This is how you do it and I know how to do it. It was easy to become self-deluded. The results of our campaign were stunning; that sitting right across the street now was a building of some architectural distinction that the school owned. Equal in square footage to the building we were in. Also by comparison with the 500, it appeared so dowdy and so awful. It was very well located, and so on. That was a big pay off for four months' work.

PEARLSTEIN: Now, let me go back a little bit both to ... to the question of your relationship with Irwin and Irwin Polishook's relationship to Hostos, and so on. Would you care to characterize that relationship, as you understood it, from his perspective? Was this support for you and the work at Hostos and for Hostos as an institution based, as you perceive it, on a real interest in the College or ...

MEYER: I think there are always multiple motivations to everything. That would be true with even the simplest things, buying a cup of coffee or anything, there's nothing that doesn't have multiple motivations. But I do think it was the kind of mix that I mentioned before. I was no threat to him. I didn't want to be President of the PSC. I didn't want his job. I was able to do something, which on the surface would certainly be, at that moment, considered to be a very difficult thing to do. Leading a campaign that convinced a predominantly minority faculty to affiliate with an American Federation of Teachers Union at that moment was not a small thing to do. There were various, all kinds of benefits back-and-forth always with everything. But that is true with all kinds of transactions... Clearly, that I was *not* going over to the opposition was worth a lot to him.

That was worth a lot of money for cookies and coffee too. But I wasn't of that frame of mind in any case. I mean, that wasn't the way I operated politically, I don't think it was the way the Party operated politically. The Party was interested in influence really, so in a sense, that's what I was doing. They wanted to influence large entities and large groups of people towards the Left and where possible activate them. They didn't want to disrupt or damage progressive organizing or leaders.

PEARLSTEIN: Well, from that point of view, were you pressed at all, or did you feel yourself that you needed to become more involved in Citywide Union activity?

MEYER: No, because I couldn't. I just couldn't. I mean, literally by the end of the term I weighed twenty pounds less. It was exhausting. What began to develop were mass movements at the College involving enormous numbers of people and constant activities. And so to stay abreast of this, to teach my classes, I continued to do ... I did almost no work on my dissertation. However I passed my orals with distinction.

PEARLSTEIN: You were still in European and Russian ....

MEYER: Well, that's interesting to look at because it shows what the college meant to me, that it wasn't just these activities. It really altered my whole life. It was a very big shift. I didn't move to the South Bronx but I did move my whole area of professional studies. I left Russian and European history. I had passed the main subject of my orals. Russian History, with distinction, and passed the qualifying exam in Russian, German,

French, and Spanish. I don't know how the inspiration or the strength came for this, but I dropped that and I shifted to American history. I said to myself: "I'm going to spend my life here. This is where I'm going to spend my life." And teaching, researching, and writing about Russian and European history doesn't fit too well with this reality. Interestingly, in recent years, I have been teaching European and even Russian history as part of my two-semester World History course. I now do not find the difficulties I had with when I first arrived at the College.

PEARLSTEIN: You dropped ... You switched to American before or after the orals?

MEYER: After. I don't know anyone else who has ever done that. I mean, I jettisoned an enormous investment.

PEARLSTEIN: So did you have to go back and retake courses in ...

MEYER: No. No. I was prepared to do that, but the Chair of the Department didn't ask me to do that. It was kind of a miracle.

PEARLSTEIN: So you just did a dissertation on ...

MEYER: My dissertation was on Vito Marcantonio, Radical Politician. But I hadn't taken an American history course since undergraduate school. At Rutgers, I mostly took a European history courses. I took very few American history courses. I didn't realize it

until many, many, many years later that when I shifted to U.S. History, it did not constitute such a dramatic change. Starting with the dissertation until now, I have been researching and writing American ethnic history; radical ethnic history. So in a sense much of my work in European history has been integrated into the American history that I write about.

PEARLSTEIN: Now, you're connecting this shift to the work at ...

MEYER: Well, in a sense, to my integration with Hostos. In other words, I wasn't just going there to do a job. It fundamentally shifted me. It shifted things for the rest of my life. For example, my Doctoral dissertation is on Vito Marcantonio, who was the great advocate for Puerto Rican independence and for the Nationalist movement, was a Congressman from East Harlem where a lot of our students at that time lived. I shifted in lots of different ways: the food I ate, music I listened to. I also met someone there, a student, Luis Romero, and we later became companions, partners. Since 1977 we've been together. On March 1, 1993 (the first day of that program) we became domestic partners, number 82 in the City of New York.

PEARLSTEIN: Now, you've alluded to this just in passing earlier in ... several times in the interview, this question of your sexual identity.

MEYER: Right.

PEARLSTEIN: When did that become an important issue for you?

MEYER: It was important all along, but I just found ways to repress that and to sublimate, to deny, that. But that became harder and harder and harder to do. I drank a lot over it. There was a lot of avoidance and denial, and lots of self-destructive behavior, a lot of acting-out behavior, very, very bad stuff. And the bad stuff got progressively worse.

PEARLSTEIN: Did it manifest itself in the teaching and the political work?

MEYER: No, no, because in part of my need to deny that and to stay married and all of that meant I could not publicly acknowledge with that. Even in my own mind I couldn't entertain that or consider that. I once called up WBAI and objected to their having gay programming because I thought that was divisive. When I look back at it, it's very shameful, and it's also pathetic. I was indulging in a lot of self-hatred in order to avoid what I feared would be a terrible fate, to be a gay person in this society. To me meant this more than anything else, becoming isolated from family, friends, and familiar things. After having children, I became very fearful that I would lose them and lose my contact with them. After 1977, finally, I left the marriage and I started living with Louie. We have been together ever since.

PEARLSTEIN: Now, at this time you're also in the process of writing a dissertation.

MEYER: Well, I had put that largely aside. I did some work on the dissertation during the summers. But not a great deal. I did worry about it. I knew what I was doing was very, very important. I was absolutely certain of that and I wasn't so sure that we would win. I didn't know that exactly. I wasn't so secure about that, but it was clear fighting for the college that that would be the best thing to do; that in order for the College to survive, to manage, we had to get our own facilities or we would ultimately be put out of business. Now, an outcome of that magnitude was very remarkable.

In writing the article about Save Hostos for *Centro: The Journal for the Center of Puerto-Rican Studies*, it's so good to write because it enables you to remember things and organize your thoughts. In the process of writing this piece, I realized that the college community forgot an important part of the victory of obtaining funding for the renovation of the building. Not only did we secure the building for the future after it would be renovated, but the Board immediately provided interim space. There was still a small Italian community on Morris Avenue, which is east of the Concourse, and there was an Italian Catholic Church there, Our Lady of Pity. The Italian community was really declining. There were perhaps two to three hundred Italians there. So the school leased its convent and its elementary school to the College. These facilities were rapidly renovated so we had some additional space for offices, a few classes, and a small auditorium. I had a nice office, and we got that from that struggle. The Chapter's activities were crucial in the struggle to obtain these buildings.

PEARLSTEIN: Is it your sense at that a time that this enhanced or jeopardized your road to tenure?

MEYER: Oh, I think it enhanced it. I knew that. I knew they were going to give me tenure. We're talking about normal people in a normal world. They would have to have done that. I didn't ask them for tenure. I didn't say if I do this, will you do that? The President of the College treated me warmly. I mean, we saved the College. He cared about that. I mean, there would be no reasonable person who wouldn't have thought that I deserved tenure. In any case, candidates got tenure routinely in those days without a Doctorate. There was no one in my Department who had a Doctorate at that point. In fact, much later in 1984, I became the first person to get a Doctorate. I really did want to complete my dissertation, but I did want to help save the college more. I was in a position to do this. It's sort of a kind of a dream come true. I mean, if you were a radical of my stripe particularly, and you believed in unions and that unions should take a broader role in the society, and I had the opportunity to actually realize that belief, why wouldn't you do that? I couldn't have imagined not doing it. The biggest problem that arose from not obtaining the doctorate was that I was ineligible for a promotion. I remained an Assistant Professor for fourteen years. Remember, I was a divorced dad, with child support payments and two children to take care of on the weekends.

PEARLSTEIN: What made you ... Was it the success of the struggle to save Hostos and to get it on some sort of solid, permanent footing that gave you a feeling that, well, my job is accomplished. I'm now going to step down as Chair or ...

MEYER: No. I didn't want to step down. I sort of knew. In some ways, I mean, that's going ahead. So I'd like to very much talk about the other two struggles, which are really more complex, and in some ways much more remarkable. That was really a small beginning for what happened. It's kind of elegant how it all worked out. There were three campaigns within one movement. That's how I've begun to view it, to systematize these events to create some kind of narrative in my brain about this movement. We reorganized the campaign to obtain the 500 ('73-'74); to save the college ('75-'76) when the BHE officially closed the College, we forced the Board to rescind that decision; and then a campaign to obtain the funding to renovate the 500 building ('78-'79). Once the City and State allocated funds for the renovations of the 500 in 1979, everything changed at the college. A new campus was built; a permanent administration came in, and so on. By the end of it I was exhausted. Also, I don't think I was willing to return to routine union.

It is very interesting what became the focus of the chapter the following year, which would have been '79-'80, after I stepped down as Chapter chair, was the demand that the administrator create separate bathrooms for the faculty. The faculty have separate bathrooms; and the faculty wanted that! Here we had fought together, the students and the faculty, to save the college, to get the building, and the issue became Jim Crow bathrooms, which, in any case, we never got. What we have is handicapped bathrooms to which many teachers have keys. This was just shocking to me. But it also shows something about human nature. I think that after all of that five-year struggle, the faculty had the desire to get back to normalcy, normality. I think there is just so much tension people can tolerate. There was so much uncertainty and so much anxiety created by the structure being shaken up all the time by these movements—as successful and necessary

they were—that were occurring. However, the political movements didn't entirely end either in '79. There were many, many initiatives that continued, that persisted after that time.

PEARLSTEIN: And it's when you step down that you then go back to working on the dissertation and ...

MEYER: Yeah. I then started to ... I did have the feeling ... Do you mind if we go back and tell you a little bit about the movements during that time and then go to that, or should I ... It's up to you.

PEARLSTEIN: Well, I think it would be worthwhile if you think that it's not in your article.

MEYER: Oh, okay.

PEARLSTEIN: If it's in there and that's certainly available, then I don't think we would need to go over that.

MEYER: After I stopped being Chapter Chairperson, I continued to do political work. I became active in the Senate. I think I found it too painful to remain involved in the union. It's very difficult to go back into the ranks, and that's especially true in the labor movement. There's no other place to go, but back to zero. That's unusual. I think that

generally doesn't occur in other contexts. It's not like you go to the B Team. You go way right back into the ranks. And it's uncomfortable for other people, too. That might have been a projection on my part, psychologically, but I think that was probably true. If you played sort of a big role, I don't know if they want you around when other people are trying to lead.

PEARLSTEIN: So you found it more comfortable to become active in the Senate?

MEYER: Right. I was already a member of the Senate from its foundation in 1974, but I became more active in the Senate doing similar things there that I had done in the Union actually. I remained a member of the Senate until I retired in the Spring of 2002, and almost all this time, I served on its executive committee.

PEARLSTEIN: That is, you perceived it not in competition with...

MEYER: No. No. But basically what occurred, the politics moved more to the Senate and out of the Union. Frankly, I brought much of that political content into the Senate so that the Senate later became the site for movements, for example, to mobilize for the budget of the College, or to defend the students during the student strike of '80-'81. It was the Senate that took the movement point of view, not the Union. The Union defended of the faculty, their schedules, their calendar. Peter Ruman, the Chapter Chair immediately after me, succeeded in getting the administration to agree to instituting a cap in class size in developmental classes. But this very substantial development was

accomplished without student involvement, and without a political campaign. I never was the head of the Senate. I think someone with as sharp political point of view as I had could not have been an effective chair on the Senate. At times I served as its gray eminence or the Chair's left-handed man, so to speak. I almost always had a connection to the students, because the Hostos Senate has student members and student representatives on the Executive Committee, with whom I worked closely. Also I was very often the faculty advisor for the Student Government Organization and other student clubs. There were many political initiatives coming out of the Senate in defense of the College's budget, for example. The Executive Committee also convinced the Senate to provided cover for the student strike in '80, '81 so its leaders didn't get arrested. We did a lot of work like that.

One of the most remarkable things I was real proud of initiating was the Hostos Solidarity Coalition which included many of the people who had been most active in the Union struggle or were active people on the Senate: some new people, some students, and very important staff. There were secretaries, African American secretaries. It was a very, very effective group, and from around 1982 to 1990 we did really openly left activities. We collected, for example, $14,000 for a college in Nicaragua. By today's standards that would be a lot more money. We had a kind of relationship with a college in Nicaragua. I can't remember the name; I believe it was a Catholic college with a pro-Sandinista administration. And we did a lot of anti-apartheid work and a lot of work to stop the enactment of legislation instituting English as the official language of the US. We also worked on other ancillary issues. We published a bilingual *Hostos Solidarity Coalition Newsletter* on a monthly basis. We didn't translate everything; there were articles in

English, articles in Spanish, back and forth. We organized assemblies, which routinely attracted as many as two hundred students. Most of the audience was amassed by teachers bringing their classes. The speakers included people who had just come from El Salvador, or meetings against apartheid in South Africa. We held *tertulias* (really a coffee klatch), where somebody who just came back to Cuba or Nicaragua would discuss what they saw and show slides. We also sponsored a major conference at the college on language freedom/stop English only, which featured Juan Gonzales, Chancellor Murphy, and Irwin Polishook. The Hostos Solidarity Coalition brought together the strands of the main issue concerning the African-American faculty and students and the Latino faculty and students along with the white progressives. However, it was not connected with the Union or Senate. It was independent of both. Actually, we got a lot of support from the administration for these activities. Isaura Santiago Santiago, the President of the College, was very Left. She had come out of ASPIRA and really had very Left sympathies. Her administration sensed that they were supposed to be nice to us so we had access to the auditorium and there was no retribution to anyone, and she generously contributed to our drives whenever we asked her, and so on.

The Hostos Solidarity Coalition dissolved around 1990. There were various reasons. I began to have a lot of family problems: my parents were getting sick, my teenage children began giving me a run for my money. So I couldn't do as much and then that dissolved. And then with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the general shift to the right everywhere, including at Hostos, I couldn't seem to get anybody or anything to happen. It was, like, a very strange thing. I was always, like, Mr. Can-do, and now I couldn't get a thing to happen. Also, the administration began to pull back from the HSC.

A small group of ultra-Left students, who also worked with the HSC, began to attack the Administration. For example, the day a delegation was to come in the school, they used crazy glue to jam the locks of the doors to the President's office, etc. The Dean of Faculty, who had previously been very supportive, let the teachers know that they should not routinely bring classes to outside events. Two of our major people left the College. However, I continued to lead the Hostos Voter Registration and Naturalization Campaign and co-chaired the Hostos AIDS Education Task Force, which were political projects.

PEARLSTEIN: Now, this may be jumping way, way, way ahead but the sense that I've had as an outsider about the recent past is that there's been terrible, terrible tension between faculty and administration at Hostos.

MEYER: There always is. I mean, there has always been a lot. My attitudes were not always identical with many of my colleagues. I grew up literally coming home from school and there was no food in the house. There was no heat in the house. To me this job is a miracle: to be able to have an academic schedule. I remember my father. He had to leave his shoes outside the door covered with shit. I remember him coming home from work with injuries, his eye being injured. It wasn't clear whether he was going to be able to see again. My grandmother couldn't go to a doctor because she didn't have five dollars. I think some faculty are a bunch of spoiled brats. I'm in very little sympathy with a lot of their complaints, very little sympathy with them. I think a lot of it is narcissistic, self-indulgent, and it's horseshit. I mean, I'm just being very frank. I mean, I've never said that this way, certainly publicly, but that's exactly how I feel. I think that

there is really a type of a UFT culture that quickly develops in CUNY and maybe more so in the community colleges. We're only here to do so much, and look how terrible it all is, and the students aren't trying. This is not my attitude.

PEARLSTEIN: Is this something that you .... is this something that you felt you were fighting against in your terms as Chapter Chair?

MEYER: Well, when I was Chapter Chairperson it was in the beginning of the school. People were younger. As people get older, people live out their character. They become more of what they are. So I think that people that were *kvechy* already and whiners already, they get worse and worse as they go on. So at the beginning, I think, a lot of that wasn't that evident. In many ways, the job wasn't that hard. The workload was lighter, the classes were small. Faculty were very, very quickly rewarded at the College; I think very often it seemed almost too quickly rewarded; people moved up very rapidly. There was no resistance to it. People could fill out the forms and they got the promotions. Now, that wasn't available to me because I didn't get my doctorate until I was forty-four, 1984. You have a small College in the South Bronx. You have to roll up your sleeves a little bit. The fact that the administration isn't that perfect. Nothing's that perfect is not a reason to dig in one's heels. It's how you can make it better. I think people have the right to appropriately try to get support. There's nothing wrong with that, but I think to get negative about the college or to get passive/aggressive because things aren't going one's way is wrong because a community college is not a widget factory. There are human beings involved. For faculty to say, "this fucking administration, I'm not going to

graduation." That's ridiculous. I mean, how could they ... this is the students' graduation. It's their students. I'm not saying that that attitude is widespread, but there are many faculty who have that attitude. And I don't think there was ever any opprobrium for that attitude. That really surprised me a bit. There was never any opprobrium. A person could project that negative attitude without losing status among their peers. I also think that there's often something withheld for those who did more. It's seen as being reproachful to the others. I think the culture in the college, and I don't think this is peculiar to Hostos at all, quickly becomes highly bureaucratic. The college becomes turf oriented and there is an instinct to fortify boundaries. This really prevents much of anything very interesting from happening; it also prevents a lot that is actually necessary from happening. Here is a startling example of that. At some point in the early 1990s, the English Department decided, and correctly so, that their second course, the Introduction to English course, which was organized around writing a term paper: how to write a term paper was inappropriate. The English Department Chair noted correctly that his faculty should be giving a literature course. So he brought this proposal and everybody's chimed in "Oh yes, somebody's finally noticed this after twenty years and this all makes sense." Then a student (thank god we had student members) rose and he asked: "Now who's going to teach us how to do the term paper?" And no one responded! That's what goes wrong in that type of structure. There's no lateral communication or interaction; even closely related units within the same department don't interact, no less those from separate departments. There's no supervision over the units, then members do what they deem best for who knows who, or for what. There are a lot of problems inherent in that kind peer governed of hierarchical, extremely segmented structure.

PEARLSTEIN: You say you got your doctorate in '84.

MEYER: Um-hum.

PEARLSTEIN: Did that in any way enter ... Was this factored into what was going on? Did you now see yourself more as a scholar than as an advocate?

MEYER: By finally getting that Ph.D. I was at last eligible for a position. I got my doctorate in 1986 and full professor in 1992. Along with the contractual revises, this meant my salary doubled in ten years. Consequently, I was able to take some short vacations and we moved back to Park Slope, which I had to leave after my divorce because of financial reasons. Earning the Ph.D. certainly made my life easier at the College. I think people were more respectful and there was less sniping. Now, it showed up in odd ways. It was hard to say because if there was anything kind of objective measure, like, say, for example, like the votes for the Senate, I always did so well, the second or third of the faculty. Boy, that's not bad! But I think that I ruffled people, especially chairpeople, a lot.

PEARLSTEIN: You were never chair of the Social Studies ...

MEYER: I was for a while and I think that was a huge mistake. I think that hurt my reputation. It took me a while to repair that.

PEARLSTEIN: Was this while you were Chapter Chair?

MEYER: I did that immediately after I stepped down as Chair of the PSC Chapter around 1979. I sort of switched jobs. Peter Roman took over being chair of the Union, and I took over being Chair of the Department from him. And when I look back at it I think I was terrible. I ran the department politically and that was obvious, and there were people who objected. They saw themselves ... their own interests being cut out.

PEARLSTEIN: During my tenure as chair, the greatest dispute was a fight to save the job of a colleague, who was denied CCE by the College World P&B. Peter Rowan fought for her from his position is Chapter Chair and I did so from my role as Departmental Chair. The campaign, which included a mobilization of students was ultimately successful. But Peter and I both lost our position. I believe that our constituencies, even when they agreed that our colleague deserved to continue in her position, viewed us as acting politically on behalf of a member of our unit in ways we never would for them. They were right, of course

MEYER: Well, I mean, I think that I really... it was just ridiculous. I shouldn't have been Chair. I was an Assistant Professor. My background had never been in academic administration. I had never paid attention to that. I had always been more or less contemptuous of bureaucracy, and now all of a sudden I'm helping to operate this structure that I despise. It seemed that every one was trading favors back and forth. I'll

give you the chairmanship. You give me this chairmanship. I mean, it's this kind of bureaucratic corruption. This is why the Soviet Union collapsed. It wasn't nice really. So I think there's a problem with leftists or people that do a lot of social activism. You sort of build up all this social capital and you sort of want something for it, that the rules don't apply. That kind of thing. Everyone is expected to understand why you can be late, or everybody should understand why you shouldn't notice this or that: if you're cutting this corner or that corner. I think I fell into that pretty quickly. Well, part of the problem was, I mean, it was just structural. I was an Assistant Professor unable to get a promotion because I didn't have my doctorate and there were full professors in the department who were opposed to me... who had a very different agenda. But I wasn't grown up enough to know that I was in an entirely losing proposition from the minute I took that on that position; that it was a big, big mistake. I did a lot of positive work during that time, but not within the Department.

I was one of the members of the College Planning Council, which existed for quite a few years and did wonderful work. Where else would a good idea come from? How could an idea...that was broader than the needs of the department which in many case means a unit come from. So how could you serve a wider mission? How could you do it? And where would the initiative for such a proposal come from within this setting? When President Flora Marcus-Edwards left I said: To her, "You know, the Planning Council had a lot of good ideas." She said: "Jerry, the Planning Council had all the good ideas." It was true. I mean, all the changes in the college came out of the Planning Council, The chairpeople found the Planning Council to be intolerable. Anything that would speak to the general interest of the college and subordinate the specific interest of

the departments had to be destroyed. And despite its excellent work, it was destroyed. I liked working in those overall college activities, a lot, whether it was the Union, the Planning Council or the Executive Committee of the Senate. I did keep the Union at arm's length and I think it was just too painful for me to return, actually. But also, it had shifted to a really generally very parochial stance of resolving immediate grievances. Recently, I have returned to working with the Chapter. Actually, I'm on its Executive Committee in some kind of ex-officer status. The current Chapter leadership maintains the balance between wider advocacy and concern for the members' immediate interests very well.

PEARLSTEIN: How would you explain that shift other than the change in leadership?

MEYER: What struck me repeatedly is that whether we have had better or worse administrations at the college, the administrations are responsible for the whole college, including the students. It seemed to me that the chapters very easily slipped into an anti-student position and were oblivious to the community, as if it didn't exist at all.

Tape Four

PEARLSTEIN: Alright. This is the second interview with Gerald Meyer from Hostos Community College. My name is Jim Pearlstein.

MEYER: Very, very likely, yes. But I wasn't a member of either of these so I mean, I would read communications or there would be discussions of that. It came up in some more direct fashion during the Save Hostos year of '75-'76 when the College was actually officially closed and there was a pretty definite split that developed between an organization that I founded, which was called the Save Hostos Committee, which operated under the aegis is of the Senate. It was really an official body of the College governance and also, of course, was allied with the Union. And then there was a group called the Community Coalition to Save Hostos, and the Puerto Rican Caucus was part of that. The Save Hostos Committee saw the College, per se, as being an extraordinary progressive development and the odds against saving it were very, very high. It was just a miracle in many ways that it was saved. The struggle to save Hostos took place during the middle of the fiscal crisis and so on. Our goal was narrower although my belief always has been, as has proven to be true, that in those struggles the power relations changed; that people become politicized and that they would bring more people to the table; as a consequence of a broad movement (especially when it's successful) the agenda changes. From this perspective, it's best to take a popular front outlook or Gramscian outlook. I didn't know about Gramsci at the time, which I think is closer to the politics coming out of the Communist Party whose activities focused on developing mass movements and in some sense some of the more left issues would take care of themselves. I think the Party went too far in that direction; that they had expectations of radicalization, which without some additional interventions could not occur. But in any case, I basically agreed with the Popular Front model, and I thought the forces were

obviously against us. My God, the Board was voting to close us and the press was against us. And there we were, a couple of thousand people in the South Bronx.

The Community Coalition to Save Hostos really wanted to save the college; I'm sure sincerely they wanted that, but they also wanted to transform the college into a clearly Puerto Rican college. They wanted to nail that down and the whole outcome of the movement to save the college did not work out in that direction. In the following year the Puerto Rican Studies Department became the Latin American Studies Department, which illustrates this kind of shift both in the demographics of the college, and also in the working out of that movement itself.

PEARLSTEIN: Among some activist groups at the time there was a moving away from the notion that racial differences, ethnic differences, could be overcome and should be overcome in the course of a struggle like the struggle over Hostos.

MEYER: Right.

PEARLSTEIN: And that whatever kind of a coalition came together, whatever kind of political grouping took the leadership should be multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-racial. But at the same time I recall that there was another tendency that said if you wanted real racial equality, groups had to come, or people had to come into coalitions from a position of strength and therefore, it was desirable to have blacks organize blacks and Puerto Ricans organize Puerto Ricans and whites organize whites, and then come together. Was there any of that that manifested itself in Hostos?

MEYER: I think so. I mean, the working out, the reality is just much less malleable than ideas, and conversation is much easier than the actual arrangements, social arrangements, that occur that you try to influence. And there were lots of conflict in the 1975-1976 struggle, the one to save the College. There was no conflict in the 1973-1974 campaign to obtain the 500 Building which set me up psychologically to imagine that that could be that way throughout, and it proved not to be true. The first movement that we had to get the building was astoundingly conflict-free and moved along almost mechanically. But the movement to save the College in '75-'76, really became rather quickly invested with questions of identity and politics.

This Community coalition, at the heart of it, really was the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP). At the college, they had a rather large group of members. Twenty actually, around twenty members; it might have been twenty-seven members or thirty members. On the campus, they were selling a hundred or two hundred copies of what at the time was its daily newspaper, *Claridad*. They tried to recruit me, actually. There were non-Puerto Ricans who were members of the party, including white people, but I had already had joined the CP. They said I could join both, but I didn't.

Some of this may seem so arcane by today's standards, but at the heart of this was a theoretical question. The PSP upheld the position that the Puerto Ricans in the Diaspora were part of the Puerto Rican nation. The PSP was totally anti-Maoist, anti-Trotskyist, and they were pro-Soviet, which is interesting. However, they did not agree with the Communist movement on the nationality issue as formulated by Stalin, which was still universally held dogma in the Communist movement. This concept developed out of a

dispute with the Jewish Bund, in Eastern Europe, which took the position that the Jews in the Diaspora constituted a nation, and therefore had a right to organize an autonomous Social Democratic Party. Representing the Russian Social Democratic Party, Stalin took the point of view that for a people to constitute a nation it wasn't sufficient to have culture and history had to have territory there also. When a people moved and did not have territory, they constituted a minority. Minorities deserved all the rights to the preservation of their languages and cultures, but they were not a nation. There were tremendously complex, tremendously far-reaching practical questions that develop out of these conflicting, theoretical point of view. That is really what burst out at that time, trying to change the power relations within the College. Specifically what the Coalition wanted to do was to remove Candido DeLeon, the President; they made that a key focus. The Puerto Rican, not the Latino culture became focused. By its nature, It excluded the Blacks and shunted, as represented by the PSC, the whites to the side. Certainly the Union was left entirely out of this paradigm. I couldn't accept any of this. I didn't think that was a way to win. From day to day not everyone might have been aware of them, but these kinds of political questions and ideological questions were objective, even when there was no one explicitly developing them or propounding them.

PEARLSTEIN: Let me take this issue and go back some. When did you draw close to the Communist Party?

MEYER: I think when I went to Israel. I don't think that it was possible for me to have been sympathetic to the CP growing up in Hudson County, New Jersey, in the '50's. It

just wasn't possible. However, I was affected by the persecution of the Communists during the McCarthy period. I remember feeling genuine anger when I read in the *New York Post* how in one instance on Communist has been denied a fishing license and in another faced eviction from a public housing project. But I think that when I joined the Labor Zionist Youth movement in 1958 I was rather impressed, actually, that all these kids who were rejecting materialism and rejecting what America seemed to have to offer in terms of going to college or becoming middle class; they were working class Jewish kids, that had this goal of going to Israel and working and living with equally. I was really very moved by it. I thought that was quite remarkable. And as I mentioned last time, most of them had come from Communist families. That particular youth movement, by the way, was associated with Achdud Avoubab and was not pro-Soviet. It was a product of a right split from Mapam, over the question of the Soviet Union. It was a Party which no longer exists in Israel. It was more left wing than Mapai, the ruling Social Democratic party, but it was very nationalist. They would get around 10 percent of the votes.

PEARLSTEIN: Coming back then to the United States and getting involved in political activity as a college student and being surrounded by the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, and so on, you were surrounded by the New Left which was in many ways so hostile to the old left. It would have been, it would seem to me, have been much easier to have become connected to these New Left formations rather than the CP which was so isolated, so discredited....

MEYER: Right. Well, in a funny way though, the milieu I was raised in looked like the 1930's. Although some Puerto Ricans had moved in, it was a declining white working class area. It was an area of declining population. Union City, which was the town over from my family, Weekawken, where my family I lived at that point had something probably like, fewer than forty thousand people. Today it has 65,000 people. There were stores boarded up, the housing consisted of tenements and three-family houses with layers of siding tacked on top of siding on top of siding. It was populated by lots older people, who were left behind when the children moved to the suburbs. They were the remnants of all the ethnic groups that had passed through, the ones who weren't eligible to get the HFC mortgages, that didn't have the VA mortgages, who didn't go to college, the people who were, within, in terms of this society, less functional. So I didn't really have contact with many middle class people, particularly. And then when I went to college in Rutgers it was, again, a repetition of that. I mean, those were largely working class and lower middle class kids. They were ethnics. A lot of Jewish kids but not in as large a percentage as in City College, but it probably was at least 20 percent or so Jewish.

PEARLSTEIN: And so SDS and groups like that.....

MEYER: I had joined SDS as an individual, but there were no SDS chapters at the local campuses until much later. They were much more likely to be present at upper class institutions. You know, I was very proud of one thing. SDS actually took over the chapter of my club, the Liberal Club, and they became the successor. But SDS wasn't there, or particularly around us. And the people that I was meeting were again, many, not

all but half at least, were children from CP families. This pattern kept occurring. Now, there's a book, I'm sorry that I'm not going to remember the title of someone that wrote a book about this, that the early phase of the '60's was, to an astounding extent, based on the children from CP families. Later there was a wave of white ethnics, actually, that joined the movement. But that was quite a bit later. I had a very definite working class attitude. That was how I grew up and, I mean, those were the people I knew. I guess my decision to go to Israel to do physical work was a part of that attitude. I had a fear of becoming middle class; that I would become a traitor to my family or to my background, that the financially successful people were somehow the enemy. I think I had in some way, adopted the attitudes that I think a lot of black youth have, the belief that success, financially or in terms of moving up, would somehow be a betrayal, of one's community, that you would be going over to the enemy.

You can't imagine what it was like to be poor in 1954... When I visited my aunt and uncle in the suburbs outside of Hartford, it was the first time I had even taken shower. I'm telling you, that was absolutely the truth. We had gone there in a Greyhound bus. But when I arrived at their home with my grandmother, I must have been maybe thirteen, and we sat down for dinner. It was one of these situations where you know something's wrong but you don't know what it is and you're feeling worse and worse by the minute. You don't know if your fly is open or what's going on. And then I realized what it was. My aunt had served roast beef with gravy and I was cutting the meat and then putting the knife down next to my plate. However the problem was that there was this ever widening a brown puddle on a tablecloth. And everyone was looking vaguely aghast, no one wanting to say anything. But I didn't know any better. Now, later that

week, because we only took a bath once a week, if we needed it, at some point, my aunt suggested that I take a bath. My aunt said, well, you have to use the shower, something I have never done before. So then I took a shower. Well, I figured something out, and it was very nice taking a shower and all that and I thought it was pretty good. Later my aunt came down the stairs angry but also laughing a lot. What happened was I hadn't washed the bathtub to start with. I didn't wash the bathtub and so she had to wash the bathtub. But when she turned on the water the shower came down on her permanent. Because I, not knowing how a shower worked, I hadn't turned the handle to return the water flow to the bath tub's faucet. She was going out with my uncle. This later reminded me of a Booker T. Washington incident related in biography, how after Emancipation, a Quaker woman gave him work cleaning out a barn and when he told her he had finished what he believe to be an excellent job, she had to point out that he had not removed a chicken, lying in the corner. When I mentioned these points to my younger brother he told me a similar story. When he had gone to another aunt's, little country house on my mother's side, my Aunt Gert said: "Well, why didn't you use the other sheet?" And my brother replied: "What other sheet?" We didn't have another sheet, a sheet covered the mattress, but we then covered ourselves with blankets. When I was young, my grandmother would place winter coats on top of us after we fell asleep. So it was that type of thing. It was like living in a kind of urban Appalachia. So the Old Left politics really, kind of naturally evolved out of that.

PEARLSTEIN: But these ... what I don't know; without wanting to sound patronizing, these working class tropes...

MEYER: Right.

PEARLSTEIN: And sort of political impulses, at what point did they take some sort of formal shape or be connected officially with the party?

MEYER: I think it was within a week or two after coming back from Israel, I went to Times Square. I didn't know what to expect, and I went to a newsstand and I said: "Do you have the *Daily Worker*"? And the woman in this really thick Jewish accent, said: "Sonny, I got one just for you." And she leaned under the counter to give me one, and I used to go back there week after week after week. Now, there was no *Daily Worker* at that time. It was the *Weekly Worker* and then it became biweekly and then later it again became *The Daily Worker*, but it was not very encouraging, frankly, to tell you the truth, I mean, in the sense that it was filled with rather random stories about strikes and there was nothing that would draw you in to a larger picture. But there were some advertisements for different events. I went to a picket line sponsored by Spanish Civil War vets, against Franco. And when I got there were some, Abraham Lincoln Brigade vets there and the police wouldn't let them picket in front of the United Nations. They shoved them, like, five or six blocks away and there was like, thirty, thirty-five people. However, for me it was kind of dramatic. There was this old, Black man who was blinded while fighting in the Spanish Civil War. Other vets were guiding him around this picket line. Two friends had come with me, they were afraid to join the picket line. I got on the picket line and an agent of the FBI or the Red Squad, or whomever it was, was taking

portrait pictures, one after the other, as we circled past them. Now, my reaction to that was a deep anger and defiance. I'm actually feeling very angry when I talk about it now. I went to a May Day celebration in Union Square that year when I came back from Israel and I met one of the kids from the Labor Zionist group there. Again there were FBI agents there brazenly taking peoples' pictures. I was very appalled by it. It made me feel very defiant. There was some emotional piece to it.

PEARLSTEIN: So what year did you join the Party? 1960?

MEYER: I didn't join. I was, like, very, very sympathetic. People assumed I was in the Party. That was one of the reasons I finally joined. It was sort of like, when I finally told people I was gay, everybody already knew. Everyone was assuming I was in the Party; they were talking to me as if I was, so why not do it? I finally joined in 1976 maybe.

PEARLSTEIN: So this was well into your teaching career at Hostos.

MEYER: Oh yeah. The Social Science Department had invited Herbert Aptheker to teach at the College. (This initiative had the full support of the administration). I had had him as a teacher in a Party-sponsored school when I was attending Rutgers. When I started researching my dissertation, I went to the American Institute for Marxist Studies, which he directed, and he was very helpful. He recently died and I spoke at his memorial and I wrote a biography of him and his wife. But someone told me later that he had some penchant for having very close relations with younger gay men. He was very fatherly,

avuncular, almost parental with me. I mean, he really provided some kind of guidance on even a social level; perhaps, because I really don't know very often the protocols. I didn't grow up in a middle class situation so some of the protocols of middle-class, no less professional, life were foreign to me. I think I've improved in these areas, but I am often really befuddled about what might is appropriate or what I expected in various situations. But he was very supportive. He shared with me a lot about his life, his personal life. His daughter is a lesbian and it might have had something to do with that, I don't know.

PEARLSTEIN: Is this Bettina Aptheker?

MEYER: Yeah, Bettina, and I think he initially reacted negatively to her sexuality very, very poorly, and later was very deeply regretful about that. So whether it came from that or not I don't know. But we were very proud to get him a job at Hostos because he had been blacklisted. He had had a small job at Bryn Mawr as a result of the lobbying of the black students there. In 1973 or 1974, I told him, I wanted to join the Party, and then I did. He was my sponsor. By custom, there should have been two sponsors. But that rule was waived. This step was overdue, basically that was my politics.

PEARLSTEIN: But even at this point however much you may have come from a working class background, and so on, certainly through your professional work and the political work you were doing you certainly must have been aware that this was not the fashionable thing to do, even on the left, at this point.

MEYER: Yeah. That may be true, but I don't think the situation was what most people would imagine. By the mid-1970s, there was an influx of people into the CP. The New Left had collapsed ignominiously, leaving behind few traces. For all the repression, extreme repression against the Communist Party, more survived in terms of magazines or journals or organizations than had remained after the New Left collapsed. The CP led Left had more lasting influence than what had remained from the New Left.

Around that time, '75-'76, the Party had many more members than people would imagine. I don't know what the numbers were but it wasn't a paper organization, believe me. I belonged to a club in the Teachers Section, which had six clubs. There was a college teacher club, which had around twenty members, and there was a Retirees club, and there were four or five public school teachers clubs. (There were also some teachers in various other community-based clubs). And the Party, at that point, led the Anti-Shanker Caucus and the UFT knew that. I mean, there was a lot going on. In the health field, the allied health field, there was a huge section, consisting of five, six clubs at least. There were a lot of older people. Now, it's kind of interesting. Former party people, as they retired, often rejoined. People that had really gotten the shit kicked out of them, and had to relocate or get new jobs or somehow barely managed by some chance to survive, they sometimes rejoined when they were retired. Children from Party families continually trickled in. Immigrants also joined. If someone was a member of the Communist Party of Greece and they emigrated here, they thought they were supposed to join the Communist Party here. So there were all of these streams of people coming in all of the time. The Angela Davis campaign led to a lot of recruits. Some Free Angela Davis clubs, as a group became Party clubs. And then there were the stragglers from the New

Left who got their fingers burned and felt that that clearly they had not been on the correct path; that something was very wrong with the New Left and their interpretation always was that there was an anti-worker, anti-labor approach and not enough emphasis on fighting racism until they gravitated to the Party. They were really good people, they were outstanding people.

PEARLSTEIN: Your experience in the Party was mostly with your college club....

MEYER: With the club, right, with the Club, the College Teachers Club, which included very prominent people. We had a Dean of Faculty from one of the campuses of CUNY, the head of the Union and the head of the Academic Senate from the same college in New Jersey, an edition of magazines.

PEARLSTEIN: So it was metropolitan?

MEYER: It was metropolitan, and I think what was lacking was a focus. With the K to 12 teacher clubs their focus was to maintain the Anti-Shanker Caucus in the UFT and they did yeoman work against this brutal guy and his bullying cadres. They had a newsletter and achieved some small successes. Their *raison d'etre* was quite clear. That was not true for our club. Unfortunately the members really didn't want to change this. A Party functionary came to us at one point, and told us the Party wanted us to take over responsibility for the American Institute for Marxist Studies which Aptheker, its directore, had basically given up because he was moving with his wife to California to

live closer to his daughter. Only me and one other member were willing to take this on. The rest of the Club didn't want to do it. In general, the club members were already deployed. They were editors of magazines. They were academics. They lectured. I mean, earlier in their lives they had done these things, like administering an Institute or whatever, and they didn't want to go back and do that again.

There was no particular focus for the Club and so it seemed terribly purposeless. Frankly, it didn't inform or guide my activities in any way. Except at one point, which I find endearing. During the struggle to save Hostos in 1975-'76, I led the Committee to Save Hostos, which coalesced the Senate and the PSZ chapter shortly after the Community Coalition to Save Hostos was formed, I was, like, thirty-five, but I was really emotionally probably around fifteen at that time and I really got pissed off. I was pretty arrogant. I thought I'm the head of the Union and I figured out how to win the campaign to obtain the 500 building. At different times I reached out to them and they reached out to us, but I just didn't act in a flexible way with them. So the Party sent two important youth leaders to talk to me, a handsome, wonderful black leader, Steel, I think his name was, and white leader, who was originally from Cleveland. They were full-time party people from the youth group that the Party sponsored at the time. They asked if they could come to my home. There were no threats or no criticisms. I pointed out to them that the leader of the Coalition red-baited me and that I believed there was a recklessness in their political behavior. They responded, "We want you to try to work with the other side, it's necessary to just swallow whatever goes on and try to work with them as best you can." Well, I went back to the school and just did what I was doing. I mean, part of it, I didn't know how to do what they had proposed. Part of it was emotional; I was

getting very burnt out. It was an awfully, really awfully hard situation. I didn't think we were going to win. I just kept trying, plugging away. And the tactics on the other side were in many ways, really impossible for me to accept. They would literally spit at the president, that kind of, just crazy stuff. They attacked, broke into a faculty meeting, and took over the microphone. It was just awful stuff. It was very alienating. I think I also wanted to secure my base. I didn't want to lose that running after them. But I think if I had been older I could have handled the conflictive situation better maybe. That was really the one time that they really gave direction and I didn't do what they said. They didn't bother me about it again. They didn't call up to check up or anything of that sort. Earlier they asked that I place a resolution on the floor of the Delegate Assembly in favor of affirmative action. I made a half-hearted attempt at this. I had just been elected, and I really didn't know how to execute this suggestion.

PEARLSTEIN: And when did you decide to leave the Party?

MEYER: I left the CP in 1985 for really two reasons. One is that it just seemed so irrelevant to anything I was doing. I was doing my political work, I would get some kind of pats on the back and all of that. But what was going on in the club, which was not a lot, didn't contribute to that in any way. I had recruited some of the people into the club, quite a few of them actually. When I would take an initiative, it wasn't matched by other people. For example, when I organized fund-raisers, it seemed as if more than half the people who attended were people I invited. I started to feel very resentful. The resentment started to build up.

The gay issue soon became paramount. The Party's position on gay rights was outrageously bad. Basically, the point of view of the Party in relationship to the gay issue was that it didn't exist. I mean, you could look through years of *The Daily World*, and you wouldn't find an article, or even mention about gay rights. They had excised it from reality. At the time, there was the attempt to get an anti-discrimination bill through the City Council, which took something like nine successive years to accomplish. The bill couldn't pass City Council which was dominated, almost exclusively by the Democratic Party, all sorts of liberals were members and they couldn't get that enacted. So I started to pester, not particularly effectively, *The Daily World* about that.

And then, in my own personal life, problems started to really accumulate. I just felt very unsupported in terms of what was going on in my own life. I didn't have any particularly deep social ties with any of the members. It's interesting. I only thought about this recently. Aptheker had left for California. That might have bothered me. I really liked him a lot. I admired him a lot and so he had gone. Also, I would have found it difficult to carry out a decision in opposition to his opinion of what was right.

PEARLSTEIN: The center of your social life was not the Party.

MEYER: No, no. I had a lot of old friends. But there'd also been shifts after my divorce, a lot of losses of friends, and so on. But I've always been very social. I've spent most of my life making social connections, including family affairs, and keeping them going, than any other area of my life. I think of it almost as a type of work. I always think about making social ties. I have some phrase in my mind about it. "Maintaining

social ties." I don't think that I didn't dislike them necessarily at all. In many cases, I thought they were very admirable people, but we weren't close. We didn't socialize together. I had this feeling that if I died, they wouldn't have attended my funeral. Maybe that's unfair. There was one extremely nice thing that happened. One of the members of the club, a remarkable woman, Celia, in a sense, saved my life. She had survived the purges in the public school system because Bella Dodd liked her, and did not include her name in the list of party members she submitted to the Board of Education. I just met somebody else whom Bella Dodd liked and didn't include on the list. She was selective about the names of the Party members that she submitted. She caused some three hundred teachers to lose their jobs, but there were many more than three hundred. Her husband had lost his job as an officer of the Federal Workers Union, CIO Union. But then later she, like a lot of these people, really clever people, she reinvented herself and became a college professor. She set up clinics for child psychiatry, and so on. She had visited the Soviet Union and Bulgaria, and was very interested in therapeutic techniques derived from Vygotsky's teachings. These involved different behavioral techniques, modification techniques, and hypnosis. I had a maddening problem, an obsessive acting-out behavior that was really very dangerous for which I'd been in therapy for a long time, with no abatement of this behavior. She took me on as a patient for free and it went away. It was amazing. There were four or five treatments that included hypnotherapy and the use of an internal scream, and some other techniques intended to sever thought patterns. It worked. This was priceless. There was an unexpected/unintended consequence of this curtailment of this compulsive acting out, which by the way, was permanent. Within

three months of this, I had separated from my wife and began to establish a relationship with my present-day partner.

Interestingly, shortly before I resigned, I went to the New York Party organizer who today is an Educational Director of an important union in New York, and asked him could I have a transfer to a community club. He said the Party wanted me to stay. So then....

PEARLSTEIN: What were you thinking of ... what did you mean by a transfer?

MEYER: To a community club.

PEARLSTEIN: Oh, I see.

MEYER: I think that structurally the community clubs, for a person like myself, would have been better because I think that, in fact, culturally in many ways more like a woman, frankly. I mean, I tend to... it's about talking. It's about social ties. It's about building relationships all the time. It's not so male heterosexual, about let's get the work done, guys, and then we can have beers later. It's a more organic way of doing things. So a community club would have been for me a more natural environment. But they said no. The Party valued more the clubs based on employment because of their link to unions. I mean, part of it, they acted very smug, and I thought, in terms of ... I think that was a problem with the Party. It was sort of like, they had this big history and I don't think they valued their members very much. I'm talking about the leadership, as much as they

logically should have. I mean, I did recruit quite a few people and they were influential people. But people that were maybe more ordinary, that I recruited were rejected. To this day I find it rather infuriating, and very sad about what the Party thought they were doing and that they imagined they were doing it right.

PEARLSTEIN: They were more interested in recruiting people in influential positions or ....

MEYER: Maybe. But it was very sad. Like, at that point they didn't want to build along ethnic lines, for example, and that's something. I felt very uncomfortable with coming from Hostos. For example, they didn't like the idea, at that point, of having separate Salvadoran clubs. However, such clubs did exist among the Greeks and others. There were some remnants of organizing along ethnic lines among older people, but not much of that. And historically, that had been a great strength of the party, that kind of building, kind of making the connections between class and ethnicity and working with that. But they no longer had that perspective. I think they were losing their grip, frankly. I mean, when I came in, on the crest of this influx of new people. But over that ten-year period there was a constant slippage in membership clearly, and they couldn't maintain some of the apparatus. *Freedomways* and the People's World (on the West Coast), which were abandoned, represented a terrific loss. *Freedomways* had an enormous influence in the black community and very big circulation.

PEARLSTEIN: So you ... when you ... you left it was around '85?

MEYER: Something like that, yeah.

PEARLSTEIN: Which was also the time when you ...

MEYER: Came out as a gay person. There was a lot happening right then in my life.

PEARLSTEIN: And also the time when you decided to write your dissertation.

MEYER: Well actually, I had completed the dissertation. I got my doctorate in 1984. A lot happened together at that time. It was amazing. I stopped drinking and smoking. I mean, an awful lot was coming together at that point and I think leaving the party might have been necessary to kind of clear the ground for this other work that I needed to do with my life. It was hard to do. It was very hard. It was very painful to me, but I think in protecting my own self, in terms of who I realized I was, that it was necessary. Remaining closeted would have been too damaging to what really was, I think it was a life-and-death matter for me to come to terms with being gay and to figure out how to live as a gay person in some kind of open, good way. I was living together with Louie but we were very quiet about it. It was all very hush-hush. It was all very obvious, I'm sure, but in terms of my own ....

PEARLSTEIN: This may seem like an odd question,

MEYER: No.

PEARLSTEIN: But did this enhance your ability to do scholarship or interfere with it?

MEYER: Well, it's hard to know the cause and effect because so much was happening at the same time, but I knew when I was writing the dissertation, which took forever; it took ten years. I knew I was writing a book. That much I knew. I almost knew from the very beginning. I said: "My god, I have a book." That was a quite clear. And I think it's good, frankly. In addition to the hard-cover edition, the paperback version of the book has had three printings and I've delivered perhaps one-hundred talks based on it. I think it's a good book, and it's really changed my whole life. There's no question about it. But once the book was published, I had published only a couple of things before. It was mostly material that overlapped the boundaries of the book, and people had begun publishing in those areas and I sort of quickly wrote them and they were published. But then, after the book was published, I had a lot of material left over. I had really overresearched the topic. And it's an extraordinarily rich topic. I approached the topic led to other related and neglected topics. I was given the approach by Herbert Gutman, who was my adviser initially, who insisted that to look at Marcantonio from the point of view of the community. So I really, without realizing it, what I had gotten into Italian-American Studies because the largest base for Marcantonio was Italian-Harlem, which during the 1930s, was the largest Italian-American community, and the most Italian of all the Italian-American communities in the United States. So by very, very punctiliously and in a very detailed way, I actually had reconstructed that community. I entered into a

whole Italian-American Studies mode and got to like that a lot. The community-oriented approach to Marcantonio was possible because Leonard Covello, the Italian-American educator, had kept this amazing archive. He had grown up in that community, this Italian-American educator, and he became then the first Italian-American principal and the founding principal of Benjamin Franklin High School, where he then put into practice his educational philosophy: community-centered education. He had been Marcantonio's teacher in Dewitt Clinton High School, which was originally located where John Jay is today, that same building, and then later it moved to the Bronx. But Marcantonio had gone there around1920. Covello was his teacher of Italian and he became his lifelong mentor. They lived in side-by-side row houses in East Harlem, on East 116th Street. So then I began researching Covello. These became my subjects that I then wrote about. Then there was a chapter on the Communist Party. I also specifically had written about the Communist Party in relationship to ethnicity. So those became my areas of research. People seemed to like my work. I'm kind of slow, frankly. I don't get lots and lots done, but I have around fifty articles and then the book, and now I have the anthology: *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism.* But I did get a lot of support for my work, and I got a one-year sabbatical from the Rockefeller Foundation to study Covello. And I did get a one-semester sabbatical from the college, which I used to learn how to read Italian, and I did get other support from the PSC CUNY Research Foundation so that enabled me to do research on Corvello, New York City's Little Italies, and Fiorello LaGuardia. I always had the point of view that the political activism was more important than academic research. There's a little bit of an anti-intellectual streak in me. But as the political work became less fruitful, not because I left the Party, but because the Left was

declining, as simple as that, I shifted my energies to Left scholarship. In addition to the writing, I also served on the Editorial Board of a couple of scholarly journals. As I have gotten older and experienced some serious health problems, it's not possible for me to do any kind of full-time work. So my energies have shifted to my writing.

PEARLSTEIN: Now, to come back to the Union, in the '90s when there was this kind of embryonic insurgency in the PSC, you and the people that you had worked with politically at Hostos didn't particularly connect to that. When this group calling itself the New Caucus began to take sort of formal shape, you didn't see that as promising?

MEYER: I wasn't that aware ... I wasn't particularly aware of it.

PEARLSTEIN: Uh-huh.

MEYER: One thing is the Union took such good care of Hostos. We were very small and very beleaguered and there had been this history of the Union being supportive of the mass struggles. I don't think there was anyone on the campus, not one individual, that made the case for the New Caucuses, and I don't think it would have gotten a very good reception. I think there was also some suspicion, I don't think only at Hostos, but in the community colleges generally, that those initiatives came from the senior colleges that didn't particularly have our interest at heart or didn't particularly perhaps think of us as equals. I'm speculating a bit on that. But I do think there was some undercurrent of that.

PEARLSTEIN: '95? And you never had the feeling in the late '90s, even more recently than that, that on precisely that kind of a question that an institution with the resources and tradition of ... of a Union could be a really powerful force in moving these kinds of agendas forward?

MEYER: Well, I think the college has, I hate to say this so categorically, it really failed at its mission and it's really very sad for me. I feel a lot of loss around the collapse of the CP, the collapse of the Soviet Union, but even coming closer to home, I feel the college's abandonment of its mission, which I very much believed in and did work very hard along with lots of people, to try to make happen.

It was a real problem. How do you get the faculty to do more? There's a Union contract. There's a resistance to change. People can say whatever they want to say what they are, "Oh, I'm a liberal;" "I'm an ultraliberal;" "I'm not a liberal, I'm a leftist." They can say whatever they want to say, but the fact is when it comes to their bread and butter, when it comes to their perquisites, when it comes to getting home on time to have dinner with the, whoever it is, or picking up the kids at the daycare on the way home those take priority. I mean these are human things. And if you have tenure and you have a Union contract on top of tenure, and you elect your Chairperson who writes your evaluation, each person is a separate entity who can do whatever they damn want to do. I don't know where larger change for an institution can come in the City University; and it couldn't at Hostos. I mean, what happened repeatedly at Hostos that worked was what was outside the governance structure. To whatever degree, Hostos became what it should have become, it happened outside the structure. Tor example, the Arts and Cultural Program,

of which I was a founding member, really fulfills the original mission of the college to maintain, to sustain a multicultural presence and encourage the further development of those cultures here. But that took place outside of governance. So, interested people could volunteer for that, and then funding could be found, and so on. Later, I co-chaired the Hostos AIDS Task Force, which was a culturally specific initiative to connect the College to the community, to acknowledge that we were in that community and to take actions and offer services that in some way that took that into account. Again, that entity emanated from the President's office.

PEARLSTEIN: So is it your sense that these days to accomplish the kind of goals that you have in mind, you're more likely to be successful looking to administration than looking to the Union or ...

MEYER: Well, maybe. I mean, I'm not a hundred percent sure of that because right now since the election both of a Republican governor and a Republican mayor, they elect the Trustees, and the Trustees are right-wingers. What they're doing is going into the campuses and using the power that they have really very effectively to bring in administrations to "normalize" the colleges. But the Union isn't resisting that. The Union isn't fighting for open admissions. It's not doing it, absolutely not. It's simply not. There's no sign of that anywhere. It's not in the *Clairon*, anywhere. It's not questioning the testing procedures that are keeping students out of the college because it's easier for the faculty to teach better-prepared students. I have friends who are Maoists that came out of, like, violent Maoists sects, and they're absolutely elitist when it comes to students,

contemptuous of students who are second-language learners and are from working class families, and so on. The main lesson that I have learned is that it's extremely hard for faculty to adopt an institutional-wide point of view. It's almost antithetical for them. They come out of academic departments, fiefdom. It's to their benefit to have a weak king; it's feudalism. I find it all very discouraging, frankly. There is caring about students. I'm not saying that the faculty doesn't care about students on a person-to-person level, but I think if you move into an ideological level, a structural level, it's different. The academic calendar doesn't match the needs of the students, in the most obvious ways. There's a total unwillingness to yield to the needs of the students. For example, at Hostos, at other community colleges, certainly; maybe not exactly to the same extent, over one half of the day-time students are mothers with young school-aged children. Well, our academic calendar is a total mismatch with the public school calendar. For example, they have Election Day as a holiday. We don't have Election Day as a holiday. What are our students supposed to do with their kids? Now they have a house full of children. They can't leave them alone. Can they bring them to school? No, not really. That doesn't work. But that occurs throughout the entire year: when the semester starts, there's no accommodation for these students whose children didn't start school until one week later. I had high school students who were embedded in the class, it was a College Bound program, and they stopped doing it. It just doesn't work putting them into, integrating them into the college classroom, which I thought was very good, actually, for them and, because, again, there is a total mismatch between that calendar year and our own. But no one ever thinks of that, that's never mentioned. I don't think there's any serious attempt to modify in any way the course curriculum to accommodate for the new

tests that have been instituted by the university, the ACT test and then for the College Preparatory Exam, which determine the ability of the students to move on and then to graduate. The tasks in those tests ask the students to show mastery are not present in the curricula of the classes. They're not there! On the College Perfunctory Exam the students have to write narratives from graphs, pie charts, tables, and so on. Where in their class work are they asked to do that? We're not talking about nuclear science or brain surgery here. When help is provided to students, it's done outside the classroom: workshops for the students. Those exercises should be modeled in the classroom. I don't think it makes a hoot of difference what the ideology of the teachers are. There is no interest in meeting out students' needs. I think very often non-leftist teachers can be more caring. I believe that's a problem on the Left always. The people that care the most about humanity very often do have the most trouble caring about human beings. That could be also true maybe with religions also. I don't think it's just necessarily the Left. I'm just more familiar with that. But I'll tell you, I think that someone who is very active on the left is much less likely to send a sympathy card if your parent dies than your neighbor that goes to a Baptist Church or something similar. There is a great lack of civility, a lack of real caring. They're invested in saving the whole fucking world! They are not going to bother with a fucking sympathy card. They don't know for shit about that. There is quite a lot of grandiosity and narcissism embedded in the thinking and behavior of many Leftists.

There is sometimes a window of opportunity with a new administration, but resistance accumulates rapidly. I think you can move a college to the right quickly, which has happened at Hostos recently. That can be done, and with little or no resistance. But

to move it to the Left, even at times when the Left had more cachet, is very difficult. One problem, there is a lack of an educational philosophy. It was once taken for granted widely, about coming out of John Dewey and others, of education having a democratic mission, preparing students for civic life, to be active players in the democracy by modeling that within the classroom setting, within the college setting. No one even mentions that. It's nowhere. It's nowhere at all. When Hostos had that opportunity with the Middle States, for example, that more or less asked us to do that; that was rejected. I attempted to create an innovative statement, and so on, and others, I think, agreed, but you couldn't get a hearing for it. Part of it is the big shift ideologically that's gone on within the country, such a vast movement to the right. But a lot of it has to do with the narrow self-interest of teachers and college faculty resisting broadening the scope of their own work; going into areas where they feel less competent; where there's more scrutiny, and where there's more expected of them. It's interesting that the privates, which offer fewer qualified faculties, infinitely poorer facilities, go further to accommodate student need. Their calendars, to a greater extent, do match the needs of the students. They hold classes closer to where the students live but which are further from where the teachers live. They offer classes during the evenings and on weekends. They instantly change their offerings to match student demand. Up to twelve years ago in the college, Hostos was offering stenography. Hostos was probably the last place on the planet teaching stenography. Why? Because there was a teacher who taught stenography. That force ended because of the Goldstein Report, which was mandated by the BHE. Otherwise we would still be teaching stenography. There had to be an external force to stop that. Where does the impulse for that change come from? The students, even when they're

empowered, seem to be unable to take up academic issues. I think it's almost too anxiety-provoking for them. It's as if you doubted the capabilities of the doctor you go to. I went for a check up recently, and if I went into that office thinking that this guy really doesn't care about me that much and doesn't know enough to know whether I'm sick or ill, then I shouldn't be here. And I think that's what it is like with students. They can't really raise those questions. It would make them feel so uncomfortable. And yet within the structure, you're not permitted to ask questions across departmental lines. That's considered to be very, very, very bad manners and there will be retaliation for that. So where would it come from? If the administration says something, then that's considered to be somehow a violation of academic freedom, which it is not, by the way. That's horseshit. It's not, because by the definition of academic freedom by the AARP or anywhere else. That's just people protecting privilege and just using any ideological shibboleth that comes along to do that. I mean, I found it very embittering, frankly, as you might get from my tone of voice. I didn't like it. And I did see the Union as playing that role, of endlessly jumping into the breech. I'll give you an example. At one point we had ... we've had various crises with enrollment at the college. I guess this particular one was Giuliani, began to enforce the federal policy on welfare, welfare clients were no longer able to go to the College without working full time. It was really an impossible situation. They had children. They had to go to school. And by the way, under the Welfare regulations had to maintain progress at a certain rate, and now they were expected to do, an additional twenty hours' work besides. At that point, they couldn't work within the college. In addition, the people on Home Relief without children had to work thirty-five hours aside from going to school full-time. They couldn't do it. And so

overnight we lost almost half our enrollment. There was a major crisis: we have a student-driven budget. The college really could have been closed quickly if someone had had an interest in doing that. Earlier I had done a lot of work on retention, I chaired a Retention Task Force, which came about from a resolution I presented in the Senate. Part of what I learned, as part of the group that work on retention, was that what really seems to lessen attrition in the community college level is that the students have some contact with a faculty member. If they have kind of personal contact with a faculty member they were much more likely to stay the term, and neither attrition nor transfer out. So in the Senate I pointed out that we had approximately a hundred and forty professional people including HEOs and so on, within the college. We had fewer than three thousand students at that moment. If we divided one into the other; everybody would be assigned twenty students to mentor. Oh my god, the storm of opposition that erupted. Among other things, faculty said that activity would violate the Union contract. Where is that against the Union contract? By the way, when we signed up for the job, mentoring is part of what we contract to do is to advise students. There was a meanness in that reaction. There's no sense of what if this was my kid? What if this was my niece or nephew, what would I want the school to do? I found a lot of this attitude not particularly admirable. I love the college, but I am very bitter and angry that we couldn't break through. I don't know. But I do think there's no specific person to blame. There were Presidents who knew what we should do. I think that Flora Mancuso-Edwards was the most effective. She became really our first real President. She was appointed after we got the buildings and the college was saved and we got funding to renovate the building that she arrived in the college with a lot of money and developed a planning council, which she chaired, and

that was really effective. She was one smart cookie. That was really to create policy, which, in a sense, everyone would have to conform to. The membership was elected and the power was democratic. It worked hard to get faculty leaders involved and so on. But the Planning Council was just torn to shreds by the P&B. They couldn't tolerate it. The idea was to create institutional goals, such as retention or language integration, around which departments would have to relate their specific goals, to show how their requests for resources related in some way to the goals, with which everyone had agreed to support. But they shredded that, and it was beaten down and abolished. In a similar way, Mancuso-Edwards' efforts to open satellite centers closer to where our students worked and lived was sabotaged by the chairs.

PEARLSTEIN: Did you find that your positions on these kinds of question alienated a lot of the people that you had been working closely with until ...

MEYER: Surprisingly, no. I mean, my mother's side was Irish, and I might have a little bit of that Irish charm, but I think I did get away with a lot. I don't know why that is, in the sense that I think that what.... People kept electing me to offices. I kept being appointed. I wasn't frozen out. There were times when I came close. There were periods when I was temporarily frozen out, but I always worked my way back into favor. I've always worked pretty hard, and I think people did trust that my motives were not self seeking. Ppeople also did know something was wrong that needed correcting. Opposition to actions that clearly would benefit our students mean that people were bad in any way. I think at different points I believed that. But the longer I was there, I think there's

something embedded in the structure that really, really, really defeats any kind of larger successes or larger work that really would have created something important. Hostos only makes sense as a demonstration project. Hostos Community College should be a demonstration project for two-way bilingual education, where Spanish speaking students would learn English, and English speaking students would learn Spanish. We've abandoned that now. We just threw that out. That's gone. And how do we teach immigrants and exemplify multiculturalism? We should be a place where people from all over the country, all over the world, would visit the campus. We have talented faculty and now we have excellent facilities. I think that Mancuso Edwards and Isaura Santiago, and for that matter, Candido De Leon knew that but they didn't know how to get the faculty to rally around that goal.

PEARLSTEIN: Well, how did you react to the argument that what you're asking for really is speed up and stretch out and that the real solution is adequate resources for public institutions like Hostos and that that's where the...

MEYER: The fact is, Hostos has more than enough resources. When we did the last Middle States, when I was being interviewed by someone from the Middle States team, she said: I've never, never, never evaluated a community college with as good of a full-time to student ratio. We have had tons of resources! We have an enormous budget; I don't know if it's thirty-two million dollars a year, whatever it is. It's a vast amount of money, if you take the number of students and divide it into it, the figure would tell you quite a tale. I don't think it's that at all. I really don't. I don't buy that. I think that's just

nonsense. There's lots of money and I think putting more money on top of a bad structure doesn't help. It just makes the institution liable for commensurate results, if somebody wants to know what happened, and it just could be used as evidence of failure. It's a mistake to even take that money, I think, if one doesn't have a good plan. We had a teacher, 85 to 90 percent whose student's passed semester after semester We had teachers who in their classes one or two students passed That just went on that way, semester after semester after semester. This is how Socialism collapses, frankly. By the way, the teacher with the great success was an arch-reactionary, he has not said hello to me for over twenty years. He had refused to teach in the 500 building when we took the building, when we occupied the building. The students were furious at him, and they pressured him. He had said the students didn't want to move the class to the 500. So, a student teacher conducted a secret vote, then they took a ballot in the class, a secret ballot, and the proof was that they did want the class relocated to the 500 Building. It was he alone, who refused to join in the struggle. So, he blamed me and never talked to me again. Nonetheless, he had the greatest success with the students. The teacher with the least success was a lovely person, a Leftist, a good friend of mine. Nonetheless, nobody would ever say maybe his method of teaching, his materials, approach, whatever should be considered as a model for the department. The department never set up some kind of in-service training, even for the adjuncts, to adopt in some other, a systematized approach that would have had greater success, so the ESL students would have more chance to move through a five-semester sequence. There was no commitment to an educational path that best works for our students? The privileges of the faculty absolutely, from what I could see, came ahead of everything else. They're a very privileged group. It has

nothing to do with their ideology. There's no particular mix or match on this that I can detect. I kept being surprised by repeatedly discovering that people who have success in the classroom were very often the people who were politically least akin to myself. I don't say that happened all the time, but that occurred frequently; I don't know how we got into this, but this is at least some of my thoughts, which are not mentioned too often, at least from the Left. It is interesting that the administration does have responsibility for the entire institution. But no one else does.

Now, the Senate at Hostos was, I think, might be unique in the sense that it includes everyone; students, non-professionals. I think John Jay may have that. And with leadership that has worked at different times to do quite important things. Most recently we deterred the gutting out of the ESL program and therefore, protected the bilingual mission of the College; that we really deterred that and delayed that by at least two years. I think I was able to at least deter this change because I was simultaneously an adviser to the Student Government and I was a member of the Executive Committee. There were nine student votes out of sixty or whatever it was, or fifty-five, and then working with the progressive faculty, and so on, and also faculty that would have been hurt by that, the ESL faculty, and so on, that we were able to stop what was really basically the elimination of the lower levels of ESL. The lower levels of ESL are also the Spanish-speaking students who provide the clientele for the Spanish-language content classes that were taught. Now that's all gone. What Isaura Santiago wanted to do, which, again, I did some work with her; I wrote proposals for this was to bring in English-dominant students to Hostos to learn Spanish. That would have put us on the map. I mean, Hostos is not an ideal place to learn English, but it's a great place to learn Spanish.

But that proposal did not come from a department. That didn't come from the chairman of, what, XYZ Department. It was interesting. Again, anything where there would be that kind of carry over that would require a shared responsibility across Departmental lines could not be implemented.

I was involved in an initiative that Flora Mancuso Edwards. She was the President from 1980 to maybe 1987 or so. She was a remarkable woman. I think about her frequently, and she said, again, we had gone through another enrollment crisis, which we've had quite a few, any number, and she set up satellite centers. They were sabotaged by the chairpeople, sabotaged! They would send their worst teachers. It was a way of getting rid of the teachers that they found embarrassing and didn't like. Those were initiatives that were critical to getting FTE's to get the budget of the college.

This interview has helped me rethink some things. Twice I was asked to be Dean.

PEARLSTEIN: Of?

MEYER: It wasn't clear. I think it would have been... It wasn't clear. It would have had to have been in the Office of Academic Affairs.

PEARLSTEIN: So you were saying that you had been asked a couple of times if you were interested in being Dean?

MEYER: One of the times was clearly, I think, at least practically, a bribe. I mean, it was after the Save Hostos, after we had saved the college. Oh, the college was in such a

mess. We had saved the College but they had cut back the budget, closed the Nursing Department, and fired most of the counselors. The college was just reduced to just this remnant. When we closed the Nursing Department we lost a great many of our African-American students and some of the faculty. It was a very large Department, actually. And somehow, all of the struggle around saving the college didn't help the school in a way because it caused people to think we were really going to close, which could have happened, and they didn't know we had reopened, or whatever. So many potential students were reluctant to enroll. A successful political struggle doesn't become a reason for someone to enroll, the fact that all of was going on. But I was still very active and the head of the Union, and we did a lot that year right away. It was kind of nice. We didn't do mass movement work but we sort of regrouped. And there had been a lot of conflict and I think what was really very sweet was that the students who were leaders from the Community Coalition really, really brought the olive branch over, and we became very close and then that helped us in the next struggle when we got the money for the 500 building. Anyway, the Dean of Faculty at that point, I think asked: You want to be a Dean? I think they really wanted me out of the picture as the head of the Union. And I didn't have my doctorate yet. The whole thing was a set up. The Dean of Faculty wanted to be President and we stopped him from being President. From the Union we organized a referendum on candidates for the Presidency. He received the fewest votes. He went on to do very well at Hunter. I saw him in an elevator recently, and he didn't say hello to me. I said hello to him (laughs). He has a long memory. We did a lot. We really influenced what was going on. So anyway, that was after he had asked me to be Dean. See, if I had been Dean that wouldn't have been the referendum, he might have become

President of the college. We wouldn't be talking now because the College would have closed. Then Flora Mancuso Edwards really, I think, liked me a lot and thought I had something to offer, said that I should be dean. She called me dean material. But she didn't like the way I dressed. She used to make a big point of that a lot.

PEARLSTEIN: But you turned that down also?

MEYER: Yeah. But later on I wouldn't say I regretted it. I do think that for myself in some ways. It's evidence of a flaw, in myself that I haven't been willing to accept some kind of wider responsibility within that structure rather than standing outside of it making these jeremiads, like I've just gone through this half hour with you, whatever, maybe a little bit longer. But I don't know how much a Dean can do either there. We've had, I swear to God; we started in 1970, that we've had probably twenty-five Deans of Faculty. There's something wrong there. They weren't all bad. They weren't all terrible people or stupid. I don't know how much anyone can do in that structure and so maybe I shouldn't castigate myself about that either. But, well, I think the promise of the college and what I was hoping to be a part of, really hasn't happened, I think the college at least has helped lots and lots of people and lots of students have learned lots of wonderful stuff there, and they have gone on to have better lives because the college is there. We do provide some services for the community; and the Arts and Cultural program is great. But, what could have been a type of, as Flora would say, a demonstration project—an institution where delegations would come from far and wide to observe—never occurred. This is how you do it; this is how a college functions in a poor, immigrant community. Out of the four-

hundred and thirty-five Congressional Districts, the South Bronx has the lowest per capita income in the entire country. We should have a college responding to that, but it means we have to open the college up.

Under Flora Edwards, the college accepted sponsoring a high school. A tremendous resistance erupted from the faculty, particularly the chairs who insisted that they took our resources. There was no sense of commitment, of responsibility. That hurt me. I found it very painful that the college faculty (all good liberals, good leftists) didn't want a high school embedded in the college. This is a model which has at Hunter and elsewhere has produced wonderful results. They didn't want the resources shared with kids from the community who are at great risk. And by the way, that high school, the Hostos-Lincoln Academy, has been written up repeatedly in *The Times*, which Hostos has not been. They have been academically successful because they have a leader who selects the faculty according to the mission of the school. They work very hard in a kind of ensemble way around a type of philosophy of some sort; a type of culture that they develop within the school that works. Parenthetically, over the years only a very small handful of Hostos-Lincoln Academy students have enrolled in the college. In my entire career at Hostos, I have had only one student from the H-L Academy, who for personal reasons could only attend college in the evening. Their graduates go directly to the senior college. Try that in a college. I mean, between the passive resistance and the active resistance it would just grind down anybody that would attempt it really. And I don't see that the Union does anything good in that area at all.

I'm very happy that the PSC is against the war and whatever else, but I don't even see yet progress in the democratic areas. I made a set of proposals to democratize the

PSC. Originally, members of the leadership wanted me to be on the slate for the original election, which I was very, very, very flattered by. In any case, I was not totally convinced that we were not replacing social democratic bureaucrats with left-wing bureaucrats. There really should be overall democratic concerns about how a Union works, which I don't see anyone in the New Caucus being interested in hearing. The PSC have slate voting. By the way, slate voting was *not* originally done in the PSC elections. It was introduced maybe the second or third election. Slate voting is outlawed almost everywhere in the United States. It is a mechanism for perpetuating incumbency and it discourages an informed electorate. It's something that comes out of Tammany Hall and other big-city mechines to control immigrant votes. All the leaders of the Progressive Era were specifically opposed to that. Is there anyone in the New Caucus interested in abolishing slate voting, where you can tick one box and you've now voted for thirty candidates. Slate voting makes the PSC resemble a *kolkhoz* in the Volga River Valley? Is there any suggestion that an opposition caucus should have access to membership in terms of expressing its point of view in the newspaper or anywhere else? This is how incumbency develops and how, whatever the politics might be, it leads to very bad results; to a kind of gerontology taking over and people being possessive and losing touch, because they're almost impossible to dislodge! They have power, they can distribute favors, and an opposition has no access to the electorate except for a brief period during elections. What occurs in the Delegate Assembly? That's not reported in the *Clarion*, not reported. I've made these concerns known.

What's very good is that the New Caucus made the dues structure progressive so that the people at the top pay more than the people at the bottom. That's socially correct

to do and helps strengthen the unity within the Union. I think they're now bringing on to the Executive Board some representatives of the non-faculty members in larger proportions. That's very progressive, and strengthens unity. I do also think that New Caucus' focus on the adjuncts is very far sighted. But in terms of the actual sharing of power that's when it gets harder. Once you have to share the power, then you really have to stay close to the membership. You have to convince your constituents on an on-going basis. You also have to find out where their thinking is, what their attitudes are. Maybe the membership isn't ready for some of the actions of the new Caucus. For the Union to come out against the War. Maybe that should be done by the Caucus. So in a sense, even in terms of protecting itself, keeping that connection to the membership is, I think, in its own best interest. Fundamentally, it does have to do very much with democracy. If the New Caucus loses, which at some point it has to; it can't be there forever; nothing is there forever, it would then benefit from the democratization of the PSC. In order to return to office, it would mean that there would have to be a democratic structure. There would have to be access. And I don't see that they're establishing that. There's a kind of short list, I mean, questions of term limits might enter into this in certain ways in terms of individuals. It doesn't have to be, I would have term limits, absolutely have term limits: two terms and out. Look what happened to Polishook. He got more and more tired, more and more lethargic, less and less in touch. It's not good for people. It's not good for anybody. Flora Mancuso-Edwards always said nobody should have the same job for more than seven years. (laughs) And she wass probably right. Maybe eight years but no more than that.

PEARLSTEIN: Well, maybe on that note we'll halt.

MEYER: Okay.

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October 2009

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