

Clarion

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OCTOBER 2005



ON CAMPUS
York
resource
center

Union chapter's
persistence
pays off.

PAGE 9



Gary Schoichet

1,200 ATTEND BIGGEST MEETING IN PSC HISTORY

Members packed Cooper Union's Great Hall – some waiting an hour to get in – in the largest meeting in the union's history. On November 3 the PSC Executive Council will decide if a framework for a fair contract has been achieved – or whether,

and when, to call for a referendum on a possible job action. Negotiations resumed in October and campus organizing intensified as the PSC does all it can to win a contract.

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UNION BUSTING **NYU graduate** **workers protest**

NYU's refusal to negotiate a second contract was met with a huge protest including a mass arrest.

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MASS MEETING **Building the** **power to win**

An excerpt from PSC President Barbara Bowen's speech on the contract talks.

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BENEFITS **Dental rider** **deadline**

The enrollment period for additional coverage for Guardian members ends November 18.

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KATRINA **Structural** **damage**

There is nothing natural about the suffering that followed Hurricane Katrina.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 25 W. 43RD STREET, FIFTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10036. E-MAIL: PHOGNESS@PSCMAIL.ORG. FAX: 212-302-7815.

Union solidarity versus giveback demands

● At the PSC's mass meeting at Cooper Union, there wasn't enough room to hold everybody who showed up.

CUNY faculty want at least a 10% increase in base salary over four years. We are demanding this after the cops got 10% over two years. Bloomberg is insulting us with 6.25% over four years and is demanding that department chairs no longer be represented by the union. This is absurd since department chairs also teach, and chairmanships often change. With demands for many other givebacks, it feels like they're spitting on us.

Basically, it's clear that Bloomberg doesn't think that poor New Yorkers are entitled to a respectable education like his rich friends' kids are. This is Republican anti-labor, anti-people politics at its ugliest.

It was heartening to have representatives of other unions coming to our meeting to give us support. The UFT's Randi Weingarten and our PSC's Barbara Bowen are a dynamic, telegenic duo – I think teachers were buoyed seeing these two erudite firebrands on a stage together.

The teachers' unions are the levees holding back the Republican tide threatening to drown labor unions across the nation. New York unions must stand up to the Republicans here, because if we can't hold the line in a Democratic stronghold then labor is doomed everywhere.

Rick Shur
LaGuardia

staff to support CUNY's academic programs and give students the high-quality technical services they deserve?

Ellen P. Steinberg
Vice-Chair, CLT Chapter

Defending our interests

● In discussing the idea of a referendum on a job action with colleagues, a vexed question often comes up – why must the choice be posed so starkly? Aren't there intermediate possibilities, less drastic alternatives than either a job action or accepting a lousy contract? My answer is this: if we show our readiness to defend our interests come what may, more favorable options may arise.

The intransigence of the CUNY management, and of the city administration, is predicated on the expectation that we will not be prepared to do whatever it takes. That intransigence can – and must – be defeated by challenging the expectation behind it.

Another frequent concern is the effect of a job action on our students: colleagues are understandably uncomfortable adding further disruption to the lives of students. Here a further consideration should be weighing the disruption of a job action against the further erosion of our working conditions – which

means the conditions of our students' education – resulting from a contract such as the one we are being asked by management to accept. Would our students not be better served by our resistance to a University administration that seems intent on gutting the University they claim to represent?

John Pittman
John Jay College

Will CUNY lose its best?

● The best young faculty will neither accept an inferior contract nor take a job action; they will leave. Last spring, when it appeared that the science building of City College would literally fall down, there was talk among those with the most grants about getting their CVs together for a job search. Those with the most grants could easily get good jobs elsewhere.

Each new hire in the sciences requires (generally) upwards of a quarter million dollars in start-up money, which would be lost for each departing faculty member.

It will not be easy to replace those who leave for several reasons: start-up money, a poor reputation for the university as a consequence of the departure of faculty, and the direct consequences of an inferior contract.

Management, and the politicians,

have a decision to make: either City University will be a serious university, which requires a competitive contract, or it will be necessary to acknowledge that the University has been designated as a mediocre training facility, not a serious university. Without a faculty with the ability to use the expensive facilities planned for City College, they will be wasted. The politicians cannot have a top-level university at a bottom-level price, although they may waste money trying.

Michael Green
City College

More than lip service

● As an adjunct professor at CUNY I have seen the union leadership give lip service to the needs of adjuncts and the inequities they endure. Yet significant issues such as concrete gains in a livable wage (parity in pay rates and additional pay steps), open and significant discussion of 9/6 and conversion lines for long-term adjuncts, an effective and workable seniority provision for long-term adjuncts, a public campaign to get proper health care benefits for retired long-term adjuncts, grants for professional development, support for meaningful PSC ethical guidelines and their implementation in all hiring, promotion and decisions have been ignored.

It is not enough to have five additional adjunct representatives on the Executive Council of the union (little essential progress has occurred in five years), the leadership must significantly engage the above issues if they want support from the 9,500 adjuncts and solidarity in a possible job action. We need an open and full discussion of the above issues in the DA and *Clarion* now! A union and a university are only as strong as their weakest link.

Howard Pflanzler
City College

Backing Bloomberg?

● Unless he is convicted of a heinous crime, Mayor Bloomberg will be reelected. Although many may see this as a moral faux pas, I suggest it is time PSC backs a winner! The golden rule of all politics is that a politician must reward his supporters, no ifs, ands or buts!! Let's make a very practical and potentially rewarding move and endorse the future mayor, who we will have to deal with over the next four years. For once let's back a winner!! Be extreme, be radical! Do something you haven't done in ages, endorse someone who could actually help the membership of the union!!

Frederick Brodzinski
City College

CALENDAR

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21: 6:00 pm / Labor Goes to the Movies – *The Take* examines the experiences of worker-run factories and other “bottom-up” social movements in Argentina after the 2001 economic collapse. At the CCNY Center for Worker Education, 99 Hudson Street, 6th Floor. For more info, contact Dania Rajendra, 212-354-1252 or drajendra@psmail.org.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28: 4:00 pm / Junior Faculty Organizing Project (JFOP) forum, followed by Halloween party. Location to be announced. For more info, e-mail at jborenstein@psmail.org.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2: TIAA-CREF pension counseling. Vito Ruvo from TIAA-CREF will be at the PSC office, 25 W. 43rd St., to discuss your retirement options. Contact Linda Slifkin at lslifkin@psmail.org or 212-354-1252 to schedule an appointment.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4: 4:00 pm / “First Fridays” meeting of the PSC Part-Timers Committee. Call Marcia Newfield at 212-354-1252.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 7: 1:00 pm / Retirees Chapter meeting. PSC President Barbara Bowen speaks on the State of the Union. For more info, e-mail jjudd18@optonline.net or call Linda Slifkin at 212-354-1252.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11: 6:00 pm / Labor Goes to the Movies – *Matewan* features a pacifist union organizer who works to pull African American miners, immigrant miners and Appalachian miners into one union despite their differences and the owners' attempts to divide them. At the CCNY Center for Worker Education, 99 Hudson Street, 6th Floor. For more info, contact Dania Rajendra at 212-354-1252 or drajendra@psmail.org.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15: 7:00 pm / CLT General Membership meeting. Location to be announced. For more info, contact Shelly Mendlinger at shellym@brooklyn.cuny.edu or 718-951-5721.

CUNY needs full-time CLTs

● CLTs are losing new positions to non-tenure-bearing titles and to non-academic unions. And management is trying to save money by replacing full-time CLTs with part-time positions, with numbers far exceeding full-time CLT staff on many campuses.

At a time when the City has an extensive budget surplus, isn't it time we fight for adequate full-time



CUNY Writing Fellow Paul Breen and Psychology Professor Nancy Romer, co-chair of the PSC's Peace and Justice Committee, marched past the White House during the September 24 anti-war protest. The PSC organized five buses to Washington.

Peter Hogness

Strength in numbers

By DANIA RAJENDRA & PETER HOGNESS

In the largest mass meeting in PSC history, 1,200 people gathered on September 29 in Cooper Union's Great Hall. With cheers, applause, boos and sometimes bitter laughter, the crowd made clear its angry rejection of CUNY management's contract offer and its support for the PSC's key demands.

"Management's offer is ridiculous," Costas Panayotakis, an assistant professor at City Tech, told *Clarion*. Barbara Comins, Professor in English at LaGuardia, agreed: "The work I do is priceless," said Comins, "but it is not valued by the administration."

PSC Secretary Cecelia McCall welcomed members and alluded to the Great Hall's history. Abraham Lincoln spoke there during his presidential campaign, and the Hall hosted the birth of the NAACP and early meetings of the women's suffrage movement. "This is a good place to feel Lincoln's good vibrations, to share fellowship with one another and express resistance to an administration that has yet to honor the value of our labor with a just offer of a settlement," McCall said.

In that spirit, the union leadership announced a seven-point plan for winning a fair contract. Speakers emphasized that the PSC's chances for success depend heavily on the strength of member involvement in the coming month.

"No one is going to 'get' us a good contract," said PSC Treasurer John Hyland. "We must win it ourselves."

SOLIDARITY

In that struggle, Hyland said, the PSC is not alone. He introduced the first of several labor representatives, Walid Raad of the faculty union at Cooper Union, who pledged his local's support for the PSC.

Next up was Alan Lubin, executive vice president of New York State United Teachers. NYSUT, he said, has been working with the PSC in Albany in an effort to secure additional State support for the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund. "You have support from Buffalo to Montauk," Lubin told the crowd.

"We at the AFT stand firmly behind you," declared Toni Cortese, executive vice president of the American Federation of Teachers. "CUNY needs to recognize that there is no institution without the faculty," she told *Clarion*.

MANAGEMENT'S AGENDA

PSC First Vice President Steve London criticized management's agenda as bad for the University. "CUNY management wants to take us in the direction of a hierarchical, corporate structure," London said, "with department chairs appointed by management, continued exploitation of part-time and contingent faculty, less job security for HEOs, lowered pay and benefits and less time for research and writing."

1,200 at PSC mass meeting

The crowd booed each of these points on management's agenda, then cheered as London listed the union's key demands (see pages 10-11). "This round of contract negotiations has become a struggle over the direction of the university," London said.

By the time PSC President Barbara Bowen took the stage, the hall was filled to capacity. About 100 stood in the back, while over 150 waited upstairs for a chance to get in. Bowen thanked members for coming, and for the thought and attention that each brought with them. "One of my colleagues said, 'I'll come with an open mind, an open heart and possibly an open mouth,'" Bowen told the crowd. "What meeting could ask for more than that?"

PLAN TO WIN

In her speech, Bowen talked about why this contract struggle has been so difficult, and described the union's plan for how to win (see pages 10-11, and sidebar below). The month of October, she said, will include both intense negotiations with management and intense organizing on the campuses. "Angry but informational" picketing will be held across CUNY on October 19 and 20, along with outreach efforts to ask for student support. "At heart, the austerity agenda for CUNY is an expression of contempt for our students," Bowen said to loud applause.

Then on November 3, Bowen said, the PSC Executive Council "will assess whether we have the framework for an acceptable settlement." If not, it will decide whether and when to hold a membership referendum to authorize a job action. Any referendum would be a vote of the entire membership, conducted by secret ballot and administered by a neutral third party – the same procedure used for contract ratification.

Bowen emphasized her hope that a good settlement would be reached

without considering such a step, and appealed to members to get involved in the October organizing push on their campus. She announced that 300 union members (100 more than the union's initial goal) have already volunteered to work as member-organizers – "picket captains" – who will speak one-on-one with fellow members about the contract and what the union should do next.

"I pledge I will give everything I have to this fight," she concluded, "and I ask you to join me." The response from the crowd was the loudest of the evening, with a standing ovation and booming chants of "PSC! PSC!"

When United Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten spoke after Bowen, she told the crowd that the UFT Delegate Assembly had voted to consider a referendum on whether to authorize a strike if a fair settlement could not be reached by early October. (The UFT and the City reached a tentative settlement on October 3; see page 4 for details.) Weingarten pledged to support the PSC, "regardless" of which union settled first. "This is a struggle that will not end this year," she said. "This is a struggle about saying that the dignity of the professional work that you do, that my members do, must be valued in a different way than the political power structure values it today."

UFT, TWU SUPPORT

Darlyne Lawson, recording secretary of Transit Workers Union Local 100, thanked PSC members for their support during Local 100's last contract fight, when the possibility of a strike loomed so large that Mayor Bloomberg bought a bicycle. "PSC members came out in full force in support of TWU," said Lawson. Now, she said, "we are going to stand with you."

Anger at austerity agenda

How to win a fair contract

At the PSC's mass meeting on September 29, the union's leadership laid out the following action plan for winning a fair contract:

The PSC will return to the bargaining table on October 6 and call on management to move beyond their current offer. The union will do everything we can to reach a fair settlement at the table.

...The PSC Executive Council has set a deadline of November 3 to assess a framework of the settlement for PSC members. If not, it will decide whether and when to hold a referendum.

The union will continue its plan to reach every member for a conversation with a member-organizer, a picket captain, about the contract and a possible referendum.

PSC chapters will hold loud, angry but informational pickets across the University on October 19 and 20. This is not a job action, but it will show CUNY management what it looks like to have campus entrances filled with picketers.

In the next month union members will distribute a leaflet addressed to students, their families and their communities explaining what the PSC is fighting for and why it needs their



Gary Schlichter

PSC members show their support for the union's demands at the mass membership meeting in Cooper Union's Great Hall.

The last part of the mass meeting focused on the PSC's campus organizing. Three picket captains – HEO Assistant Arthurine DeSola, Adjunct Assistant Professor Walter Dufresne and Distinguished Professor Rosalind Petchesky – each talked about why they had volunteered. "It's critical that we realize that the union is not a service organization," DeSola said. "The union is us!"

MEMBER SUGGESTIONS

During the question-and-answer period that followed, several members advanced suggestions for the contract campaign. For example, Evelyn Berg of LaGuardia called for the union to buy advertising in NYC's ethnic and immigrant press.

Others asked about particular contract concerns. Alexis Cournos, an adjunct at BMCC and LaGuardia, was one of several who raised adjunct issues, urging the union to press harder to get part-time faculty on the regular City health plan.

In their reactions to speakers and their questions from the floor, members expressed both support for and concerns about the idea of a possible job action. The meeting kicked off a wider phase of a union-wide conversation about what the PSC's next step should be.

Executive Council members Mike Fabricant, Marcia Newfield and Anne Friedman urged members to commit to working on the contract struggle – signing the public statement (see page 12), leafleting students, taking part in the October 19 and 20 informational picketing, and volunteering as picket captains. Newfield quoted a fortune cookie: "Many a false step is made by standing still."

At the end of the meeting, picket captains in the audience were asked to come up to the front. As they did so, the meeting burst into boisterous chants: "Who's got power? / We've got the power! / What kind of power? / Union power!"

INSPIRING UNITY

The large turnout and high energy of the meeting spurred animated conversations among members as they filed out of the Great Hall. "I've never been so inspired!" said Roopali Mukherjee, an assistant professor of media studies at Queens.

"Your union seems very strong," said Vetty Coleman, a member of CWA 1180. "I hope this solidarity is contagious!"

support. Students will also be asked to join the informational picket.

The PSC will step up the campaign to make its case to the public, including taking out a full-page ad in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* calling on CUNY to provide a fair contract. The text of that ad is on page 12; you can add your name to the hundreds already there on the union's website.

Three hundred people have already signed on as picket captains – several hundred more are needed if we are to succeed in the project of speaking to every member. Talk to your chapter chair about signing up.

Huge protest vs. union busting at NYU

By LETICIA TAYLOR

More than 1100 people rallied on August 31 to protest NYU's refusal to negotiate a second union contract for graduate employees.

In an act of civil disobedience, 76 members and supporters of NYU's Graduate Student Organizing Committee (GSOC) blocked the entrance to Bobst Library and were taken into police custody. Those arrested included AFL-CIO President John Sweeney; UNITE-HERE President Bruce Raynor; PSC Treasurer John Hyland; SUNY faculty union president William Scheuerman; PSC member Kitty Krupat; UAW Sub-Regional Director Julie Kushner; and State Senator Thomas Duane.

NYU was the first private university in the country to recognize a graduate employees' union. "It's outrageous that the University has just slammed the door in our face and refused to bargain," said Miabi Chatterji, teaching assistant in the American Studies Department, "but it's really inspiring to see so many people come out here to join us in support for their union."

STUDENTS ARE WORKERS TOO

The school's refusal to negotiate came after the Republican-dominated National Labor Relations Board ruled in 2004 that graduate teaching and research assistants at private universities are not workers and cannot form unions. Reversing an NLRB decision from 2000 in a case at NYU, the Board held that teaching and research work by graduate students is not wage labor but simply

Sit-in sparks dozens of arrests



Solidarity Committee Co-chair John Hyland (in hat) was one of the activists arrested.

part of their education – a position that unionists called ridiculous.

Unionized graduate assistants point out that their work often has nothing to do with their specific field of study and that universities use them as a cut-rate workforce.

"The administration knows you're workers when they give you tests and papers to grade, when they give you classes to teach," said Elizabeth Bunn, secretary-treasurer of the United Auto Workers. "The only time they don't know you're workers is when you try to organize." (GSOC and graduate unions

at Columbia and the New School are affiliated with the UAW.)

While Bunn and others in the sit-in were being arrested, the rest of the demonstrators filled the street in front of the library with a huge, noisy picket line. The crowd included members of GSOC, the PSC, Musicians' Local 802, Communications Workers, UNITE-HERE, the AAUP and American Federation of Teachers locals at NYU and the NYC public schools.

Full-time faculty from NYU and universities in California, Illinois and Georgia also stood with the graduate

workers. "What happens at NYU affects the rest of the country," said Pamela Voekel, a professor at the University of Georgia who is working to organize her colleagues.

GSOC members expressed appreciation for the outpouring of support, and stressed that solidarity is a two-way street. "We're in this together with PSC and other academics," said Mike Palm, GSOC Unit Chair. "Your fight is our fight."

The labor movement is making solidarity with NYU's graduate assistants a high priority. "The Bush Labor Board [has] denied another group of workers the protections of federal labor law," said a leaflet from the NYC Central Labor Council. "First it was workers at the Department of Homeland Security, and then it was airport screeners. Now it's graduate employees – who will be next?"

THE UNION DIFFERENCE

The AFL-CIO's Sweeney said the protest was not a one-day affair. "We're in it for as long as it takes," he declared.

GSOC's first contract with the university made significant improvements in working conditions including increased stipends, health care, overtime compensation and a grievance procedure, members said.

"It's a real shame," said Simon Jackson, a graduate assistant in the history department. "I had a problem with a professor in the past, and it was easy to resolve with union assistance. Now, without a contract or union rules, those situations can become personal problems."

"Before the union, graduate labor wasn't clearly defined," commented José Muñoz, a full-time faculty member at NYU. "But with the union, they are safeguarded. There's greater respect between faculty and staff, and better working conditions for everyone."

STRIKE LIKELY

NYU said that it was willing to sign a contract – but only if the

Other unions turn out in support of the right to organize.

union accepted its unilateral offer without discussion. That proposal contained many anti-union provisions, including a grievance procedure without neutral third-party arbitration, reduced

pay increases, a possible reduction in health care benefits and elimination of the union shop.

Last year's NLRB decision does not apply to graduate assistants employed by public universities like CUNY. But the CUNY Research Foundation (RF) – in theory a private organization – cited the ruling when it asked the NLRB to prevent RF employees at the CUNY Graduate Center from unionizing with the PSC. In response, the PSC has pointed out that the RF says it is a separate employer from CUNY, and that it does not grant degrees; the case is under appeal.

This fall is likely to be a hot one at NYU. As one grad assistant in handcuffs waited to be loaded into a police wagon, he led the crowd in a chant that echoed off the library walls: "We'll be back! We'll be back!" If NYU continues to refuse negotiation, GSOC members said a strike is likely.

UFT, Bloomberg announce settlement

By PETER HOGNESS

As *Clarion* went to press, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the Bloomberg administration reached agreement on a contract settlement, which would provide current teachers with a pay increase of about 15% over 52 ½ months.

Teachers would be required to work an extra ten minutes per day and start the school year two days earlier; those who work in Brooklyn and Queens would also give up a day off that had applied only to them.

There will no longer be "forced" transfers, giving school principals more authority over hiring. Layoffs will still be done on a seniority basis, but those laid off will no longer have the right to bump more junior teachers from their positions in another school.

NO SALARY CUT

The agreement would bring the maximum teacher's salary from its current level of \$88,212 to \$93,416. Starting pay for teachers newly

Fifteen percent raise, longer days

hired in the future would go up from \$39,000 to \$42,512 – a 9% increase rather than the 15% pay hike that current teachers would receive.

"This is a good day for our educators and our students," Weingarten said. "I am particularly pleased that we have significantly closed the pay gap between our hard-working educators and their colleagues in the suburbs."

The new contract would expire on October 12, 2007 – a longer term than other recent City contracts, and one that both sides said would give the public schools more stability. The accord calls for a 2% raise effective December 1, 2003; a 3.5% increase a year later; a 5.5% boost on November 1 of this year, and a 3.25% raise on October 1, 2006. These add up to 14.25% in raises, worth about 15% after compounding.

It would be a longer contract than that suggested in the non-binding

recommendations of a fact-finding panel, and the first raises would come earlier in the life of the agreement. This would mean a larger amount of retroactive pay if the agreement is ratified.

Other provisions of the settlement would strip teachers of the right to grieve letters placed in their personnel file (though they would have the right to add their own letter in response), and give principals more ability to assign teachers to monitor lunchrooms and hallways.

Advances for the union include a ban on specific types of micromanagement that had caused great resentment among teachers, such as being disciplined for how bulletin boards or classroom furniture are arranged, or departing from rules on the exact length of different parts of a lesson plan. New "lead teacher" positions would be created, in which

veterans could earn an extra \$10,000 per year for working in under-achieving schools, mentoring those with less experience. (Until now these posts have only existed in a pilot program.)

Public school teachers had been working under an expired contract since June 2003, and negotiations for a new agreement had been drawn out and contentious. Last July Mayor Bloomberg predicted a deal before the start of the school year, but the two sides made no progress over the summer.

FACT FINDING

On September 13 a fact-finding panel issued its recommendations for a settlement. Many teachers expressed anger at its proposal that they work longer hours and give up some existing contract rules in exchange for higher pay, arguing that the pay gap with suburban schools and improved test scores were reason enough to give them a raise.

Although there was sharp debate at the UFT's Delegate Assembly on

September 20, the 2,000 delegates voted by a wide margin to "use the fact-finding report as a vehicle to conclude negotiations." UFT President Randi Weingarten told the meeting, "Don't take them off the hook by rejecting it. Let's set a firm deadline and enforce that deadline with meaningful action."

The resolution approved on September 20 also said that if there was no settlement by the next Delegate Assembly in early October, that meeting should "consider the union's options including a strike authorization secret ballot vote by the membership, and/or a mayoral endorsement."

RATIFICATION NEXT

The mention of a possible strike, which would have been illegal, made some headlines in the daily press.

The 120,000 UFT members covered by the proposed agreement will vote on it by mail, with ballots to be counted in early November. At *Clarion* press time, the exact date had not yet been set.

Why did you volunteer to organize on your campus?

On every CUNY campus, PSC members are volunteering as picket captains – local organizers who talk with colleagues about the contract negotiations and what the union should do next. Our Roving Reporter spoke with some of them.



ANNETTE OPLER
Assistant Professor, Biology
Bronx Community College

I volunteered because I believe the union is only as strong as its membership. To me it's important to get every single member involved, whether they're adjunct or full-timers or HEOs or whatever. The union is us.

I've talked to probably 15 colleagues. Their reactions run the gamut from very cautious to "I think we should have been out already!"

I think management should offer us the kind of salary increases they've been giving themselves. Then it would be a fair offer. It's pretty pathetic when college professors can't afford to send their own children to college.



ROSALIND PETCHESKY
Distinguished Prof., Political Science
Hunter College & Graduate Center

I'm probably as much at the top in rank and salary as anyone and I still had to fire my dentist of 20 years because I couldn't afford him. So I have a stake in the outcome, and I have a stake in the process.

Talking to my colleagues, I've found a kind of double consciousness. They are unanimous in rejecting the offer from management: It's demeaning and shameful and we won't accept it! But many have not taken the next step to ask "what can we do?" The "we-ness" of it hasn't yet sunk in, and that's where we picket captains can make a difference.

For me this is a struggle for democracy. What this union has done is make CUNY a space for democratic deliberation.



TOM SHEMANSKI
Senior CLT, Library Dept.
Queensborough Community College

I signed up because I already serve as a department representative, and on my chapter's executive committee, plus I'm an officer-at large on the campus chapter.

Management's offer is negative – it's insulting. They are looking for a lot of give-backs that seem completely unnecessary. The minimum I expect is a cost-of-living increase. Anything less is a decrease in salary, that's the bottom line. Everything is going up but our salaries, so a lot of people are going to leave the system. It's really hard to get by, and they can make more on the outside.

This contract is a very important one for us. We will never be able to maintain a quality educational institution without proper support.



WALTER DUFRESNE
Adjunct Assist. Prof., Graphic Arts,
NYC College of Technology

I've watched this union become the defenders of the poorest, the weakest, the least powerful members of its union and for that I am deeply grateful. That's the reason I'm a picket captain.

Now, I'm going to talk more with fellow adjuncts. I learn so much from speaking with them. Not only is it a chance to talk about the contract, but we brainstorm and solve all kinds of problems related to being an adjunct – relationships with department chairs, benefits and more. We strategize together, and it's so great to spend time with them.



LYNDA DAY
Chair, Dept. of Africana Studies
Brooklyn College

I am polling the members of my department to see what they think about the contract. I am the chairperson of my department, so management's offer would mean I wouldn't be in the union, and I don't like that!

I'm a representative of my colleagues, and I work to support their work in the department overall.

About 50% of CUNY courses are taught by adjuncts and we need to be supportive of them, because they're teaching so many of our students. Their working conditions really are our students' learning conditions.

Union, CUNY return to table

By PETER HOGNESS & DANIA RAJENDRA

As the PSC and CUNY management began a series of bargaining sessions in October, the basic positions of the two sides were unchanged since early summer.

CUNY management's proposal includes removal of department chairs from the union, a cut in annual leave and other concessions. CUNY's proposed salary increase – 6.25% over four years – is less than the rate of inflation, and would thus mean a pay cut in real-dollar terms.

The PSC's counter-proposal would provide for salary increases that total more than 10%. In the fourth year of the new contract, members would receive an additional raise of \$800, pro-rated for part-timers. Under the union plan, the fourth year would also see an additional \$500 longevity increase and improvements in equity and working conditions.

Management's proposal for the

Management's position unchanged so far

PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund would be insufficient for financial stability. Along with one-time cash amounts, CUNY has offered increases in its contributions worth about 1.3%. While providing some short-term help, management's plan would mean another financial crisis in the near future.

CUNY MUST PAY

The PSC's bargaining proposal emphasizes the need to go beyond stop-gap measures and devote more resources to the Welfare Fund on an ongoing basis. It would require an economic increase of 2% to CUNY's contributions to the Fund – an amount that would stabilize the Welfare Fund and allow restoration of the dental benefit.

Management has said it would consider putting more into the Welfare Fund, but only if this money

comes out of the amount that in other municipal contracts has gone into salaries.

PSC leadership continued to meet privately with CUNY management in September, in an effort to find a path that could lead to a settlement. PSC President Barbara Bowen characterized these informal discussions as "productive," and said that "the union welcomes management's willingness to talk." A return the negotiating table was set for October 6, with further sessions scheduled through the month.

COMPROMISE

Fall semester saw continued controversy over one issue: a tentative agreement between the two sides – contingent on reaching an

overall settlement – that would restore full annual leave to faculty counselors hired after 1998 and would allow CUNY to hire Higher Education Officers with the appropriate degree as clinical psychologists for students.

The two sides resumed negotiations in October.

At a September 12 meeting with union negotiators, several faculty counselors expressed their displeasure at the HEO counselor proposal, saying that HEOs lack important rights and protections that come with faculty status. On most campuses, HEOs cannot vote on college governance bodies, and some faculty counselors said this would limit their ability to act as advocates for students.

Others contended that allowing HEOs to provide psychological counseling would mean an end to

hiring on faculty counselor lines, and that this would lead to less racial diversity among CUNY's professors.

Faculty counselors who support the proposal emphasized the divisiveness and unfairness of the current two-tier system in faculty counselors' annual leave, where those hired after 1998 start with only four weeks per year. "The leadership is fully committed to working with counselors, the administration and politicians to emphasize the importance of hiring in the faculty counselor line," said PSC First Vice President Steve London.

DIVISIVE

Union negotiators pointed out that about half of faculty counselors are currently hired in the lecturer title and unable to advance, while the proposed change would require that HEO counselors be hired into one of the two top titles in the HEO series, with correspondingly higher salaries.

PSC candidates win Council primaries

By CHRISTINA INGOGLIA

Twenty-seven out of thirty PSC-endorsed candidates for City Council won their primary races on September 13 and are expected to win in November. In the union's one endorsement in a city-wide race, civil liberties advocate Norman Siegel lost the Democratic nomination for public advocate to incumbent Betsy Gotbaum.

"The PSC candidates who won their primaries will definitely be re-elected and we expect them to be strong advocates for CUNY, continuing to restore funds that the Mayor has attempted to cut on several occasions," said Eileen Moran, co-chair of the union's Legislative Committee. "We also expect them to hold the line on tuition."

CUNY ADVOCATES

At *Clarion* press time, the union had not yet made an endorsement in November's mayoral election. While Democratic candidate Fernando Ferrer "does support public higher education and does support CUNY, that does not necessarily

No endorsement yet in November mayoral race



Robert Jackson spoke at a PSC-sponsored breakfast with City officials in March last year.

translate to support for the union and our contract issues," said Legislative Coordinator Cecelia McCall. "At a breakfast meeting in September,

we encouraged Ferrer to talk about CUNY, the PSC and how our contract affects the public."

Some of the Council members

that the union backed for re-election have been particularly strong allies of the PSC, going far beyond simple opposition to Bloomberg's budget

cuts. "Charles Barron is a very good friend of this union and CUNY, and he won overwhelmingly," noted McCall. "He is a strong advocate for faculty, staff and students. We're hoping he will have a public hearing on CUNY employment practices, to look at the issues from the workers' point of view."

STAUNCH SUPPORT

Councilman Robert Jackson has also been a staunch union supporter and a friend to public education, noted McCall. Jackson is a long-time education activist and a lead plaintiff in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity's successful lawsuit against the underfunding of NYC's public schools.

"He's played a key role in the struggle to fund public education," observed Moran. "If NYC collects that money, it will help to prepare CUNY's future students."

The victories of first-time City Council candidates who were supported by the PSC will boost the union's political clout in the future. "Rosie Mendez, Jessica Lappin, Inez Dickens and Jimmy Vacca will all be good for us," said McCall.

Union solidarity with Katrina victims

By LETICIA TAYLOR & PETER HOGNESS

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, unions across the country stepped into the gap left by the inadequate response of local and federal government. Labor organizations have deployed rank-and-file volunteers and raised millions of dollars, providing emergency medical care, cash assistance, help with communications and more.

The PSC is one of many local unions that has contributed to the labor effort, donating \$2,400. The union allocated \$600 to the AFL-CIO's Union Community Fund, \$600 to the AFT Disaster Relief Fund and \$1,200 to Community Labor United, a grassroots coalition of New Orleans unions and community groups.

The PSC has also begun building a relationship with Dillard University, a historically black institution in New Orleans. The PSC is looking for ways members can provide direct assistance, such as replacing professors' personal libraries or sending specific supplies. The Dillard campus was flooded, then many buildings were destroyed by fire. University officials are raising money to rebuild.

DIRECT HELP

"We immediately discovered the only source for medical supplies and other essentials was the makeshift supply center that SEIU Local 21 had set up in the middle of the union office," wrote Cathy Stoddart, a nurse and SEIU member from Pennsylvania

Residents demand fair reconstruction

who joined one of several volunteer teams organized by her union. FEMA was nowhere to be found. "My first four days on the ground, all medical supplies and prescriptions came from SEIU members across the country," Stoddart said.

The Communications Workers of America made an immediate donation of \$4 million to relief efforts. As its members labored to restore phone lines in the disaster zone, the union's health and safety department worked to make sure they had information on avoiding infectious disease, chemical exposures, electrical hazards and dangers from unstable structures.

TIME & MONEY

In some cases, union contracts have enabled workers to devote time to the relief effort. The Vermont Federation of Nurses has a contract provision for "volunteering leave," which about 50 members used to travel to the Gulf Coast to help provide emergency health care.

Many unions offered financial assistance to suddenly destitute members. The Teamsters' Disaster Relief Fund paid for \$500 debit cards for newly-unionized casino workers, freight drivers and other members who had lost both homes and jobs. The AFL-CIO's Union Plus credit card program is providing cardholders with grants of up to \$2,000 to

help cope with the disaster, and up to \$250 for card payments and fees.

United Teachers of New Orleans, a local of the American Federation of Teachers, has worked to make sure that its far-flung members know how to use Western Union to collect pay that they are owed, and that retired members know how to get their pension payments.

Union relief efforts are also strengthening the region's tattered social fabric, helping people connect in different ways. The Louisiana AFT has a special web page that displaced members can use to report their location, or search for family members and friends. SEIU member Stoddart paid tribute to "the shared commitment and sense of solidarity between SEIU nurses, IAFF firefighters, and the many plumbers, pipe fitters, sheet metal workers and carpenters, among other union members, who've come together to rebuild the New Orleans community." After two straight weeks of 15-hour days, "I have never been so certain of what it means to have a union and face our challenges together," Stoddart said.

"I want you to know that United Teachers of New Orleans is still here for you," wrote UTNO President Brenda Mitchell. "We have received hundreds of calls, drop-ins and e-mails" at the union's tempo-

rary headquarters in Baton Rouge, she said. In coming weeks and months, Mitchell noted, members will face not only "the stress of the tangible" such as rebuilding homes, "but also the insidious stress spawned by uncertainty." Being a labor union member, she wrote, can help in coping with the latter.

Of course, unions are also doing what they always do: advocating for members' interests with their employers. UTNO President Mitchell told members she had been meeting with New Orleans and Louisiana education officials. "I am asking them the questions you would ask if you were meeting them," Mitchell wrote. "When will teachers receive the \$530 state supplement approved by the legislature and the money owed from the sick leave/sabbatical settlement UTNO fought for?...What plans are there for getting our schools back in operation?"

CONTROL

The question of who will control the reconstruction has begun to emerge as a pressing issue. Community Labor United, a coalition bringing together unions such as UTNO and UNITE HERE with community organizations such as ACORN, the NAACP and the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, is demand-

ing that the inequities that were part of the initial response to Katrina not be repeated in the reconstruction.

CLU has helped launch a Peoples' Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition, uniting over 40 local organizations that want grassroots voices to be heard in the reconstruction process. "The people of New Orleans will not go quietly into the night, scattering across this country to become homeless in countless other cities while federal relief funds are funneled into rebuilding casinos, hotels... and the wealthy white districts of New Orleans like the French Quarter and the Garden District," the Coalition declared in a founding statement.

"We really need to put pressure on local and national government to begin the process of bringing people home," said CLU organizer Malcolm Suber. "Tens of thousands of workers are being imported when there are tens of thousands of New Orleansians who can do the work of the cleanup. We need a seat at the table and to demand that people from New Orleans be given jobs so they can begin the process of returning home."

To donate, to help and for more information please visit:

AFT Disaster Relief Fund - www.aft.org/news/2005/katrina/what_cando.htm

AFL-CIO help for Hurricane Katrina survivors - www.afl-cio.org/aboutus/ns08312005.cfm

CLU website - www.communitylaborunited.net

Campus Equity Week highlights adjuncts' contributions to CUNY

By **MARCIA NEWFIELD**
PSC Vice President for Part-Time Personnel

October 31 to November 4

There are a million part-time and adjunct faculty, graduate employees, full-time non-tenure-track faculty and continuing education teachers throughout the US. This number grew 41% in a 10-year period, according to Department of Education data for 2003. As of Spring 2005, CUNY had 9,600 part-timers teaching more than 50 percent of its courses.

BI-ANNUAL EVENT

Campus Equity Week (CEW), October 31 to November 4, is a bi-annual event that aims to educate universities, the public and policy-makers on the inequities of contingent work in academia. Participating groups in the US, Canada and Mexico design their own events for the week, with the common theme of the need for equitable labor policies and standards that encourage fairness and dignity for all members of the campus community.

Inaugurated in 2001, CEW grew rapidly and in 2003 over 250 campuses in North America took part. The logo for this year's tri-part theme – fair employment, campus unity and quality education – is built around the equality symbol that has accompanied CEW since its inception.

The PSC Committee on Part-time Personnel (also known as the First Friday Group) has come up with plans to commemorate the week at CUNY. A "Seniority Scroll," indicating the names and number of years that long-serving part-time faculty have worked at CUNY, will be unfurled.

Holly Clarke, who has taught economics and public administration at John Jay for 17 years, came up with the idea for the scroll. "The seniority scroll represents years of dedicated service given to CUNY and its students," Clarke explains, "by adjuncts and other part-time faculty who are not given the most minimal job protections: job security, accumulated sick days, reasons for dismissal and disability insurance."

THE FUTURE

Other plans for CEW include a forum at the Graduate Center on "The Future of Academic Labor," a book party, and lunchtime "teach-

out" – lectures for the New York public, to showcase the work that adjuncts do.

Details of these and other events will be posted on the PSC website, www.psc-cuny.org, along with the resolution of support for Campus Equity Week passed at the union's September Delegate Assembly. The website will also have information on the PSC's legislative agenda for 2005-06, including a renewed campaign to change New York labor law to allow adjuncts to collect unemployment insurance during periods when they are not working.

Campus Equity Week (called Fair Employment Week in Canada) was conceived at the fourth Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) conference in San Jose, California in 2001. COCAL has no regular staff, and a shifting steering committee of volunteers. The bi-annual conference is coordinated by the host committee (COCAL VI is slated for Vancouver, British

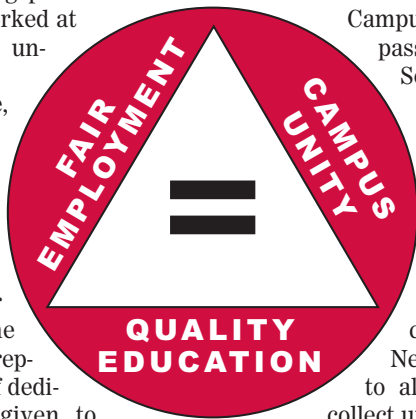
Columbia, in August 2006). National labor organizations – including the AFT, NEA, AAUP, National Writers' Union and the AFL-CIO – have endorsed and contributed to COCAL and CEW, as have the PSC and other local unions.

NAFFE, the North American Alliance for Fair Employment, is coordinating the activities and website for CEW 2005 (www.campusequityweek.org). NAFFE is an alliance of organizations across a broad range of constituencies affected by problems associated with nonstandard work, such as part-time, temporary and contract employment. Its goal is to ensure the well-being of all workers and communities. (For more information on NAFFE, see www.fairjobs.org.)

CONTINGENT LABOR

Joe Berry, author of the newly published book *Reclaiming the Ivory Tower: Organizing Adjuncts to Change Higher Education*, the first comprehensive analysis of the contingent organizing movement, argues that winning broad public support will be key to its success.

"A national strategy," he maintains, "must understand that contingent faculty are part of a casualized workforce and must be organized as a whole workforce, on the job and in the community." CEW 2005 aims to be one step in that direction.



HIGHER ED IN BRIEF

Hesitation on the hatchet?

Congress is considering a \$36 billion budget bill that would authorize deep cuts in student aid and other critical federal safety net programs. The combination of Bush's tax cuts, the war in Iraq and Hurricane Katrina has led to an explosion in the federal deficit, and the Republican leadership has announced that higher education spending is on the chopping block as a result. But according to the AFT, some Republicans in both House and Senate are reluctant to pass a bill that hurts low- and middle-income students in the wake of the hurricane disaster. House action on the budget is expected soon.

Go tell the Spartans

M. Peter McPherson will be the next president of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. President of Michigan State University for over a decade, McPherson was also a Bank of America executive, deputy secretary of the Treasury Department and administrator of the US Agency for International Development. During 2003 he was director of economic policy for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq.

McPherson will become the leader of the association on January 1; he currently serves as co-chair of the Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa, which he helped found five years ago.

EOC faculty demand fair play with pensions

By **CHRISTINA INGOGLIA**

PSC members at the four Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) in New York City have submitted a petition to SUNY demanding an end to problems with their pension payments and other deductions, which have occurred repeatedly since 2001.

Four years ago, faculty at the Queens EOC opened letters that left them in shock: TIAA-CREF had sent each a notice stating that their accounts were about to be shut down because no payments had been made to either their pension accounts or their voluntary 403(b) annuities.

FUNDS MISSING

Facia White, then PSC chapter chair at the Queens EOC, investigated and discovered that even though pension contributions had been subtracted from her paycheck every two weeks, the Queens EOC had not forwarded any funds to TIAA-CREF. Ms. White and other PSC members at the Queens EOC wanted this mess straightened out immediately, and they confronted the Center's director.

Sick of SUNY missing payments

The director told the employees that the problem was that the EOCs had not been receiving regular funding payments from SUNY. "We thought this was ridiculous," White told *Clarion*, "because the money was taken regularly from our paychecks."

SUNY PROGRAM

The EOCs are a SUNY program operated under a contract between SUNY and CUNY, providing a combination of job-skills courses and preparation for college. CUNY colleges provide administrative and academic oversight, while funding is provided under the SUNY budget directly to each Center.

EOC employees at the Queens, Brooklyn, Bronx and Manhattan centers all receive their salary bi-weekly, and employee pension contributions along with voluntary 403(b) contributions are deducted from each paycheck. This money

should be immediately transmitted to TIAA-CREF – but it turned out that the Queens EOC was improperly holding on to the funds for several months at a time. While the money was eventually paid, EOC employees lost whatever financial gains would have accrued from interest if the payments had been made on time.

Funding for the EOCs in NYC is part of the overall SUNY budget, and monies are forwarded to the Centers by SUNY in lump-sum payments. When approval of the State budget is delayed, the lump-sum payments are delayed as well and the Centers have to scramble for cash.

But such problems do not relieve management of its obligation to pay workers' wages and benefits, emphasized the PSC. "These delays are the equivalent of not paying our members' wages on time," said PSC Executive Director Deborah Bell.

When EOC chapter chairs met last year to discuss the contract campaign, they realized that it was not only the Queens EOC that had problems with timely transmittal of employee deductions. The Bronx and Brooklyn EOCs had experienced this also, if not to such a dramatic extent. In addition, the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund reports that the EOCs' employer contributions are routinely several months behind schedule.

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

After this discussion, PSC negotiators raised the subject at the bargaining table on behalf of the EOCs. Bell reminded CUNY and SUNY EOC representatives that it was their legal responsibility to ensure that employee deductions for pension contributions and annuity funds were made fully and on time – even if they had to walk the money to TIAA-CREF themselves. Management promised that that

the problem would be fixed. But despite these assurances, the delays have recurred.

INVESTMENT VALUE LOST

After meeting with PSC Secretary Cecelia McCall, all four EOC union chapters decided to circulate a petition, and members have eagerly signed it. The union decided that the highest levels of SUNY management need to be made aware of what is going on, so the petition was addressed to SUNY Senior Associate Provost Rick Steiner and was sent out on August 17. The union has asked that members be made whole according to a TIAA-CREF calculation for investment value they lost.

"It's never a problem to convince anyone to sign the petition," said Sherwin Hunte, a PSC member at the Queens EOC. "People are very, very upset at the way this has been handled over the last few years. We're taking this action to make sure that payments are on time, and that we get the compensation to which we are entitled."

Shocking letters exposed pension problems.

Flexible spending accounts Sign up now to save in 2006

By **CLARISSA GILBERT WEISS**
PSC Director of Pension & Welfare Benefits

Between October 3 and November 30, 2005, full-time CUNY employees can sign up for flexible spending accounts for health care or dependent care.

These federal programs allow employees to set aside pre-tax dollars from their salary to pay for out-of-pocket costs for medical treatment or care for dependents. By reducing your gross salary for federal and social security tax purposes, you lower your tax bill – and for some people, the savings can be substantial. But be careful how much you set aside: any money not spent within a certain period is forfeited.

(Note that the sign-up period, October 3 through November 30, is not the same as the transfer period for City health insurance.)

HEALTH CARE

Through the Health Care Flexible Spending Account (HCFSA), employees can be reimbursed for eligible out-of-pocket medical and dental expenses not covered by insurance.

You can set aside between \$260 and \$5,000 for expenses incurred for you, your spouse or eligible dependents. An HCFSA can be used to pay for deductibles, co-insurance and out-of-pocket costs for medical dental, vision and hearing expenses. Physicals, psychologist's fees, braces, prescription glasses and contact lenses are also eligible.

In a similar program, employees can also pay for care for dependents while you or your spouse work or attend school full-time. The minimum contribution is \$500 and the maximum is \$5,000.

Under this program, an eligible dependent is defined as a child under age 13 or any dependent who is mentally or physically incapable of caring for himself/herself and spends at least eight hours a day in your home, such as a dependent parent. The types of expenses that are covered include babysitting, nursery school, preschool, summer day camp and other dependent care.

EMPLOYEE ESTIMATES

In both of these programs, the employee estimates how much will be needed for these types of expenses in the coming year. The account is funded through automatic payroll deductions, based on the annual amount you specify. When an expense has occurred, you submit a claim for your eligible expenses and receive a reimbursement check from your account. Both plans are administered by the NYC Employee

Benefits Program. Each participant in the HCSFSA receives a personal account statement every quarter; participants in the dependent care program get an account statement every month.

USE OR LOSE RULES

By reducing your gross salary for federal and social security tax purposes you can lower your tax bill. Someone earning \$50,000 a year who sets aside the maximum might save \$1,000 or \$1,500, depending on tax filing details. However, there is a downside to this program: if you don't use it, you lose it.

If your medical and/or dependent care bills are less than the

YOUR BENEFITS

amount that you have set aside in the account, the unused amount will be forfeited. This is in accordance with IRS rules. However, recently the IRS slightly relaxed this "use it or lose it" provision. Employees may now permit employees to carry forward balances for a maximum of two and one-half months after the end of the calendar year, and to receive reimbursements for qualified expenses incurred during those months.

'Use it or lose it' deadline is extended

Full-time CUNY employees should also be aware of the City's Health Benefits Buy-Out Waiver Program, which allows participants in the City health plan to receive an annual incentive payment for waiving this coverage when non-City group health insurance is available to them. An employee will receive \$1,000 annually for waiving family coverage or \$500 annually for waiving individual coverage. Payments are made semi-annually in June and December and will be included in the employee's taxable income.

OPTING OUT

After signing up for the Buy-Out Program, employees can opt out of it if a "qualifying event" occurs. Qualifying events include marriage, death, divorce or a change in a spouse's or domestic partner's insurance coverage such as termination of employment, or a spouse or partner's change from full-time to part-time work.

All three plans are available only to employees (not retirees) who are eligible to receive City health benefits. Applications are available online from the NYC Office of Labor Relations, or by calling them at 212-306-7760, or from your college personnel office.

Adjunct health insurance changes are revised

By **PETER HOGNESS**

The September *Clarion* announced a revision to part-timers' health coverage under the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund. But as this issue goes to press, those changes have been revised and improved after further negotiations with providers.

"There were a number of open issues that remained to be negotiated with carriers in the New York/New Jersey area," explained Welfare Fund Executive Director Larry Morgan. "As negotiations continued, it became clear that it might be possible to offer a lower-cost or no-

Welfare Fund negotiated with providers

cost Blue Cross option alongside the new HIP program. We have now adjusted some co-payments in order to make the revised Blue Cross plan a more attractive option,

with higher co-pays instead of a monthly premium." For those who would find these somewhat higher point-of-service co-payments burdensome, Morgan said, the HIP Prime option will be available with co-pays equivalent to the original Blue Cross plan.

Morgan told *Clarion* that the Welfare Fund announced the change in September even though details

were not final because members deserved to know that modifications were in the works. "This information was not something that we had any right to keep to ourselves," he said. "Transparency is very important in the Fund's relationship with members."

WORK IN PROGRESS

The revised plan has been approved by the WF Board of Trustees. Affected WF members will receive details in the mail soon. "We have done our best to establish a program of reasonable alternatives and still contain our costs," Morgan said.

For City health plan, WF dental rider

Change period ends Nov. 18

By **CLARION STAFF**

This year full-time active CUNY employees may change their choice of health plan between October 17 and November 18. If you choose a new plan, the change will take effect in January; see your campus human resources office for details.

Retirees are allowed to change plans only in even-numbered years, so they will next have the chance to make a switch in the Fall of 2006.

BETTER COVERAGE

The PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund adopted the same dates, October 17 to November 18, as the enrollment period for members in the Guardian dental program who wish to purchase a higher level of coverage through an optional rider. The rider allows a higher level of reimbursement for dental services and is useful when you will need more than standard preventive procedures.

The dental rider proved popular when it was first offered last year, and enrollment soon reached over 3,200 members. Those who already have the rider do not need to take any action to have it continued.



The bi-weekly cost is still under negotiation. Guardian will post details at www.guardianmarketing.com/psccuny, by October 17.

"When our basic dental benefit was stripped to bare bones because of budgetary issues, we focused on providing preventive care and providers who would discount charges," said Welfare Fund Executive Director Larry Morgan. "But anyone who has substantial work done – even with a participating

dentist – feels it in the pocketbook. The rider can take the edge off."

LIMITATIONS

Morgan noted that the rider has its own limitations, including an annual limit of \$1,500 per person. Members with families cannot get individual coverage; they must take family coverage if they want to sign up. Further details are available from www.guardianmarketing.com/psccuny or the Fund Office.

Transit benefit for both full-time & part-time

By **DIANNE MENNA**
PSC Part-Time Personnel Officer

Want to save money when you commute via the buses and trains of NYC Transit?

The TransitBenefit Transportation Spending Account (TSA) is now available to all instructional staff at CUNY, both full-time and part-time.

Through a TSA, you use pre-tax payroll dollars to pay for public transportation in the five boroughs of NYC, with the result that you pay lower taxes. Deductions are taken out of each paycheck, with a small service fee of 84 cents or more, depending on salary.

You have the right to discontinue the plan during the summer months

or cancel at any time.

Application forms are available at your campus Human Resources Department. You will be sent a TSA Chase E-Funds Debit Card. Insert the card into a MetroCard vending machine and type in your PIN number to receive your MetroCard.

Additional information available at www.cuny.edu/transitbenefit.

NEW ORLEANS & THE GULF

The Bush hurricane

By NEIL SMITH

Distinguished Professor, Center for Place, Culture and Politics, CUNY Graduate Center

It is an axiom of environmental geography that there is no such thing as a natural disaster. In preparedness, response, reconstruction – the hand of social discrimination casts a far larger shadow than meteorology. Although we will never know the real figures, it is now clear that perhaps 1,200 people in Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi died unnecessarily in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, not just because of incompetence but because of longstanding and willful class and race contempt.

Taking the naturalness out of natural disasters in no way denies the power of natural processes. To understand why earthquakes and blizzards, droughts and hurricanes occur we need to know geophysics, physical geography and climatology, but to understand what makes these events disasters is a much larger question. A severe earthquake in the remote high Andes may not be a disaster at all, whereas an event of the same scope and intensity in La Paz could kill tens of thousands. After the simple fact of the physical event, who gets to live and who dies is very much a social calculus.

VESTED INTEREST

Even natural causes are not devoid of social content, however. It is statistically impossible to pin responsibility for a single event such as Katrina, or even a record hurricane year such as 2005, on global warming, but it is clear that such warming will likely raise sea-levels at record rates over the next few decades, intensify hurricanes and typhoons, and make places like the Gulf, Venice and Dacca dramatically more vulnerable. The Bush administration, with its social class origins among the petroleum and energy elite, has a vested interest in denigrating and denying such science.

The social determination of who is vulnerable to disasters was never more tragically apparent than in Hurricane Katrina. In New Orleans, death came most often for the poor: those who had no private transportation, no credit card or flush bank account, no wealthy relatives to rely on, no home insurance to let them more easily put their lives before their life's possessions, no resources to evacuate the young and aged.

UNPREPARED

The lack of preparedness for Katrina is now notorious. For decades wetlands, which absorb storm surges, were sold to developers in the belief that “the market knows best.” This made low-lying urban areas more vulnerable, yet levee enhancement and pumping projects were shelved after Army Corps of Engineers budget requests for New Orleans were cut 80% in 2004.

FEMA warned in 2001 that a huge hurricane could overwhelm New Orleans – but when the agency was merged into the Department of Homeland Security, preparing for natural disasters took a back seat to “the war on terror.” When the first federal supplies appeared in New Orleans, days after the hurricane struck, stunned aid workers reportedly asked why they were being sent anthrax vaccine.

Meanwhile political hacks were put in charge; the supremely unqualified Michael Brown was only one of many. “Our professional staff are being systematically replaced by politically connected novices and contractors,” an officer of FEMA’s employees’ union told Congress in 2004.

As many as four days after the hurricane, Bush – flying from one photo-op to another but still not daring to enter New Orleans – maintained that private charity was the best solution to the Katrina disaster. “Try the Salvation Army, Bush Tells Refugees,” was the outraged headline in Glasgow’s *Daily Herald*, as the death toll mounted. Bush was not simply stupid or innocently out of touch; rather, the habitual class and race cocoon he occupied was exposed for all to see.

Katrina revealed that the government cared less about protecting its own citizens than about maintaining a corrupt network of favors, influence and class cronyism, built atop a blind allegiance to neoliberal marketization. “The people of New Orleans weren’t just abandoned during the hurricane,” was how Senator Barack Obama put it. “They were abandoned long ago.” Over the longer term, the Democratic as well as Republican administrations that gutted the postwar social welfare system share responsibility for that abandonment.

CLASSQUAKE

So-called natural disasters don’t simply wash the landscape flat, rather they deepen the social grooves of the societies they hit. Those trapped in the New Orleans Superdome and Convention Center were not wrong to think they were being “abandoned to die.” The first instinct of the Bush administration, as scared of and alienated from its own citizens as from the people of Iraq, was to send troops, not food and water – to secure property before securing lives. Promised evacuation buses never arrived; National Guard water trucks sped past hungrily, dehydrated throughs hip deep in sewage, excrement and bodies.

The same divisions were seen at the local level. White sheriffs ordered police to fire on mainly black crowds of anguished evacuees to keep them from entering the suburb of Gretna. They said they acted to keep their town from becoming “another Superdome”; as a *Times-Picayune* editorial writer wrote, “They assumed the people were bringing the Superdome with them.” Encampments of people struggling to organize their own survival were seen as potentially threatening mobs, and troops and sheriffs used guns and helicopters to break them up.

Looting there surely was, but gangs of young men also organized to liberate water,

food and diapers for women, babies, the aged. Denise Moore, living in the Convention Center, said they were “exactly like Robin Hood, and that’s why I got so mad [that] they’re calling *these* guys ‘animals.’” The early military response actively thwarted these desperate survival efforts out of a fear that was rooted in race and class.

Guatemalan peasants after the mammoth 1976 earthquake, which killed 23,000 and made 1.5 million homeless, got it right when

cruellest winds. In the disaster area George Bush has suspended the 1931 Davis-Bacon Act, which requires corporations with federal construction contracts to pay the prevailing wage.

Put bluntly, for the ruling class, the hurricane has accomplished what decades of gentrification policy couldn’t. Rep. Richard Baker of Baton Rouge said so quite callously: “We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans.... We couldn’t do it, but God

did.” When George Bush proclaims that “out of New Orleans is going to come that great city again,” no one thinks that high-quality and affordable public housing is what he has in mind. If Bush, Bechtel and the developers have their way, New Orleans may not recover to become, as it was before, a city that is two-thirds black. “This could be their dream come true,” one resident told *The Nation*. “Get rid of all the poor African Americans and turn the place into Disneyland.”

ALTERNATIVES EXIST

There are alternatives. “We will not stand idly by while this disaster is used as an opportunity to replace our homes with newly built mansions and condos in a gentrified New Orleans,” reads a statement from a citywide coalition of New Orleans low-income groups, Community Labor United. CLU insists that those evacuated from New Orleans must have the primary power over how the rebuilding of the city proceeds.

It will be hard for them to have such a voice from hundreds of miles away. But as Naomi Klein has reported,

“roughly 70,000 of New Orleans’s poorest homeless evacuees could move back into the city... without a single new structure being built.” Wealthier areas like the French Quarter or the Lower Garden District had a surprisingly high number of empty apartments before the storm, and these neighborhoods on higher ground were barely flooded.

BOTTOM-UP RECONSTRUCTION

The question of what gets reconstructed where is first and foremost a political question. The same corporate and federal abandonment that fostered such a widespread disaster can hardly be expected to perform an about-turn by empowering a disempowered population. Yet given the visceral anger of thousands of survivors, attempts to impose a top-down solution by force may incite a powerful response from below.

There is no such thing as a natural disaster, and the supposed naturalness of the market is the last place to look for a solution to this demented, disastrous and avoidable tragedy. The best hope for New Orleans comes not from the invisible hand, but from the visible and callused hands of the city’s working class, rebuilding their city from the bottom up.

"My goal is to cut government in half in twenty-five years, to get it down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub."

— Grover Norquist, Republican Strategist and author of the Bush Plan



they came to explain their predicament as a “classquake.” More recently, Asian fishermen made homeless by the 2004 tsunami are being prevented at gunpoint from returning to the coast to resume their livelihood because the authorities want to reserve the coasts for tourist resorts. The fishermen increasingly refer to reconstruction as “the second tsunami.” In New Orleans today people are talking about the Bush Hurricane.

If previous disasters are any guide, the class and race ruts of the global South, right here in America, are likely to be deepened as New Orleans is reconstructed. Already there are plans to put some 130,000 refugee families in mobile homes in far-flung state parks and camp sites, while developers are banging down the doors to buy up flood-damaged property in the city. Government’s first reconstruction plans are eerily Iraq-like. Bechtel and the Fluor Corp. have already been awarded no-bid \$100 million contracts, and Halliburton, too, is at the trough.

While corporations are relieved of the sacred neoliberal obligation to compete, workers are being subjected to competition’s

Who lives and who dies is a social calculus.

THE CONTRACT

Building the power to win

Below is an excerpt from PSC President Barbara Bowen's speech at the union's mass meeting on September 29. The full text is available on the union's website, www.psc-cuny.org.

I will talk tonight about why this contract has been so difficult, what is at stake in winning a good settlement and how the union plans to consolidate the power to win. You will hear the union's timeline and strategy for bringing the negotiations to a successful close. I also want to talk with you about the way PSC members' new level of engagement in this fight has begun to transform the union and holds the key to the power we need.

What has made this round of contract negotiations so difficult is politics. As academics, we've organized our lives around logic and argument, and we can sometimes find it hard to believe that negotiating a contract is not just about who makes the better arguments. Strong arguments for our demands are important, and we've made them, but the struggle at this point is not about arguments.... We're up against a well-developed agenda of dismantling the public sector, in part by steady erosion of the salaries and benefits of public servants. I sometimes hear members say that if the union just had more lawyers at the bargaining table or if we could just make our argument differently, we would have a contract by now. We might have a contract, but we wouldn't have a good one.

POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

To ignore the political nature of our negotiations is fundamentally to misperceive the process and thus to misjudge the strategy we should use within it. We are public employees, paid with public funds; both the City and the State must sign off on our contract. The union has come to the point in negotiations when what must be shifted is a political agenda, not just the perspective of individual negotiators on the other side of the bargaining table....

Mayor Bloomberg makes no secret of his anti-labor agenda, and neither should we. He has explicitly demanded contracts from City workers in which salary increases even below the level of inflation have to be "paid for" by givebacks that save the City money. And this is in a year in which the City has a record \$3.5 billion surplus and the State has higher than predicted revenues. The demand for austerity is not about a lack of money in the City or the State. It's about curtailing what are seen as the outrageous luxuries of a salary, health benefits and a pension for public-sector employees, and it's ultimately about dismantling the public sector and endangering those who depend on it. That's exactly the agenda that was exposed in the catastrophe following Hurricane Katrina, but it still has currency in Pataki's and Bloomberg's New York.

We are at a turning point in negotiations because... we have [now] hit the limit of the economic framework the City has sought to impose on public-employee contracts.... [T]he current offer from CUNY management, unchanged since last May, is essentially a reduction in salary (because the total offer falls below inflation), a reduction in health benefits (if not this year, then within the next few years) and reduction in the

quality of our working lives. That's why I call this a concessionary contract: not just the outright givebacks on summer annual leave, the removal of department chairs from the union and other issues, but a complete concessionary framework.

That framework was established in the 4.17% contract settled with District Council 37, but it also, less obviously, underlies the 10% contract settled with the police union. The same framework is also visible in the fact-finding decision that the teachers' union, the UFT, is now trying to hammer into a settlement that works for them. Here's the math: the City offer is 4.17% over three years; anything over that must be "paid for" by givebacks that save the City money. In the DC 37 contract, worth over 5%, that meant introducing a new, lower salary scale for incoming workers. The police union contract starts with that same 4.17%, adds a small differential for the additional risks of uniformed workers, and then reaches 10% with larger givebacks. Each new recruit will lose \$48,000 in salary over the first five and a half years at work.... Larger increases, but larger

The austerity agenda for CUNY is an expression of contempt for our students.

givebacks. The fact-finding decision for teachers included an increase of 11.4%, but also demanded additional days of work, additional minutes each day and changes in contractual protections.

Faced with this political landscape, the PSC had three choices. One, accept the concessionary pattern – below-inflation raises, continued problems in the Welfare Fund and onerous givebacks. Two, submit our contract to arbitration and then try to reach a settlement based on the fact-finding that would result. And three – organize to break through the anti-labor, anti-public-sector, anti-education political agenda.

SUBSIDIZING CUNY

I don't think I need to say why we didn't choose option one; no one to whom I have spoken has said that 4.17% is even thinkable. Option two, arbitration, may seem more promising, but what may not be at first apparent is that arbitration is conducted in the same political environment as negotiations. I sympathize with those of you who imagine arbitration and fact-finding as an airy, neutral process where our cause would prevail, but the truth is that arbitration too is subject to the pressures of political policies. Of the three arbitrators, one is chosen by the City or the State, and the decision that results typically bears the imprint of management's demands as well as the union's. We could expect that an arbitration decision for us might hold out one or two percent more than we've been offered so far, but at the price of concessions even more onerous than those that are currently on the table.... Guided by you, the union leadership chose option three: organize and fight....

Our collective aversion to another round of concessions is so strong, I believe, because a series of austerity contracts in the late 1980s and the 1990s has been compounded with a history of under-funding of CUNY. The combination is lethal. Just as our contracts were providing below-inflation

increases – in other words, decreases – public funding for CUNY was being eviscerated. Since 1990 the real-dollar value of CUNY's public funding has been slashed by 40% – nearly in half. We all live that history every day, in the thousands of silent accommodations we make to a culture of scarcity: no chalk in classrooms so you bring your own; no time to spend with individual students when there are 40 in a class so you do extra office hours after midnight by e-mail; no funds for quality lab equipment so you fish the unbroken test tubes out of the box of discount supplies; no money for adequate staffing in the financial aid office so you stay till two in the morning to serve all the students waiting in line. We can all recite our own lists – or we could if we allowed ourselves to admit how we subsidize the University.

CHEAP LABOR

And then there's the dirty little secret of CUNY's labor structure: under the pressure of shrinking budgets, CUNY cut costs in the time-honored corporate way – by replacing a

more expensive labor force with a cheaper one.... [T]he majority of teaching is [now] done not by full-time faculty with benefits and expectations of research and protections of academic freedom, but by part-timers paid a fraction of the full-time rate with few or none of these provisions. There is the fiction about CUNY, displayed in subway ads with happy faces, and then there is the hollowed-out reality. CUNY's reliance on cheap labor hurts us all, and undoing it must be one of our major goals as a union. It won't happen in a single contract and it will take all of us together – full-timers as well as part-timers – but it will be essential in reclaiming CUNY as a serious university.

As resources for CUNY dwindled, we also experienced the losses of a decade and a half of concessionary contracts. The first contract in 10 years to include increases above inflation was the 2000-2002 agreement, the first negotiated under our leadership. That contract brought real raises, additional Welfare Fund contributions, and creative ideas such as a full semester of paid research time for junior faculty, paid office hours for adjuncts, a professional development fund for staff. But a single contract cannot reverse decades of decline in the real value of our salaries. If our salaries had merely kept up with inflation since 1972, the last time the PSC took a strike vote, the top salary now would be \$147,000. Instead, it's \$93,507. The median salary for assistant professors and HEO assistants would be \$79,208; now it's \$48,162.... I'm sure every person in this room knows of a colleague who left CUNY or a job candidate who wouldn't come because of the embarrassing lack of competitive salaries.

ENDANGERED FUND

The PSC faces an additional challenge in this round of bargaining: a decade and a half of austerity contracts have left our Welfare Fund in crisis. The simple arithmetic is that drug costs, the major expense

of the Welfare Fund, have been going up by 18% or so a year, and our Welfare Fund contributions from CUNY have not. In the last contract we negotiated several million additional dollars annually for the Welfare Fund, and even still the Fund has had to reduce the dental benefit and make other difficult changes to survive. CUNY management's response at the bargaining table so far has been: choose between benefits and salary. They say, you can have some money – though not enough – for the Welfare Fund, but it will have to come out of the amount that for other unions goes to salary. We have said that is not acceptable; [we must have] a substantial and permanent increase in Welfare Fund contributions....

AUSTERITY HURTS STUDENTS

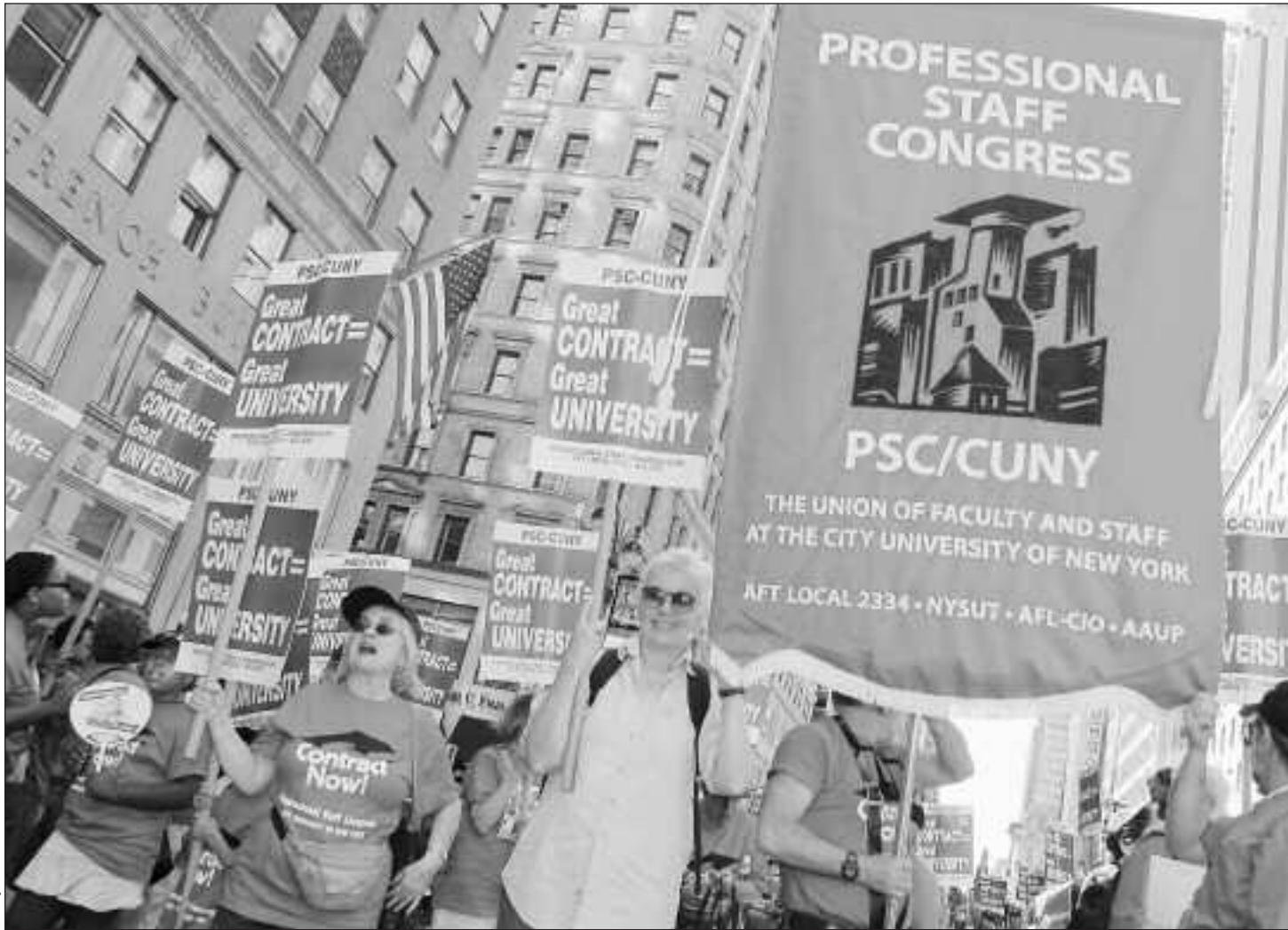
What we're fighting against when we refuse substandard wages, benefits and conditions for ourselves is a substandard future for our students. Do you think Mayor Bloomberg, Governor Pataki and Chancellor Goldstein would be content to send their children to a college where the faculty had no time to spend with individual students, no support for research? The governing class that advocates austerity for us and our students would never dream of visiting it on their own children. At heart, the austerity agenda for CUNY is an expression of contempt for our students. It's a declaration that a real university – one where faculty don't have to worry about how they'll pay their dental bills, one where young scholars are not fleeing for other jobs and senior scholars retiring in disgust – a real university is too good for them.... [for] students [who] are overwhelmingly working class, poor, people of color and new immigrants. "We were never meant to survive," the poet Audre Lorde said about black people in this country. Our fight as CUNY faculty and staff is so hard – and so important – because in a certain sense, our students were never meant to survive either.

ORGANIZING POWER

The PSC has made tremendous progress in the last five years in beginning to reverse the pattern of budget cuts for CUNY, but ultimately we don't control the State and City budgets. Nor do we control the national political agendas that lie behind them. There is one thing we do control, however, and that's the contract. We have the power to say "no" to one more round of deepening poverty for CUNY by refusing to agree to a poverty contract. I am far from underestimating the obstacles we face... but I am confident that we have the support and the strategy and the power to win.

So how do we do it? The only answer is, we organize. But the question demands a fuller response, given our particular position as university workers, the entrenched politics we're up against, the lack of mass labor resistance to the austerity agenda for New York's employees....

After nearly three years of negotiations and firm resistance to an austerity contract, we may have reached the limit of what can be accomplished by rallies, faxes and letters alone. These tactics are good, and every time we have used them, management has shifted its position, but they may not be enough.... We have come to the point where we are



CUNY faculty and staff march in the Labor Day Parade, demanding a fair contract.

forced to consider our most potent weapon as a union. Just as we have the power to say “no” to an unacceptable contract, we have the power to withhold the labor on which the University depends.

DEMOCRATIC DECISION

That’s not a step any union would take lightly, and the PSC Delegate Assembly understood that in the resolution it passed in May. The resolution first mandates that the union leadership continue to do everything it can to reach a good settlement at the bargaining table. And we are doing that, through intense and productive discussions throughout the summer, now with a return to the formal bargaining table. The two sides will meet across the table on October 6, with a series of sessions scheduled throughout the month. By being here tonight, you give us power at the table; you have made it unmistakable that hundreds of PSC members are deeply engaged in this issue. But if we are not able to reach a settlement when negotiations resume, the union’s Executive Council now has the authority to conduct a referendum on whether to authorize the leadership to call for a strike or other job action. Why so many steps? Because we want to make this decision as democratic and authentic as we can.... If the union leadership holds a referendum, all PSC members in good standing will have the chance to vote yes or no. You will be voting not on an immediate action but on whether to authorize the

union leadership to take the next step and call for a withholding of labor....

[W]e will work tirelessly over the next month to achieve a settlement before November 3. On that night, the union’s Executive Council will assess whether we have the framework for an acceptable settlement or whether and when we will hold a referendum. We chose November 3 because it is a strategic date. It gives us one month to complete the project of talking to every union

Any decision on authorizing a job action will be made by our members.

member one-on-one about what a referendum means.... November 3 is also days before the mayoral election, when the city’s attention will be most sharply focused on Mayor Bloomberg’s policies. And it coincides with the beginning of a wave of labor actions that we are about to see in private universities, where graduate employees have had to strike even to be recognized as a union. We want to have a settlement or the basis of a settlement by November 3; if not, we will decide on whether and when to hold the referendum.

The decision on whether to authorize the leadership to call for a job action [will be made] by the membership. The referendum, if we hold it, will be conducted by secret ballot among the entire membership by a neu-

tral third party, just as we conduct a contract ratification vote. I hope that we can reach a settlement without conducting a strike or job action, and I am doing everything in my power, including working directly with the Governor’s office, to achieve that. But if we don’t achieve it, we will know by November 3. If the Executive Council then decides to hold the referendum, I will be asking you not just to vote, but to vote yes.... A yes vote would enable the negotiating team to press harder,

armed with that expression of support, for the contract we need. Only if necessary would we call for a strike or other job action.

JOB ACTION EXPLAINED

What is a job action? It’s typically defined... as a collective withholding of labor. Unions have used anything from an indefinite strike to a one-week or one-day strike to a rolling series of strikes in different places. Other unions have used work-to-rule tactics, sick-outs or withholding of specific, strategic forms of labor, such as grading. Some academic job actions have turned the community into a classroom and held thousands of classes off-campus in churches, synagogues and community centers. If we do hold a referendum and if we do get a yes vote, we would

first use that vote to pressure management to settle, and only if that failed would we plan for a strike or other action....

IMPLICATIONS OF A STRIKE

We are many steps away from a strike, but I want to be straight with you about what a strike means.... A strike forever changes a union and can be the beginning of a totally new level of strength. Don’t underestimate the visibility and moral force a job action at the country’s largest public urban university would have. But a strike can also be very, very hard. It’s too early to talk about a strike or other job action, but you are entitled to know as you think about it that the same political climate that brings us austerity for union contracts and CUNY students brings us a labor law that contains severe penalties on public-employee unions that strike – and almost no penalties on employers that refuse to settle fair contracts.... If the union moves to a referendum, we will provide you with full information about the Taylor Law. We will inform you about your rights, the protection the union offers, the financial assistance available to those who need it and the political context that influences how the law is applied. A strike or other job action is serious business; there is no way to do it without sacrifice, at least short-term sacrifice, and risk. This union leadership will not soft-pedal that risk – but nor will we soft-pedal the power we have if we organize. Nothing has been won by the labor movement without risk – not the eight-hour day or the weekend or the right to form a union. We are doing everything we can to win a good contract before November 3 without having to consider that step, and tonight I’m asking for your support.

COLLECTIVE POWER

The way we will win is to make an unprecedented effort in the coming month. I want us to leave this room with a commitment to reorder our priorities for the next few weeks and make the contract fight primary. That may mean putting a writing project on hold for a while or getting up an hour earlier to grade papers every day, but we will not win this if you leave it up to a handful of die-hards. If this is worth fighting for – and I think you believe it is – we can’t do it through business-as-usual. Already, something transformative is sweeping across the University – and management is taking notice. Hundreds of members have volunteered to be grassroots organizers – picket captains – committed to talking to other members in person about the contract. The member-organizers run the gamut from Distinguished Professors to first-year faculty, from long-serving adjuncts to new lab technicians. Three hundred people have already signed on for this work, and as a result, the conversation in this union has changed.... In thousands of individual encounters, we have begun to grapple with the hard questions – as rich as any we consider in our scholarly work – about power, education and collective struggle. The attention management has paid to our resolution making a referendum a possibility should convince us that we command a new kind of power when we consider collective action. We start tonight with these seven points of action.... (Ed. note: See page 3 for details.)

This is a powerful moment in the history of this union, and perhaps the city. We will expand what it means to be an academic if we imagine ourselves in an intellectual and political alliance with those whom CUNY’s founders called “the children of the whole people.” When this leadership was elected to PSC office, our promise was that we would fight, and we would organize. Tonight I pledge that I will give everything I have to this fight – and I ask you to do the same.

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York PSC chapter gets results

By DANIA RAJENDRA

As the “migrant laborers” of the CUNY system, adjunct faculty face frustrating practical problems as they try to do their daily work. They are often forced to compete with students for campus computers to create or print class materials, they have to write exams with students hovering over their shoulders, they plead with security to open offices so they can make copies.

Shirley Frank knows these problems all too well. An adjunct assistant professor at York College, she has taught English there for the past six years. Like many of CUNY’s 9,600 adjuncts, Frank teaches at two CUNY colleges to make ends meet. And at City Tech, she had seen how a resource center exclusively dedicated to faculty use, with computers and other tools of the trade, could make a difference.

PUBLIC CHALLENGE

PSC Chapter Chair Janice Cline and other union members agreed that this made perfect sense, and the PSC chapter began to raise the idea with York’s previous administration at labor-management meetings. “We discussed it at every labor-management meeting for at least two years,” said Cline.

At a forum last December, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein announced another of the frequent changes in York’s leadership. At the meeting, Cline stood up and publicly challenged Goldstein to fund a Faculty Resource Center on campus. Under fire for CUNY’s second-class treatment of York, Goldstein agreed. “It’s yours,” he told me,” Cline recalled.

HEAVY USAGE

The Faculty Resource Center opened at the beginning of this semester, and it is already a big success.

“It’s very helpful and very useful – a wonderful idea,” said Edwin Hughes, an adjunct lecturer in mathematics and computer science, who was using a Center computer to generate examples for his 6:30 statistics class. “Now I don’t have to worry about being bumped off by a colleague in the office we share.”

The Center features 10 new computers, a scanner, two printers, a

Faculty Resource Center already a success



The Faculty Resource Center at York greatly improved working conditions for part-timers, said adjunct Virginia Thompson.

copier, a fax machine, and a phone. The room has a magnetic lock, programmed so that faculty can open it with their ID badges to allow round-the-clock access – an idea

implemented by Stephen Barrera, assistant to HEO in the public safety department. “This way, when faculty members get their ID cards they can access it any time, and public safety officers aren’t stuck opening the door every day,” he said. “It allows us to better serve students.” Early data show the room is getting heavy use, Barrera said.

That didn’t just happen, explained Cline and Frank. Throughout CUNY, adjuncts often don’t get information they need, even for basic facts about their jobs like health care or pension rights. So the York PSC chapter publicized the Center through flyers and word-of-mouth. “We got flyers out to all department chairs and all new faculty in all departments,” said Cline. “We also asked that chairs announce it the first week of school.”

Virginia Thompson, also an adjunct in the math department, said

she learned about the Center from a PSC flyer in her mailbox. “When I got the flyer, I was skeptical,” she told *Clarion*. “But once I saw it – wow. It’s not crowded, and there are enough supplies. It helps me get my job done.” Thompson said construction in York’s math department means she has been without a reliable computer and private workspace since the beginning of the semester. “Without the Center, I don’t know how I would have managed getting the material ready for my class,” she said.

24-HOUR ACCESS

Faculty feedback means continuing improvements to the Center. Thompson requested installation of the program Mathematica – and it was, on one computer, by the time she revisited the Center. Barrera also noted that one computer is hand-capped accessible.

CUNY adjuncts often share office space with several – or several dozen – colleagues, and covet desk space, explained Barrera. To increase the square inches available, he is coordinating the installation of slings to hold the computers (the CPU “towers”) under the desks, to

allow more room for professors to spread out their materials.

“York, like other colleges in the CUNY system, has more adjuncts than full-timers. Just like full-time

faculty, we need to be able to check our e-mail and prepare classroom materials,” said Frank. “Up till now, we’ve done these things at our day jobs, at Kinko’s, etc. But that’s not fair, nor is it efficient. Adjuncts do enough running around on the subway system as it is, and they certainly don’t make enough money to pay for printing and photocopying that the university should provide.”

All parties agreed that the Center came together because of cooperation and effort from York’s new president, Marcia Keizs, her administration, PSC members and CUNY Central Administration. Architect Noel Gamboa and Barrera, both HEOs, were integral to getting the Center open, Cline said. “It was a group effort,” Barrera said.

ONE NEED MET

The Resource Center has the added bonus of bringing together faculty across departments, noted Cline, who teaches English. “The diversity of people I’ve met down here has been fantastic,” she said.

Frank, who serves as PSC Adjunct Organizer for York, agreed. “Many adjuncts are telling me that this is the greatest thing that’s happened here,” Frank said.

“Of course, part-timers have a lot of other unmet needs – equal pay, job security, better benefits and more... I want other adjuncts and PSC chapters to know that if you persist it’s possible to accomplish something.”



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

Add your name

Join the hundreds of people who have signed their names to the public statement (below) demanding a fair contract. Show management – and fellow academics – that you’re part of the chorus calling for a settlement

that meets members’ needs: real increases and health benefits. The statement will form the basis of an advertisement in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Sign on by visiting the union’s website, www.psc-cuny.org.

CUNY faculty and staff: We deserve better

We the undersigned are faculty and professional staff at the City University of New York (CUNY), represented by the Professional Staff Congress, our union. We have been without a contract for three years. CUNY management’s current contract offer is unacceptable. As public servants and educators who graduate tens of thousands of students each year, we deserve a contract that does not leave many of us wondering how we will pay our bills each month or how we will afford our dental care and medical prescriptions.

The austerity contract offered to us by CUNY management insults

the work we do and undermines the recent renaissance at CUNY. Without a fair contract, the University will no longer be able to attract the best faculty and staff. Its mission – and our students – will suffer.

As academics who are committed to the promise of public higher education, we call on Chancellor Goldstein, Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Pataki to offer us a contract that provides fair salary increases, funding to restore benefits, and improvements in equity and daily working conditions. For our students, our city, and ourselves – we cannot afford to accept anything less.

Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

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