters always move. Then you have to re-register. Some voters lapse, and they don't vote for a few elections and you have to reregister. So that an apparatus which relies on making it hard to get to voter registration, intimidating forms and hostile officials will constantly recreate a class-tilted electorate in the United States. Turn-out, in short, is down in part not only because the local parties and the unions are both paralyzed and resistant, but also because they, in a certain sense, sit over, control, a registration apparatus which has forced turn-out down by lowering registration, especially among minorities and the poor. In 1960, registration was 71 per cent; by 1984 registration was 63 per cent. Sixty-five million unregistered people in the United States today, two-thirds of them below the median income. These 65 million are, of course, the main opportunity for the reconstruction of the Democratic Party. For the reconstruction of the Democratic Party in a way that it might sometime in the future become something more like a labor party than the peculiar and distorted accommodation that was achieved in the 1930's. There they are, 65 million unregistered voters. Two-thirds of them below the median income. Two-thirds of them with overwhelming Democratic preferences. But the party is frozen. Its union and local party apparatus, which worked in the 1930's to increase turn-out modestly, at least, is enfeebled and defensive. Its national leaders are resistant, too. They fear that new voters, especially these low-income voters, especially these minority voters, would alienate other groups in the traditional Democratic coalition. Incumbents in the Democratic Party never want large numbers of new voters because those are different voters than the voters who elected them before. Moreover, new voters will fuel the chances of challengers. New voters will give strength to leaders like Jesse Jackson. Mayor Koch announced - he's so cute - , Mayor Koch announced in September, a program in which voter registration would be offered in all city agencies and a program also in which the franking privileges of Senator Moynihan and Senator D'Amato would be used to send voter registration forms, it's as simple as that, to two million unregistered voters in New York City. There are actually two-and-a-half million. Somehow, after the September press conference, nothing happened. I don't know if anything ever will happen, but I'll bet you it doesn't happen before the Democratic primary in April. So, another reason is that the new voters are likely to add strength to challengers. Still a different reason is that the new voters are likely, especially as times turn bad, to make new demands, and to add strength to movements that emerge to make new demands. And, in that sense, the new voters are likely to antagonize the funders. There is, in other words, a Democratic Party organization out there in which significant segments of the leadership would rather be safe than win the presidency, would rather be safe than enfranchise some 65 million Americans. Thank you. [N.B. Since Professor Piven spoke from notes, this text was prepared by the Senate Office which accepts responsibility for editorial content.]

Chair Wedeen thanked Professor Piven on behalf of the Senate and said that she thought all could understand why this was the Senate's special meeting of the year. She said too that she had just asked, and Professor Piven would be pleased to accept

any questions, or a few questions.

Professor Piven then responded to the following questions from the Senate:

1) Professor Bleyman (Natural Science, Baruch) - "I am just curious. Do you ever foresee a new party arising that might look at these disenfranchised voters?" / It's very difficult to begin a third party in the United States because we have single member districts and that means that unless a third party has overwhelming regional strengths so that it can get more than half the votes in a district, it doesn't gain the kind of representation which gives it the stamina, the strength, and the funds to continue. So third parties tend, if they succeed at all, if they last at all, to be regional parties. Nevertheless, there have been third parties before in American history in the wake of the breakdown of the major parties, of one of the major parties or of both of the major parties, and that's by no means impossible. The prospectus that I rely on, and actually try to work on, but that I didn't try to sell to you tonight, is a prospectus in which - actually the Democratic Party is quite fragmented, and the American government is very fragmented too. In which that kind of fragmentation creates opportunities to institutionalize voter registration in a wide range of governmental and voluntary agencies, which now are very widespread in American society. And I've been working with a campaign that has been trying to do that over the last four or five years. Some entrepreneurial Democrats who think they can gain themselves, that low income and minority voters will vote for them, have ordered voter registration in state agencies, and in city agencies and county agencies. Although in a number of places we've had great difficulty in getting those orders implemented. We did succeed, about two-and-a-half or three weeks ago, in the Northern District Court of Mississippi, in striking down the voter registration laws of the State of Mississippi, and we are hopeful that in the next two months the Federal judge will order as a remedy that all Mississippi state agencies make voter registration available to the public who use those agencies.

2) Professor Greenbaum (History, Queensborough) - "I was just wondering if you had taken into account two factors in low registration. I don't know if they really are. One, the systematic destruction of the socialist movement by Wilson during World War I and immediately thereafter, which doesn't give you an organized base trying to get working class voting, and secondly, the Progressive movement's need to prevent voting early and often as a reason for constant reregistration?" / I'll answer the second question first. And let me restate it so that it's absolutely clear. Some analysts think that the reason that voter registration and officially printed ballots and other reforms were introduced was in reaction to the fraud that was pervasive in American electoral politics in the decades after the Jacksonian period for most of American history. There was fraud, although nobody has...there has never been...maybe it can be done, I'm not sure it can't be done, but nobody has ever tried to systematically study its extent. The difficulty though with this argument is twofold. One that there were two kinds of fraud: those that had to do with voting the cemetery stones, and those that had to do with employing thugs so that certain kinds of people didn't vote at all. Fraud worked both ways. It both reduced the voter totals and it inflated the voter totals, and we don't know. Maybe it is much more one way than another, but since our studies of fraud consist of compiling one set of anecdotes or another set of anecdotes, and all of these contemporary observers are very partisan people. They tend to be the reformers who are doing the observation and the accounts of the fraud. We don't really know whether the vote totals of the nineteenth century are in fact inflated by fraud or if so, how much. The second problem with that analysis is that it doesn't really tell us why the Progressives were so suddenly or why reformers, and it didn't begin with the Progressives, the Progressives actually came somewhat later. Why the Mugwumps were so sincere and idealistic and so determined to root out fraud. It imputes to people a motivation unrelated to their roots, for example, in the

business community and in the Republican Party. We know that in state legislative battles over various reforms to root out fraud, the Republicans were always on one side and the Democrats were always on the other side, and that's because the proposals to root out fraud were always directed at the cities in which the Democratic constituencies were concentrated. As if there were no fraud in rural areas. It simply is not true. There was fraud. We don't know whether it raised the levels of voting or whether it lowered the levels of voting, and I also consider cleaning up elections an insufficient accounting of the motivation of the Mugwumps. As for the destruction of the Socialist and anarchist movements after World War I, after all the Wobblies were wiped out too. I certainly think that that was of great importance, but I think it was related to declining turn-out. The very sharp turn to the right during and after World War I and throughout the 1920's seemed to me to be correlated with the progressive drop in voter turn-out during this period. In the early part of the twentieth century, certainly Teddy Roosevelt was a businessman's president. But his rhetoric, his platform sounded like the Populists' platform. So long as voter turn-out remained high, I would say, the Socialists were, in a certain sense, stronger because a constituency to which they were appealed remained in the electorate. That when so many working class people were marginalized from the electorate, that the Socialist movement was itself greatly weakened.

Chair Wedeen said she would entertain the last question.

3) Professor Trefousse (History, Brooklyn) - "Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center. Don't you think that the decline of the power of the city machines due to the fact that the federal and state governments have taken over so many of the social functions that these machines used to carry out has a lot to do with the decline of voter participation?" / Yes. I think that the decline of the local parties, or the machines, does have to do with the decline in voter participation, but I date that decline from a much earlier period. I think that the city machines got a new lease on life from the New Deal, at least those machines that were friendly to Roosevelt. Where they weren't friendly to Roosevelt - Tammany didn't do so well under FDR because of his long-standing enmity, of course, with Al Smith and with Jimmy Walker. But the Chicago machine...the Boston machine didn't do well under Roosevelt either. But the machines that were supportive of Roosevelt did very well under the New Deal. Programs like WPA and PWA were used to revive the machines, and in New York they were used to strengthen La Guardia and Moses. But decades earlier the machines had taken a terrific buffeting at the hands, really, of the reform movements, of a series of reform movements determined to weaken the machines, partly because they were very unreliable in doing business. Tammany, for example, was notorious for not even doing the favors for which it had been bribed. You can't deal with people like that. The machines were also stripped of manpower through Civil Service. Whole agencies were taken out of the control of the machines. And this was done during approximately the same period that the electorate on which the machine depended was in a sense being fenced in by new procedures, or fenced out by new procedures. And the two worked together. If the machines were weakened because a lot of the precinct captains and so forth who relied on no-show jobs, that's what kept them working. Well, the no-show jobs were going, going, gone, there was less graft in the second reform movement of 1903 through 1915, a lot of arrangements through which the machine took a lot of money from big business were much more difficult. As the machines lost a lot of their resources in both person, power and money, they lost the capacity to help people hurdle these registration obstacles or, you know in some places, in the early days, Tammany just took them over. Every time the State Legislature would impose voter registration, Tammany would run it. What good was it? Or then the State Legislature would create a new Office of Inspections of Voter Registration, and Tammany would take over the Office of Inspections. But as machines

like Tammany suffered in a certain sense blow after blow after blow, in decades between the 1890's and the 1920's, they were much less able to subvert or circumvent voter registration. Voter turn-out did go down, and the machines settled in. Like any political organization, they then became dependent on the circumscribed electorate. So that by the 1920's the Chicago machine was defending voter registration against the Chicago Board of Public Efficiency. So - yes, but it happened earlier.

Chair Wedeen said: "On behalf of all of us, Frances, thank you so much. I will entertain a motion to adjourn. 'Happy Holidays, everyone!'"

The meeting then adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Jean Ellis  
Executive Director