

# Clarion

NEWSPAPER OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS / CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



NOVEMBER 2008



**CONSTRUCTION**

## Fund Fiterman!

Union members demand an end to the space crunch at BMCC.

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## PSC FOR OBAMA IN PENNSYLVANIA

# LABOR TO NEIGHBOR

Since September PSC members have been working to elect Senator Barack Obama the next president of the United States. The PSC had one of the first NY labor phone banks up and running. Members called other union members in swing states, mostly Pennsylvania, about supporting Obama and getting to the polls.

In addition to the phone banks, the PSC sent buses to Pennsylvania on three weekends in October. More than two hundred members had taken part by mid-October. Above, Marguerite Spence, a continuing education adjunct at Queens College, talks with a Philadelphia voter. **PAGES 3 & 11**

### FUNDING

## Tuition hikes & budget cuts

Pundits clamor for cutbacks, but the PSC, students, community groups and prominent economists say what's needed is more public investment.

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### 80TH STREET

## Top CUNY execs get big raises

CUNY's Board of Trustees approve big raises for college presidents and vice chancellors. Chancellor Goldstein gets a \$55,000 increase.

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### ORGANIZING

## Local links build union power

At the root of any union's strength is local organizing. It's how we win, on issues from fair contracts to free speech on campus e-mail. It's a PSC priority.

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### HEALTH PLANS

## November: your chance to change

In November, you can change your health plan choices. It's also the open enrollment period for doctoral employees' new health coverage.

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# Union leader on race & election

Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer and former president of the United Mine Workers Union, spoke at the Steelworkers convention on July 1 about racism and the role of unions in the campaign. The speech has received attention online – with more than 430,000 views on YouTube – and in discussions in the labor movement. An excerpt:

You see brothers and sisters, there's not a single good reason for any worker – especially any union member – to vote against Barack Obama. There's only one really bad reason to vote against him: because he's not white.

And I want to talk about that because I saw that for myself during the Pennsylvania primary.

I went back home to vote in Nemaconlin and I ran into a woman I'd known for years. She was active in Democratic politics when I was still in grade school.

We got to talking and I asked

## Trumka talk is YouTube hit

who she was supporting and she said: "Oh absolutely, I'm voting for Hillary, there's no way I'd ever vote for Obama."

Well, why's that? "Because he's a Muslim."

I told her, "That's not true – he's as much a Christian as you and me, [but] so what if he's Muslim?"

Then she shook her head and said, "He won't wear an American flag pin."

"Well, I don't have one on and neither do you. But c'mon, he wears one plenty of times. He just says it takes more than wearing a flag pin to be patriotic."

"Well, I just don't trust him."

Why is that?

Her voice dropped just a bit: "Because he's black."

I said, "Look around. Nemaconlin's a dying town. There're no jobs here.

Kids are moving away because there's no future here. And here's a man, Barack Obama, who's going to fight for people like us, and you won't vote for him because of the color of his skin."

### OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Brothers and sisters, we can't tap dance around the fact that there are a lot of folks out there just like that woman.

A lot of them are good union people; they just can't get past this idea that there's something wrong with voting for a black man. Well, those of us who know better can't afford to look the other way.

I'm not one for quoting dead philosophers, but back in the 1700s, Edmund Burke said: "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing." Well, there's no evil that's inflicted more pain and more suffering than racism – and

it's something we in the labor movement have a special responsibility to challenge.

It's our special responsibility because we know, better than anyone else, how racism is used to divide working people.

We've seen how companies set worker against worker – how they throw whites a few extra crumbs off the table and how we all end up losing.

But we've seen something else, too. We've seen that when we cross that color line and stand together, no one can keep us down.

### STAND TOGETHER

That's why the CIO was created. That's why industrial unions were the first to stand up against lynching and segregation. People need to know that it was the Steel Workers Organizing Committee – this union – that was founded on the principal of organizing all workers without regard to race....They overcame poverty and brutality that few today can hardly imagine and built

## In NY on Nov. 4

Several local races are PSC priorities on Election Day, this November 4. They include:

### For State Senate:

26th District: Liz Krueger  
21st District: Kevin Parker  
13th District: Hiram Monserrate  
16th District: Toby Ann Stavisky

### For the Assembly:

39th District: José Peralta  
66th District: Deborah Glick

### US Congress:

13th District: Michael McMahon  
19th District: John Hall  
20th District: Kirsten Gillibrand

A full list of endorsements by New York State United Teachers, the PSC's statewide affiliate, is at <http://tinyurl.com/nysutendorsements>.

organizations that won impossible victories.

That's the story of the American labor movement....We're not afraid to fight, we're not afraid to win – and we know that the way things are isn't the way things have to be.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 61 BROADWAY, 15TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10006. E-MAIL: PHOGNESS@PSCMAIL.ORG. FAX: (212) 302-7815.

# Vote for Obama on the Working Families line

● On November 4, New York ballots will list Barack Obama and other Democratic Party candidates on two lines. In addition to being listed on Row A, they will also appear on Row E, the Working Families Party (WFP) line. For PSC members inclined to vote for Obama (very much including my-

self), casting our ballots on Row E allows us to express a preference for a progressive candidate without simultaneously registering an endorsement for a major party that is deeply enmeshed in the corporate culture. Voting the WFP ticket helps build a party that aims to represent the political

interests of New York's working people.

The WFP has steadily strengthened its influence in the political arena. In last year's race for governor, Elliot Spitzer amassed 165,000 votes on the WFP line, more than three times what the party first received in 1998. Last year the WFP attracted more votes than the Republicans in several assembly districts in the Bronx and Brooklyn.

At times, the WFP has presented independent candidates or provided Democrats with the winning margin. It has fought for pro-labor legislation, leading a successful campaign to increase the state minimum wage in 2004.

Please seriously consider voting for Obama on Row E, and alert your family, friends and co-workers to this progressive option.

Gerald Meyer  
Hostos Community College

### Paterson's wrong choice

● It is outrageous that Governor Paterson could find no better new trustee for the CUNY Board than the anti-labor lawyer Peter S. Pantaleo. The article in the September *Clarion* states it clearly: this man's specialty is corporate labor law – and if a client asks, his firm will do everything possible to prevent unionization among the company's employees.

### Write to Clarion

Letters must be less than 200 words and are subject to editing.

I call on my fellow CUNY faculty members to urge Gov. Paterson to ask Mr. Pantaleo to resign. This appointment, along with the governor's recent reductions of CUNY funds, says a lot about his misguided priorities. We should remind him of this in regard to what will probably be his run for a second term as governor.

Joan Young Gregg  
City Tech

### Pay problem must be fixed

● I have taught as an adjunct at CUNY for 34 years. After many years as an adjunct assistant professor on the top step of the salary schedule, I was promoted to adjunct associate professor in Fall 2007, on the middle of that title's five salary steps. An adjunct must wait three years to advance to the next step, so it will take me six years to reach the top step in my new title.

The last raise in the new contract, effective October 20, 2009, gives a much higher percentage increase to each title's top step. If I had remained an adjunct assistant professor, I would then begin earning \$87.29 per hour. But on the third step as an adjunct associate professor, I will get only \$85.78 per hour – so I will be earning less money due to my promotion. I will keep earning less through June 2010.

This is basically unfair, especially when I have been teaching at CUNY for so long. I am asking that this problem be addressed in the

next contract, and that all adjuncts in the same position as I am be compensated for monies lost through this inequity. The three-year waiting time between steps for adjuncts is too long and should be changed also.

Lynda Caspe  
BMCC

PSC President Barbara Bowen responds: *Thanks for writing, Lynda. The promotion puts you financially ahead, by a wide margin, for two academic years, and narrowly behind for one. So overall, you still gain significantly more pay by being promoted, even if this aspect of the salary schedule means you temporarily earn less.*

*For most of this academic year (starting October 6), you will earn \$3.02 per hour more than if you had received no promotion. Your hourly pay for most of last year (starting 9/20/07) is \$2.90 per hour more than if you had not been promoted (this wage rate will be reflected when you get the retroactive pay due to you under the new contract). It's true that next year for seven months you will earn \$1.51 less than the top step of your old title, but the net result is in your favor.*

*While I understand your frustration and acknowledge that the larger raise at the top step (applied in 2009) may create some imbalances, those imbalances are relatively small and temporary. The bigger effect is a gain in equity and a long-sought enhancement for the thousands of members who have been stranded on the top step.*

## Part-timers: Who you gonna call?



From left: Nick Cruz (PSC staff) and part-time organizers Bill Rooney (KCC), Kay Neal (York), Michael Batson (CSI), Linda Hart (QCC), and PSC Part-Time Personnel Officer Diane Menna were among those who gathered for a workshop as part of the union's focus on local, campus-based organizing this academic year. A list of part-time organizers is at [www.psc-cuny.org/PTorganizers.htm](http://www.psc-cuny.org/PTorganizers.htm). Contact yours to help fight for everything from pay parity to computers in your office.

# PSC goes to Pennsylvania

By PAT ARNOW

In an election year with many surprises, one thing seems certain: Barack Obama will carry New York state, and it won't be close. So hundreds of PSC members have volunteered to campaign in Pennsylvania, a state that could decide the outcome of the national election.

Daily phone banking and three Saturday bus trips organized by the PSC are part of organized labor's push to help Obama win the presidential election on November 4. The two main labor federations, the AFL-CIO and Change to Win, have united to reach more than a million members in swing states, said PSC First Vice President Steve London, who joined the bus trip on October 18.

## UNION VOTE

"The union vote was important in 2004, and we think the union vote is going to be even more important now," said London, as the chartered bus drove 38 labor activists to the Sprinkler Fitters Local 692 union hall on the edge of Philadelphia. There, the PSC bus was joined by two other busloads of New York union members who broke into teams of twos and threes. Pennsylvania union vol-

## Working to win state for Obama

unteers used carefully notated maps to drive the teams to assigned neighborhoods, where they knocked on doors and spoke with teachers, auto workers and other union members.

Northeast Philadelphia was prime territory for gentle persuasion. Plenty of union members live in the neat, modest houses, but it's a more conservative part of the city. "We are not going to areas where we expect overwhelming support," said London.

Canvassers reported mixed reactions. One voter said of Obama, "I wouldn't vote for him if he was the last and only person in the campaign." But then there was the 89-year-old woman who said she hopes to live long enough to vote for Obama and see him elected president.

Most residents were friendly, said Judith Barbanel, PSC chapter chair at Queensborough Community College. "I was heartened," she told *Clarion*. "People opened their doors. Most of them were friendly and willing to talk to us. They all had kids, they all had dogs, they all had Halloween decora-

tions, and they all had opinions about the elections."

Results from the team of Connie Passarella and Roberta Elins were typical. They spoke to 51 people, of whom 20 supported Obama, 11 favored McCain and 20 said they were undecided.

Canvassers agreed that many of the latter didn't appear completely undecided. "It seemed as though they were covering the fact that they were going over to McCain," said Michelle Matteson. Her husband John, an associate professor of English at John Jay and her canvassing partner, agreed.

Yet there was the experience of Juliette Solomon, an adjunct at Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT). She met a lifelong Republican who had served directly under John McCain in the Navy. He's voting for Obama.

When Solomon, who is African American, talked about her impressions of the day, she was so moved she began to sob. "I went through the civil rights movement, and to have someone like Obama running

for president, it's an honor to me. Today was just amazing," she said, her voice trembling.

Others were encouraged by the union-to-union camaraderie. Juliette Romano, president of FIT's United College Employees local, was one of 18 members from her college on the bus. "The best part of the day for me was when we all got back to the union hall," she said. "To really feel the commitment, it's inspiring. It energized me."

## ENERGIZING

PSC members felt the energy, too. Those who couldn't join a bus trip volunteered for phone banks that were held five days a week, calling Pennsylvania union members. "I felt I had to do something," said Gary Schwartz, a professor of classical language at Lehman. Schwartz made 60 calls one evening and thought that his conversations had made a difference; he planned to work another shift before the election.

Obama was endorsed by the PSC's national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers, a stand supported by the PSC. Funds for the union's electoral work come from a voluntary political action committee, not from dues. "PSC members

are well informed about this election, and I respect their right to make their own decisions on November 4," said PSC president Barbara Bowen, who also joined the Philadelphia canvassing. "But there is no question about which candidate is more supportive of access to higher education and the rights of workers. The PSC is working for Obama both to ensure his election and to build a broader movement for progressive policies."

Ron Hayduk, associate professor of political science at BMCC, recalled one Pennsylvania union member who laid it all out. "He said that this election is a moment, but the struggle is for a lifetime," Hayduk said. "For him, the most important result of this election was *organizing* people to become active in the political process – registering to vote, getting active in their union and their community."

Working people have powerful enemies, the man told Hayduk, and unions can't just elect one man and expect him to solve their problems. "He said, 'Come January 20, I hope to celebrate Barack Obama's inauguration. But that's also the day we keep pushing, to make sure the *promise* for change becomes the change we really need.'"

# NYC unions demand a bottom-up bailout

By DANIA RAJENDRA

More than a thousand union members rallied across the street from the New York Stock Exchange on September 25 as Congress debated the shape of a bailout for the ailing financial industry. PSC President Barbara Bowen was one of several labor leaders who encouraged the New York Central Labor Council to call an emergency protest to voice opposition to the Bush administration's proposal as a "blank-check bailout" for Wall Street.

Union leaders and members demanded that Congress include more accountability, oversight and regulation, plus an equity stake for taxpayers in any banks that receive assistance. They also demanded help for the average homeowner and wage-earner and stimulus measures to keep a deepening recession from sliding into depression.

## NO MORE MISTAKES

"We can't afford any more mistakes from this administration," AFL-CIO President John Sweeney told the crowd. "We must put

## Call for regulation & oversight

working families first in line." He also called for consequences for "the perpetrators of this disaster." Many other union leaders joined Sweeney at the rally, including Bowen and AFT President Randi Weingarten. Jesse Jackson also appeared.

"We keep hearing that we have to sign this blank check because Wall Street firms are 'too big to fail,'" Bowen told the crowd. "Why isn't national healthcare too big to fail? Why isn't public education too big to fail? And why wasn't New Orleans too big to fail? Because when it comes to the needs of working people, no money can be found."

Union members from across New York City and the US agreed. Tyrone Wilson, an IAM member from Minneapolis, said that he and about 50 Northwest coworkers flew in to join the rally. The bailout "is going to make the rich richer and the poor and middle classes poorer," he argued.

"We realize in all fairness that something has to be done, but it

has to include the people who are suffering around this country," said Murray Morrissey, executive vice president of RWDSU/UFCW Local 338.

New York municipal workers voiced their frustration. "If I gamble away my money, no one bails me out!" said Vanessa Smith, a CWA Local 1180 member. "If I go to Atlantic City and lose all my money – no one helps me buy groceries!"

## DISINVESTMENT

"This crisis is a direct consequence of the deregulation" of the last 20 years, said Gary Goff, first vice president of AFSCME Local 2627. "All the things that were part of the New Deal to prevent this sort of economic meltdown from happening have been eroded."

The PSC contingent convened in front of the union's central office at 61 Broadway, and members marched together to the rally. "I came because I'm very upset about the bailout," said Sybil Shaver, an adjunct faculty member at City Tech and Brooklyn College. "This is what happens when people refuse



At the Wall Street rally, from left: PSC President Barbara Bowen, DC37 Executive Director Lillian Robers, CWA 1180 President Arthur Cheliotos

to invest in the public good," said Ashley Dawson, who teaches at CSI and the Graduate Center.

The rally made local and national headlines in mainstream and union media, and portions of Bowen's speech were broadcast on CNN.

The bailout package that Congress eventually passed did include some of the reforms demanded by the labor movement – including more oversight – but lacked many others. The final legislation "will not address the real underlying weaknesses in the US economy," AFL-CIO President John Sweeney later said. "Without a stimulus and bankruptcy reform, the bailout looks like what it is – help for Wall

Street – when what America needs is help for Main Street."

Progressive economists urged lawmakers to re-regulate the financial markets and adopt measures such as "a tax on financial transactions to help repay US taxpayers for coming to the industry's rescue," as James Parrott, chief economist at the Fiscal Policy Institute, wrote in an article titled, "The End of Wall Street as We Know It." A deep and sustained recovery, he argued, will require bolder measures, such as universal health insurance and increases to the minimum wage to strengthen the economy at its base.

With reporting by Peter Hogness

# CUNY gives raises to top execs

By PETER HOGNESS  
and KARAH WOODWARD

On September 22, the CUNY Board of Trustees approved pay increases for vice chancellors and college presidents that ranged from \$7,067 to \$14,235. Top executives now receive annual salaries of more than \$200,000.

Additionally Chancellor Matthew Goldstein received a \$55,000 raise, a 14% increase that brings his yearly pay to \$450,000. The chancellor also receives a housing allowance and other compensation, which add more than \$100,000 to his base pay.

Vice chancellors received the most new money after Goldstein. Most got five-figure increases, for pay hikes of 5 to 6%. The highest paid vice chancellor is Allan Dobrin, the University's chief operating officer, whose \$13,183 raise brings his salary to \$276,847 per year. The next highest is Senior Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs Frederick Schaffer,

## Presidents get up to 5.5%

who is now paid \$253,050 after a raise of \$12,050.

The lowest-paid vice chancellor is VC for Student Development Garrie Moore, now earning \$200,304 after a \$7,704 boost. Moore was one of three vice chancellors to receive an additional \$5,000 bonus, which is not added to base pay.

### EXEC PAY

College presidents received smaller raises than executives at 80th Street. Only three of 18 got more than \$10,000, and in percentage terms all but a few got between 4 and 4.5%.

At \$273,061, Gregory Williams of City College remains CUNY's highest-paid college president. His \$14,235 raise, or 5.5% was by far the largest, in both percentage and absolute terms.

Williams may in fact receive considerably more. In the past, he has also received a paycheck from the CUNY Research Foundation (RF). In the 2005-2006 academic year, the last period for which figures are publicly available, Williams was paid an additional \$58,313 by the RF, plus \$70,613 for "expense account and other allowances." Though Williams sits on the RF board, the foundation has stated that he "did not receive compensation for serving on the board, but rather for [his] activities for City University of New York."

CUNY Director of Communications and Marketing Michael Arena declined to respond to questions from *Clarion* about whether Williams or other top CUNY administrators currently receive extra pay from the RF. A portion of Chancellor Goldstein's salary was similarly

paid by the RF from 2003 until 2006, but all his pay now comes from tax-levy funds.

Besides Williams, the two college presidents whose raises exceeded \$10,000 were Kathleen Waldron of Baruch (\$11,218, for a salary of \$260,503) and Brooklyn College's Christoph Kimnich (\$10,534, for annual pay of \$244,614), a 4.5% increase in both cases.

The smallest increases among presidents went to Carolyn Williams of Bronx Community College (\$7,067, with a \$208,989 salary) Edison Jackson of Medgar Evers College (\$7,461, annual pay of \$220,641) and Dolores Fernández of Hostos CC (\$7,733, for a new salary of \$201,058). This amounts to raises of 3.5% for Williams and Jackson, and 4% for Fernández.

### ALMOST DOUBLED

Since Goldstein was hired as chancellor in 1999 his pay has almost doubled, rising from \$250,000 to \$450,000

today. His other compensation, as reported last year by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, includes a \$90,000 housing allowance, payment of "club dues," and a car and driver.

The latest increase came in two parts: a retroactive increase of \$25,000 covering the period of October 1, 2007 through September 30, 2008, and another \$30,000 raise effective 10/1/08. Goldstein's last raise was in October 2006, while presidents and vice chancellors got their last increase in September 2007.

### Chancellor Goldstein gets a 14% raise.

All the raises were described as "performance-based," and the board singled out the chancellor for special praise. "It is clear that Chancellor Goldstein's performance continues to be of the highest rank," the board stated. In explaining their decision, the trustees argued that the increase was "consistent with data from comparable institutions," and cited the heads of Rutgers, University of Maryland, Columbia and NYU as examples.

A full list of the raises for CUNY's top executives is on the web at [www.psc-cuny.org/ExecRaises2008.htm](http://www.psc-cuny.org/ExecRaises2008.htm).

## LABOR IN BRIEF

### Strike against a sour deal

Some 18,000 Colombian workers, members of the National Union of Sugarcane Cutters, have been on strike since September 15.

The cutters receive poverty wages for 14-hour work days and seven-day weeks under dangerous conditions and pay for their health and retirement benefits out-of-pocket. Their employers, government-promoted "cooperatives" that sell cane to large mills and ethanol plants, are not obligated to bargain with the union.

### Utility workers back single-payer plan

The Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA) became the 19th international union to endorse HR 676, the bill for single-payer health insurance introduced by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.).

HR 676 would expand upon the existing Medicare system to cover every person in the United States for all necessary medical care including prescription drugs, preventive care, dental, vision, chiropractic and long term care without co-payments or deductibles. All US residents and residents of US territories would be covered regardless of employment, income or health care status. If passed, the bill could save billions annually by eliminating the high overhead and profits of the private health insurance industry and HMOs.

HR 676 has been endorsed by 466 union organizations – including the PSC – in 49 states, including 116 Central Labor Councils and Area Labor Federations.

# Fiterman Hall stuck without City funds

## Bloomberg won't match State

By KARAH WOODWARD

On September 10, 500 students, faculty and staff from Borough of Manhattan Community College demanded that the City provide its share of the funding needed to replace BMCC's Fiterman Hall, which was damaged beyond repair in the 9/11 attacks. The rally on West Broadway was organized to commemorate the 15th anniversary of Miles and Shirley Fiterman's gift of the building to BMCC.

The wrecked structure loomed in the background as PSC Chapter Chair Rebecca Hill, union President Barbara Bowen and BMCC President Antonio Pérez took turns at the podium. City Councilmembers Charles Barron and Alan Gerson also spoke and called for the City to do its part.

### \$70 MILLION SHORT

CUNY is slated to provide \$143 million to pay for Fiterman to be demolished and then replaced, with the City and State to share the remaining \$182 million cost. Albany allocated \$91 million in its budget this year, but required that the City match these funds in order for CUNY to access them. The City, however, offered \$21 million, leaving CUNY's capital budget more than \$70 million short. As a result, the project is stalled.

"It's in the City's capacity to provide [our] students with adequate classroom space, in a school that might give them a chance to change their living conditions," Hill told the crowd. "It doesn't seem like too much to ask. The State didn't think

so. The federal government didn't think so – and I don't think so," said Hill. "We deserve better."

When World Trade Center 7 collapsed, Fiterman was ripped open by falling debris, and toxins such as mold, lead, asbestos and mercury spread throughout. The two-step process required to first decontaminate and demolish the structure had begun, but the project is now on hold.

The current dispute with the City is just the latest chapter in a prolonged struggle to secure the necessary funding, which has also involved contentious negotiations with insurance carriers and drawn-out talks with New York State. The resulting delays have coincided with a steep rise in construction costs in NYC, as the price tag for replacing Fiterman has risen from an initial projection of \$166 million to \$325 million today.

Alan Gerson, chair of the City Council's Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Committee, and Councilmember Charles Barron, chair of the Council's Higher Education Committee, called on the mayor to allocate the \$71.2 million needed to complete construction. At a special hearing on the issue in June, a standing-room-only crowd of BMCC students and PSC members packed the council chambers. Some joked that the heavy turnout left the room almost as jammed as BMCC, at least for one afternoon.

It was grim humor, because teaching and learning suffer from the college's severe overcrowding. "I have taught in trailers on the West Side

### Politicians, PSC say City must pay its share.



BMCC PSC Chapter Chair Rebecca Hill at the September 10 rally.

highway, where it is so loud that I would be hoarse by the end of class," Rebecca Hill told the rally. "But those aren't the worst rooms. Before we came up with the trailer stop-gap, I taught in rooms carved out of the cafeteria – where I had to ask students to bang on the back wall, to get the people hanging out there to stop talking so we could continue class."

### CROWDED

Faculty members share crowded offices, making it difficult or impossible to meet privately with students.

Even 15 years ago, when the Fitermans donated the 375,000 square-foot building to CUNY, overcrowding was already a fact of campus life at BMCC. In 1993, there were 17,000 students – but the college's main campus was built to serve only 8,000.

Today BMCC continues to register students in record numbers, with 21,000 enrolled this Fall. It has the largest student body of any community college in New York City, but the least space per student of any in the state.

At BMCC, frustration has grown as the rest of Lower Manhattan rebuilds, Hill said. "Bloomberg is the reason the money is not available," she emphasized. The mayor "is just refusing to pay for something we need," Hill said. "The students are fed up, the faculty are fed up, and now finally the administration is starting to get fed up as well."

That growing sentiment led to the September rally, she told *Clarion*. The current situation is "totally unacceptable," she said, and the college community will fight for a solution.

# PSC, allies fight budget cuts

By DANIA RAJENDRA

Unions, social service agencies and community groups are opposing threatened City and State budget cuts through a coalition called "One New York."

"The PSC is participating in the coalition because we want to stop these cuts," said PSC Treasurer Michael Fabricant. "No single union or community organization can do that on its own. A larger, collaborative effort will enlarge our power and increase the possibility of turning some of these cuts around."

The approximately 90 organizations in the coalition include unions like the United Federation of Teachers and DC37 and community and social service groups like Education Voters of New York and the University Settlement House.

## Union & community coalition

Hundreds of their members gathered on the steps of City Hall at a press conference on October 10. As New York grappled with the effects of the Wall Street meltdown, they urged the mayor and City Council to protect poor and middle-class New Yorkers by closing the budget gap in part through more equitable taxes. The coalition also plans to press its case with State lawmakers.

"One New York, one fight!" SEIU 32BJ Secretary-Treasurer Héctor Figueroa got the crowd chanting. "We are not going to be divided.... We're going to fight like hell for a fair budget and not stop until our families have been taken care of."

The "progressive revenue enhancements" supported by One

New York follow recent advice from two Nobel-prize winning economists, Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman, on the smartest response to an economic slowdown.

### UNFASHIONABLE

"It's politically fashionable to rant against government spending and demand fiscal responsibility," Krugman wrote in his *The New York Times* column on October 16. "But right now, increased government spending is just what the doctor ordered." In an open letter to Paterson and other state lawmakers in March, Stiglitz said that "it is economically preferable to raise

taxes on those with high incomes than to cut state expenditures."

But Bloomberg and Paterson have so far rejected this advice. Bloomberg has called for a 2.5% across-the-board spending cut this year, and Paterson has called the legislature to Albany for a second special session to consider another round of midyear cuts. The two lawmakers are already talking about deep cuts in next year's budgets.

"We have to review both revenue and spending," said S.J. Jung, president of the Young Korean American Service and Education Center (YKASEC), at the One New York press conference. "We are here to call on Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council to enact other mea-

asures, including progressive revenue enhancements."

The coalition has not endorsed a specific revenue proposal, but one option drawing press attention is a proposal to raise taxes on the wealthiest New Yorkers. The richest 1% of New Yorkers have had their tax rates cut in half in the last 30 years according to the Working Families Party.

### INTOLERABLE

"Progressive revenue options are the right choice for the City and the State," said PSC First Vice President Steve London. "CUNY cannot tolerate any further cuts – not after two decades of disinvestment. New York and CUNY need a renewed public investment, even in this recession. Because in a downturn, New Yorkers depend on CUNY more."

# Students oppose tuition increase

## State support needed

By KARAH WOODWARD

Top CUNY administrators have made it clear that they will seek a tuition increase in next year's budget. They have not tried to draw public attention to this proposal, but students are already voicing concern and opposition.

"It's huge for me – I'm a full-time student and in student government," said Jerdene Allen, a student at Bronx Community College. "If tuition goes up, then I might have to drop one or two classes and that will prevent me from graduating on time."

"It's a public university, and here on campus you can already see people struggling economically," Jason Jeremias, chair of the Student Conference at Lehman College, told the *Riverdale Press*. "If we don't react...you're going to watch students be recycled into poverty,"

### NET LOSS

Advocates for a tuition hike often portray it as regrettable necessity, a way to ease CUNY's chronic shortage of funds. But historically tuition hikes and budget cuts have turned out to be two sides of the same coin. "It looks good on paper, but what has happened in the past is that the State reduces its funding of CUNY, in the amount of the tuition hike or more," said Bob Cermele, chair of the PSC chapter at City Tech. "So what the students give with one hand, the City and State take back with the other."

The result has been a net reduction in CUNY's resources. City University raised tuition three times in

the 1990s – yet by the end of the decade, CUNY had \$280 million less in total funds.

In 1990, 20% of CUNY's operating budget came from students' tuition payments. By 2006, that figure was 41%. CUNY students have already absorbed an across-the-board increase in their technology fee this semester, which rose 33% for full-time students, from \$75 to \$100 and 25% for part-time students from \$37.50 to \$50.

"The record of the last two decades is clear: the State has not done its share," said PSC President Barbara Bowen. "Adjusted for inflation, New York State's spending in public higher education fell by 28% between 1987 and 2007. That's the worst record of any state. It's specious to argue that students should – or could – fill a gap of that size. Public investment is really the only option."

This semester the union is working with students on a postcard campaign asking Governor Paterson, Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Goldstein to "invest in CUNY with public dollars – not tuition hikes." The goal is to collect tens of thousands of signed cards and deliver them to decision makers before they prepare next year's budget proposals. The effort is part of the PSC's CUNY Rising project, which links students, their families and communities with CUNY faculty and staff to advocate for the University.

Tabling is being organized on every CUNY campus this semester. In late September, a two-day organizing drive at Hostos collected 2,500 signed postcards (see page 12), and



Brooklyn College student activists Helen Abreu, Odalis Dominguez and Arianney Guillong.

activists at Medgar Evers College gathered 1,000 cards in a single day in mid-October. At Bronx Community College, the postcards were featured at a voter registration rally in the school's cafeteria, and BCC's Student Government Association and NYPIRG chapter are now working on the campaign.

### AFFORDABILITY

Keeping CUNY affordable is a priority for NYPIRG, the New York Public Interest Research Group. "We certainly don't like the idea of tuition hikes," said Fran Clark of NYPIRG.

"\$300 million in cuts have hit SUNY and CUNY in just the last six months. We are urging no more cuts – it's time to invest in affordable higher education."

The twin threats of a tuition hike and budget cuts emerged as key issues at a September organizing workshop offered by the United States Student Association in conjunction with the PSC. "We brought this up because we are all reading about the national crisis going on and how it will affect New York State and CUNY," said Sameen Farooq, a student at Brooklyn College and one of about 30 students from five CUNY campuses who took part.

Lydia Viñas, a student activist

from City Tech, said that her classmates are mostly unaware of CUNY's plans to raise tuition. "When they realize that their rights are at risk they want to get involved and do things to fight tuition increases," Viñas said.

Many who attended are now working with the union on the postcard campaign. Allen, who is Treasurer of the Student Senate at Bronx Community College, said that a stack of the postcards are kept in the Senate office, and students often walk in to pick up cards or bring back ones that have been completed.

Opposition to a tuition hike was a theme of a September 22 demonstration at the CUNY Graduate Center, organized by the newly formed group CUNY Contingents Unite. About 50 people, a mix of part-time faculty, graduate students and undergraduates, marched to Governor Paterson's office and listed their three demands: restore funding to CUNY and SUNY, stop plans to deregulate tuition and end CUNY's two-tier labor system.

### ON THE EDGE

"Most CUNY students already live on the edge," said David Skinner, an adjunct in political science at Hunter who joined the march. "Working, taking care of loved ones while trying to

get an education. Paterson's budget cuts will only make it worse."

When CUNY management argues for "a rational tuition policy," it argues that students who cannot afford it will be "held harmless" thanks to financial aid. "That's a myth," responded PSC Secretary Arthurine DeSola. "TAP already falls far short of the need for working adults, part-time students and thousands of immigrants. It will not cover every student, and it will close the doors to thousands."

"For many students, \$50, \$100 or \$200 can shut the doors of opportunity," said Nelson Reynoso, director of counseling at Bronx Community College and the PSC chapter's student liaison. Students say, "I cannot re-register because I owe \$200." The hardest thing is to see these talented students, who could make such contributions to society, be derailed because we could not keep our funding or maintain the cost of tuition."

*PSC members interested in working with student activists should contact Kate Pfordresher at (212) 354-1252. For postcards, contact Chris Aikin at [caikin@pscmail.org](mailto:caikin@pscmail.org). A list of tabling times on each campus, plus budget updates, is at [www.psc-cuny.org/budget0809.htm](http://www.psc-cuny.org/budget0809.htm).*

## CUNY IN BRIEF

### Retiree gets MacArthur award

A retired CUNY professor is one recipient of the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellowship known as the “genius grant.” Distinguished professor emerita Nancy Siraisi earned her PhD at CUNY in 1970 and taught at Hunter and the Graduate Center until 2003, when she retired. She is a medical historian who studies the impact of medical theory and practice on Renaissance society, culture and religion.

Her “erudite and insightful works have opened up new areas of inquiry,” the foundation says on its website.

“I am deeply appreciative. I was completely overwhelmed,” said Siraisi. The award will allow her to make trips to Europe and access the libraries and historical resources necessary for her work, she told *Clarion*.

Her book, “History, Medicine, and the Traditions of Renaissance Learning,” was published last year.

The \$500,000 award will be distributed over five years from the John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Siraisi is one of 25 fellows named this year.

### “I Kiffe NY” event held at Medgar Evers College

The French Embassy held part of its “I Kiffe NY” festival at Medgar Evers College – the only CUNY campus to have an event. “Kiffe” is French-Arabic slang for “being crazy about,” and the festival celebrated French urban culture. Medgar Evers hosted a film presentation and panel discussion on French and American hip-hop cultures.

The embassy chose the school because of its location in the heart of Brooklyn, as well as its predominantly African-American student body. It is one of the few historically black colleges in the North.

### Education from the Inside, Out

SUNY College at Old Westbury will host a one-day forum on Nov. 13 on restoring public funding to increase access to higher education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. “Education from the Inside, Out” is presented by the College and Community Fellowship, The Fortune Society of New York and the Correctional Association of New York.

Panelists include: Assemblymembers Jeffrion Aubry and Deborah Glick and CCF Executive Director Vivian Nixon among others. For more information see [www.correctionalassociation.org/news/Higher\\_Ed\\_Forum.htm](http://www.correctionalassociation.org/news/Higher_Ed_Forum.htm)

By KARAH WOODWARD

In 2007, one in 99 adults in the United States was incarcerated – the highest rate of any nation in the world.

Keeping 2.3 million people behind bars costs US taxpayers about \$60 billion each year, and high recidivism rates are one reason those numbers are so large. Within three years of release, 67% of former prisoners are re-arrested and 52% are re-incarcerated.

One cost-effective way to help former prisoners stay out of jail is to provide them with access to higher education while still in prison. “College education for prisoners is life transforming,” said Dr. Michelle Fine, distinguished professor of psychology at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Fine’s study of inmates in a New York women’s prison found that those who took college classes were four times more likely to remain out of prison over a three-year period after release. More than 15 other studies have also linked college study behind bars with lower rates of re-imprisonment. The size of the effect may vary, the studies have different strengths and weaknesses, but almost all research points in the same direction.

“If we know this and we know this works, then why isn’t there a college program in every prison?” asked Sean Pica, executive director of Hudson Link, a prisoner education program serving inmates at Sing Sing Correctional Facility.

Such programs in fact are scarce. Though CUNY helps many former inmates reenter society, it offers no college programs for men and women currently in prison. The reasons are bound up with the politics of crime, where an emphasis on punishment over rehabilitation has ruled for the last few decades. Those who work in prisoner education are hopeful, however, that this is beginning to change.

#### PUNISHMENT VS. REHABILITATION

For almost 25 years, the federal government provided Pell Grants for all students in financial need, including those serving prison sentences. From 1970 until 1994 incarcerated students were eligible to receive federal tuition assistance. Higher education programs extended throughout the nation’s prison system, with 350 college programs in 45 states.

Then in 1994, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act was passed by Congress and signed by President Clinton. This overturned a section of the Higher Education Act of 1965 by eliminating prisoner eligibility for Pell Grants.

The number of programs nationwide dropped to fewer than 10. In New York State there were nearly 70 post-secondary prison programs in April 1994. Within four months, only four remained.

Individual states soon followed the national government’s lead, cutting State funds for post-secondary education funding by limiting or eliminating prisoner eligibility. In 1995 New York’s Governor Pataki elimi-

# The impact of col

## Higher ed linked to lower recidivism rates

nated the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) for incarcerated individuals and barred the use of public funds for college programs in prison. “At that point in time, it was believed that politicians got elected to office by being tough on crime,” said Fine.

Thirteen years later, post-secondary prison education at the national level is a shell of its former self. In that landscape, Pica said that New York State is doing better than most.

Today there are 16 college programs within the 69 facilities of the New York State Department of Correctional Services (DOCS). All are coordinated with private colleges and universities, and most rely upon private funding. Many of the supportive faculty and advocates are

from public institutions, but in contrast with states such as North Carolina or Texas, public colleges in New York are not institutionally involved.

Today about 1% of New York prisoners are enrolled in on-site programs of higher education.

College programs originally spread through New York state prison facilities in response to prisoner demands for improved living conditions in the wake of the Attica uprising of 1971. In 1973, former Attica inmates transferred to Green Haven Correctional Facility in Poughkeepsie worked with prison administrators and community members to start a bachelor’s degree program with Marist College. Other institutions followed suit.

When programs were cut due to the funding restrictions of the mid-1990s, it was again through prisoner advocacy that higher education slowly began to return. Prisoners at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility

and, later, at Sing Sing petitioned for college degree programs at their respective facilities after student aid for prisoners was eliminated. Bedford Hills started offering a privately funded degree program in 1997. The Hudson Link degree program at Sing Sing began in 2000, also funded by private donations and grants.

According to Pica, none of the Hudson Link graduates has returned to prison. “Our programs at Sing Sing are shattering recidivism numbers all over the country,” he said. As someone who went to prison at age 16, Pica has witnessed the transformative results of education firsthand. By the time he left at age 33, he had acquired his GED and bachelor’s and master’s degrees. After release he earned a second master’s degree at the Hunter School of Social Work.

#### POSITIVE EFFECTS

Bedford Hills, New York’s only maximum security women’s prison, has one of the best known college programs across the country, called College Bound. Affiliated with Marymount Manhattan College, it has served as a model for other state programs including Hudson Link, which partners with Mercy College.

The study of the program at Bedford Hills, titled “Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum Security Prison,” completed in 2001, was undertaken by a participatory research team that included seven women prisoners in Bedford and five researchers from the Graduate Center at CUNY. A three-year recidivism study, conducted by the New York State DOCS, found a recidivism rate of 7.7% among the 274 inmates who took college courses, compared to 29.9% among 2,031 who did not. Participants in the college program were also far

less likely to violate parole: only 1.1% did so, compared to 17.8% of those with no involvement in college study ([http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/changing\\_minds.pdf](http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/changing_minds.pdf)).

Selection bias is of course a potential issue and hard to control for in this kind of research. But in a cautious review of the literature on all types of prison education, Gerald Gaes, former director of the Office of Research and Evaluation at the Federal Bureau of Prisons, concluded that studies designed to control for stronger motivation or other selection effects “still demonstrated reductions in recidivism and [positive] effects on labor market outcomes.” Effects shown in these studies were not as large, Gaes told a conference on prisoner education at John Jay last spring – but he noted that “even small effect sizes can produce substantial net cost-benefits.”

The interview-based component of the Bedford Hills study “explicitly sought evidence that could disconfirm positive impact,” the authors wrote, interviewing women who had dropped out of the program or who were dissatisfied with it. But the interviews, with both prisoners and guards, still pointed to a range of strong positive effects. Guards were unanimous in the opinion that the college program improved safety and discipline inside the prison walls – even those guards who were not supportive of college for the women conceded the positive effects on the women, their children and the prison disciplinary environment.

#### SUPPORT

Beyond the recidivism numbers, the interviews in the Bedford Hills study describe how the experience of college study changed women’s sense of themselves and their relationships with others, including guards and other prisoners.

“For these inmates a college education is a lifeline, a new identity, a new self,” said Fine, who worked with college programs at Bedford Hills from 1994 to 2001. “People really need a strong liberal arts education, not only vocational training. They need to read, write, think and reflect.”

A broader education, she told *Clarion*, allows students to develop critical and reflective thinking skills, to see, as one student noted, “my own intellectual signature for the first time.” Learning from mistakes and revising, increasing one’s ability to understand different points of view, understanding the past and reimagining the future, and taking responsibility for the crime and for tomorrow are skills that apply to life beyond the classroom, said Fine.

The current program at Bedford Hills started in 1997, three years after its predecessor shut down due to the loss of public funding. One of the leaders of the effort was Regina Peruggi,



Samuel Farrell’s program serves at-risk youth, including many at Rikers Island.

Lisa Quinones

# College study in prison

now president of Kingsborough Community College. Then head of Marymount Manhattan College, Peruggi helped form a consortium that worked to bring college classes back to Bedford Hills.

"I went up to the prison and met with a committee of inmates," Peruggi told *Clarion*. She had heard of their interest from a friend who was a volunteer, former New York State Deputy Commissioner of Aging Thea Jackson. In a joint effort with prison staff, inmates and Westchester residents, Peruggi gathered support from academia, particularly from other women college presidents. "As women and presidents of colleges, we thought we should do something for these other women," she recalled. "We thought education was essential." Faculty at Marymount Manhattan were "extremely supportive."

## CHANGE

The results included a more positive atmosphere within the prison, Peruggi said, with 60% of inmates involved in some type of education. "The program makes a real difference. Frankly it is startling to see the difference it makes, especially in the lives of women."

For years the impact of College Bound was little known outside of Bedford Hills, but Peruggi credits Fine's research with changing that. "Her study was very important work," Peruggi said, "one of the first to get the data from the system and really follow this" over time.

Fine and colleagues also found that College Bound participants often continue their studies after they are released. Whether this involves completing their degree or earning a more advanced diploma, Fine said, "there is a lot of interest in college once they are on the outside."

Chrystal Kitchings is one former inmate who is intent on continuing her education. She enrolled at Lehman College this fall as a sociology major, transferring credits earned while getting her associate's degree during six years at Bedford Hills.

Using the skills she gained while incarcerated, Kitchings went to work with the College Initiative Program at Lehman College after her release in December of last year. The College Initiative is a reentry program that assists former inmates who want to begin or continue college studies. It is one of four programs at CUNY that work to help those released from prison succeed in higher education.

## CUNY'S ROLE

"Education is the best thing a place like that can offer you," she said about life at Bedford Hills. "Everything else is just something you do for the state. But your education is for you, for the betterment of you."

Launched in 2002, College Initiative (CI) was formerly at John Jay before moving to Lehman College last year. Each semester about 200



Michelle Fine of the Graduate Center co-authored a study on how college transforms prisoners' lives.

students benefit from its services, which help clients bridge the gap between prison release and a college program. Tutoring, mentoring and help with college applications are among its offerings. A stipend helps cover the cost of participants' books if they maintain their academic performance and work to give back to the community.

"They use college as part of their plan to re-integrate into society because it's a real anchor and helps with their identity — they can say 'I am a student,'" explained Benay Rubenstein, the program's director. To date, the recidivism rate for College Initiative participants is just 3.2%.

Other programs at CUNY are the College and Community Fellowship (CCF) at the Graduate Center, the Prisoner Reentry Institute at John Jay College and CUNY CATCH, a youth program that operates out of three college campuses.

At the Graduate Center, the College and Community Fellowship began in 2000. CCF was founded to serve formerly incarcerated women to help them overcome barriers to transition into work and school. Close to 200 people have benefited from the program, with more than 30 going on to obtain post-graduate degrees. In its eight years of operation, less than 2% of program participants have returned to prison.

Today CCF has about 125 participants, with about 50 enrolled at CUNY and the rest at other area schools.

CCF's director, Vivian Nixon, is herself an alumna of the program. "In today's world, education will be the only way that people can stop the cycle," said Nixon. "Places like CI and CCF need to be everywhere." "Reentry" is a popular buzzword,

she added. "But it's superficial until we understand that the way for people to stay out of prison is through educating people for jobs that will sustain a different way of life."

The Prisoner Reentry Institute (PRI) was established in 2005 at John Jay and is housed within the college's Office of Continuing and Professional Studies. Rather than providing direct services to ex-offenders, PRI's mission is to promote education and public policy that support successful reentry into society for former prisoners.

One example is the training and technical assistance programs for CUNY Career Placement Centers that PRI recently initiated. After hearing from College Initiative and CCF students that there was a gap in services, PRI began working with the career centers to help advisors provide better career counseling to ex-offenders.

"The Career Placement Centers lacked the expertise to work with this population," explained Debbie Mukamal, the institute's director. "And when these students went to employment programs outside of the colleges, such as the Fortune Society, where most of the clients do not have college degrees, the programs were unfamiliar with how to deal with an educated base. We are providing training curriculum and making resources available to help them do a better job."

"Education of all kinds is an excellent vehicle for re-integration," said Mukamal, noting that not everyone is ready for college and many former inmates will need pre-college preparation.

Such pre-college preparation is one of the missions of the CUNY College Alliance for Transitional Career

Help (CUNY CATCH), a program based at LaGuardia Community College, Bronx CC and Medgar Evers College. In collaboration with the NYC Department of Education, CUNY CATCH works with adolescents in City jails, on probation or just at risk, among both high school students and dropouts. The program provides outreach and career counseling, with an emphasis on GED test preparation and pre-college prep.

"What we are doing in the program is teaching transitional skills," explained Samuel Farrell, administrative director of CUNY CATCH. In operation for the last 15 years, it is the longest running program at CUNY that works with prisoners and ex-offenders. Many of its participants at any given time are at Rikers' Island, making CUNY CATCH the only program at City University to provide educational services directly to people currently behind bars.

## MISSION

"In all the years we have offered GED classes, we have not needed to do outreach," Farrell said. "The fact that we don't have to do any outreach to get students shows that the need is great."

These four CUNY programs provide vital assistance to those they serve. But college classes for prison inmates are still not part of the mix, and Fine argues that this needs to change. "Our mission is to educate all the people of the city," said Fine, adding that more than 55% of inmates in New York State prisons are New York City residents. "CUNY has the intellectual and political know-how to build such a program."

"A couple of years ago we tried to initiate a program to teach a course at John Jay College and Lincoln Correctional Facility, a New York State work release prison in Man-

hattan, that would be comprised of both John Jay College undergraduates and Lincoln prisoners," said PRI's Debbie Mukamal. The course didn't get off the ground, she said, but the discussions led the New York State DOCS and CUNY to explore new ways they might collaborate to provide higher education to people with criminal records.

## MODELS

Manfred Philipp, chair of the University Faculty Senate, would like to see CUNY take the lead by seeking State funding for higher education in prison. State law needs to change, he said, to enable CUNY to play the role that it should. The University Faculty Senate advocated for this proposal to be included in the University's 2008-2012 Master Plan. But to Philipp's disappointment, the idea was not incorporated in the document's final draft.

"Governor Pataki arranged it so that State money could not be used," said Philipp. "But while incarcerated, those individuals should be able to be productive and have an opportunity to go beyond what got them into prison in the first place. This would really help CUNY fulfill its mission of being an institution in the public interest."

North Carolina provides one model of how post-secondary education can be provided throughout a state's prison system. "State-sponsored tuition is one of the keys to success in North Carolina," according to a paper presented by Jeanne Contardo and Michelle Tolbert at last spring's prisoner education conference at John Jay.

## PRO EDUCATION

"The State does not make specific appropriations for prison education; rather, it treats inmates enrolled in college courses the same as non-incarcerated students," wrote Contardo, director of programs for the Business-Higher Education Forum, and Tolbert, a senior researcher at MPR Associates. The cost of prisoners' tuition is then covered by a "robust funding structure," including both waivers and education grants.

New York has yet to move in that direction, but prisoner education advocates are hopeful. They see signs of a shift away from a purely punitive approach in the growing use of drug courts and other alternative sentencing measures and the recent partial reform of New York's Rockefeller drug laws.

"Right now people in parole and corrections are very pro-education," said the College Initiative's Benay Rubenstein. "It's the first time in a long time that there has been a collaboration on all parts — colleges, parole officers and prison facilities. I've been waiting for this for 15 years."

Fine argues that making college widely available in State prisons would also mean a substantial investment in prevention and supporting families. "We save dollars on re-incarceration and in return we create stronger communities," said Fine.

"There are lots of good reasons," says Mukamal, "why now the time is right."

Lisa Quiriones

# Health plan change period

By **PATRICK SMITH**  
PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund

All non-retired PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund members (full-time and adjunct) and other eligible employees may change their basic health insurance coverage during this fall's health benefits transfer period, November 3 to 28. Because 2008 is an even-numbered year, retirees are also eligible to participate.

During this time, you may switch from your current basic health plan to any other plan for which you are eligible. You may also add or drop optional rider coverage to your present plan. All changes will become

## November 3-28, retirees included

effective January 1, 2009.

In order to make transfers, additions or drops in basic health coverage, full-time faculty and staff must submit a new health benefits application, available from campus benefits offices or the Office of Labor Relations (OLR) website. The Welfare Fund website, [www.pscunywf.org](http://www.pscunywf.org), includes a link to the OLR site, where you can find a list of insurance plans, riders and cost comparison charts. Members should submit completed applications to their campus benefits office.

Teaching and non-teaching adjuncts may make changes to their basic health plans by completing the Welfare Fund's adjunct enrollment form, along with an application for a Blue Cross or HIP plan. Plan comparisons and enrollment forms are available on the Welfare Fund website. Submit your completed forms to your campus benefits office.

Retirees should expect to receive pension information in the mail, in-

cluding a health benefits application and insurance plan comparison material. Retirees may also obtain the health benefits application, enrollment instructions and plan comparisons from the OLR website. Retirees should submit the completed application to City of New York, Health Benefits Program, 40 Rector Street, 3rd floor, New York, NY 10006.

**The WF website, [pscunywf.org](http://pscunywf.org), is the place for benefits info.**

For more information on the transfer period and the benefits available to PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund members, please visit the Welfare Fund website, [pscunywf.org](http://pscunywf.org).

## Open enrollment for doctoral health insurance

November is also the "open enrollment" month for doctoral student employees to enroll in the NY State Student Health Insurance Program scheduled to take effect in January 2009. Doctoral students employed at CUNY as graduate assistants or teaching or non-teaching adjuncts who did not attend the Graduate Center information sessions in October should contact Josette Johnson in the GC Human Resources Office for details. In particular, doctoral students employed at CUNY community colleges should contact Johnson directly to ensure coverage. Doctoral students employed as adjuncts will no longer be eligible for coverage through the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund.

## CALENDAR

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5: 6:00 pm** / Ergonomic Training Workshop for HEOs and CLTs. NYCOSH's Dave Newman will lead a workshop about repetitive strain problems and workstations. At the PSC office, 61 Broadway, 15th floor. For more information contact the PSC Health & Safety Watchdogs at (212) 354-1252 x208 or [hswatchdogs@pscmail.org](mailto:hswatchdogs@pscmail.org).

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7: 4:00 pm** / First Fridays meeting of the PSC Part-Time Personnel Committee. In the PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor. For information contact Marcia Newfield at [mnewfield@pscmail.org](mailto:mnewfield@pscmail.org).

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14: 6:00 pm** / Labor Goes to the Movies presents *My Brother's Wedding*, by director Charles Burnett. Filmed in 1983, but not released until 2007, Burnett's acclaimed *My Brother's Wedding* is about the daily struggles of working people in South Central Los Angeles. In the PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor, \$2 suggested donation. Contact Albert Muñoz at the PSC, (212) 354-1252 or [amunoz@pscmail.org](mailto:amunoz@pscmail.org). No RSVPs.

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15: 9:30 am** / International Committee Meeting. For location and more information, contact Tony O'Brien at [ajobrien@bway.net](mailto:ajobrien@bway.net).

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17: 6:00 pm** / Solidarity Committee Meeting. At the PSC office, 61 Broadway, 15th floor. For more information contact Jim Perlstein at [jperstein@bassmeadow.com](mailto:jperstein@bassmeadow.com).

**TUESDAY NOVEMBER 18: 6:00 pm** / Women's Committee Meeting. At the PSC office, 61 Broadway, 15th floor. For more information, contact Marcia Newfield at [mnewfield@pscmail.org](mailto:mnewfield@pscmail.org).

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18: 7:00 pm** / CLT Chapter Meeting. In the PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor. Dinner will be served at 6:30 pm. For more information contact Albert Sherman at [ASherman@CityTech.cuny.edu](mailto:ASherman@CityTech.cuny.edu).

# What your pension system has to say

Like many US workers, PSC members have been concerned about their retirement funds because of the recent volatility in the stock market. Below are links to statements from the different pension systems to which PSC members belong, with a few short excerpts. Many of these links are accessible directly from the PSC website's pensions page, at [www.psc-cuny.org/pensions.htm](http://www.psc-cuny.org/pensions.htm).

New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), the PSC's state affiliate, spoke directly to the most basic issue in the October 3 issue of *New York Teacher*. "All of the pension funds

## TRS, ORP views on the market

that cover NYSUT members remain adequately funded to meet their obligations to current and future retirees," NYSUT's statement said.

Members' questions will vary depending on their choice of pension system, so start by finding your own system below.

**TRS:** An update from the Teachers Retirement System of the City of New York (TRS) is on the TRS website, at [www.trs.nyc.ny.us/html/news.htm](http://www.trs.nyc.ny.us/html/news.htm).

TRS members' benefits are also

protected by law. "The New York State Constitution guarantees [that] no public retirement allowance will be reduced once it is implemented," a NYSUT statement reminded members.

In addition to its basic defined-benefit pension plan, which pays retirees a set amount based on their prior service and their pay in the period preceding retirement, TRS also offers optional investment choices through its Passport Funds. These are discussed in the statement

above; they were described in more detail in the April 2008 *Clarion*, on page 8 (see [www.psc-cuny.org/communications.htm](http://www.psc-cuny.org/communications.htm)).

**TIAA-CREF:** CUNY's Optional Retirement Program includes all the University's defined-contribution plans; the largest of the ORP plans is TIAA-CREF. A basic Q&A from TIAA-CREF about recent market changes is at [www.tiaa-cref.org/support/help/financial-strength](http://www.tiaa-cref.org/support/help/financial-strength).

Current and past issues of TIAA-CREF's *Market Monitor*, a biweekly bulletin on economic and financial news, is available at [www.tiaa-cref.org/about/press/publications/market\\_monitor.html](http://www.tiaa-cref.org/about/press/publications/market_monitor.html)

**Guardian:** Another ORP plan, Guardian, has posted a message from President and CEO Dennis Manning at [http://www.guardianlife.com/company\\_info/financial\\_strength.html](http://www.guardianlife.com/company_info/financial_strength.html).

He said, in part, "Guardian remains in very strong financial condition despite the unprecedented volatility currently roiling the financial markets. Only a minimal amount (approximately one-third of one percent) of Guardian's total investment portfolio (nearly \$30 billion) was impacted by credit losses related to troubled financial institutions."

**MetLife:** Also part of the ORP, MetLife did not have a statement posted on its homepage as *Clarion* went to press. For possible updates, you can check its main website ([www.metlife.com](http://www.metlife.com)) or this page for individual benefit information (<http://tinyurl.com/6dy7vj>).

— DR & PH

## PSC supports Stella D'Oro strikers



**PSC Secretary Arthurine DeSola and members from Hostos and Bronx Community Colleges rallied with workers from Stella D'Oro bakery, who have been on strike in the Bronx since August. Unionized workers across the country are seeing benefits erode; as this happens, pressure grows to diminish pensions, healthcare and other benefits for employees in the public sector. The BCC PSC chapter has been regularly visiting the picket line, where a common chant is "no contract, no cookies!"**

## Clarion NOVEMBER 2008

Newspaper of the Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York, collective bargaining representative of the CUNY instructional staff. Vol. 37, No. 8. PSC/CUNY is affiliated with the American Association of University Professors, National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers (Local 2334), AFL-CIO, the New York City Central Labor Council, and New York State United Teachers. Published by PSC/CUNY, 61 Broadway, 15th floor, New York, NY 10006. Telephone: (212) 354-1252. Website: [www.psc-cuny.org](http://www.psc-cuny.org). E-mail: [phogness@pscmail.org](mailto:phogness@pscmail.org). All opinions expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the PSC.

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## ONE BY ONE

# Organizing power for the long run

By **MIKE FABRICANT**  
PSC Treasurer  
and **CHRIS AIKIN**  
PSC Director of Organizing

The developing financial and economic crisis will put our union to the test. A storm is coming, and CUNY is in its path. To protect our members and our University, we need to strengthen the PSC. The union has a plan – and we ask you to join us.

The strongest unions are the ones with expansive and deep member participation. The power of a union comes from a web of human connection, from building robust and enduring relationships in every part of the bargaining unit. In the coming months the PSC will engage members chapter by chapter, working to solve local problems that if unattended can damage both working and learning conditions. This local organizing, one relationship at a time, is essential to expanding the collective power of the PSC and its members over the next few years.

At the same time, to stand against the stiff budget-cutting wind blowing toward CUNY, we need strong alliances with groups who share our goals for the University. The twin objectives of our organizing are to sink deep roots on campus and build broad alliances across the city and state. Over time, this can cohere into a power capable not only of resisting the budget cutters, but also advancing a program for substantially greater investment in CUNY.

**The financial meltdown:** The drastic contraction of credit and the stock market's roller-coaster ride have prompted government to construct a seat-of-the-pants bailout plan for financial corporations that are tanking. We can expect that State and City revenue will decline substantially over the next year or two: the financial sector accounts for approximately 20% of State revenue, and the overall economy is headed for a severe slowdown.

Under Governors Pataki and Cuomo, state revenue was reduced by deep cuts in taxes on the rich – and as long as New York remains in this fiscal straightjacket, CUNY and other critical public services will be starved for funds. Those budgets can expand only if the tax code is restructured to have the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share. This is an especially salient point when middle-class taxpayers are bailing the water out of very leaky corporate vessels.

## SMART RESPONSE

Massive government cutbacks are not the smartest response to an economic downturn. As economist and Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz wrote to Governor Paterson, "It is economically preferable to raise taxes on those with high incomes than to cut state expenditures."

CUNY's history shows us that there are alternatives: Brooklyn College and Queens College opened their doors during the Great Depression. In the 21st century, public higher education is more necessary than ever to the economic growth of New York state.

Logic alone, however, will not prevail in the budget wars that are about to intensify in Albany. What will carry the day is power, and that is why expanding our organizing capacity is key. The question before the PSC is how to develop the power not only to resist cuts, but to win increased public investment. It can be done, but we cannot do it alone.

**Developing a statewide alliance for public higher education:** An important step in enlarging the power of the PSC is building alliances with other CUNY stakeholders. The PSC is taking on this work in at least three arenas. We are working with the United University Professions (our SUNY sister union), with NYSUT and, where our positions converge, with CUNY management to build a united front for securing the resources that CUNY needs.

Between 1987 and 2007, New York State ranked 50th out of 50 states in growth in state investment in public higher education, with a 28% decline in spending. Clearly, we must do much better. But any serious effort to resist cuts and reverse this trend requires a statewide presence, advocating day in and day out for substantial investment in public higher education.

**Collaborating with students:** Any effort to build a broad-based alliance for CUNY must involve students. CUNY students number nearly a quarter million and if organized can be a powerful force for increased public investment. Recently the PSC developed a program with the United States Student Association to train student organizers on a cross-section of campuses (see page 12). Faculty mentors will work with these students to help structure organizing initiatives at each college. By strengthening students' capacity to fight for their interests, together we can form a more powerful alliance.

**Building community and labor solidarity:** The PSC's Solidarity Committee has led a series of conversations with community-based organizations, local unions and churches on our common commitment to public higher education. The organizations were selected because of their history of involvement in public education struggles and/or their record of involvement with the PSC. These preliminary conversations are expected to lay the groundwork for new forms of solidarity and common action, so that we can win the budget battles for CUNY and for public investment in New York State.

But organizing with other stakeholders will only be effective if we have successfully organized our own members. We have large challenges ahead of us that may seem daunting, but can be dealt with: the key is to approach these tasks in a systematic way and from the ground up. With an involved and active membership on every campus, we can bring more strength to a broad alliance.

**Chapter organizing:** "The only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time." The only way to build a union's organizing power is one conversation at a time. To build the PSC's organizational power, the union will connect individual members with colleagues to address issues that affect them every day, from health and safety concerns to departmental workload. The goal is to engage

every member of the PSC on the workplace issues that matter to them most.

Local organizing can begin quite modestly or with only one or two dedicated members in a given department. For example, if unsafe lab conditions have been a persistent problem in a biology department, a couple of PSC members can initiate organizing that leads to action. A logical first step would be to meet with several colleagues in the department and devise a systematic way of discussing lab concerns with every union

member on the workplace issues that matter to them most.

Working on such a local scale may seem three steps removed from the financial crisis and Albany's decisions on CUNY's budget – but in reality it is part of the same fight.

## PERSISTENT PROBLEMS

On every CUNY campus there are persistent problems that have come to be seen as "normal" simply because they have existed for so long without complaint. Maybe you teach in a

classroom that's freezing cold every winter. If no one says anything or if all you do is "go through channels," you can be pretty sure that room will be just as cold when next winter rolls around. When we allow such problems to go unchallenged, we contribute to a slow erosion of standards in our workplace.

These "small" problems also have much bigger implications: they can be powerful examples of how CUNY's chronic underfunding short-changes students. A campaign on a local campus problem might bring the issue to the attention of a community newspaper to show how budget decisions in Albany are felt in Flushing or Flatbush. With the PSC's new borough-based legislative committees, chapter activists can invite local elected officials to tour their campus and see conditions firsthand.

By developing more muscle to deal with the "small" issues

that face all members every day at work, we can build the strength we need for the huge budget fights ahead. By establishing strong networks of organized PSC members in each chapter in this academic year and joining this enlarged base of activists to external alliance work, we'll be in a stronger position in the upcoming city- and state-wide struggles around CUNY funding, taxes and public services.

## HIGH STAKES

To protect our University during this period of fiscal crisis, and to ultimately produce the public investment that CUNY deserves, we must build an unprecedented power for tax reform and for public investment. Thousands of PSC members need to take part in the defense of public higher education – and the only way to ensure a good showing on the larger stage is to start small at the local level.

Before we can get 3,000 to a rally to defend CUNY funding, we need 300 at a campus rally to fix a local problem or 30 people to take a "small" action to fix a problem in one department. We need to build our strength one day and one PSC relationship at a time.

That work begins with you and the people you work with. The stakes are high. Now is the time to get involved with the PSC. Please join us in this critically important academic work: defending and improving our working conditions and the conditions in which our students learn.

*To get involved in organizing on your campus, contact your chapter chair ([www.psc-cuny.org/chapterdirectory.htm](http://www.psc-cuny.org/chapterdirectory.htm)).*



George Bates

member who is affected: full-time and part-time, both faculty and staff.

The next step might be for the PSC chapter to support small, organized actions to bring attention to the conditions: college senate resolutions, a release of a report from the CLT chapter about lab dangers, a demonstration to highlight the problem, etc. Out of this work, two or three department leaders might begin to direct a chapter-based campaign to remedy the problem.

Whatever the details, effective organizing begins with one-on-one discussions and with faculty and staff identifying the issues that matter most to them. Over time, these small conversations and new member networks can yield greater power through expanded membership education and unified action. This trajectory, from conversation to developing a network to collective action, can ultimately win solutions. It may lead to a formal agreement in a labor-management meeting, or may simply spur long-delayed action by the administration once they start to feel the heat.

This approach has been key to the local victories we have already won, from restoring free speech on the campus e-mail system at LaGuardia, to fixing the fume hoods in science labs at John Jay. Our task now is to build on these examples in a more systematic way.

Our capacity for this kind of local organizing will increase as more chapters establish a structure of departmental representatives. PSC chapters at Bronx Community College, Brook-

## Local issues and the big picture

## PUBLIC INVESTMENT

# NY needs vision, not cuts

By ERROL LOUIS

As the financial crisis deepens and whole sectors of the economy slow to a crawl, a dangerous myth is dominating public discussion about what we should do next.

Politicians, economists and conservative think-tank types are shouting from the rooftops that federal, state and local governments all need to cut spending.

That wrongheaded approach will only make matters worse. Right now, when our economy is on the brink of disaster, is precisely when we need sensible spending, delivered on an emergency basis – and only government is big enough to handle the task.

And yet everyone from Gov. Paterson to Mayor Bloomberg is talking about chopping government services next year, as layoffs and shuttered businesses result in fewer tax dollars flowing into the public treasury.

The politicians and pundits have it all wrong, according to economist James Galbraith of the University of Texas at Austin.

“The wave of spending cuts that are being proposed in New York and California and elsewhere to try and cope with collapsing property tax revenues is totally dysfunctional,” he told me. “It is the kind of thing that will accelerate the decline of the economy and really runs the risk of putting us in a severe recession with many, many lost jobs.”

The mechanism is easy to grasp. Adding government layoffs to the army of 750,000 mostly private-sector workers who have already lost jobs this year will leave more households with reduced incomes, causing more foreclosures and bankruptcies.

## REDUCTIONS

And trimming vital services that leave streets unpaved and, unclean and neighborhoods unsafe, risks replaying the worst days of the fiscal crisis, when middle-class families fled the city and state – and took their tax dollars with them.

Instead of talking all austerity all the time,

government officials should be unveiling smart, job-producing programs designed to get people working and help tide families over until the economy recovers.

Now would be a good time for state and local politicians to press for a National Infrastructure Bank – an idea that’s been kicking around for decades – to provide federal funding for bridges, roads, sewers, airports, railways, schools, levees and other improvements. Digital infrastructure projects, like nationwide access to broadband internet, are also critically important in today’s economy.

This would create jobs and improve commerce and quality of life for everyone. The same is true for investments in job-training programs.

But even before the current clamor for cuts, the Bush administration slashed workforce training dollars by more than \$2 billion over the past six years, according to a recent report by the Center for an Urban Future, a Manhattan-based think tank.

## Now is the time to create jobs.

New York City has especially suffered from the job-training cuts, losing \$50 million in federal support since 2001. Now is the time to press for a restoration of *this* money, if not an increase.

Instead of obeying the knee-jerk reflex to cut public investment, we need to pay more attention to people like economist and author Robert Kuttner.

“Anybody who thinks the fiscal cupboard is bare doesn’t agree with [US Treasury Secretary] Hank Paulson, who just persuaded Congress to part with \$700 billion,” Kuttner told me. “And we’re going to have to part with a lot more money to put people back to work and prevent a financial collapse from turning into Great Depression II.”

## SMART ECONOMICS

Making smart investments during tight budget times requires true visionary leadership from Paterson, Bloomberg and other officials.

They must resist the temptation to simply slash budgets and instead fight an all-out battle against conservative pundits and other shortsighted tightwads whose refusal to think beyond the next budget year threaten to make an already bad situation catastrophic.

*Another version of this article appeared in the New York Daily News, where Errol Louis writes a regular column. Reprinted by permission of the New York Daily News. © Daily News, L.P.*

## LABOR LAW

# The right to choose a union

By THOMAS FRANK

This is the season for hypocrisy spotting. Pundits have pounced on the moral contradiction presented by the pregnant but unwed daughter of the right’s latest family-values champion. They have figured out that riding the Amtrak home to Delaware doesn’t automatically make Joe Biden a regular guy.

But as they ponder these personal failings of the mighty, it’s easy to overlook the great, yawning hypocrisies that make up the very substance of political life. Take the venomous backlash against the Employee Free Choice Act, a bit of union-backed legislation that might allow labor to start reversing decades of decline. Almost wherever there is a close race for a Senate seat, you can see TV commercials assailing the initiative in the most strident terms.

Currently, employees at a given workplace can form a union after a majority of them choose to do so in an election. The new legislation would allow them to do it after a majority of them sign cards. This “card check” system would surely make it easier to start unions, and naturally it is heavily opposed by the business community, which – get this – doesn’t much like organized labor.

## DISTASTE

But that distaste isn’t the real issue, to hear card check’s opponents tell it. What offends, rather, is the threat that card check poses to democracy itself. This is not a battle over something low and ugly like money. This is a fight for principle, for the American Way. It is about the sacredness of the secret ballot, about every individual’s right to express him or herself freely in elections at work.

The Employee Freedom Action Committee, a “nonpartisan” group based in Washington, DC, declares that by fighting card check it is “protecting your right to vote on the job.” Meanwhile, the Coalition for a Democratic Workplace, a creature of the Chamber of Commerce and other business groups, is running a series of TV commercials showing us the dark side of the melodrama, suggesting that card check will permit the intimidation of workers by union hoodlums and even wheeling out an actor from “The Sopranos” to play this durable stereotype.

## EVERY DAY

But why stop there? The business community has opportunities every day to stand up for a “democratic workplace.” Why don’t the Chamber’s member companies just let their workers vote whenever management wants to increase the deductible on their health insurance? Why doesn’t the Employee Freedom Action Committee run indignant TV commercials every time a company moves a factory overseas without first consulting its work force? Where’s the right to vote on the job when companies decide – as they do year after year – to hold the line on wages?

The answer, of course, is that most workplaces aren’t democracies at all. They are dictatorships, of varying degrees of benevolence.

Nor do most big employers really have anything against intimidation and coercion during elections. These are the everyday tools of what is politely called “union avoidance,” and companies routinely use them when their employees try to organize: Threats to move the operation abroad if the union wins the election; compulsory meet-



Mike Konopaki

ings to listen to anti-union propaganda; termination for select pro-union employees.

These practices are so well known that they have been the subject of reports by Human Rights Watch. They have been scrutinized by academics and quantified with scientific precision, most notably in a 2000 study written by Kate Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University and submitted to the US Trade Deficit Review Commission.

## Corporations don't like 'card check' bill.

Among its findings: In 51% of union organizing drives, management made some sort of threat to close its operation down if the union won the election. Ninety-two percent of companies facing union elections made employees attend “captive audience meetings”; 67% had employees attend weekly “supervisor one-on-one” meetings; 70% sent out “anti-union letters”; 55% showed “anti-union videos”; 34% gave “bribes or special favors” to anti-union employees; and 25% simply fired pro-union employees. If American business was its own country, it would probably come in for sanctions from the State Department.

## SECRET'S OUT

“There has been no such thing as a secret ballot for the 20 years I’ve been studying elections,” Bronfenbrenner told me a few days ago. “Employers know exactly which way an employee is going to vote.”

...But it’s more than the hypocrisy that should concern us, and it’s even more than the ongoing violation of people’s rights, human or civil. The destruction of the labor movement by tactics like these is a big part of the reason why wage-earners no longer rise as the economy grows, and why some day soon we will speak of the great middle-class nation in the past tense.

*Thomas Frank is the author of The Wrecking Crew: How Conservatives Rule. This article was previously published in his column in The Wall Street Journal.*

*The American Federation of Teachers is working with other unions to gather one million signatures in support of the Employee Free Choice Act. You can add your name at [www.freechoiceact.org/page/saft](http://www.freechoiceact.org/page/saft).*

## IN THE VOTING BOOTH

# What role does racial animus play?

By FRANK DEALE  
CUNY School of Law

The November 4 election can be viewed from many different levels of perception. Many Republican supporters of John McCain will vote for him because they wish to maintain the reins of power seized by the Bush administration eight years ago. Many Democratic supporters of Barack Obama will cast their ballot for him because they seek desperately to end what they have experienced as eight years of war, greed, lies, corruption and illegality.

But many others will see this election as part of something much bigger. They will see it as an opportunity for the voters of America to demonstrate to the world that they aim to reject the 400-year legacy of racial discrimination against black Americans and to select the best candidate for the most powerful job in the world without regard for that person's race. This weighty opportunity will follow millions of people into the voting booth on November 4, and the entire world will anxiously await the outcome.

## OPPORTUNITY

We know that a small percentage of voters will reject Obama because he is not white, their minds made up long before their ballots are cast. Some are visceral believers in white supremacy and have been the subject of news reports on the distribution of racist campaign literature, threats of violence against Obama campaign workers and threats against the candidate. Fortunately, unless the election is unbearably close, the outcome will not be determined by this relatively tiny cohort.

There is another, larger, group of white voters who do not support white supremacy, but are hesitant to back Obama. Those who are working and middle class stand to benefit enormously from an end to Republican governance of the country, especially on economic policy. The fact that they are nonetheless undecided or even more favorable to McCain has led many to suspect that these voters experience "apprehensions over having a black man at the head of government," as suggested by emeritus CUNY professor Andrew Hacker in *The New York Review of Books*.

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

In polls, these potential voters cite other reasons for their choice, and those reasons may be the biggest factor in how their votes are cast. But if race prejudice is a significant factor for some, that could be enough to determine the outcome of the election.

Racism can affect elections in many, and sometimes subtle, ways. Voting rights litigation has often identified structural barriers that appear neutral on their face but operate to dampen minority group participation and engagement in the electoral process. Examples from the past include the poll tax and the literacy test, and at-large electoral schemes.

But while work in voting rights law has had some success in utilizing social science techniques to understand and counteract governmental obstacles to full electoral participation by all racial groups, none of these tools have been designed to assess racial bias expressed in the privacy of a voting booth.

In the context of employment discrimination law, civil rights attorneys have relied on

social science studies that seek to measure cognitive bias – subconscious racism – and how it affects real-world decision making. What they have discovered from studies of the Implicit Association Test and other sources is that (1) implicit prejudice is distinct from explicit prejudice; (2) implicit prejudice is pervasive; (3) implicit prejudice typically operates beyond conscious control; and (4) implicit prejudice produces discrimi-



Associate Professor Patrick Lloyd of Kingsborough CC talks with a Philadelphia voter.

natory behavior. Although not free from controversy, these studies serve to alert us that much work is needed to unearth hidden biases that drive our behavior when making extremely important decisions.

## WHITE ELITES

Attempts to assess the implications of these data for the current election have hit a nerve. In an extensive survey with similar methodology, conducted by Stanford University researchers in conjunction with the Associated Press and Yahoo News, 40% of white voters held some negative attitudes about black people. "Statistical models derived from the poll suggest that Obama's support would be as much as six percentage points higher if there were no white racial prejudice," AP reported.

In early October, *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof cited this study and explored the broader relevance of such research to the upcoming election. Yale psychologist John Dovidio told Kristof that unconscious discrimination – prejudice among "those who don't think that they're racist" – will be a bigger factor this November than open bigotry. "Faced with a complex decision," Kristof wrote, those influenced by unconscious racism may "feel doubts about a black person that they don't feel about an identical white."

The column drew over 400 responses on Kristof's blog, some of which charged proponents of this research of seeking to "guilt-trip" undecided whites into voting for

Obama. But this was a minority position among responders. Overall, discussion of this research in the media may decrease the likelihood of subconscious racial voting by drawing more attention to it.

One problematic feature of this discussion, however, is that white wealthy Republicans who have reaped enormous financial rewards from Bush administration policies and who are fully committed to John McCain

of attack allows the targeted voter to tell themselves that what they are really concerned about is not race but something else, such as crime or welfare.

The McCain campaign has continued this tradition of trying to have it both ways. Its first ad of the general election proclaimed that McCain would be "the American president Americans have been waiting for." In a campaign against a man named Barack Hussein Obama, whose father came from Kenya, the nature of this appeal is clear, even if implicit. The same can be said of Sarah Palin's charge that Obama is "not one of us," and the overall effort to portray Obama as different, frightening and dangerous. All this takes place when the landscape of American racism is shifting, with growing Latino and Asian populations that may make white people a minority within two generations.

## DIVISIONS

This time around, older racial fears are linked to the post-9/11 wave of hostility toward Arabs and Muslims, and ads and speeches portraying Obama as a friend of "terrorists" have pushed these buttons. "Palin's words avoid repulsing voters with overt racism," commented a writer for the Associated Press. "But is there another subtext for creating the false image of a black presidential nominee 'palling around' with terrorists while assuring a predominantly white audience that he doesn't see their America?"

Crowds at Republican rallies have responded to these efforts. Obama's name increasingly sparked shouts of "traitor," "terrorist," "liar," "treason" – even "off with his head," "kill him" and (at a rally in Georgia) "bomb Obama." At one event, racial epithets were hurled at a black member of a TV crew; at another, a McCain supporter declared she couldn't trust Obama because "he's an Arab."

For many, this reaction evokes the violent resistance to desegregation in decades past. On October 11, Rep. John Lewis declared that the McCain-Palin campaign was "sowing the seeds of hatred and division," and the civil rights veteran urged them to change course. "As public figures with the power to influence and persuade," Lewis said, "Sen. McCain and Gov. Palin are playing with fire, and if they are not careful, that fire will consume us all."

## PROFOUND CHANGE

These open displays of hate support those who claim that there really is no "unconscious" bias if, after political campaign manipulation, it can so easily surface as "conscious" racism. It suggests, at least, that there is not a clear-cut separation between the two.

The harsh attacks on Obama did not seem to improve McCain's standing in the polls, and many commentators declared that they had been counterproductive. Certainly these tactics cost McCain some votes while gaining others – but it was hard to be sure about the net result. The nation's financial crisis has hurt McCain's support so badly that it could be overwhelming other factors.

Appeals to racism have been a regular part of American elections because they win more votes than they lose, and this is not going to change all at once or in a single election. But when that is no longer true, it will mean a profound change in the American electoral equation.

**Stanford study: racism might cost Obama 6%**

# Hostos scores with organizing coalition

By KARAH WOODWARD  
& PETER HOGNESS

This year the PSC is focused on local campus organizing and building alliances – and the Hostos chapter has started off with a bang.

In an energetic two-day outreach campaign, union activists worked with students and community members to gather 2,500 signatures on postcards against tuition hikes and budget cuts at City University. They also registered 173 voters at the South Bronx campus.

The group set up shop just outside the college on the Grand Concourse on September 24. The sounds of bachata music and a video presentation drew attention to a table loaded with cards, while union members and students approached passersby and asked if they'd like to support CUNY or register to vote.

A freestanding tent made the table hard to miss and helped create a welcoming atmosphere. A mock voting machine allowed students and newly registered voters to practice the act of casting a vote, so they could be certain about the procedure and their rights before the November presidential election.

## COMMUNITY

"I loved seeing their faces. They felt it was really a significant thing for them to vote," Chapter Chair Lizette Colón said later. "Mothers with their babies and carriages would come by the table. And that embodies what we really wanted to do, not only for our students but also for the greater community."

The next day the weather turned bad, so the tabling was moved inside the college to the Bridge – a centrally located campus hub – where volunteers could reach the maximum number of students.

"I was happy that 173 people were registered over the two days," said Laura Kaplan, a CLIP instructor and PSC part-time organizer. "I was shocked that so many people in the South Bronx were not regis-

## Thousands of postcards collected

tered so close to an important election. It reaffirmed the importance of what we did that day."

"It's incredibly effective when faculty, students, staff and the community are visibly working together," said Jerry Meyer, a member of the chapter's executive committee. "It's not just an endorsement at the bottom of a flyer."

Colón said that collaboration with the New York Civic Participation Project (NYCPP), an immigrants' rights group, added a new dimension to the chapter's outreach work. NYCPP's Bronx Organizer Sussie Lozada, a former Hostos student, secured the mock voting booth from another union, DC37, that her group has worked with in

the past. NYCPP also pledged to call all newly registered voters on Election Day to remind them to get out and vote.

The two-day tabling event also had the support of the Hostos Student Government Association, and Colón said it provided an opportunity for the Hostos chapter to build a stronger relationship with student leadership. Students walked away from the table with batches of postcards calling for investment in CUNY that they can distribute to and collect from their classmates. The postcard campaign is an initiative of the PSC's CUNY Rising project, which aims to foster alliances with students and community organizations.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Sonia Maldonado, the Hostos PSC chapter's new liaison to student organizers, recruited 10 students to join in the tabling effort. Maldonado told *Clarion* that whether students choose to get active depends on education about the political process. "If they don't understand the impact that these

cards can have, they will not get involved," she explained. "But students can move anything ahead if they are organized and believe they can do it."

## POSTCARDS

"I will distribute them to my friends and approach other students on campus and get them to sign, because this affects all of us," said Hostos student Yesmin Peña. If tuition is increased, "I don't know how I will afford it," she said. "I don't get financial aid. When I was working, I was saving all the money I could."

Peña was one of seven students from Hostos to attend the Grassroots Organizing Weekend (GROW), a training workshop jointly sponsored by the PSC and the United States Student Association in mid-September. Student activists from five CUNY campuses took part, and another session is planned for next semester.

## STRONG TIES

"We can already see the effect of their receiving this training and wanting to be involved," said Colón, noting that several students are now working on the CUNY Rising postcard campaign. Building close ties with students and the community is one key to a stronger union, Colón said. Meyer agreed, adding that this is a lesson taught by Hostos's history.

"This college was saved because of the community," said Meyer. In the mid-1970s, the City's fiscal crisis led to a threat that the school would be closed. The Save Hostos movement involved the PSC, community groups and students in a successful campaign to keep the college open and later to win better facilities. (Meyer's account of that struggle, in which he was deeply involved, is in the Summer 2006 *Clarion* at [www.psc-cuny.org/communications.htm](http://www.psc-cuny.org/communications.htm).)



Lizette Colón (left) and her colleagues at Hostos collected thousands of postcards and registered new voters with the help of student allies.

"The Save Hostos Coalition established strong relations with students and the community," said Colón, "and we want to go back to that model."

The chapter's organizing push this semester emphasizes outreach to every affected constituency. At Hostos, that means that effective outreach to students has to include non-citizens. "At least half of our students are immigrants," said Meyer. "If you have a campaign that leaves them out, then it doesn't build unity." So in addition to voter registration, the tables also distributed hundreds of pamphlets on naturalization to those interested in pursuing citizenship. "Then if students let us know they're not citizens, we still have something to give them," Meyer said. "And we have student non-citizens who help us."

## NETWORKS

For the Hostos chapter, broad outreach is not a substitute for getting faculty and staff more involved – it's been a vehicle for it. "The days that we had the table, many faculty

members were asking for cards and handing in cards," said Kaplan. "I think faculty and staff were happy to be doing something with respect to budget cuts, to have an outlet for their frustration, and they were happy that the union was taking this initiative."

## POWER

Like several other chapters, the Hostos PSC chapter is starting to build a structure of departmental union representatives. The goal is for every department in the college to have someone who can serve as a contact person for union information and activity.

"We want to make sure people have information about the contract, and know that the union is committed to making the contract work," said Felipe Pimentel, who will serve as union representative in the behavioral and social sciences department. "The idea is to have better communication," he said, "to reach out beyond our core of activists and to build a better network."

As the history of Hostos shows, a strong network means power.

Professional Staff Congress/CUNY  
61 Broadway, 15th Floor  
New York, New York 10006

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## 15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

# Gather ye postcards while ye may

Activists on every campus are collecting signed CUNY Rising postcards that call on Gov. Paterson, Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Goldstein to invest in CUNY with public dollars, not tuition hikes. Stop by the table on your campus and help out. If you can't stay long, grab a stack to distribute among your colleagues

and students. Signed cards should be returned by Nov. 14. The union will then take tens of thousands of postcards to Albany for the Nov. 18 special session considering proposed budget cuts, to remind legislators that New Yorkers depend on CUNY. (See [www.psc-cuny.org/budget0809.htm](http://www.psc-cuny.org/budget0809.htm) for tabling schedule.)