

Clarion

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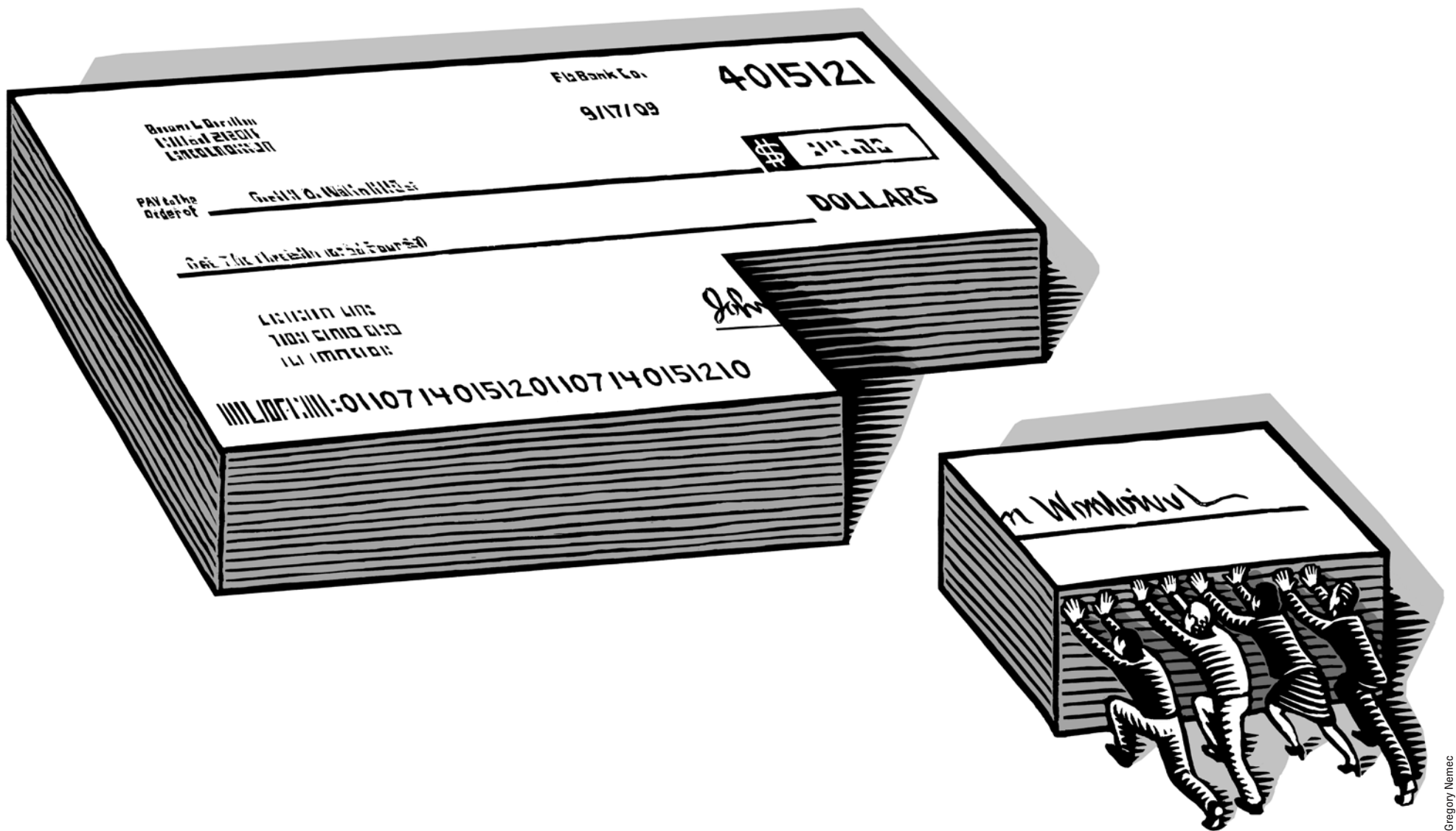
SUMMER 2009

ANTARCTICA

**Studying
the icy
past**

QC prof
& students
go south.

PAGE 6



Gregory Nemeo

ADJUNCTS WIN CHANGE AT FIVE COLLEGES FINAL WEEK PAID IN FULL

Since 1973, five CUNY colleges have paid part-time faculty less during the final week of the semester – despite the fact that this is generally the busiest time in the academic year. But starting this Fall, that will change: in an agreement with the PSC, the University said that adjuncts on all campuses must be paid the same for

each week of work. Union activists had demanded an end to the unfair practice with tactics that ranged from petitions to picket lines to guerilla theater, in a “Campaign of Outrage” that was launched in 2007. “Our persistence paid off,” said Diane Menna, lead organizer of the campaign. **PAGE 3**

POLITICS

Endorsements in City elections

In the September 12 primary elections, the PSC is supporting both old friends and promising newcomers. All are strong supporters of CUNY and the union movement. **PAGE 10**

REFORM

The prospects for health care

As Congress discusses health care reform, the insurance industry is working hard to rig the game in its favor. An analysis of the options under debate in Washington. **PAGE 9**

FUNDING

Higher ed on the chopping block

Across the US, funding of public higher ed has been shrinking for years. This year state budget cuts are deeper than ever, as anti-tax politics block real solutions. **PAGE 4**



PENSION FIGHT

Gov. pressing for changes

Paterson’s legislation would reduce retirement benefits for new hires. The PSC and other unions have blocked this proposal so far – but the fight is not over. **PAGE 5**



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.

Kudos for persistence on final week

● Congratulations to the union on winning full pay for the 15th week for all adjuncts, a much-deserved increase for our colleagues who deserve full-time funding. I thank our union leaders for being on the job all year and for doing a good job in the worst of times. I remember how poorly the previous group ran the PSC when times were better, when more could be expected but instead we kept losing ground for years, before and until the current leadership was voted in.

Ira Shor
College of Staten Island
& Graduate Center

Tobacco, research & Gillibrand

● A full year before our next senatorial election, NYSUT endorsed Kirsten Gillibrand for the Senate. I caution PSC members to learn more about Gillibrand and other prospective candidates before voting in the senatorial primary and election next year.

NYSUT, representing educators and health professionals statewide, endorsed a candidate who, as an attorney for the Davis Polk law firm, was responsible for blocking data demonstrating the link between tobacco and ill health, despite the law firm's policy that permitted associates to opt out of cases they found ethically objectionable. Gillibrand vigorously defended Philip

Morris' right to obstruct research identifying tobacco as a carcinogen and defended her actions in a recent *New York* magazine interview. How could NYSUT support someone who showed no respect for research and knowledge!

Secondly, I am an asthmatic and Gillibrand's action forced me to deal with "smoked filled" environments longer, as it did for many others suffering from respiratory disorders; thus shortening our lives. How can NYSUT explain its actions supporting a senatorial candidate who still believes it is fine to withhold information from the public, including children who might view smoking as "cool"? What message is NYSUT sending out in its endorsement of Kirsten Gillibrand?

Arline Bronzaft
Lehman College (retired)

Adjuncts excluded

● In May our PSC newspaper published a front-page article stating that paid parental leave, a benefit won in the last contract, was "in full effect." But CUNY adjuncts face a very different situation.

Adjuncts make up the majority of the teaching force at CUNY – but unlike their full-time colleagues, they are not included in this benefit. Not only don't adjuncts have paid parental leave, but they can take only limited leave for illness

or emergency – just one-fifteenth of their teaching time per semester. Even if they don't use it, this allowance is not cumulative.

Many adjuncts work at the City University for 10, 20, 30 years and more and are still allowed only this token provision for sick leave. If these instructors have children who are ill, they cannot stay home and care for them – unless they do so knowing they will not get paid, and that they are putting their job in jeopardy. By contrast, full-time staff have job security and accumulate sick leave at a rate of one month per year, up to a total of six months.

The PSC is the union of all staff, both full- and part-timers. You would never know it from the callous triumphalism of the *Clarion*, our union newspaper.

Lynda Caspe
BMCC

Editor's response: *The article in our May issue did clearly state that this benefit covered only full-time employees. Clarion has repeatedly reported on the inadequacy of leave and other benefits for CUNY adjuncts. Last year's feature article on adjunct health insurance and sick leave just won a top award from the International Labor Communications Association for "using the stories and voices of [the] union's members to illustrate the arbitrary cruelty of the system."*

There have also been weaknesses

in our past coverage of the conditions of part-time faculty and staff, and past criticism has helped to improve it. But it is not accurate to imply that we have ignored the inequities which Caspe's letter details.

Administration by, of and for the faculty

● With regard to the chancellor's proposal for term limits on department chairs, Barbara Bowen asks why he does not propose term limits on administrators. Indeed, why not?

It's clear that the administration's overall (and largely successful) objective is the corporatization of the University, and this new proposal is just one more move in that direction. Faculty responses have been defensive, but why not be proactive? Advance a new governance paradigm in which administrators are simply faculty members who are given some released time (but still teach) to supervise administrative matters, with moderate additional pay as compensation for additional hours in the summer and other times. Let there be term limits. Let them be selected by the faculty.

These leaders will work out of a sense of service and dedication, rather than for the money and the power.

Michael Sobel
Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center

Election & selection

● As pointed out in an anonymous letter ("Library limits?") in the June 2009 *Clarion*, the chairperson of the library department is appointed rather than elected. However, this provision does not come from the contract, but rather from the bylaws of the Board of Trustees (Sec. 9.1.b). Article 1 of the contract reiterates the bylaws by including Chief Librarian in the list of excluded titles (i.e., management). If the Board of Trustees has the power to change the bylaws to impose term limits for chairs, one would assume it therefore also has the power to change the bylaws to mandate elected library chairs.

John Drobnicki

The writer is a professor and chief librarian at York College.

LABOR IN BRIEF

Honduran teachers killed

Honduran high school teacher Roger Abraham Vallejo Soriano died August 1, two days after he was shot in the head while participating in a non-violent protest outside of the capital city of Tegucigalpa. A second teacher, Martin Florencio Rivera Barrientos, was killed on August 1 after leaving Vallejo's wake. Rivera's body was found dumped in an impoverished neighborhood with 27 stab wounds.

Since the June 28 coup that ousted Honduras's president Manuel Zelaya, Honduras's teachers' unions have played a leading role in galvanizing resistance to the de facto regime of Roberto Micheletti. Before the coup, teachers' unions were also strong supporters of Zelaya's efforts to convene a constituent assembly to rewrite Honduras's Constitution on behalf of the country's poor majority. A non-binding referendum on whether to go forward with a future vote on holding a constituent assembly was scheduled to occur on the day Zelaya was deposed.

Vallejo was participating in a highway blockade when he was gunned down by government security forces. Supporters of Zelaya have repeatedly paralyzed the country's main highways to exert economic pressure on business elites who support the coup.

Correction

In "Jane Young remembered at BMCC," our June issue reported that Rochelle Weinstein shared an apartment with Jane Young in 1963. Weinstein shared her apartment not with Young, but with a mutual friend.

New PSC Executive Council takes office



The newly elected PSC Executive Council met for the first time on June 5. Front Row: (l-r) Steve London, First VP; Lorraine Cohen, Community College Officer; Marcia Newfield, VP Part-Time Personnel; Donna Veronica Gill, Cross Campus Officer; Iris DeLutro, VP, Cross Campus Units; Eileen Moran, Retiree Officer. Second Row: Andrea Ades Vásquez, Cross Campus Officer; Barbara Bowen, President; Anne Friedman, VP CC; Susan DiRaimo, PT Personnel Officer; Steven Trimboli, Cross Campus Officer. Third Row: Robert Cermele, VP, Senior Colleges; Michael Batson, PT Personnel Officer; Penny Lewis, CC Officer; Alex Vitale, SC Officer; Arthurine DeSola, Secretary; Kathleen Barker, SC Officer. Back Row: Bill Friedheim, Retiree Officer; Steve Weisblatt, PT Personnel Officer; George Brandon, SC Officer; Michael Fabricant, Treasurer; Felipe Pimentel, CC Officer; Jonathan Buchsbaum, SC Officer; Costas Panayotakis, University-Wide Officer. Not Present: Carl Lindskoog and Nikki McDaniel, University-Wide Officers; Diane Menna, SC Officer.

Look who's getting fully paid at CUNY

By JOHN TARLETON
& PETER HOGNESS

Adjuncts win full pay in 15th week at all campuses

For decades, adjuncts at five CUNY colleges have received a smaller paycheck for their work in the final week of the semester. On July 16, the University agreed to end this practice, after a creative, grassroots campaign by union members that began in 2007.

As of Fall 2009, teaching adjuncts at Baruch, College of Staten Island, and Bronx, Kingsborough and Queensborough Community Colleges (and full-time faculty teaching overloads) will be paid the same amount for the last week of the semester as they are for all other weeks.

"We were innovative, we were persistent," said PSC Senior College Officer Diane Menna, a long-time adjunct at Queens College and lead organizer of the campaign for change. "We made it more trouble than it was worth for them to maintain this policy."

SINCE 1973

At most CUNY campuses, adjuncts have been consistently paid 45 hours per semester for a three-credit course (three hours per week for 15 weeks). The inequity at the five campuses began in 1973, when they started paying adjuncts for only 14 weeks of teaching per semester plus pay for proctoring an exam (usually 2 hours) – or nothing at all for the final week if the adjunct didn't proctor an exam. As a result, most adjuncts on these campuses were paid for only 44 hours per semester. (Kingsborough, under faculty pressure, later increased this to 44.4.) Of course, adjuncts who taught a four- or five-hour class were short-changed even more.

Part-time faculty who taught six or more hours per week at the same campus lost not only full pay for the 15th week, but also that week's paid hour of professional time. Full-time faculty teaching an extra course on an overload basis got smaller checks as well.

WORKING MORE

"This was an ugly issue," said David Hatchett, a lecturer in English at Medgar Evers who had worked as an adjunct for two decades. "It wasn't just the money – it was about the fact that you are already paying us so little, and then you want to cheat us out of a little more! It was almost unfathomable."

The practice was especially insulting, Hatchett said, because the combination of exams, term papers and grading means that the final week is often the busiest time of the entire semester: "To be paid less when you're working more – that's just not right."

The union filed a grievance on the issue in 2005, but received a split decision in arbitration the following year. Citing past practice, the arbitrator found that the five campuses that paid less could continue to do



Adjuncts and their supporters demonstrate at Bronx Community College during finals week in May 2007. BCC was one of five colleges that had paid adjunct faculty less in the last week of the semester.

so, a ruling that preserved the practice of full pay at the other 12 CUNY colleges.

Adjunct activists refused to give up. "When you can't get a fair decision in a grievance," said Menna, "you can do it through organizing."



The Grinch starred at a Baruch protest.

It's not easy, and you have to stick with it. But if you engage wholeheartedly and persistently in a just cause, you can create the pressure that's needed to win."

In discussing what to do next, part-time faculty kept coming back to the obvious unfairness of the policy. "No matter how long this had been going on, we felt it was unacceptable," said Menna. "It completely disregarded how hard we work when the semester is coming to an end. It was just

outrageous!"

With the full support and backing of the union's leadership, they decided to organize a campaign for change – and dubbed it the "Campaign of Outrage."

The campaign was launched in April 2007 as union activists gathered petition signatures from across the CUNY system. During finals week the following month, pickets were held on each of the five campuses, and petitions were presented to several college presidents.

Next came a series of smaller, out-of-the box actions, as organizers looked for creative ways to make the issue hard to ignore. That summer, protesters showed up at "open house" functions at Bronx, Queensborough and Kingsborough Community Colleges, passing out flyers and speaking with prospective students about the 15th week issue. The actions contrasted the five colleges' labor practices with the theme of excellence featured in CUNY's subway and newspaper ads.

When holiday season came, the campaign moved into guerrilla theater. Shortly before Thanksgiving, an activist dressed in a turkey suit attempted to present a stuffed turkey to the presidents of Baruch and BCC, both of whom had previously refused to accept the PSC's petitions. Volunteers distributed flyers headlined, "CUNY, don't be a turkey!"

"It's appalling to see Baruch refuse to give adjuncts even the few dollars they deserve for finals week," the chairperson of the college's sociology department, Glenn Petersen, told the student paper *The Ticker*.

During finals week that Decem-

ber, the campaign returned to all five campuses. This time protesters suited up as "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas," while leafleting students and faculty and passing out day-glo stickers that read "Outrage!"

"We showed college presidents that we were not going away," said Menna. "As long as they continued to cheat us, we would continue to show up and speak out."

"Full-time faculty and students were shocked at how far CUNY would go to pinch pennies at the expense of adjunct faculty," recalled Carl Lindskoog, a QCC teaching fellow who participated in several of the events. "It did get the issue on people's radar screens," agreed former QCC Chapter Chair Jay Appleman.

At College of Staten Island, PSC Chapter Chair Vasilios Petratos raised the issue with the college's new president, Tomás Morales, and urged him to do the right thing. "Adjuncts teach upward of 50% of our students, and we should recognize them for their work," Petratos told *Clarion* in 2008. "What we demand is fair compensation, full remuneration for our members' excellent work...and this will help make the college a better place."

AT VARIANCE

At QCC, Phil Pecorino, chair of the Curriculum Committee of the QCC Academic Senate, put the issue on the committee's agenda in September 2008. By shortchanging adjuncts for an hour each semester, Pecorino said, the five schools had been putting themselves at variance with State rules that require 45 hours of contact time for a three-

hour course. Working through college governance, with support from QCC's administration, the committee pressed for a change in the college's academic calendar so that adjuncts would have to receive full pay in the final week. "We did have the State Education Department regulations on our side," Pecorino told *Clarion*.

A SMALL PRICE

Meanwhile at Baruch, the Faculty Senate passed a resolution calling on CUNY to pay adjuncts for a full 15th week on all CUNY campuses. "The faculty actually works more in the exam week than during the average week in the semester," said Stan Wine, a Baruch adjunct in computer information systems who co-authored the resolution. Wine told *Clarion* that the Baruch resolution, which also referred to State regulations, "caught the eye" of administrators at 80th Street.

Bill Ferns, an associate professor in the same department, worked with Wine to secure passage of the resolution. Baruch's policy represented a "grave injustice," said Ferns, who is currently secretary of the college's Faculty Senate. "If we let the people who are most vulnerable get mistreated, then they will eventually get to us," said Ferns. "I couldn't just sit there and do nothing."

Ferns said that he did not agree with all of the Campaign of Outrage's tactics, but the bottom line was that the protesters were right. "It was just wrong not to pay someone that lousy, stinkin' extra \$55," he told *Clarion*. For the Spring of

No more short wages in busiest week.

2007, Ferns calculated that Baruch would have owed 257 adjuncts a combined \$40,057, for a total of 618 hours. In the scheme of CUNY's budget, he said, the cost of doing the right thing was not large.

The cost of doing the wrong thing, on the other hand, was growing. "As it became more and more public, it got harder to hold onto," said Ferns. "No matter what you say about 'past practice,' it looked terrible, what they were doing to the adjuncts."

By this summer, CUNY proved ready to address the issue. Discussions with the union on a number of payroll-related issues led to the July 16 agreement. "In the end, it was impossible for the five college presidents to ignore the unfairness of their practice," said Executive Director Deborah Bell. "Part-timers' Campaign of Outrage and the solidarity of full-time and part-time faculty at the campuses put pressure on CUNY to solve the problem."

"We used many different tactics, and we may never know exactly what was the final factor," Menna told *Clarion*. "But one thing we know for sure: if we had just accepted this quietly, it never would have changed."

Public higher ed imperiled across US

By MICHELLE CHEN

As the economy sinks, state colleges and universities are being bludgeoned by the budget axe from all angles, with plans to shrink programs, cap enrollment or slash staff. Yet the current crisis is rooted in a pattern that has been in place for a generation: the ongoing withdrawal of government funding from public higher education.

"We've been on a several-decade trend of public higher education becoming more of a private good than a public good," said Dan Hurley, director of state relations and policy analysis with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. "And certainly that trend is being exacerbated rather dramatically in the current recession."

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, most states have moved to cut higher education funding in the face of a widening recession, utilizing measures like tuition hikes and cuts in programs and/or staff.

In New York, statewide budget cuts were moderated by some tax increases on the wealthy and federal stimulus funds. The State nonetheless slashed support for CUNY senior colleges by \$45 million and increased the burden of tuition on CUNY students to cover the difference. (Tuition will now pay for more than 40% of CUNY senior colleges' operating budget.)

Public colleges in other states have seen cuts that are far more severe, and even large tuition hikes have failed to fill those budget gaps. The latest budget plan in California, for example, would drain \$2 billion from state university systems. Community colleges would additionally lose more than \$900 million in state funding and could face deeper shortfalls due to their heavy reliance on unstable local property tax revenues.

UNSAVORY OPTIONS

The University of California Board of Regents has approved a furlough plan that could affect 80% of the system's staff, more than 140,000 workers, which requires employees to take a number of unpaid days off and lose up to 10% of their wages. The California State University Board of Trustees is weighing a range of unsavory options, from furloughs and fee hikes to simply eliminating students themselves: the system has closed admissions for the spring and winter semesters.

At Fresno State University, Virginia Crisco, a member of the California Faculty Association, told *Clarion* that in her writing program, budget cuts could soon unravel an initiative to expand literacy-building supplemental coursework for struggling students.

At the University of California-Santa Cruz, students have protested budget cuts as a matter of equity

States slash spending as revenues fall short



More than 6,000 California students, teachers, administrators and education workers converged on the State Capitol in March.

for the increasingly diverse student body. "With the demand for enrollment rising, and many low-income students of color not being able to enroll, we will soon be able to see the privatization of education play out as clear as ever right in front of us," said Carmen Chan, an activist

with the university's Students of Color Collective. "Those who can afford it can receive a higher education, while those who cannot are left out."

Nancy Shulock, director of the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy at Sacramento State, said the rising cost of attendance compounds other impacts of the recession. "The idea of raising tuitions and fees on university students when the economy is down is just backwards," she said. "Families don't have the money to pay ever-increasing tuition right now."

The federal stimulus bill was supposed to keep states from worsening the recession with savage budget cuts. But the depth of funding cuts to higher education suggest that the measure has fallen short.

In Florida's state university system, the Board of Governors recently approved tuition increases that could force undergraduates to pay up to 15% more annually. The university is also threatening to slash programs and faculty benefits.

"I don't think we have a budget problem in this state as much as we have a revenue problem," said Blake Scott, associate professor of English at the University of Central Florida. Noting that Florida has no personal income tax, he said, "we don't have taxes that are generating the revenue that could support our universities the way they should be supported."

Scott is a local officer of United Faculty of Florida, which reluctantly backed a tuition increase at the state's 11 public universities. Other academic unions, however, have opposed tuition hikes as a short-

sighted response to fiscal pressure. When the University of Massachusetts trustees recommended a \$1,500 increase, for example, the Massachusetts Society of Professors argued that the State first should squeeze more out of federal stimulus funds. The quick resort to a tuition increase "stiffs the students and their families," said Dan Clawson, a union vice president.

The president of the California Federation of Teachers (CFT) Community College Council, Carl Friedlander, noted that in California, budget shortfalls have at times divided education unions over how to distribute scarce funds across community college, K-12 and university systems. "Everybody's fighting over inadequate and shrinking resources," he said.

To get out of that bind, the CFT supported a \$13 billion revenue package, including tax increases of 0.7% to 1.7% on those with annual incomes above \$250,000, that would have closed this year's budget gap. But a Republican minority in the legislature has blocked all proposals for new income taxes.

CFT media director Fred Glass attributes California's fiscal problems to a peculiar legislative structure that requires a two-thirds majority to pass any new taxes – the legacy of California's right-wing anti-tax movement that took off in the late 1970s.

DISINVESTMENT

"We're where we are in California because every year, in order to pass a State budget, the Democrats had to win over a few Republicans," Glass said. "Each year, they had to offer them a bribe...The bribe was they would eliminate or reduce a tax." The result has been that the State's structural deficit – the ongoing gap between revenues and expenses – has grown larger and larger.

Such ideological resistance to taxation has shaped state politics across the country. Progressive

labor and policy analysts say the fiscal mess in the states has fed a nationwide trend of educational disinvestment.

The Delta Project, which analyzes higher education data, found that in 2006, public four-year institutions drew nearly half their funding from student tuition, up from one-third in 2002. During the same period, State appropriations per student fell overall.

STATE SHARE FALLS

Jane Wellman, executive director of the Delta Project, said dwindling government support is in part "a function of where higher education sits inside State budgets," because State Medicaid payments and prison systems consume so much of the limited pool of State funds.

"State legislators traditionally see raising tuition as a first safety valve for the budget," said Ed Muir, a policy analyst with the American Federation of Teachers. They force institutions to fill gaps by charging students more. Though stimu-

lus funds have limited some of the budget pain, Muir predicts that the next fiscal year could bring even deeper cuts as states plow through the stopgap money.

Christine Domhoff, a staff member at Ohio's Youngstown State University and secretary of the National Education Association's Council on Higher Education, said that instead of using the stimulus simply to plug fiscal gaps, states should see the emergency infusion as "a shot in the arm...to move education programs forward." Despite the fiscal crisis, the Ohio Education Association has worked with Governor Ted Strickland's administration to push ahead with a 10-year plan to revamp K-12 and higher education programs and to expand college enrollment by 230,000 students by 2017.

The Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts (PHENOM), a union-supported coalition of students, staff and faculty, argues that advocates must look beyond current budget battles toward broader reforms. PHENOM's ultimate aim is tuition-free community college for all state residents, lead organizer Ferd Wulkan told *Clarion*. To generate the funds needed to ensure universal access, the coalition is working with other unions and advocacy groups for a more progressive income tax structure.

"Going for small incremental changes – we have to do that," said Wulkan. "But we also have to have a vision and a broader political agenda that looks at higher education as a right."

"We make such a great case for the individual importance of higher education," commented George Boggs, president of American Association of Community Colleges, pointing out that families and lawmakers prize the economic and career benefits of a college degree. "We need to make a better case for how important it is for society for everyone to be educated and that there is a public responsibility to get people educated."

Community college connection

While community colleges struggle to absorb soaring demand for enrollment along with deep budget cuts, the Obama administration has proposed \$12 billion in new community college funding over the next 10 years, with the goal of producing five million new graduates by 2020.

A competitive grant fund would distribute \$9 billion to initiatives aimed at expanding access to college, improving degree completion rates, and connecting students to job training and development programs. Another \$2.5 billion would back loans for the construction and renovation of campus facilities, and \$500 million would go toward developing online tools for distance learning.

The initiative would be funded with savings from another proposal – to stop subsidizing private banks to make student loans and offer students direct federal loans instead.

Five million new graduates by 2020

The president of the California Federation of Teachers Community College Council, Carl Friedlander, was one of many advocates who welcomed Obama's proposal – but cautioned that it is not a cure-all. With California's community colleges slated to lose about \$900 million this year alone, he noted, Obama's \$12 billion – spread out over a decade and across the entire country – is only a down payment on what is needed. – MC

Unemployment, Tier 5 top PSC agenda

By PETER HOGNESS

Though Albany began the summer in turmoil, the PSC kept working on its two key legislative issues: support for adjunct unemployment insurance reform, and opposition to an inferior "Tier 5" for future members of CUNY pension systems.

As June began, the legislature entered a prolonged period of gridlock, with a dispute over control of the State Senate that took weeks to resolve. But the union used this time to continue organizing visits to lawmakers in their local district offices, urging the legislature to remove the unfair restrictions that limit part-time faculty from collecting unemployment insurance (UI).

UI REFORM

PSC activists met with State Senators Martin Malave Dilan, Bill Perkins and Diane Savino, and Assemblymembers Deborah Glick and José Peralta. Glick is chair of the Assembly's committee on higher education, while Savino chairs the Senate's committee on civil service.

The UI reform bill is a priority for the PSC's state affiliate, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). NYSUT and the PSC want part-time faculty to be treated similarly to other seasonal workers, such as those in the resort or construction industries.

After the State Senate finally resolved its internal struggle in July, it passed a limited number of bills and then adjourned. But UI reform may still get action this session.

The New York State AFL-CIO is leading statewide efforts in support of broad UI reform, including increasing the maximum benefit. Because of New York's high unemployment rate, a comprehensive UI reform package – including equity for adjuncts – could come to a vote this fall.

NEW PENSION TIER?

Governor Paterson has been seeking a new, inferior pension tier for public employees, dubbed Tier 5, since he issued his budget proposal in December of last year. Union opposition blocked the governor's effort to push the measure through in the spring in conjunction with this year's state budget.

In June, however, two large unions of state employees, the Public Employees Federation (PEF) and the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) agreed to support creation of a Tier 5 for future employees, in return for protection against threatened layoffs. Key changes from current pension rules would include moving the minimum retirement age from 55 to 62 and requiring public workers to continue their 3% employee pension contributions for their entire career, instead of only for the first 10 years, as is the case today.

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) reached a separate

Prepared to push back on Paterson proposal



State Assemblymember José Peralta (far left) of Queens meets with PSC Executive Council members (left to right) Steve London, Carl Lindskoog and Diane Menna to discuss adjunct unemployment insurance.

agreement with Mayor Bloomberg on June 22, in which it agreed to support a similar change in employee contributions, but without any change in the retirement age.

PRESSURE

Pension changes require legislative action – and Paterson is keeping up the pressure for Tier 5 changes that would affect other public employees, not just those who have reached a deal. Opposition to the measure from other public-sector unions, including NYSUT and the PSC, has been fierce. The legislature took no action on any Tier 5 legislation before it adjourned for the summer, but such legislation could be con-

sidered this fall. "How can everything fall into place [just] because they had three of the 48 bargaining units?" the chair of the Assembly's labor committee, Peter Abbate, said to *The New York Times*.

"Neither the PSC nor NYSUT was involved in the talks that led to this agreement," said PSC President Barbara Bowen. "The PSC is strongly opposed to a pension reduction in principle and in practice."

Any changes would not affect current members of New York's public pension systems, whether working or retired, since those are protected against retroactive

changes by a provision of the State Constitution. But imposing inferior pension terms would damage City University, Bowen argued.

"Given the working conditions at CUNY, the University already has to compete hard to attract the best new talent," she wrote in a letter to members on July 16. "Relegating future employees to a lower pension tier would make recruitment even harder."

For CUNY adjuncts who have not yet joined a pension system, the push for a Tier 5 is a reminder to sign up right away. If an inferior pension tier is approved, those who sign up after it takes effect would

receive the reduced benefits.

Those who support the proposed pension cutbacks often cite the state's current fiscal problems – but Bowen called this a false argument: "A lower pension tier would not add one penny to this year's budget because the money it generates is not realized for years." More fundamentally, Bowen said, "New York State's budget crisis was not caused by overspending on pensions or education. It was caused by 30 years of tax policy that reduced the top tax rate by half and deprived the state of income."

ATTACK ON BENEFITS

The PSC Delegate Assembly strongly opposed creation of a Tier 5 in a resolution adopted on June 28 and noted that this proposal comes out of a broader anti-union agenda.

"The call for a reduction in the pension benefits of public employees is part of a larger attempt – that predates the current recession – to redistribute the wealth generated by working people by attacking the benefits of public employees and promoting the idea that none but the very rich are entitled to a secure retirement," the DA stated.

While efforts to create a Tier 5 have so far been unsuccessful, renewed attempts can be expected in the fall – and the PSC has vowed to fight hard against it. "Working together with NYSUT, we will continue to oppose any diminution of pension benefits for future faculty and staff at CUNY," Bowen said.

The union's leadership asked PSC members who are willing to take action against attacks on public pensions to contact the union, by e-mailing Sharon Tonge at the PSC (stonge@psemail.org). "Our strongest defense against this concession is your engagement and support," Bowen said.

Council restores Bloomberg's cuts

By PETER HOGNESS

After weeks of negotiations, New York's mayor and City Council reached agreement on the City budget on June 19. A grassroots lobbying effort by PSC members helped defeat broad cuts in CUNY funding proposed by Mayor Bloomberg. The budget does not, however, include the money needed to fund CUNY's budget without the tuition increase proposed by Chancellor Goldstein. CUNY community college tuition will go up \$350 per year as of next semester.

"Measured by what is happening to higher educational systems in California, New Jersey and elsewhere [see facing page], CUNY community colleges are in a relatively good situation," said PSC

But also OKs tuition hike

First Vice President Steve London. "But this year's budget will impose new burdens on our students."

The Council restored \$21.4 million out of \$25 million in proposed cuts to CUNY's budget. In addition, the Council added \$2.75 million in funding to the Vallone Scholarships and restored \$2.5 million for CUNY's Black Male Empowerment Initiative.

MANDATORY NEEDS

The final numbers show total City support for CUNY's community colleges up \$15 million over last year's base. However, \$8 million of this amount is money that is set aside for future collective bargain-

ing increases, in negotiations yet to be concluded with DC 37. Thus, this money cannot be touched for current expenses.

This leaves just a \$7 million net increase over last year's base budget of \$237.9 million in City aid. It is enough to cover increased costs for mandatory needs (including contractual raises) but not to fund new investments. "In terms of this year's budget process, it represents a success," said London, "but it is far from meeting CUNY's needs."

Most funding for CUNY community colleges comes from the City, but the State provides a certain

amount of support per full-time-equivalent student (FTE). While the State budget adopted last spring provides \$15 million more in State community college aid, almost all of this increase is due to increased student enrollment, which will create increased demands on the system.

The tuition increase of \$350 per year will generate an additional \$25.1 million. "While much of this increase will help pay for new faculty and other important needs, it comes at a cost for our students," London said. Instead of imposing increases in tuition, the union had urged both the City and State to find additional revenue through progressive tax reform.

Students pay the cost of funding shortfalls.

Inside the Antarctic icebox

By JOHN TARLETON

With concerns about global warming and our planet's future heating up, a Queens College geology professor is searching for answers in the ancient past of the coldest place on Earth – Antarctica.

Last fall, Stephen Pekar led a team of 17 that spent a month on the sea ice between East Antarctica and Ross Island. The team, which included two Queens College students and a Harlem middle school teacher, investigated sediments below the sea floor from earlier epochs, seeking a deeper understanding of the climate change in Antarctica tens of millions of years ago when Earth was a much warmer place.

LOOKING BACK

"Antarctica is ground zero for past climate change," Pekar said. "The change has been and will be bigger there. Studying this climate period is a look back at our future."

Until 34 million years ago, Antarctica enjoyed a cool climate with alpine forest and mountain streams. Then temperatures began to drop and giant ice sheets gradually spread down from the inland plateaus. By 14 million years ago, the entire continent was locked in an icy grip that endures to this day. For Pekar, solving the mystery of why such a dramatic climate change happened is a "holy grail" of Antarctica climatology and has drawn him to the frozen continent three times.

Pekar's team worked on the ice 18 kilometers offshore. Surrounded on three sides by white-capped mountains and volcanoes, they planted flags in the ground every 100 meters in two intersecting lines that ran 32 and 16 kilometers respectively. They then probed the ocean floor, using a giant air gun to fire powerful pulses that entered the sub-surface sediments before bouncing back. By recording the returning echoes from below, the scientists gathered data they will study for the next two years to determine where to drill core samples that could be extracted from as much as 3,500 feet below the sea floor.

CLIMATE SHIFTS

The sediments could potentially yield a treasure trove of information about Antarctica's climate history, as far back as 50 million years ago. Climate shifts are reflected in the presence of various marine and plant fossils, geochemical signatures left by oxygen and carbon isotopes, and the coarseness or fineness of the sediment's grains. An advancing ice sheet bulldozes everything in front of it, depositing coarser grains, while a retreating ice sheet leaves behind finer grains as it withdraws.

Working in the field gave the crew plenty of time to contemplate Antarctica's austere beauty.

"It was otherworldly. Looking

QC prof, students head south

at pictures doesn't do it justice, as far as how vast it is, and how silent it can be when you are in the field camp," said Howie Koss, who is working on a master's in geology at Queens College. Koss blogged about his experiences on the expedition, as did Andrea Balbas, a Queens College senior majoring in geology.

"It's the closest you get to going to another planet," added Pekar. "It's the coldest, harshest place on Earth."

That could change.

The polar regions have been warming at more than twice the rate of other parts of the globe for the past 50 years. Pekar said the historical record shows that climate change is a non-linear process, and he warns that the climate-related phenomena we have seen so far (increased droughts, floods, heat waves, more powerful hurricanes, melting tundra, expanding deserts, retreating Arctic sea ice) could be a harbinger of more dramatic changes to come during this century.

"We have unplugged the refrigerator and left the door open," Pekar said. "We could move into a major change abruptly."

According to leading NASA climatologist James Hansen, the planet will be set on an irreversible path toward an "ice-free state" if the steady worldwide growth in carbon dioxide emissions is not reversed within the next two decades.

Pekar, a former second grade teacher, also structured the trip so that young people could share in his team's experience. While several crew members blogged about their work, Shakira Brown, a teacher at the Promise Academy of Harlem, invited different scientists to join her in giving weekly lessons that were videocast live over the Internet. The lessons were followed by 15,000 high school and middle school students across the United States. Students were invited to ask questions, and they responded with thoughtful queries about everything from seismic waves to the history of climate change during the past 65 million years.

"It was fabulous," Koss told *Clarion*, "to be able to have a real-time conversation about what we are doing."

"Students become excited about the subject matter and their questions rise to a much higher level," said Pekar.

"Students become excited about the subject matter and their questions rise to a much higher level," said Pekar.

PUBLIC OPINION

For Pekar, opening this public window to his Antarctica research was another part of his work as a climate scientist: pushing back against the ignorance of global warming that was promoted under the Bush administration.

A recent study by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the American As-

sociation for the Advancement of Science found a widespread lack of accurate knowledge about climate change. Only about half of the US public believes that climate change is caused by human activities, while 11% doesn't believe in global warming at all. The study's parallel survey of the scientific community found that only 3% of US scientists speak "often" with reporters.

SPEAKING OUT

Pekar said he has learned over the years to become a better public speaker. By honing concise soundbites, he has found he can argue effectively against climate change deniers, who often claim to be experts but have not been published on the subject in peer-reviewed journals.

"I encourage all scientists working in environmental science who have the energy to share their expertise," Pekar said. Unless scientists engage with the broader public, he added, "it is the pseudo-experts who will dominate the airwaves."

Pekar will head south again in January to drill for sediments off the coast of East Antarctica. That work will focus on the climate change that took place about 25 to 45 million years ago, during the transition from the Eocene to the Oligocene epochs.

As for his students, they both said the journey to Antarctica further inspired them to pursue their own research interests. Koss wants to study the workings of sea ice in the Southern Hemisphere, while Balbas is eager to begin graduate school,

where she plans to study variations in solar radiation as recorded in the rock record. Understanding past levels of solar intensity will deepen our understanding of the history of the natural world, Balbas explained.

"The sun is a driver of many things on our planet," she said. "If you were able to understand how it was behaving in the past, you would be able to understand how it relates to other processes on our planet across hundreds of millions of years of time."

A day in the life

Working in the world's most inhospitable climate isn't easy even if you are a hardy, determined scientist like Andrea Balbas, a 36-year-old geology major who will graduate from Queens College in December. Balbas and other members of the New Harbor Offshore Expedition lived in pairs in unheated tents floating on eight-foot thick sea ice over Antarctica's McMurdo Sound. They obtained the fresh water they needed by taking a chainsaw to a nearby ice-berg and then heating the ice back at camp. There were no showers. When nature called, the crew used a makeshift outhouse that consisted of a tent placed over a hole that they had dug into (but not through) the ice shelf. Late spring temperatures hovered between -15 and +10 Fahrenheit, and the threat of being hit by sudden storms was always present.

"There's a constant danger in Antarctica," said Balbas, who is working this summer at NASA's Goddard Space Center in Maryland.

SUB-ZERO HUMOR

The crew's day started at 6 am when the camp was awoken by a colleague from Montana Tech singing, "Ain't nothin' in the world like a big-eyed girl to make me act so funny/ make me spend my money."

"It was hilarious," Balbas recalled.

A breakfast of pancakes and sausage would follow in the galley tent where communal meals were prepared by a cook flown in for the expedition. The crew would then head out to take seismic readings of the ocean floor beneath them.

Recording 30 to 35 readings in a day was a success, according to Balbas. After a dinner of stew and filing a blog post, an exhausted Balbas would retreat to her tent and her down sleeping bag (rated for use down to minus 50 degrees Fahrenheit). It was late spring in Antarctica and the sun never set, but Balbas had no problem passing out.

To persevere in Antarctica, Balbas said, "you are constantly trying to stay warm. You need more food, more fuel and more sleep." – JT



Working on eight-foot thick sea ice, researchers use a giant air gun to probe sediments beneath the ocean floor.

Courtesy of Stephen Pekar

Enforcing contract rights

By JOHN TARLETON

After five years as a financial aid counselor at College of Staten Island, Zoraida Hernandez was hired as an academic counselor at Brooklyn College. When she moved from one job to the other, she arranged for a week off in between, to spend time with her ailing father.

But on Hernandez's first day in her new position, she was told that she had been stripped of all of her seniority: management said that her one-week hiatus constituted a "break in service." Her vacation days were reduced from 20 to zero, she lost several weeks in accumulated sick time, and was stripped of several years' credit that would have counted toward her retirement.

"I was shocked," said Hernandez, who had previously utilized all of her vacation and sick time while recovering from knee surgery. "They said, 'you can't do any-



Yochanan Shachmurove, prof. of economics at CCNY, and Debra Bergen at a July 16 workshop.

thing about it,' that it wasn't their fault. That's when I called the union."

With help from a PSC grievance counselor, Hernandez filed a complaint. It led to a settlement that restored her sick and vacation time, as well as one of the four years that counted toward her retirement.

TEAM EFFORT

Today, six years later, Hernandez comes into the PSC Central Office once a week to work as a HEO grievance counselor, helping to carry out one of the union's most important functions: making sure that contract rights are fully enforced.

"The union's grievance operation combines an expert and professional staff with members trained in grievance representation," said PSC First VP Steve London. "When a grievance must be filed, we fight tooth-and-nail to enforce our members' rights."

"You've got to have perseverance to do this work," says Debra Bergen, the PSC's Director of Contract Administration. "It's very rewarding when we can get somebody their job back, or get an unfair performance evaluation reversed."

Bergen leads a team of three full-time staff in the union's Department of Contract Administration, which coordinates the work of about two dozen rank-and-file grievance counselors like Hernandez. Grievance counselors for HEOs, CLTs and

PSC staff work closely with members

adjuncts work out of the PSC office, as do some grievance counselors for full-time faculty. Most full-time faculty grievance counselors serve on their own campus, as the grievance officer for their local union chapter.

"Contract enforcement is the real guts of the union," says Howard Prince, a retired BMCC professor of social science who started doing grievance counseling in 1975. "If you can't enforce the contract, it's not worth the paper it's written on."

According to PSC Coordinator of Contract Administration Albert Muñoz, the department is responsible not only for handling grievances; more broadly, it works to educate members about their rights.

"We provide a space free from management's influence where an employee

administration and legal affairs. The three of them make a recommendation to the Grievance Policy Committee (GPC), a 12-member body of union activists with experience as grievance counselors. It is this committee, chaired by Danny Lynch, professor of English at LaGuardia, that weighs the strength of the case and decides whether to request formal third-party arbitration.

When a case does go to arbitration, the union's Department of Legal Affairs is centrally involved. "The arbitration hearing is a powerful tool," said PSC Director of Legal Affairs Peter Zwiebach. "It is the setting where a wronged employee, with the aid of the union, can stand as an equal to a billion dollar institution and demonstrate that her or his grievance needs to be redressed." Arbitration hearings usually last one full day and cost about \$1,600 to \$2,200, with each side sharing half the expense.

Zwiebach works closely with legal assistant Donna Williams-DeVose, whose work includes maintaining a union database of past arbitration decisions. "It allows us to see at a glance any similar cases going on at other CUNY campuses," she told *Clarion*, "as well as when we have prevailed in past cases and when we have not."

In addition to handling almost all of the PSC's arbitration hearings and disciplinary issues, Zwiebach also represents the PSC in lawsuits, and in proceedings before state and federal labor boards. PSC-initiated lawsuits have led to some important victories for members' rights in recent years – for example, a settlement guaranteeing the right of certain HEO-series employees to be paid for working overtime as specified under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

The PSC Contract Enforcement Committee, chaired by First Vice President Steve London, meets monthly to discuss the strategic implications of management practices and campus policies, and how the union can take the initiative in contract enforcement. The committee includes the union's principal officers and the chair of the Grievance Policy Committee and staff, including Bergen, Muñoz and Zwiebach.

INFORMED

To enforce the contract, PSC staff in contract administration and legal affairs work closely with each other – and with chapter chairs and rank-and-file members. Contract enforcement staff are also responsible for member education about contract rights.

"We have organized grievance training for the last nine years," says Bergen, "and have also held many workshops on the campuses." This Fall there will be an 8-week training program for rank-and-file members who may want to become grievance counselors or just gain a more thorough knowledge of the contract. (For more info e-mail amunoz@pscmail.org.)

"It's much better to have people in the workplace who can inform members about their rights," Bergen says "Our work here in the PSC office is important, but an educated membership is key to building the strength and power of the union."

Education about the contract is a major focus.

The union's contract enforcement staff

Debra Bergen

The PSC's director of contract administration since 1991, Debra Bergen previously worked for Local 1199 and for the Doctors Council.

Debra's involvement with unions began in 1978, as a rank-and-file member of the organizing committee for clerical workers at Syracuse University in 1978. Women in the labor movement have been a central concern, from her involvement with SEIU Local 925 to teaching at the annual Northeast Regional Summer School for Union Women.

Debra has a master's degree from the Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations and has taught a class in contract administration there since 1988.



Bill Mulholland

When PSC members call the union about a problem on the job, the first person on the other end of the phone is often Bill Mulholland, administrative assistant in the department of contract administration.

Bill routes callers to the person they need to talk to, be it Debra Bergen or Albert Muñoz or a union grievance counselor. A lifelong union man who has been with the PSC for the past 10 years, he maintains the department's grievance database. Bill is responsible for filing the paperwork for all Step One and Step Two grievance hearings, and when settlements are reached, he makes sure the necessary documents are processed correctly.



Gary Schoichet

Albert Muñoz

As coordinator of contract administration, Albert Muñoz makes sure that PSC members benefit from the hard-earned rights that they have won through collective bargaining. His responsibilities include investigating violations of the contract and handling grievances, as well as member education.

Albert's labor movement experience began at CUNY. While a student in the Union Semester program, he interned at 1199. He then became an organizer for the NY Hotel and Motel Trades Council and was originally hired at the PSC as an organizer in 2007.



Gary Schoichet

Donna Williams-DeVose

Legal assistant Donna Williams-DeVose maintains the union's arbitration database and screens calls regarding disciplinary matters. She helps members prepare their paperwork in advance of meetings with Zwiebach and others working on contract enforcement.

A longtime Democratic Party activist, Donna was elected to the South Orange, NJ, City Council last year. Before joining the PSC in September 2007, she worked as business representative for OPEIU Local 32, which represents 3,500 clerical workers in the Superior Court of New Jersey.



John Tarleton

Peter Zwiebach

As the PSC's director of legal affairs, Peter Zwiebach's contract enforcement responsibilities include handling arbitration and disciplinary hearings and arguing matters before the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB).

Before joining the PSC in 2007, Peter was an attorney at the labor law firm of Gladstein Reif & Meginness, where he represented several public-sector unions. He also worked as an organizer for Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians. Peter is a graduate of Duke Law School.



Gary Schoichet

Stella D'oro workers fight for jobs

By SARAH SECUNDA

Support grows for saving Bronx bakery

Stella D'oro workers ended their 11-month strike July 7 after winning a sweeping judgment from the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The NLRB ruled that the firm's owner, Brynwood Partners, had engaged in unlawful labor practices and ordered the strikers rehired, with back pay, under the terms of their old contract. But the Bronx bakery workers now find themselves racing to save their jobs after Brynwood, a Greenwich-based private equity firm, announced plans to close the cookie factory by October.

The workers' union has filed a charge with the labor board alleging that Brynwood is illegally closing the plant in order to dodge the union. "Under the law, you can't keep an employer in business if it wants to go completely out of business," said Louie Nikolaidis, the union's attorney. "But they're not allowed to move production to avoid the union."

MORE SKIRMISHES

The Stella D'oro workers are now focusing their efforts on building the political and community support that will be needed to keep these jobs in New York City. They are pressing Brynwood to sell Stella D'oro to a buyer that would continue production in the Bronx. In late July the union appeared to have won an initial skirmish in that fight by blocking a potential sale to a company that would have closed the plant.

Mike Filippou, a shop steward and strike leader, said the union learned Brynwood was planning to sell the Stella D'oro brand – but not the factory – to Lance, Inc., a Charlotte, NC-based snack food giant. With a non-union workforce of 5,000, Lance posted sales of \$825.5 million for 2008.

Filippou said that the union at Stella D'oro, Local 50 of the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union, also learned that Brynwood had received other offers, from buyers who would keep the landmark cookie plant operating in the Bronx, but the company had refused to consider these proposals.

PUBLIC PRESSURE

The effort to block a sale to Lance was launched on July 22 with a noisy protest outside the headquarters of one of Lance's largest shareholders, Goldman Sachs, in lower Manhattan. "There's no doubt Lance will move production if they buy that brand," said Micah Landau of the Stella Workers Solidarity Committee. "Lance might get cold feet if they see people going to their investors."

Apparently, that is exactly what happened. The day before a second planned protest at the headquarters of another top Lance shareholder, Barclay's Capital, the *New York Post*



After a July 13 press conference outside the Stella D'oro factory, longtime employee Eddie Marrero (left) urges NYC Comptroller and mayoral candidate William Thompson Jr. (right) to follow through on his promise to help the workers.

reported that the controversy had caused Lance to back off. The plan to sell the cookie brand "appears to be crumbling," the *Post* reported July 28. The Solidarity Committee had identified more than a dozen large employee pension funds with substantial investments in Lance, including the New York State Teachers' Retirement System and TIAA-CREF, and was preparing to seek their support.

The next day, the New York City Council passed a resolution supporting the union's efforts to keep Stella D'oro operating in the Bronx, and the campaign has attracted support from several high-profile

politicians. City Comptroller William Thompson Jr. jumped on board July 13 with a press conference outside the factory gates.

Calling Brynwood's behavior "disgraceful," the mayoral candidate promised to "squeeze the company" by urging public pension funds invested with Brynwood to divest their holdings. On July 17 Thompson wrote to the head of the Pennsylvania State Employees' Retirement System (SERS), one of the nation's largest public employee pension funds, with more than \$26.2 billion in assets, to urge that it drop Brynwood from its portfolio.

The quarrel between the union and the company began last summer when the two sides met to negotiate a new contract. According to

Local 50, Brynwood claimed it could not operate Stella D'oro profitably without steep concessions from the workforce but refused to provide the union with the financial information necessary to document that claim.

BACK PAY

The NLRB found that the company's refusal to provide those financial records represented a failure to bargain in good faith. The union said that, contrary to Brynwood's unsubstantiated claim, the company was not running at a loss. The problem, attorney Nikolaidis said July 9 on *Democracy Now*, is that private equity companies like Brynwood promise their investors very high profits, on the order of 30 to 35%. "That is an unreasonable rate of re-

turn for most companies," Nikolaidis said. "So, it is profitable, it's just not as profitable as they would like."

The labor board further found that the company had acted illegally by unilaterally implementing its own contract terms two weeks after the strike began. In addition to immediate reinstatement of the strikers, the NLRB ordered the company to pay the workers back wages dating to May 6, when the company had rejected an offer by the strikers to return to work under the terms of their old contract.

ANNIVERSARY

Local 50 has petitioned the NLRB to seek an injunction that would keep the factory open while the board investigates the union's charge. "The company's decision to close came immediately after they got an unfavorable decision," said Nikolaidis. "We're saying that's a retaliation for the protected concerted activities of the workers."

The *Post* reported that Senators Schumer and Gillibrand support the union's request for an injunction. If one is granted, it would buy more time to force Brynwood to accept an offer from an owner who will commit to staying in the Bronx. Nikolaidis said the union is also exploring whether it can secure financial backing for an employee buy-out, though he acknowledged that this would be difficult.

As the Stella D'oro workers struggle continues on several fronts, the Solidarity Committee is expanding its outreach to area unionists. As *Clarion* went to press, plans were announced for a rally at the plant at noon on August 15, the one-year anniversary of the start of the strike. "Persistence and solidarity – among the workers and their community supporters – have taken us this far," Landau said, "and it is only by expanding that grassroots support that we can ultimately win this battle."

For more information and further updates, see stelladorostrike.com.

New associate editor at Clarion

By CLARION STAFF

Clarion has a new associate editor, John Tarleton. He previously worked for eight years as an editor and general coordinator for *The Independent*, a New York-based alternative newspaper that has won scores of journalism awards for its coverage of community struggles.

Tarleton graduated from the University of Missouri School of Journalism in 1989 and subsequently worked as a reporter for Iowa's *Ottumwa Courier*. Dissatisfied with the narrow constraints of corporate journalism, he left the *Courier* and spent 10 years writing and traveling across the US and in Latin America. His website www.cybertraveler.org predated the blogging

revolution by a decade and featured a mix of reporting on grassroots political activism, stories of daily life and profiles of the unique people he met along the way.

Tarleton supported himself teaching English and as a farm laborer – and the latter put him in the middle of a three-day wildcat strike during the Maine wild blueberry harvest.

"A large agribusiness conglomerate was trying to force us to take a pay cut," Tarleton recalled. "People got angry and then they got organized. When 500 workers went on strike and production slowed to a trickle, our employer backed off and even threw in a bonus to get us to return to work."

It was a lesson, he said, in the power of collective action – one that he applied in his participation in the historic 1999 Seattle demonstrations

at the meeting of the World Trade Organization. Tarleton soon began working with Indymedia, a decentralized worldwide network of independent journalists that was born during the Seattle protests.

In 2001 Tarleton joined the New York City chapter of Indymedia and went to work on its fledgling newspaper *The Independent*. Created to cover the everyday struggles of New Yorkers that are too often ignored by the mainstream media, *The Independent* became a magnet for independent journalists, artists and community

Award-winning writer and experienced editor

activists. Tarleton played a key role as a writer, editor and volunteer coordinator. He established the paper's community reporting workshops, in which he trained hundreds of aspiring citizen journalists.

As an editor, Tarleton helped build *The Independent* to a publication with a readership of more than 40,000. His own articles have twice won the New York Community Media Alliance's award for best feature story, once for coverage of student opposition to military recruiting in Bushwick and once for a profile of a homeless veteran living on the streets of New York.

"John is a thorough reporter, a skilled writer and an experienced editor," said *Clarion's* editor, Peter Hogness. "He's also a master of the practical details required to put out a print publication with high standards and tight deadlines. We're fortunate to have him on our team."

City unions reach health care deal

By JOHN TARLETON

As City revenues continued to fall, the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) agreed in early June to a two-year package of \$400 million in health care cost savings. Most of the savings come from funding allocation changes proposed by City unions; less than 10% (\$30 million) will come from benefit reductions affecting union members in HIP or Senior Care.

The City and the MLC also agreed to devote about \$120 million from the Health Insurance Stabilization Fund, which had built up a large surplus in preceding years,

Welfare Fund Q&A

Got questions about your PSC Welfare Fund benefits? Go to www.psc.cunywf.org to get answers. The site also has links to information about basic health insurance benefits.

Deep cuts to benefits averted

to the unions' welfare funds. As a result of this agreement, the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund will receive an additional \$3.45 million over the next two years.

The MLC bargains collectively over the terms of City health coverage on behalf of more than 100 member unions, including the PSC.

LIMITED CHANGES

The benefit changes include a \$50 co-pay for emergency room visits for HIP and Senior Care patients; a \$50 co-pay on ambulatory surgery for HIP patients; and a \$100 co-pay on HIP hospital admissions. Union negotiators thwarted City attempts to impose a \$10 co-pay on every HIP medical visit.

"The MLC tried to limit benefit changes," said PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Executive Director Larry

Morgan. Eleven percent of PSC members are covered by HIP, said Morgan, who also noted that retirees will not be disproportionately affected.

The pressure to conclude the negotiations was prompted by the Bloomberg administration's threat to lay off 1,000 City workers by July 1. Instead, an agreement was reached to avert the layoff of permanent employees for three months by taking funds from the Stabilization Fund while the unions meet with the City about identifying alternative positions for these employees.

"The purpose of the stabilization fund is to stabilize us in negotiations like these when we have to come up with some money," said Morgan, who helped establish the

Fund in 1983 when he was the director of health and security planning at DC 37. "I think it's an appropriate use of it."

PSC President Barbara Bowen, who sits on the MLC steering committee, told *Clarion* City unions worked together to preserve the affordability of health insurance

and to stave off the layoffs of the endangered workers.

An additional \$250 million in technical/structural changes add up to a "win-win" proposition, said Morgan, who

sits on the MLC's technical committee. The MLC had advanced these proposals before, but did not secure the City's agreement until June. The changes include coordinating benefits with other insurance carriers and incorporating a large number of non-metro New York City hospitals in a participating

network to avoid excess charges and reduce premiums. The adjustments also involve a legal change of filing status for Blue Cross in order to properly address New York State insurance premium taxes, a shift that will save the City nearly \$50 million per year.

A SMALL STEP

In a joint labor-management committee, the MLC also got the City to agree to explore, for the first time, the inclusion of CUNY adjuncts and other inadequately covered groups of employees in the New York City Health Benefits Program. Bowen described the City's agreement to discuss such a change as a small but essential first step for future progress on this PSC priority.

"At a time of contraction, we and the MLC pushed for considering an expansion of health benefits," Bowen said.

PSC, pension fund explore affordable housing solutions

By JOHN TARLETON

More than 1,200 PSC members returned an affordable housing survey that the union sent out this summer. The survey was an initial step toward assessing what role the union might play in addressing members' housing needs.

"Urban higher education faculty are faced with an affordable housing crisis," PSC Treasurer Mike Fabricant told *Clarion*. "This is particularly acute in New York City. If we're going to recruit the kind of faculty that CUNY needs, we have to address the issue of housing."

INTENSE INTEREST

Sixty percent of those who responded currently rent an apartment, while 4% rent a room. Homeowners included the 13% who currently own a co-op or condo and 17% who own a house. The balance (6%) said they live with family or friends.

Sixty-two percent of respondents said they were very interested in buying a home, while 32% said they were very interested in renting, and many expressed some interest in both. Manhattan was the most desired location, followed by Brooklyn and Queens. About two-thirds of respondents have worked at CUNY for 10 years or less.

The survey is "one of many steps the union will take, as we move in a deliberate fashion to address our members' pressing housing needs," said First Vice President Steve London. "We are at the beginning stages of this process, and we will

be examining a range of alternatives to deal with this complex and difficult problem."

On July 28 Fabricant and London met with representatives from TIAA-CREF, the pension fund giant in which most PSC members are enrolled. London and Fabricant presented the survey results and had exploratory talks on several possible ideas. "They were powerfully interested in the number of responses and in the intensity of interest reflected in the results," Fabricant said.

One option discussed at the meeting was to provide affordable housing information to members by organizing a housing fair, which would connect PSC members with developers who have affordable housing on the market. They also discussed the feasibility of the union's ultimate goal of securing new housing for PSC faculty and staff.

GOOD WILL

"There has been an evolving partnership of good will, and hopefully this will yield a positive result," London said after the meeting. He said TIAA-CREF has shared expertise and networks with the union that would be helpful in organizing a housing fair. In a distressed market, London explained, such a fair could help facilitate a process of "best match" between real estate developers eager to sell or rent and union members looking to rent or purchase housing they can afford.

TIAA-CREF, which serves em-

ployees in the academic, research, medical, cultural and nonprofit fields, is one of the largest pension funds in the United States. In 2006 the PSC's Delegate Assembly passed a resolution calling on TIAA-CREF to engage in more socially responsible investing, including investing in community development. The PSC submitted its resolution to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which adopted the PSC resolution as AFT policy.

London said that TIAA-CREF had taken initial steps toward social investing and greater corporate responsibility. The PSC's and AFT's actions caught TIAA-CREF's attention and provided the initial momentum for the current talks.

"This is an example of how a larger conception of the union's role in society can create opportunities that directly benefit union members," London said.

Housing survey shows strong interest.



Courtesy of UFCW

Victory at Smithfield at last

Above, two of the 5,000 workers at the world's largest pork processing plant in Tar Heel, NC, ratified their first-ever union contract, after a two-day vote ending July 1. The deal comes after two decades of campaigning, during which Smithfield management tried to intimidate union supporters in many ways. The workers at Smithfield overcame these obstacles by focusing on cross-racial, shop-floor solidarity.

Clarion SUMMER 2009

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2009 VOTE

Support for CUNY is key for PSC-backed candidates

By **STEVE LONDON**
PSC First Vice President

Tuesday, September 15, is the date for this year's New York City primary elections. Almost all victorious primary candidates for City Council and citywide offices will likely win the general election in November. They will hold office for the next four years, making decisions on CUNY's operating and capital budgets.

That is why dozens of PSC members and staff have worked hard this summer to provide members with the union's best assessment of the candidates running for office. The PSC Executive Council made its endorsement decisions on July 16, following the Legislative Committee candidates interviews, recommendations, and discussions in the Delegate Assembly.

The PSC has had an active endorsement policy since 2000. While the union works through our state and national affiliates (NYSUT and AFT) on decisions about which candidates to support for state and national office, in local elections the PSC makes its own candidate endorsements.

LOCAL RACES

The union has emphasized City Council races during local primaries, and our work in these elections has introduced the issue of adequate funding for CUNY into City Council politics at a grassroots level. This direct involvement with candidates has been an important factor in reversing declining City support for CUNY's community colleges.

Every year, when Mayor Bloomberg (and Giuliani before him) has proposed cuts to CUNY's operating budget, the PSC has urged the Council to restore those cuts – and Council members have generally been very responsive. According to the Fiscal Policy Institute, New York City funding for CUNY, when adjusted for inflation and the number of full-time equivalent students, rose by more than 30% between fiscal years 2001 and 2009.

It's important for our union to be involved in local elections. And it's important for our members to vote – especially in primary elections where turnout is generally low.

The PSC's endorsements are based on the candidates' records. The union examines their positions on policies affecting CUNY's funding, our students' education and working conditions of PSC members, as well as general public policies (e.g., tax policies), and also evaluates the strength of the candidate's campaign. There are persuasive arguments for the choices the union has made.

NEW WEBSITE

This year the union is doing something new. The PSC's Political Action Committee has created a web page with a range of information about this year's candidates (www.psc-politicalaction.org).

Members will be able to read the responses of all candidates who returned the PSC's issue questionnaire, whether or not they were endorsed.

In addition to the PSC's own endorsements, the website also indicates which candidates are supported by the Central Labor Council (CLC) and the Working Families

Party (WFP). The PSC formally participates in the CLC endorsement process and, while the PSC is not part of the WFP, many members are interested in their endorsements. This site will be useful not only to PSC members but also to other interested voters. Because it includes information on candidates' stands on the issues, the site can also be used, where appropriate, with students.

In this election cycle, the union is building



City Council candidate Jumaane Williams (left) talks with residents of his Brooklyn district.

relationships not only with current leaders but with the next generation of leaders as well.

The complete list of PSC-endorsed candidates is to the right. The union has endorsed many incumbents who have been long-time friends. Below, I briefly highlight some of the new Council candidates who are receiving our support – community leaders who will have a growing impact on New York City's future.

YDANIS RODRIGUEZ, Council District 10 (Washington Heights, Inwood, Marble Hill): A former student activist at City College, Rodriguez has joined PSC members at union contract rallies. After graduating from CCNY, he pursued a master's degree at City College's school of education. As a teacher, he has fought for more resources for public education. An impressive community organizer, Rodriguez will be a strong advocate for CUNY and a friend of the PSC if he is elected.

S.J. JUNG, CD 20 (Flushing): Jung is a strong labor and CUNY supporter. Shortly after coming to the US from Korea, Jung helped found an organization that assists new immigrants. A community organizer and business owner, Jung is interested in a partnership between labor and neighborhood activists to carry out community education on the value of unions.

JAMES VAN BRAMER, CD 26 (Long Island City, Maspeth, Sunnyside, Woodside): Van Bramer is a progressive grassroots activist who has been a solid supporter of both CUNY and the labor movement. Like others highlighted here, he is in favor of a progressive tax policy and against tuition increases as the way to fund CUNY.

LYNN SCHULMAN, CD 29 (Forest Hills, Kew Gardens, Rego Park): A strong supporter of CUNY and labor, Schulman has been deeply rooted in her community for years. Her cam-

paign has targeted the increasing unaffordability of New York City for working-class people. "There are not enough jobs, the wages aren't sufficient, and there's not enough housing," she told the *Queens Chronicle*.

BRAD LANDER, CD 39 (Carroll Gardens, Kensington, Park Slope, Windsor Terrace): Former director of Brooklyn's Fifth Avenue Committee and of the Pratt Center for Community Development, Lander has a very good record of support for community and labor struggles and has been very supportive of CUNY. He has led effective efforts to defend and extend affordable housing and to create living-wage jobs.

TULANI KINARD, CD 41 (Ocean Hill, Brownsville): An experienced community activist, Kinard has long been involved in K-12 issues. She describes herself as "an advocate for a school system that will teach our youth the truth about the world they live in, as well as how to make a living." Kinard is committed to public education and will be a solid supporter of CUNY.

JUMAANE WILLIAMS, CD 45 (East Flatbush, Flatlands): Williams is an organizer with deep roots in the community. A Brooklyn College graduate, he was a student activist while at CUNY and brings personal experience to his advocacy for City University. He is former director of Tenants & Neighbors, a statewide tenants' rights organization. Like other PSC-endorsed candidates, he supports progressive tax policies.

DEBI ROSE, CD 49 (North Shore): A long-time community activist on Staten Island's North Shore, Rose has fought for better health care, transportation and environmental justice. Director for many years of a highly successful dropout prevention program based at CSI, she is committed to CUNY. Rose lost the last election by a very slim margin. If she wins this year, she would be Staten Island's first African American elected official.

The PSC has made no endorsement at this time in the mayoral race. We will revisit this contest before the general election. In the race for comptroller, we have made no endorsement, but City Council members David Weprin and John Liu are both strong candidates and friends of CUNY and the PSC.

For public advocate, the PSC has decided to support Bill de Blasio, who has built a broad coalition in support of his candidacy. De Blasio has a clear strategic vision for economic development of the city and CUNY's place in that development. He has also been a good friend of CUNY and of the PSC in the past. He has been outspoken in defending the rights of CUNY students on public assistance and worked to restore their right to have time in college study count toward workfare requirements.

As you decide how you will cast your vote in September, I hope you will give the PSC endorsements serious consideration. Take a look for yourself – go to www.psc-politicalaction.org and examine the answers from those candidates who responded to the PSC questionnaire.

And make sure to vote in the primary election on **Tuesday, September 15**.

PSC endorsements

MAYOR No Endorsement At This Time

PUBLIC ADVOCATE *Bill de Blasio*

COMPTROLLER No Endorsement At This Time

CITY COUNCIL

Borough	Dist.	Candidate
Manhattan	1	Alan Gerson
Manhattan	2	Rosie Mendez
Manhattan	3	No Endorsement At This Time
Manhattan	4	Daniel Garodnick
Manhattan	5	Jessica Lappin
Manhattan	6	Gale Brewer
Manhattan	7	Robert Jackson
Manhattan	8	Melissa Mark-Viverito
Manhattan	9	Inez Dickens
Manhattan	10	<i>Ydanis Rodriguez</i>
Bronx	11	G. Oliver Koppell
Bronx	12	Larry Seabrook
Bronx	13	James Vacca
Bronx	14	<i>Miguel Santana</i>
Bronx	15	Joel Rivera
Bronx	16	Helen Foster
Bronx	17	No Endorsement At This Time
Bronx	18	Annabel Palma
Queens	19	No Endorsement At This Time
Queens	20	<i>S.J. Jung</i>
Queens	21	Julissa Ferreras
Queens	22	Peter Vallone Jr.
Queens	23	<i>Mark Weprin</i>
Queens	24	James Gennaro
Queens	25	Helen Sears
Queens	26	<i>James Van Bramer</i>
Queens	27	Leroy Comrie
Queens	28	Thomas White Jr.
Queens	29	<i>Lynn Schulman</i>
Queens	30	Elizabeth Crowley
Queens	31	James Sanders Jr.
Queens	32	No Endorsement At This Time
Brooklyn	33	No Endorsement At This Time
Brooklyn	34	<i>Maritza Davilla</i>
Brooklyn	35	Letitia James
Brooklyn	36	No Endorsement At This Time
Brooklyn	37	Erik Dilan
Brooklyn	38	No Endorsement At This Time
Brooklyn	39	<i>Brad Lander</i>
Brooklyn	40	Mathieu Eugene
Brooklyn	41	<i>Tulani Kinard</i>
Brooklyn	42	Charles Barron
Brooklyn	43	Vincent Gentile
Brooklyn	44	No Endorsement At This Time
Brooklyn	45	<i>Jumaane Williams</i>
Brooklyn	46	Lewis Fidler
Brooklyn	47	Domenic Recchia
Brooklyn	48	Michael Nelson
Brooklyn	49	<i>Debi Rose</i>
Brooklyn	50	No Endorsement At This Time
Brooklyn	51	<i>Janine Materna</i>

BOROUGH PRESIDENTS

Bronx	Ruben Diaz Jr.
Brooklyn	Marty Markowitz
Manhattan	Scott Stringer
Queens	Helen Marshall
Staten Island	<i>John Luisi</i>

Where the PSC-endorsed candidate is not an incumbent, name is in italics.

City Council races are crucial.

NATIONAL DEBATE

Will we get health care reform?

By **LEONARD RODBERG**
Queens College

President Obama has proclaimed this the Year of Health Care Reform. From Stakeholder Summits at the White House to nearly daily hearings of five separate congressional committees, activity on health care reform has been at the center of the nation's domestic agenda.

While the president has deferred to Congress on the details of the reform plan, its proposed structure has been clear from the beginning. It would be modeled on the plan Massachusetts implemented three years ago which has substantially reduced the number of residents without insurance (but has not reduced the number having problems paying their medical bills!).

The ingredients of these plans are: (1) an employer and individual mandate, requiring that employers provide insurance or pay a fee to the government and requiring that individuals purchase health insurance or pay a penalty; (2) a health insurance "exchange" that would offer a range of insurance options to those without insurance; (3) subsidies for low- and moderate-income individuals and families buying insurance through the exchange; (4) a requirement that private insurers take anyone who applies, with no exclusions for pre-existing conditions and no excessive premiums; (5) a "public option," a public insurance plan that would offer an alternative to private insurance; and (6) expansion of Medicaid for more coverage of very low-income Americans.

SINGLE PAYER

The general theme of the discussion in Washington has been to build upon and, in fact, to protect the existing private insurance industry. In recent years, it has been losing customers as more and more employers have found its products too expensive. The plans being developed in Congress amount, in effect, to a bailout of the private insurance industry. However, accomplishing this bailout requires Congress find at least a trillion dollars (over 10 years) to fund the subsidies necessary to permit the uninsured to purchase private insurance policies. This has not been an easy task and, as of this writing, it has not been solved. Finding places to cut within the existing system (particularly the public programs, Medicare and Medicaid) has been difficult, and Congress never likes to raise taxes, even for the worthy task of expanding insurance coverage.

From the beginning, a single-payer plan – a Medicare for All program in which government would provide insurance for everyone – has been declared "off the table" in Washington. A single-payer plan would cover everyone and, according to numerous analyses, would do so without the country having to spend any more on health care than it does today. Medicare currently provides comprehensive coverage for those over 65 and has low administrative costs and high popularity ratings among both patients and doctors.

Compared with today's system that is dominated by private insurance companies, a single-payer plan would have substantially lower costs, mainly through reduced overhead (projected at 3%, versus today's 20% average) and elimination of the complex billing systems now required in every hospital and doctor's office. This would provide



On May 12, US Capitol police arrested doctors and nurses who demonstrated at a Senate Finance Committee hearing, targeting Congress's refusal to discuss a Canadian-style single-payer plan.

more than enough savings to cover the uninsured and reduce the growing epidemic of "underinsurance" that leads to more than a million "medical bankruptcies" every year.

Polls show that two-thirds of Americans and 59% of US doctors would support such a plan. Barack Obama declared his support for a single-payer plan back in 2003 when he was running for the Senate. John Conyers' HR 676, the single-payer Medicare for All bill now in Congress, has been endorsed by 558 union organizations, including 39 state labor federations and 20 international or national unions. The PSC and the American Federation of Teachers both back a single-payer solution.

But despite activists' efforts, the single-payer approach to health care reform has yet to receive serious consideration within the Beltway (see sidebar). Until single-payer advocates stood up in congressional hearing rooms demanding to be heard and got themselves arrested (see photo), not one supporter of a single-payer system had been invited to speak at any of the numerous hearings on health reform issues.

PUBLIC OPTION

Many health care activists and numerous unions, organized in a lobbying group called Health Care for America Now (HCAN), have been supporting the inclusion of a "public option" in whatever reform bill comes out of Congress. Many members of HCAN ultimately favor a single-payer plan and think that the costly failings of private insurance will, in the long run, lead to greater public support for a government-sponsored plan. Indeed, the original concept of the "public option" would have allowed very wide enrollment and presented a real challenge to the private insurance industry. But it is now clear that any "public option" that might actually be included in the final legislation will be a pale shadow of that expansive concept, open to relatively few people and operating with little or no financial backing from the government.

So what has Congress come up with? As of this writing, the Senate Finance Committee, the most conservative of the congressional committees, has yet to produce a bill, but Ted Kennedy's Senate committee,

the Health, Education, Labor and Pension (HELP) Committee, along with three House committees, have produced draft legislation. They follow the expected pattern, with some details added:

DRAFT LEGISLATION

- Employer-based insurance plans would continue as they are now, but they would have to meet some conditions. For instance, they could not contain annual or lifetime limits on coverage, thus incorporating catastrophic insurance and undoubtedly raising their cost. Otherwise there would be little change, except that now employees would be required to accept coverage, if they can afford it. (They would be allowed to skip employer-based insurance and access the "exchange," where subsidies are available, only if the employer-based plan's premium is more than 12% of their income.)

- Individuals would be required to buy insurance through an "exchange" if their employer didn't provide it. Subsidies would be available for individuals and families up to 400% of the poverty line (those for whom coverage was still deemed unaffordable would get a "hardship exemption" – that is, they could remain uninsured). The legislation does not impose any pricing limitations on private insurers or specify what insurance will cost. To get an idea of what such a policy might cost, we can look at Massachusetts, where this type of program is now in effect. For a family of four with income above \$66,156, the least expensive plan would cost \$9,800 per year with a \$3,500 deductible; that is, this family would have to spend \$13,300 before the insurance would provide any coverage, and they would still face 20% co-insurance charges when they access care.

- A new public insurance plan would be created, but it would be severely constrained. Only those who are uninsured and do not receive insurance from their employer could access it. Further, it would have to operate under the same financial rules as private insurers: it would have to survive on the premiums it collects, and it would not receive any federal subsidy. At July's AFL-CIO health care rally in Washington, CUNY retiree and PSC member Gloria Waldman told

a camera crew, "We need a public option where everyone has health care, everyone is taken care of." The bills now in Congress fall far short of that goal.

STILL COSTLY

The most striking failing of these plans is their lack of any significant means of controlling costs. As the director of the Congressional Budget Office, responsible for the economic "scoring" of these plans, stated (in the arcane jargon that permeates Washington), "In the legislation that has been reported, we do not see the sort of fundamental changes that would be necessary to reduce the trajectory of federal health spending by a significant amount." In other words, the problems of rising costs and declining benefits that face all of us trying to get coverage are not seriously addressed.

As of this writing, it is too early to know if any bill will pass. As *Clarion* went to press, a bloc of 57 liberal House Democrats vowed to vote against any bill with the "public option" watered down even further, blasting a compromise with conservative Democrats in the House Commerce Committee.

However, it is clear that, no matter what emerges from Washington this year, it will not go nearly far enough to solve the problems of declining access and rising cost that beset our health care system. Costs will continue to climb, growing numbers of people will be uninsured and underinsured, and individuals and families across the country will suffer from lack of access to the health care they need. The struggle for *real* health care reform will go on.

Leonard Rodberg is a professor of urban studies at Queens College and a member of the PSC Health Care Reform Committee.

Tiny steps for single-payer

After months of being completely shut out of the legislative discussion, single-payer advocates in Congress made some small gains in July. At the end of the month, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi agreed to allow a vote in the full House on a single-payer plan before the end of the year. With just 86 supporters of HR 676, there is little suspense about the outcome – but the vote provides an opportunity to gain a bit more public attention for this alternative.

In mid-July, the House Education and Labor Committee approved an amendment from Rep. Dennis Kucinich to its health reform bill, which would let states request a federal waiver allowing them to establish statewide single-payer plans. Some commentators hailed this as significant, pointing out that single-payer health care first came to Canada at the provincial level before it was adopted nationwide. The California Legislature has twice passed single-payer bills, only to see them vetoed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. But Kucinich's amendment is sure to meet fierce opposition from the private insurance industry, and it remains to be seen if it will survive in the final House bill, much less in the Senate.

The real effects of proposed legislation



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

Support PSC members at CUNY's Research Foundation

PSC members at the CUNY Research Foundation's Central Office – who earn, on average, \$48,500 per year – have been without a contract since January 1, 2009. RF-CUNY has demanded that the workers pay a larger share of health insurance premiums and offered them below-inflation salary increases, around 2% per year, while

spending half a million dollars on union-busting lawyers. Tell the RF management – including CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, chair of the RF-CUNY Board – to offer the Central Office employees a fair economic package. Sign the petition by clicking on the Get Active icon on the PSC homepage, www.psc-cuny.org.

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INEQUALITY

Race & recession: falling behind

This article is adapted from Race & Recession, a report from the Applied Research Center, publisher of ColorLines magazine. Full text of the report is at arc.org/recession.

The country is facing an economic crisis and many are experiencing unprecedented instability. Individual Americans of all races are facing dire situations – losing their jobs, homes and security. Communities of color are affected disproportionately; here, the crisis is intensified.

The emergency now upon communities of color is the result of historic and current inequities, policies and practices that block black, Latino, Asian and American Indian people from opportunity and stability, and now plunges more families into despair.

FEW GAINS FOR WORKERS

These disparities pose a threat to the health of our national economy. In contrast to our collective ideals of fairness and opportunity, in the real world the terms are rigged against people of color. The outcomes are not random and reflect neither merit nor skill; rather, they are warped by a set of rules, practices, assumptions and histories that position some at a disadvantage from the onset and continue to restrict opportunity at every turn.

In his inaugural address, President Obama affirmed: “A nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous. The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our gross domestic product, but also on the reach of our prosperity, on our ability to extend opportunity.” Indeed, comparative research shows that countries with equitable incomes see faster rates of overall growth.

But the United States has failed to extend prosperity. While productivity and employment were on the rise between 1990 and 2008, the growth was not mirrored in the lives of most US residents. Though productivity was up almost 50% from 1990, real median hourly wages had only risen 6% for all workers, with none of the growth occurring after 2001. While a few people on the very top of this increasingly stratified economy have reaped the benefits of high levels of growth, most workers have not gained.



Gregory Nemeec

Yet this inequality itself has not been evenly distributed. Income inequality between whites and people of color has increased as general stratification grew over the past decade. While it is widely noted that growing inequality is a sign of an unhealthy economy, less often acknowledged is the color of inequality. As wages of all workers grew only marginally and then remained static, Latino and black real median family incomes actually fell 2.2% and 1%, respectively, between 2000 and 2007. The decline was the first in a business cycle of this length since World War II.

STRATIFICATION

Indeed, this country's growing economic stratification cannot be fully understood without accounting for persistent racial inequality. The Applied Research Center compared levels of overall income inequality in the 50 states and the District of Columbia to racial demographic data and found a significant relationship between income inequality and percentage of people of color per state: states with the largest income disparities between the top and bottom earners were also the ones with the highest proportion of people of color. Among the states with the highest levels of income inequality, 11 had high percentages of people of color. This included three states with a majority population of color – New Mexico, California and Texas. Only two of the 17 states with high

income inequality, Kentucky and Ohio, had low concentrations of people of color. Just four states buck the trend with low income inequality yet high concentrations of people of color.

This state analysis reveals that overall rates of income inequality in the United States are inextricably linked to growing and persistent rates of racial inequality. To address the growing divide – the same stratification that we now know pushed the economy into decline by diminishing real incomes and increasing family debt – requires eradicating racial inequities that pull people of color to the bottom.

According to calculations of the Economic Policy Institute, a basic budget required for a family with two adults and two children was \$48,778 last year. This is well above the median income of families of color, while the median income of white families is above this measure. In fact, over 50% of black and Latino families fall below the basic family budget, as compared to 20% of white families.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

Income and wealth inequality is racialized in the United States because the cumulative and compounding effects of past and present policies generate deep racial disparities. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 – the GI Bill – provides a clear example of the way that racial inequity accumulates

over time. Signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the bill aimed to give every returning World War II veteran the opportunity to further his education, borrow money for a house or business, or receive a well-paying job. Yet veterans of color were blocked from buying homes during these post-war years by restrictive racial covenants that denied them access to mortgages. As home ownership grew exponentially, the economic gap between white and nonwhite households widened, and the ripple effects are still felt today.

Across the nation, people of color continue to face housing discrimination that builds upon that of the past, are relegated to precarious and low-wage jobs and regularly confront persistent barriers to opportunity. People of color have less accumulated wealth than whites and therefore less to fall back on in hard economic times. Yet the safety net for all poor people has been diminished, leaving many families without the support they need to survive.

ACTION NEEDED

These failures of public policy need to be addressed immediately as federal, state and local governments implement job creation and economic recovery programs with funds from the Stimulus Bill. The persistent reality of these disparities means that without explicit attention to inequity, racial divisions will remain, or even grow. Discussing efforts to revitalize the job market, former US Secretary of Labor Robert Reich stated: “If construction jobs go mainly to white males who already dominate the construction trades, many people who need jobs the most – women, minorities, and the poor and long-term unemployed – will be shut out.”

Racial inequity stands in the way of opportunity for communities of color and a healthy economy for all Americans. We need only the political will to adopt the many solutions available. These policies will have to tackle both the institutional and historical roots of racial inequity that created an unequal playing field for people of color and the compounding effect of the multiple institutions that affect these communities. The crisis facing communities of color requires both immediate relief and long-term, structural repairs that create fertile ground for our most precious American Dream: liberty and justice for all.

Economic gaps are growing wider.