

Clarion

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



FEBRUARY 2005



PSC ELECTION City Tech RF workers to decide

Research Foundation employees will vote on February 15 and 16.

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CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

STATE OF EMERGENCY

Assistant Professors Nichole McDaniel and Claudio Mazzatenta discuss contract negotiations at Bronx Community College. Their conversation was part of the PSC campaign for a fair settlement organized across CUNY during the

first week of classes. The PSC is promoting one-on-one organizing as part of the mobilization in response to the Delegate Assembly's declaration of a state of emergency on January 27.

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BENEFITS

Planning to retire?

You can pay supplemental benefits right from your pension check. But you need to act to make the switch.

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UNION PEOPLE

Activist Vera Weekes

HEO Vera Weekes is fighting for Montserratians' right to stay in the U.S. after their island was devastated by a volcano.

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STATE FUNDING

Pataki's budget is bad news

The governor promised more for SUNY and CUNY, but the numbers show a shortfall in state support for public higher education.

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IRAQ WAR

CSI student killed

Francis Obaji, 21, was a talented artist who hoped to become a doctor. He was the third CUNY student killed in Iraq.

PAGE 3

Tsunami relief for higher education

By DAVE SANDERS

As part of the global response to the December 26 tsunami that left nearly 300,000 people dead or missing, educators and trade unionists are working to help universities in coastal areas of southern Asia.

"It is going to take possibly months to get a true picture of the destruction in the education sector, especially in the far flung islands in Indonesia," said Aloysius Mathews, regional coordinator in Asia for Education International (EI), a coalition of teacher unions in 165 countries.

PSC DONATES \$2,000

On January 6, the Professional Staff Congress Executive Council voted to donate \$2000 to help with relief and reconstruction efforts at affected universities and grassroots relief. Other local unions in New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) have also lent support, raising over \$40,000.

Tom Hobart, outgoing president of NYSUT, represented the American Federation of Teachers on an international union delegation to the region that was led by EI in mid-January. "Thousands and thousands of educators are lost throughout the region," Hobart said on his return. "And for many of the survivors, there are no schools to return to."

PSC donates \$2,000 to rebuilding



Education International's Regional Coordinator said it may take months to know the tsunami's effect on education in southern Asia.

By far the worst damage was suffered by colleges and universities in Indonesia, particularly in the province of Aceh.

At Syiah Kuala University, Aceh's largest university with 11,000 students, classes have been suspended indefinitely. EI reports that about 200 lecturers from Syiah

Kuala University are dead or missing, as well as an estimated 150 of their children. The total number of students and support staff killed may be as high as 2,000. According to one local resident, the university could be dissolved entirely as remaining students are considering transferring to other schools.

Many students from Aceh will no longer be able to afford tuition costs, even had their colleges not been destroyed. The University of Indonesia recently announced it will waive tuition this year for its students from Aceh who lost their families, the *Jakarta Post* reports. Bogor Agricultural University will do the same, and may open its doors to agricultural students from Syiah Kuala University who want to transfer.

Iskandarmuda University, located in Banda Aceh, has undergone severe damage to its buildings and campus. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported in mid-January that blocked roads made vehicle access to the school impossible. A 50-foot fishing boat remained lodged between the library and the engineering department, two miles from the ocean. Despite the wreckage, four of the university's six buildings are still standing. "If the government sends in help, the university could open in three months," said Syaifei Ibrahim, the school's rector.

EI's General Secretary, Fred van Leeuwen, urged the president of Indonesia to rescind government restrictions on travel in Aceh, so that unions and other groups giving aid could do their work. Human rights groups said the Indonesian military has committed many human rights

abuses in its long-running war against secessionist guerillas in Aceh, and expressed concern that the travel restrictions could be aimed at keeping outside witnesses out of the conflict zones.

UNIVERSITIES AFFECTED

Universities in Sri Lanka and elsewhere did not suffer heavy damage, according to the UK's *Guardian*, but have been affected in other ways. Some students at Sri Lanka's Uni-

No schools to return to

versity of Moratuwa were killed, according to a report from the Lanka Academic Network. Faculty and students in the school's chemical engineering department have been manufacturing chlorine-based disinfectants and distributing them in the disaster area for water purification and post-disaster clean-up. The University of Ruhana has helped with medical care for nearby refugee camps.

Indonesian universities that escaped major destruction have also moved to help. Muhammadiyah University, relatively undamaged by the quake, has served as the headquarters of an enormous relief operation. Offices are filled with food and medical supplies, and a makeshift health clinic on campus is treating about 100 patients a day, according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.



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Cat escapes from bag at 80th Street

● Chancellor Matthew Goldstein recently boasted about \$22 million in savings from the CUNY Productivity Initiative, saying that "savings are plowed back into our colleges to hire more faculty and support staff." Yet CUNY's own press release shows that over one-third of these savings come from "leaving positions vacant or replacing full-time staff with part-time staff," and that 45% of the overall savings were used to hire adjuncts, while just 26% went to hire full-time faculty. At City College, a whopping 78% of the money from productivity savings went into the adjunct hiring budget.

These numbers call into doubt the CUNY Master Plan's stated goal of having 70% of all instruction provided by full-time faculty. They also show that adjuncts continue to play an essential role in educating CUNY students, even as management negotiators refuse to consider any im-

provements for adjunct faculty and make comments indicating that they think adjuncts are unimportant to CUNY's mission.

Ellen Balleisen
BCC

Whose education?

● CUNY's recent economic offer reflects not just disregard but contempt for what is one of the most outstanding public universities in the country. And it comes under the administration of a mayor who has been committed to educational excellence.

As chairman of the board of trustees of The Johns Hopkins University, Michael Bloomberg has given millions to fund a new library and to build a magnificent medical center to insure Hopkins-quality health care for all the people of Baltimore. Above all, he initiated "The Bloomberg Challenge," with his own vast matching funds, so that "every qualified student who wants to come to Hopkins has the opportunity to do so."

Now, why does our "Education Mayor" not contemplate similar

concern, or even regard, for the hard-working students of our greatest public university? How could Mayor Bloomberg possibly stand for this contemptuous offer to our excellent, dedicated faculty? As a graduate of Hunter College and The Johns Hopkins University, I want to make it clear to our mayor that CUNY is to New York, and the world, what Hopkins is to Baltimore, and the world: the greatest centers of learning, individual achievement, societal advancement, and hope.

Blanche Wiesen Cook
John Jay

Research vs. austerity

● I condemn NYC leaders of excessive wealth and privilege who demand "austerity" contracts. I applied for a first sabbatical to write a book and pursue international research, but I can only afford a fully paid one. I'd need an "austerity" loan to pay my bills otherwise. My inability to live on a half-salary sabbatical means I may not receive one. Ironically, my research is in how transformative school counsel-

ing programs help close funding, opportunity, and achievement gaps in urban schools through data-driven interventions.

The PSC can use data-driven organizing to speak truth to austerity and close our funding and opportunity gaps. Let's total classes taught, papers graded, assignments given, grants obtained, service hours performed, publications written, students advised/counseled/registered, presentations made, library patrons served, phone calls answered, and e-mails typed. Let's contrast wage gains for administrators versus our "1.5%" proposed increase on our website and with campus flyers.

As a new parent with no parental leave in my 12th year as a professor, I'm a bit tired. But neither I nor my colleagues tire of challenging and questioning the inequitable conditions comprising academic labor, teaching, and learning for CUNY faculty, staff, and students.

With hope, restored and enhanced benefits, and fully funded sabbaticals for all,

Stuart Chen-Hayes
Lehman College

CUNY IN BRIEF

New president at York

CUNY named Marcia V. Keizs as the new president of York College. Keizs, formerly a vice president at Bronx Community College, will assume her new post on February 14. It was reported that former Borough President Claire Shulman and others were pushing CUNY to offer the position to former congressman and local pastor Rev. Floyd H. Flake, who told *Newsday* that he was committed to staying at his current job as president of Wilberforce University in Ohio.

The PSC Chapter at York passed a resolution in mid-January, reproaching Chancellor Matthew Goldstein for "a revolving-door of presidents" as well as decrying the extra burden such transitions create for faculty and staff. Keizs is the fourth president since 1995. York Chapter Chair Janice Cline told *Clarion*, "We're very hopeful that our new president, who is energetic and knows her way around CUNY, will bring us the stability and funding we need to rebuild our academic program and regain the prestige we deserve."

Write to Clarion

Letters should be no more than 150-200 words in length, and are subject to editing.

Pataki budget falls short for CUNY

By SHIRLEY FRANK

On paper, Governor Pataki's executive budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2006 appears to increase State funding for CUNY. But PSC leaders say that there is less here than meets the eye, and that in reality Pataki's proposal fails to keep pace with mandatory cost increases. "It is smoke and mirrors," declared PSC Secretary Cecelia McCall.

The governor's budget would also require tuition increases at both CUNY and SUNY schools. If his plan is approved, New York State would cross an important threshold: for the first time, the state's public colleges would receive more money from tuition than they get from State support.

There are several ways that Pataki's budget boosts its numbers without actually providing CUNY with more resources. First, in Fiscal Year 2005, Pataki exercised his right to freeze \$22 million for CUNY that had already been appropriated. His proposed new budget would turn that "temporary" freeze into a permanent cut, lowering the baseline for future years. "So it starts off with a subtraction," said PSC President Barbara Bowen, "because they never put back the money that the governor held back last year."

Second, the budget includes \$73

Taking the "public" out of "public education"?

million for collective bargaining settlements with CUNY's unions – DC37, the PSC, and others. In the past, these needs would have been covered by a separate pay bill and not included in CUNY's annual appropriation. This artificially inflates the apparent amount of State support. "However it is presented," said Bowen, "this amount would not be sufficient to meet the PSC's basic salary and Welfare Fund needs."

State aid per full-time-equivalent student at the community colleges would be frozen at \$2,235, with no increase for inflation. A small increase in the total appropriation of \$3.2 million is provided in anticipation of growth in enrollment.

Overall, CUNY's Budget Office estimates that the governor's proposal includes \$26.3 million in unfunded mandatory needs, including energy costs, health and safety expenses and building rentals. Thus, while Pataki's numbers point to an apparent rise of \$59.7 million in State aid for CUNY, his budget would actually mean another year of belt-tightening at City University.

For CUNY students, Pataki's budget starts out with a \$250 tuition increase, bringing senior college tuition to \$4,250. (Tuition at SUNY would rise



Pataki's proposed budget fails to keep pace with CUNY's mandatory cost increases.

by \$500.) But it might be more at some CUNY campuses: Pataki has also proposed allowing different tuition rates at different CUNY colleges. The governor also called for both schools to adopt tuition indexing, under which there would be regular tuition hikes linked to the rate of inflation. CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein has expressed support for this idea in the past.

WITHHOLDING TAP

The governor would also eliminate financial aid funding for the SEEK program in the senior colleges and for College Discovery in the community colleges, a \$7.2 mil-

lion cut that would hurt some of CUNY's poorest students.

For the State's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), Pataki again proposes, as he has in previous years, to hold back 50% of the TAP grant until after graduation. Students are invited to fill the gap with federal or state loans, a scheme that the governor dubs an "incentive" to graduation. Critics say that, for students whose studies may be interrupted by work or family responsibilities, Pataki's plan for TAP would impose an extra obstacle to graduation.

While the Legislature has rejected this idea in previous years, the governor now comes to the table

with increased leverage. Thanks to a recent court decision, the Legislature cannot alter language in Pataki's budget, but must simply vote it up or down. This could result in Pataki and the Legislature playing "chicken" over the future of TAP. While there will still be some negotiation, the Assembly and State Senate may ultimately be confronted with the choice of accepting Pataki's holdback scheme, or voting against the entire program.

SIPHONING FUNDS

Finally, the executive budget proposes a new program called PACT – the Partnership to Accelerate Completion Time. If adopted, Pataki's budget office explains, "public colleges and participating private colleges would be provided financial awards of \$250 per associate degree and \$500 per bachelor degree" for each student graduating "on time."

CUNY students, who tend to be poorer and have heavier outside responsibilities, would find it harder to qualify than most students at colleges like Columbia or NYU. "This is a huge advantage for residential private colleges," says Bowen. "It's a straight transfer of money from the public to the private sphere – a subsidy for colleges that educate the rich, and a withdrawal of funding from colleges that educate the poor and working-class."

CSI student killed in Iraq

By PETER HOGNESS

College of Staten Island student Francis Obaji died in Iraq on January 17 while serving with the Army National Guard. Obaji, who was 21 when he died, was the third CUNY student and the 20th person from New York City to be killed in the Iraq war.

"I'll always remember his name," said Frederick Kaufman, a professor of English at CSI, when he learned of Obaji's death. "I'm kind of shaken up by the news." Kaufman is faculty advisor to CSI's student newspaper *The Banner*, and he remembers clearly the day Obaji walked into the paper's offices. "He was a good artist," Kaufman told *Clarion*. "He came in one day with some really gorgeous sketches he had done on the subway, and we put one of them on the cover."

GOOD ARTIST

Obaji's illustration was published in the April 1, 2002 issue. "It's a drawing of a very fat, isolated homeless person, sitting on the subway," said Kaufman. "Everybody just loved it. They found it so arresting that they

3rd CUNY student to die in war



Francis Obaji, 21, who died January 17 while serving in Iraq.

just let it have the whole cover by itself. It's a disturbing image, but beautiful in a way – almost like something from the 'Ashean School.'"

Obaji had a notebook full of impressive sketches he had done on the subway, Kaufman recalled: "He had a very long commute, coming from Queens, and this was how he occupied his time. The funny thing is, we put that picture on the cover

but he never came back."

Like Segun Frederick Akintade, a City Tech student killed in Iraq in October, Francis Obaji was originally from Nigeria. He came to Brooklyn in 1994 with his mother and siblings, joining their father who had come here in 1979. "He ran track in high school," said his cousin, Delmar Obaji. "He was very good, good enough to continue in college. But

he wanted to focus on his studies."

After Francis Obaji graduated from high school, his family moved to Queens Village and he enrolled at CSI, where he was a student from 2001 to 2003. Despite some difficulty with his math classes, his family said he remained intent on becoming a doctor.

His path into the military began soon after he started at CSI. On September 11, 2001, Obaji was waiting for the Staten Island ferry when the World Trade Center was attacked. "He had a lot of love for America, and he was deeply affected by 9/11," his cousin said. "He was there, he saw what it did to New York." Francis joined the National Guard in 2002, was mobilized the following year, and sent to Iraq in 2004.

AGAINST THE WAR

But Obaji did not support the war in which he was killed. "Francis, he was ready to fight for his country," said his uncle Alphonsus. "He was for the war in Afghanistan. But for Iraq, he said there was no need to go to war right away. He felt they should have given some time for the

UN to negotiate. Even though Bush said all avenues had been explored, Francis did not agree."

The Department of Defense's press release said only that Francis Obaji died "after he was involved in a motor vehicle accident" in Baghdad. But his cousin Delmar said that the family was told a different version by some military officials – that Francis's vehicle went into a ditch after it was hit by an explosion. "Things changed in what they were

Deeply affected by September 11

told," he said, "and anyone would be suspicious of that, especially after that kind of loss. But there's nothing we could draw firm conclusions from."

Delmar Obaji almost decided to join the Air Force around the same time that his cousin signed up with the National Guard. He is doubtful that his cousin expected his National Guard unit to be sent overseas when he enlisted. "This is what the military does to get young kids to join," he said. "They draw kids in with the idea that you don't have to worry about war...especially something like the National Guard, where their job description is mainly to protect people on our own soil."

He was silent for a moment. "I love America," he said. "It's a great country. But I'm kind of disappointed in its people right now. The youth of America are in jeopardy, and people are not paying attention."

CSI chapter presses health & safety

By PETER HOGNESS

"They call me a troublemaker," says Shah Jayman with a twinkle in his eye. "The president said, joking, 'Jayman, you are the troublemaker.' But I said, 'What trouble am I making? I am working for the community.'"

"Our goal," he says, turning serious, "is simply for CUNY to be a safe place for the community. If we are considered troublemakers, it is because we are not yes-men. We are not there just to say 'yes.'"

The PSC's College of Staten Island chapter, where Jayman serves on the executive committee, has made health and safety a priority – and the biggest problem is mold. "There is mold in at least 75% of the buildings," Jayman says. "Too often, instead of fixing it they only do a cosmetic job. Instead of doing effective remediation, they only change the ceiling tile – and the problem shows up again in two weeks."

OVEREXPOSURE

PSC health and safety organizer Bob Wurman says, "The thing about mold is, if you're not sensitized to it – so what, it just looks horrible. But if you're exposed repeatedly, you may become sensitized and you may have a serious reaction."

"People do get sensitized," Ralph Giordano tells *Clarion*. "You're talk-

Mold, moisture & a shocking problem

ing to one of them." A HEO and registered architect who is assistant director of campus planning, Giordano has a personal stake in the fight to clean up mold at CSI. "I ran ten marathons – but now I can barely run three miles, because I wheeze when I run."

Lack of attention to the problem can have lasting consequences. "A faculty member in the English department now needs asthma medication," says Jayman, "but he was never asthmatic before. And we had been reporting for three years straight that there was mold in his room, mold in the ventilation system." Now the administration has installed an air filter in the professor's office. "But that's not a cure," he says.

Jayman, a professional engineer, has done thorough annual reports of problems in CSI's buildings, including those that cause the mold to be so widespread. "The key thing is, they have to stop the moisture," he explains. Wherever there is persistent moisture, mold growth is likely.

"The problem really goes back to the construction of the new campus, in the mid-1990s," says Roz Bologh, vice chair and grievance officer of the CSI chapter. "The people hired to do

the construction really did a slipshod job." Giordano agrees, and speaks from his experience in the campus planning office: "One building, when it was built the punch list [of problems to be fixed] was 300 pages. Now, 300 items would be excessive."

Across the campus, says Giordano, "The roofs have been leaking from day one."

But there has been some progress on this persistent problem. "In some places, the work is getting done," says Jayman. "In these areas, the mold is beginning to disappear. This is a very good sign for us – the administration is responding."

Long-term efforts start to pay off

EXPERIMENTAL GUTTERS

A factor that contributes to mold growth, says Jayman, is that more than 90% of the buildings at CSI lack gutters. "With no gutter, water flows onto the walls," he explains, "and after a while stone and brick walls tend to be porous." Jayman says he welcomes the fact that CSI Vice President for Finance and Administration Angelo Aponte has agreed to put gutters on one building as an experiment.

There are other health and safety problems at CSI as well. A mainte-



Mold found in some 75% of the buildings at CSI is causing respiratory problems for PSC members.

nance building that is being partly converted to office space has outdated fire alarms, inadequate ventilation, and cars whizzing by right outside the front door – where there is no sidewalk. And on a December campus visit in another building, Wurman was shown a persistent water leak running down onto a high-voltage electrical box, with a standing pool of water directly below. "That's a disaster waiting to happen," says Wurman. "If the insulation on any of those wires corrodes, it could cause a fatality." (Aponte did not respond to *Clarion's*

requests for comment.)

Bologh said there had been some limited good news last fall: for one building, the Dormitory Authority of the State of NY agreed that the roof – which was only 10 years old – had to be replaced, which will cost around \$10 million. "But they said it would be Priority 2," she adds. "The problem is that it takes forever to get things done that are Priority 1!"

But the chapter already knows the value of persistence. Its multi-year effort on health and safety is starting to pay off, and members are not about to give up now.

"Homeland Security" certificate plan is dropped

By PETER HOGNESS

A controversial proposal for a security management certificate program at Borough of Manhattan Community College appears to have hit a dead end.

"Unfortunately, CUNY Central has decided not to move forward on this proposal," Elinor Garely, the proposed coordinator of the program, told *Clarion*. "It is not going to see daylight."

The proposed program, with a heavy emphasis on "Homeland Security," was faced with growing questions about its content, the quality of jobs for which it would prepare its graduates, and whether it was appropriate at immigrant-heavy BMCC. It was opposed by BMCC's Student Government.

Particular concern was sparked by a course syllabus that included discussion of "interrogation by [a] private citizen," and another that would teach "how to protect the organization from outside investigators." Shirley Rausher of the English department told *Clarion*, "It threw up enough of a concern for students to say, 'we don't want this on our campus!' Faculty questioned

BMCC proposal lacked support

what it was about and where it might be going."

A Letter of Intent, describing the program, was first presented at a Faculty Council meeting last May. The first class in the curriculum is "Homeland Security," while the last of six security-related classes is on "Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism." Though much of the curriculum concerns more routine security questions like theft prevention in hotels, the rationale for the entire program is heavily framed in terms of "national security."

The program would have been offered by BMCC's Business Management Department; Prof. Garely, named as coordinator, now coordinates Travel and Tourism Studies. Anthony Bowen, head of business development for Trafalgar Tours, was named chair of the program's advisory board.

POLITICAL TENSION

John Jay College offers a certificate program in security management, with a very different curriculum. Its courses have a practical focus, such as "The Investigative

Function" or "Emergency Planning"; security management is not presented in terms of national defense.

The coordinator of John Jay's certificate program is Robert Hair, associate professor in the Department of Law and Police Science. He also oversees the college's A.A. and B.A. programs in security management. Hair told *Clarion* that those devising the BMCC proposal asked him a few questions early in the process, but that no one has approached him since.

The debate at BMCC was inflamed by political tensions around the conduct of the federal Department of Homeland Security. "After 9/11, students from BMCC were picked up on immigration charges and disappeared from our campus," said Yuvie Figueroa, a student active in organizing against the BMCC proposal. "That was done by [what is now] Homeland Security. I just didn't feel BMCC was the appropriate place to give this course."

"In many BMCC students' experience, 'Homeland Security' has been less about security and more about

attacks on civil liberties and the racial profiling of Arabs and Muslims," commented Bill Friedheim, professor of social science at BMCC and a member of its Faculty Council. He said faculty were also concerned about the kind of jobs for which this program would equip its students.

The proposal says it would "provide students with the academic background they require for entry-level positions in the security industry, which includes security guards." A 2003 study by the Fiscal Policy Institute found that the median wage for security guards in NYC was \$8.46 – about 2/3 the pay earned by janitors and building cleaners.

ERODING SUPPORT

Last year, BMCC President Antonio Pérez was named co-chair of the Ad Hoc Task Force of the American Association of Community Colleges, formed to promote "homeland security programming" at community colleges. Also on that committee is the president of Monroe Community College, which last year opened a Homeland Security Management Institute. The institute's director, retired U.S. Army Col. John Perrone,

was commander of the Joint Detainee Operations Group at the U.S. base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, according to *Community College Times*. Students organizing against

Students and faculty share concerns over profiling

the BMCC course dubbed this "the Guantánamo connection."

The BMCC administration backed away from the proposal at a December Faculty Council meeting. "They seemed to feel it was drawing too much attention to the college," said Friedheim, a member of the Council.

Friedheim said that the proposal was more or less "dead in the water" even before it lost support from 80th Street. The campus union chapter had not taken a position on it, he said, but growing faculty questions and concern meant the proposal would have not been likely to receive final Council approval.

Sources at BMCC said the proposal was finally abandoned after Selma Botman, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, informed the college that it was at odds with State Education Department regulations, which require credit-bearing courses to be applicable to a degree program.

Research Foundation employees at City Tech
tell *Clarion's* Roving Reporter

Why I'm voting "Union Yes!"



SANDRA SWINEY
Joint Urban Manpower Program

I'm voting "Yes" to achieve our ultimate goals: free education, job security, room for advancement and growth, and a more responsive executive management at the RF. In my program, I have a great boss, but we need to have more power when we deal with the RF. The salary and benefit packages should be consistent throughout CUNY, no matter whether the funding source is RF or tax-levy. And we should have the opportunity to advance our education, just like employees at other colleges and universities.



JAY KLOKKER
Adult Learning Center

A major problem is that people frequently get switched from one line to another, and lose their benefits in the process. Job protection, too, is a very important issue. More fundamentally, in a time of tight budgets, the tendency is to balance the budget on the backs of the workers. With a union, we can fight this much more effectively.



JANICE RIMLER
Student Support Services

I've been working under RF for 14 of my 15 years here at CUNY. As great as RF is, there have been a number of years without cost-of-living increases. And without a union contract, there's no real recourse for this. In this office, we're mixed between RF and tax-levy funding. It's really time that the RF steps up and falls into place with the rest of CUNY. RF workers deserve the same protections that state-funded workers enjoy.



JAMES JACKSON
Title V

Workers do better when they're in a union. A union helps you to be more aware of the rights that you have. And the more aware you are of your options, the easier it is to take advantage of those options. The more you understand your rights, the more willing you are to fight for them.



ELAINE SOHN
Adult Learning Center

One thing our directors do is to pay people from whatever funding source they can. Many of us, myself included, have been moved five times from one line to another, with no continuity. Accumulated benefits are lost, and we have to start all over with a different health plan. Also, there's a severe lack of information, especially among the part-timers. We need some definitive answers about our rights and benefits, and a union can help us have a sense of clarity about these things.

By KRISTIN LAWLER

Union vote for City Tech RF employees

By JEREMY BORENSTEIN

CUNY Research Foundation (RF) employees who work at City Tech are voting on union representation on February 15 and 16. RF employees at City Tech have been organizing to join the PSC since early 2004.

About 150 teachers, tutors, counselors, advisors, and office workers are included in the proposed bargaining unit. They work on grant-funded projects and get paychecks from the CUNY Research Foundation, technically a separate employer from CUNY. Yet their jobs are often similar or identical to those of co-workers on the CUNY payroll.

UNJUST

"We think it's unjust that RF employees work side by side with CUNY employees and receive inferior benefits and pay," said PSC Treasurer John Hyland. "We're looking forward to negotiating a contract that addresses these inequities."

Big turnout expected February 15 and 16

RF employees at City Tech say they are overworked, underpaid, and stressed-out. Some haven't had a raise in over two years and don't know if or when the next one is due. They have no job security and feel that they have little control over what happens on the job.

Without a union, Research Foundation employees at City Tech don't enjoy the collective bargaining rights and grievance procedures that CUNY faculty and staff have had for years. Without such representation, City Tech's RF employees have less power to combat work-related problems when they arise. They also lack many benefits that CUNY faculty and staff take for granted.

Their responsibilities are varied. Some RF employees teach or tutor students in the campus math and writing learning centers. Some are

counselors in SEEK or COPE educational opportunity programs. Many teach English as a Second Language in the Adult Learning Center, and there are office workers paid by the RF in virtually every corner of the campus.

Despite the fact that they work in different programs and offices, almost all RF employees at City Tech have similar ideas about what is needed to make their jobs better. Tuition reimbursement is a key issue for many. "It's unfair that RF employees don't receive tuition remission, despite their contributions to the core mission of the University," Hyland said.

Job security, regular raises, implementation of salary steps, and the ability to maintain seniority when transferred from one grant to

another are some of the other things RF employees want to gain through unionization. Working without these benefits can be trying, RF employees said. "Morale in many departments has been low," one teacher said. "There is a great feeling of uncertainty that makes it hard to be an effective teacher."

RF workers lack benefits normal for CUNY workers

In some of the tutoring centers, teachers are required to work 60-minute hours in facilities that are too small to accommodate the number of students who attend. Many are reluctant to take a break even when they work a five- or six-hour shift. They are not given a lunch break and feel like the work is more demanding than teaching credit-bearing courses, for which they are paid much more. Many say that the operations

are understaffed.

In many cases, scheduling and workload changes are made with minimal input from affected teachers. And part-timers are not made aware of the few benefits that may be available to them.

TWO-DAY ELECTION

PSC organizers insisted that the election be held over two days and in two locations, so that everyone in the bargaining unit would have a chance to vote. On Tuesday, February 15, polls will be open from 8:30 – 10:00 am, 12:00 – 3:00 pm and 4:00 – 6:30 pm in Namm 505A. The next day, Wednesday, February 16, polls will be open during the same hours in the fourth-floor conference room of the Howard Building.

"RF employees at City Tech have been working hard to form their own PSC chapter," said PSC Associate Director MaryAnn Carlese. "They're excited that this moment has finally arrived."

Union actions kick off Spring seme

By DANIA RAJENDRA

Spring semester started off with PSC contract protests across CUNY, from a demonstration at the Board of Trustees to local campus leafletting. The events marked the start of the mobilization that the union's Delegate Assembly called for when it declared a "state of emergency" in contract negotiations (see page 12).

With CUNY management refusing to increase its economic offer, Spring semester is likely to see more union protests, led by the PSC's new Contract Action Network.

PSC members packed the January 24 Board of Trustees' meeting to press union demands for equity for CUNY's part-time and contingent faculty. Members held up purple silhouettes of a human head that bore a question mark and the message, "9,500: CUNY's invisible part-time faculty," representing the often-ignored adjuncts who teach almost half of CUNY classes.

After the Chancellor's report, members rose and began a whispered chant, "We're here, be fair, equity for part-timers!" Holding a large banner emblazoned with the same slogan, they circled the room, gathered at the door, chanted loudly, and marched out.

"I've been an adjunct, beginning in the 1980s, and I've been working in administration since 2001," Jane

The push to win a fair contract

House, a HEO Assistant at the Graduate Center, told *Clarion* later. "It's very important that the Chancellor's office know that people are upset about what they offered in negotiations."

The protest was followed by a wave of activity during the first week of classes, including informational leafletting on almost every campus.

"As a new faculty member I'm actually shocked by CUNY's economic offer," said Penny Lewis, an instructor at BMCC. "They've just hired all these new faculty who came to CUNY, despite its lack of competitive salaries, because they believe in this university. To make that offer is contemptuous."

In the first days of the semester, union activists distributed leaflets at most CUNY colleges, informing PSC members and students about the state of negotiations and how to join the Spring campaign. Some chapters revived last semester's tactic of a campus-wide "purple day," – members wear purple to show CUNY management PSC members are united in the contract struggle.

These actions were organized by the PSC's Contract Action Network (CAN), made up of rank-and-file

organizers at each CUNY campus. CAN met twice during January to broaden local participation in the contract fight. "The discussion was really lively," said CAN co-chair and bargaining team member Mike Fab-

ricant. "People took ownership of local actions, as well as the University-wide contract campaign."

When the PSC Delegate Assembly declared a state of emergency in contract talks at the end of January, delegates voted to "rededicate the union to old-fashioned, one-on-one organizing so that every member is

informed and engaged." At the foundation of that effort is the "My Five" outreach program. "My Five" asks union members to volunteer to stay in touch with five coworkers about the contract campaign throughout the semester. Volunteers will get information and materials to help keep coworkers informed, and will report

The PSC's new Contract Action Network links members on every campus



Above, Queens Chapter Chair Jonathan Buchsbaum spoke with students about the contract struggle on the first day of classes. Below right, silhouettes represented PSC part-timers, for whom equity is an urgent concern in the contract fight.

Contract enforcement gets results

By STEVE LONDON

Chair, Contract Enforcement Committee & PSC First Vice President

The PSC is pursuing contract enforcement with renewed vigor and a clear message has been delivered to CUNY: the PSC is a staunch advocate for members and will marshal every resource to defend their rights. The effort is showing results:

- We have increased the number of grievance counselors and involved more and more rank-and-file members in contract enforcement, with a growing program of educational workshops and training sessions.

- A record number of arbitrations have been filed, and resulting decisions have reaffirmed our members' rights on Travia leave and removing improper evaluations from a personnel file. An arbitrator upheld the union's challenge to a non-reappointment decision and forwarded the matter to a select faculty committee, while another decision reaffirmed that adjuncts must be paid for an entire course if they are notified that their

Members' rights affirmed

class is cancelled only after they began teaching.

- In the last two years, campus-level grievance filings have increased to over 130 per year.

- Last year the number of wins and settlements at the campus and central office level doubled.

- The union has put new emphasis on using the Public Employees Relations Board (PERB) to defend PSC members' rights. The union's legal team has charged CUNY with violations of NY State labor law, and prevailed or settled in most cases. PERB ordered CUNY not to interfere in the communication between a chapter chair and members, not to attempt to intimidate chapter leaders, and not to try to evade the contract by making individual contracts with employees.

- The union has also have been willing to go to court when necessary. For example, PSC lawyers are currently before the New York State Appellate Division challeng-

ing the State Board's reversal of an earlier regional PERB ruling that CUNY must bargain over intellectual property issues.

The backbone of the PSC contract enforcement effort is a team of campus-based grievance counselors and a small group of central office coun-

UNION VIEWS

sors who handle the bulk of grievance activity. Supervised and trained by Debra Bergen, director of contract administration since 1991, the member-based grievance counselor corps has been expanded and includes representatives from all major titles, full-time and part-time. The union guarantees that members will have professional, tenacious, and creative representation in each case, even if we cannot always guarantee a favorable outcome.

Professor Charles Molesworth chairs the union's Grievance Policy

Committee, composed of 12 union members who are grievance counselors, plus professional staff and legal counsel. If a grievance is not resolved after hearings at the first step (on campus) or the second step (at CUNY Central Administration), these member-counselors decide whether the case should go to an impartial arbitrator. An experienced counselor is assigned to do an independent investigation of the grievance and present findings and recommendations to the committee, along with the counselor who originated the grievance. The Grievance Policy Committee then discusses the case and votes on how to proceed.

MEMBERS DECIDE

Most unresolved cases are taken to arbitration. If the committee feels a case is particularly weak and could set a precedent harmful to the membership at large, the grievance may not move forward. These judgment calls are often difficult to make, but in the PSC, unlike many other unions, members who understand their col-

leagues' interests will make the call.

Three years ago, a Contract Enforcement Committee was established to deal with broader strategy on contract enforcement. This allows the PSC to take the initiative, instead of just reacting to contract violations. Local contract enforcement committees are being formed at each campus.

More member involvement

We are taking on more fights and winning more victories – and at the base of all contract enforcement is making sure that union members know their rights. Every PSC member should know that:

- If your contract rights have been violated, the union has only 30 working days from the date of the violation in which to file a grievance.

- You have a right to review your personnel file and respond to inaccuracies or improper evaluations.

- You have a right to bring a union representative to any meeting that may result in disciplinary action; or stop a meeting until a union representative is present if you think your rights are being violated.

Ultimately, the most effective contract enforcement mechanism is a membership that knows its rights and acts to defend them.

ster

members' responses. (See "15-Minute Activist" on page 12.)

On February 12, the PSC will hold a skills-building training on outreach to fellow union members, (see Calendar, page 8). "For me, it's a long-term strategy," said Nichole McDaniel, assistant professor at Bronx Community College. As someone just begin-

ning a career at CUNY, she said, "expanding the network of active union members" is an important investment in her own future.

Miriam Thompson, a HEO from Queens College, said that the test for CAN was to turn discontent into action – and power. "HEOs have a powerful voice representing them at the negotiating table – they have to strengthen that voice on the campus and on the street."

The state of emergency resolution, passed by union delegates on January 27, calls on "every member of the faculty and staff to become a

part of the mass effort that will be required...to win the contract that we need." It invites members to join in a "broad-based discussion" of union tactics, to help decide what kind of actions will be needed.

"The more of us who are activists, the more we can involve the greater membership," said Pat Rudden, associate professor at City Tech, "and bring the kind of pressure that's never been brought before on this administration."

Updates on negotiations and how to get involved is available at www.psc-cuny.org.

Contract talks update

No movement on money

PSC and CUNY management negotiators met three times a week throughout January, but CUNY refused to offer additional Welfare Fund contributions or improve its proposal on salaries. The lack of motion on key economic issues led the PSC's Delegate Assembly (DA) to declare a "state of emergency" in contract negotiations in late January (see page 12).

Union officials reported that the intensive talks produced modest progress on some smaller issues, but said the two sides remained far apart on the most important questions.

In the January sessions, the PSC bargaining team pressed for salary increases, higher CUNY contributions to the Welfare Fund and equity for HEOs and adjuncts, and maintained its opposition to concessions demanded by management. Here is a summary of the main points discussed during intersession:

ECONOMIC ISSUES

CUNY declined to make a better monetary offer since its December proposal of a four-year contract with a one-time bonus of \$400 (pro-rated for part-timers) and a guaranteed salary increase of just 1.5%. (A potential increase of an additional 1% would be paid only if funded by union concessions.) In 2004 alone, the cost of living in the NYC metropolitan area increased by more than 3%.

CUNY continued to insist that any additional support for the Welfare Fund must be carved out of money available for raises. PSC President Barbara Bowen said CUNY suggested that the Welfare Fund cut benefits, starting with retirees – a move that she said the union "strongly opposes."

The lack of movement on the Welfare Fund was a big factor in the decision to call a state of emergency, said John Hyland, bargaining team member and PSC treasurer. "The DA Resolution is not a cry of desperation, it's a shout out to the membership. The seriousness of our proposals is not being adequately heard, and we need more

frequent, and more militant action by more members as part of the campaign."

HEOS

CUNY's proposals would sharply reduce HEO job security. PSC negotiators said that this was unacceptable, and argued instead for improvements in HEO working conditions, including enforcement of the contractual work week. HEOs are supposed to work 35 hours per week, and management refuses to recognize that most routinely work longer hours.

"Every one of their proposals is horrific," said Iris DeLutro, a HEO at Queens College and a negotiating team member. "They want to dismantle the protections of Article 13.3.b. We are dedicated professionals who deliver more than our contract demands, and we deserve a promotional system and real recognition of our value," she said.

By midmonth, Bowen said, there had been movement on some HEO issues, but the two sides remained far apart on the most important points.

PART-TIMERS

CUNY and the PSC made some progress on what Bowen called "issues that should be routine," such as improved adjunct access to campus e-mail. There was little headway on structural issues, such as seniority.

"The negotiations I attended indicated again that CUNY Central is not interested in equity," said Jane Young, chapter chair at BMCC, and one of dozens of member-observers who sat in on negotiations in January. "It was clear to me that our pleas for certain advances for adjuncts fell on deaf ears."

Rosalie Friend, an associate adjunct professor at the Hunter School of Education, observed negotiations early in January. "As someone who has been working for CUNY for decades as an adjunct, I am very pleased that the union is telling CUNY that adjuncts are not just part-time and not just temporary,"

she said. "We need CUNY-wide seniority, office hours should be protected, and I think the demand for working space is very realistic. I've worked in a place where 60 adjuncts shared one room with three desks."

CONTRACT ENFORCEMENT

The PSC and CUNY management also clashed over how much re-assigned time PSC members would be allowed for contract enforcement (see page 6). "Our demand for re-assigned time is a demand to enforce the contract and build the union," explained negotiating team member Andrew McInerney. "It's a demand for a stronger union, and that is a benefit for all members."

Member-observers said that the intense negotiations in January were often frustrating. "I must say I was disappointed," said Mariya Gluzman, an adjunct lecturer at Brooklyn College, about the sessions she attended. "I didn't think [management] held us in such disdain."

"It has been productive to meet so often," Bowen said of the January talks. "There is some willingness to move on both sides. But what's alarming to us is that on basic matters of salary and health care, there is no indication of movement towards a settlement that meets our needs."

—DR

PICA plan survival dependent on talks

City and unions seek new funds

By DANIA RAJENDRA

New York City and municipal unions are in high-stakes talks over the future of the PICA program, through which PSC members and other municipal workers receive life-saving drugs for asthma, cancer, multiple sclerosis, and psychiatric conditions.

In December, the City had threatened to discontinue the program as of January 31, citing a lack of funds. But after an angry response from the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) led to stepped-up negotiations, the City withdrew the termination threat. MLC Chair Randi Weingarten had said the MLC would go to court, if necessary, to prevent a shutdown of the program.

The PICA plan is named for the "Psychotropic, Injectable, Chemotherapy and Asthma" medications that it covers, drugs that are generally expensive and must often be taken for life. It is paid for through the Health Stabilization Fund, created by municipal unions and the City 20 years ago to use health plan surpluses to provide supplementary benefits.

LIFE SAVING DRUGS

In late 2000, when surpluses in the Stabilization Fund were large, the MLC and the City agreed to create the PICA program, to help ease the pressure on union welfare funds by picking up the tab for some of the most expensive drugs for members and their families. "PICA drugs were selected for special support because they are often the difference between life and death," said PSC President Barbara Bowen.

But rising prices and increased use of these medications are exceeding what the Stabilization Fund

can pay, and contributions by the City have not increased enough to cover the cost. The City says that at current rates of spending the Fund will be depleted by around March 2005, and the unions agree that the shortfall must be addressed.

Changes in the PICA plan adopted last year include \$5 co-pays for generic prescriptions, \$15 co-pays for preferred brand-name prescriptions, and \$35 for non-preferred brand-name prescriptions. These increased worker contributions kept the PICA program from running out of money in 2004, but they were not enough to offset steeply rising drug costs.

HIP conversion could bail out PICA shortfall

For a medium-term solution, the MLC wants the PICA plan to secure a share of the money to be generated by the conversion of the Health Insurance Plan for Greater New York (HIP) from a not-for-profit to a for-profit corporation. This would require approval by the State Legislature, and the MLC asked Bowen to coordinate this effort.

HIP was created in 1947 in order to provide for City workers' health care; and until recently, a majority of HIP members are municipal employees. Thus, HIP's market value has been created, in large part, by City health plan payments.

The earlier conversion of NY Blue Cross/Blue Shield provides a precedent; in 2002 Albany decided to spend roughly \$1 billion of the proceeds on health care costs and health care workers. In most other states, Blue Cross conversions resulted in funds to cover the uninsured. Estimates of the HIP conversion windfall run as high as \$1 billion; under Gov. Pataki's January 2005 budget proposal, \$400 million would fund reauthorization of New York's Health Care Reform Act.

If no new funding is found, responsibility for PICA drugs could revert to union welfare funds, few of which could afford to provide them under the current level of employer contributions.

FALSE CRISIS

Weingarten had said that the City was dragging its feet and allowing the PICA shortfall to get worse, to use a PICA funding crisis to extract concessions from the unions. She called the City's threat to terminate the problem "your quintessential false crisis."

"The City's response to rising health care costs has been to try to shift costs from employer to employee," said Bowen. "But we're glad that the City is now engaged in serious discussions with us, because we deserve health care coverage as part of our wages for public employment."



Lisa Quifones

CALENDAR

THURSDAY, JANUARY 27: Nominating petitions are available for chapter offices, delegates, and alternates to the Delegate Assembly and the Welfare Fund Advisory Council. Chapters holding elections this Spring are: Baruch, Bronx, Brooklyn, City, CUNY Central Office, Grad Center, Hostos, Hunter, John Jay, LaGuardia, Queens, York, and the cross-campus CLT chapter. Petitions are available from chapter chairs or the union office through March 1. For more info contact Barbara Gabriel, bgabriel@psmail.org, 212-354-1252.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 12 / 12 – 4:00 pm: Organizers' Training at Hunter School of Social Work, 129 E. 79th St. Build skills for talking with your coworkers about the contract. Contact Karen Miller, krmiller@hunter.cuny.edu or MaryAnn Carlese, 212-354-1252.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18 / 6:00 pm: Labor Goes to the Movies shows Jonathan Demme's *The Agronomist*, about assassinated Haitian activist Jean Dominique. At 99 Hudson St. Contact Dania Rajendra, drajendra@psmail.org, 212-354-1252.

TUESDAY, MARCH 1 / 5:00 pm: Deadline for nominating petitions. Contact Barbara Gabriel, bgabriel@psmail.org, 212-354-1252. See above.

FRIDAY, MARCH 4 / 1:00 pm: Academic Freedom Committee meeting. At the PSC office, 25 W. 43rd St. Contact Steve Leberstein, sleberstein@uwalumni.com, 212-650-7274.

FRIDAY, MARCH 4 / 4:00 pm: DA Part-time Personnel Committee meeting. At the PSC office, 25 W. 43rd St. Contact Marcia Newfield, mnnewfield@psmail.org, 212-354-1252.

SATURDAY, MARCH 5 / 9 am – 5:00 pm: Educators to Stop the War East Coast Regional Conference. At Hunter College High School, 71 E. 94th St., at Park Avenue. See page 9 and www.educatorstostopthewar.org.

MONDAY, MARCH 7 / 1 pm: Retirees Chapter meeting – all PSC members welcome. Larry Kaplan discusses investment strategies in retirement. At the CUNY Grad Center, C201-202. Contact Jack Judd, jjudd18@optonline.net, 914-941-4315.

TUESDAY, MARCH 8 / 6:00 pm: Women's Committee meeting. At the PSC office, 25 W. 43rd St. Contact Debra Bergen, dbergen@psmail.org, 212-354-1252.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16 / 6:00 pm: Solidarity Committee meeting. At the PSC office, 25 W. 43rd St. Contact Jim Perlstein at jperlstein@bassmeadow.com, 212-354-1252.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23 / 6:00 pm: PSC Mayoral forum at the Proshansky Auditorium, CUNY Grad Center.

Montserrat native organizes for community's right to stay

Vera Weekes fights for justice

By SAUNDRA BUNTON

When a dormant volcano came to life on the tiny Caribbean island of Montserrat in 1995, evacuated residents thought they would soon return. But by 1997, increasingly violent eruptions had buried the capital and the island's airport under ash, rocks and lava flows, and both lay abandoned. Most of Montserrat's population fled into exile. Today scientists say that the eruption is still not over, and two-thirds of the island remains uninhabitable.

Two hundred ninety-two Montserratians sought safe haven in the U.S., and were granted "Temporary Protected Status" (TPS) because of the devastated condition of their homeland. But this summer, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) revoked that status and gave them until February 27, 2005 to leave or face deportation. The U.S. government did not claim that the crisis was over; rather, it said the Montserratians would be expelled because the crisis had no end in sight: "The volcanic activity...is not likely to cease in the foreseeable future. Therefore, it no longer constitutes a temporary disruption of living conditions."

One of the most active and outspoken opponents of this decision has been Vera Weekes, a Higher Education Officer at Medgar Evers College who is assistant director of the college's Caribbean Research Center. "How can TPS be terminated for a country that is unsafe and has an active volcano?" she asks. "These unfortunate Montserratians have no home to return to."

NO HOME

Weekes's organizing efforts have drawn press coverage from the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, the BBC and more. For years she has led lobbying efforts for legislation to provide the 292 Montserratians with permanent residence in the U.S. She convinced Congressman Major Owens of Brooklyn to introduce such a bill in 2001, only to see it swallowed up in the anti-immigration backlash after the September 11 attacks. But Weekes persevered: Owens reintroduced the bill in 2003, and Sen. Charles Schumer introduced a similar bill in the Senate in 2004.

With Republicans tightening their grip on both houses last November, the chances of Congressional action before the February 27 deadline are slim. But Weekes spearheaded efforts to pressure DHS and appeal directly to President Bush. "It's like putting them on a boat in the middle of the ocean and leaving them there," Weekes comments.

With the government of Montserrat unable to accommodate these citizens and their families, who no

longer have homes or jobs on the island, many are anticipating life in makeshift shelters. "Who are they going to stay with when they leave here – and where?" asks Weekes. Britain has opened its doors to Montserratians fortunate enough to have relatives in the UK who are able and willing to sponsor them – but this still leaves many with nowhere to go.

Vera Weekes's passionate interest in Montserrat has its roots in the

Teachers' Union asked me if I could come in and help them rebuild the union." Weekes weighed the impact this would have on her church involvement, teaching career and her growing family, and then cautiously agreed. But little by little, her involvement grew due to her administrative skills and her work experience in Britain. She became secretary of the Montserrat Union of Teachers, with responsibilities that grew to include public relations and

Caribbean students. In 1997, in response to the work of the CRC, the Board of Education implemented mandatory guidelines on helping foreign-born students with the transition into the NYC public schools. Today Weekes is coordinator of both fiscal affairs and outreach at the CRC, and oversees its parent and prison outreach programs.

ENERGIZING HEOS

Social policy and political action are not the only ways that Weekes seeks to help others: she volunteered at Our Lady of Mercy Hospital as part of HIP's Integrative Services program, visiting the sick and elderly once a week, from 1998 to 2002. Her church has always been important: for ten years, she was Sunday school superintendent at the Bronx's Zion Pentecostal Church.

It might seem natural that Weekes would become active with PSC, but as in Montserrat it was someone else who asked her to take the first step. Jean Weisman, chair of the HEO chapter, asked Weekes to get involved after reading about her work on the Medgar Evers website. "She is a dedicated organizer at Medgar Evers and has energized the HEOs," says Weisman. "Vera has played a key role in building the union's Legislative Committee." As co-chair of the Legislative Committee, Weekes lobbies at the state and national level to rally support for union-supported bills. As a union grievance counselor, she helps other HEOs deal with unfair evaluations and holds campus workshops to explain members' contractual rights and how the grievance process works.

Weekes says she has found that PSC has "a good collarbone" of elected officials, who "have an interest in peace and justice and the welfare of all people." She considers this broad vision the organization's greatest strength.

When Vera Weekes first came to the U.S., she thought she would continue to teach, get a graduate degree and become a university professor. That all changed, however, once she got her position at the CRC and saw how badly she was needed there. "I got so involved with my job, I forgot what I came here to do," she says, laughing.

For the future, she has considered the prospect of opening a nursing home with her son, getting more involved at her church, and perhaps finally getting her PhD. But whether she is collecting a pension or a paycheck, Weekes doesn't seem likely to give up the 14-hour days she takes for granted. "I don't think I'll retire," she says with another laugh. "I must have something to do!"



Lisa Quinones

Vera Weekes: HEO, community champion, union activist

fact that she was born there. But it is also rooted in her decades of experience as an immigrant and a fighter for equal rights.

In 1962 Weekes left Montserrat for Britain, where she had her first encounter with racism. When she asked a Labor Department career placement counselor about the prospects of furthering her education, she was politely told, "Not you." In response, she says, "I made a decision that they will never keep me back. I wanted to put my degree in their face!"

Not wanting to work in factories her entire life, Weekes began to lay the groundwork for her career as an educator. She earned money as a secretary and personal stenographer, and after her husband received his PhD they returned to Montserrat in 1972. Once there, Weekes raised four children while attending the University of the West Indies, receiving her B.A. and becoming a teacher at the Salem Junior Secondary School, the Montserrat Secondary School, and the island's Technical College.

After her return to Montserrat, Weekes says, "the President of the

community affairs.

In 1989 Weekes and her family immigrated to the United States – and as in Britain, she faced many closed doors. After being turned down for several jobs for not having "any American experience," she finally landed a position at Medgar Evers College's Caribbean Research Center (CRC), founded in 1985 to serve as a crossroads for academics, immigrant organizations and legislators to address issues of the Caribbean community.

FIGHTS BIAS

At the Center, Weekes dedicated herself to ending educational discrimination in NYC schools that had been wrongly placing Caribbean immigrants in remedial and special education classes. "It was really a struggle," she says. "No one wanted to admit to the error of their ways." From 1985 to 1997 the CRC went into schools, tutored students, held Saturday classes, offered psychiatric services to immigrants, and sponsored workshops to sensitize teachers and administrators to the needs of

Dedicated HEO takes on Homeland Security

Retiring soon?

Supplemental benefits & your pension check

By PETER HOGNESS

If you pay for supplemental benefits with a payroll deduction and are about to retire, you will have to switch these deductions over to your pension check.

This applies to payments for such benefits as:

- John Hancock's long-term care insurance.

- The Marsh catastrophic major medical coverage (formerly known as Wohler's).

- The optional dental rider (see article at right).

- Any of the supplemental benefits offered by NY State United Teachers (NYSUT) – the NYSUT legal services plan, homeowners' or auto insurance, etc. (More information on these benefits is available at www.memberbenefits.nysut.org.)

The first three benefits are only available to full-time employees.

Your paycheck lists a single deduction to NYSUT that covers all of your supplemental benefits; NYSUT in turn pays the individual benefit providers. When you retire and go off CUNY's payroll, these payments stop and each benefit provider will send you a separate bill to continue your coverage.

IMMEDIATE DEDUCTION

If you are receiving an annuity from TIAA-CREF or other parts of the Optional Retirement Program, you can have these payments immediately transferred to a deduction from your pension checks. Each time you receive a bill for a particular benefit, contact the provider and ask them to arrange for the deductions.

If you are in the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS), there may be a delay before you receive your first

pension check. If so, you must pay the bills from each benefit provider until your pension checks start to arrive. (The same applies if you are in TIAA-CREF but have not yet annuitized your retirement funds.) Once your pension checks begin, ask each supplemental benefit provider to start a pension deduction.

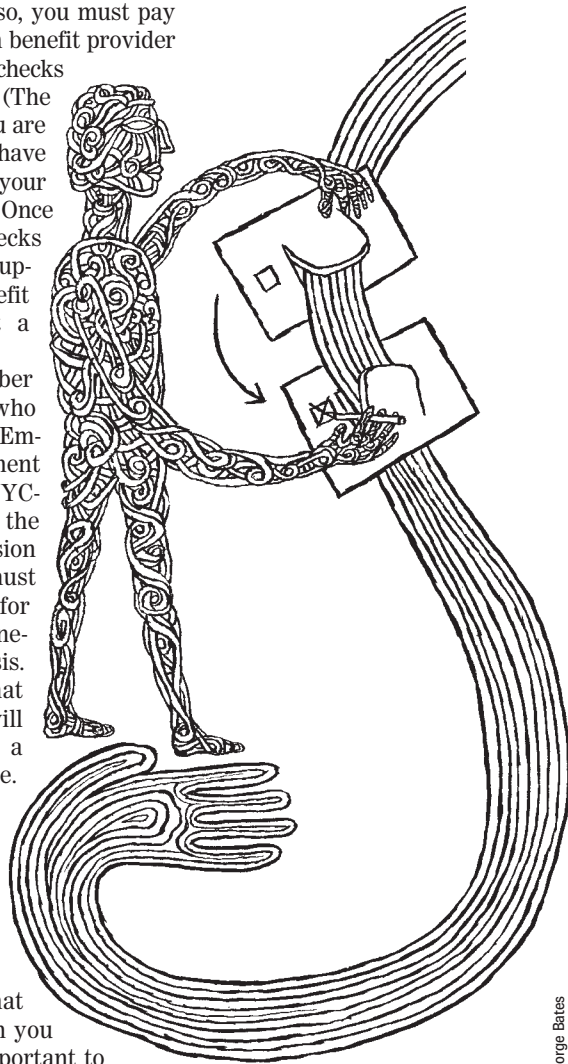
The small number of PSC members who are in the NYC Employee Retirement System (ERS or NYC-ERS) do not have the option for a pension deduction and must continue to pay for supplemental benefits on a billing basis.

Be aware that providers' bills will each arrive on a different schedule. Marsh's bill is semi-annual; the Welfare Fund's dental rider is annual; and John Hancock offers several options.

No matter what retirement system you belong to, it is important to be on the lookout for the first bills from your benefit providers. Be aware that these bills are coming, particularly if you will be traveling or away from your usual home address. You must either pay the bill or arrange for a pension check deduction, or these benefits will not continue.

If you have not heard from a

provider within a couple of months of your retirement, contact the provider and ask when you will receive a bill. Here is a list of providers' numbers: Marsh Affinity, 800-503-9230; John Hancock, 800-543-7108; PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund (e.g., dental rider), 212-354-5230; NYSUT (e.g., legal plan, insurance), 800-626-8101.



George Bates

3,200 choose dental rider

Next chance to sign up: Fall 2005

Enrollment in the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund's new dental rider has reached 3,200 members. The enrollment period is now closed, but will open again next Fall.

The rider, which provides expanded dental coverage for an additional bi-weekly (\$7.78 per individual, \$17.68 per family) premium, has turned out to be popular. Larry Morgan, executive director of the Welfare Fund (WF), told *Clarion* that 1,900 members signed up during the initial enrollment period last Summer. Another 1,300 opted for the rider in November, during the annual open enrollment period for changes in health coverage.

The next opportunity to choose the dental rider will come in the open enrollment period for calendar year 2006, in October or November 2005.

"The response to the rider has been overwhelming," Morgan told *Clarion*. "We're heartened by that response – but it also reflects the fact that the current financial condition of the Fund doesn't allow us to offer a higher level of basic dental coverage."

INCREASED COVERAGE

While the dental rider offers increased coverage, Morgan cautioned that it is not perfect. "It will not cover the entire bill, and it will pay a maximum of \$1500 per person per year," he explained. "But within those limits, the rider combines the discounted rates offered under the basic Guardian plan with a higher reimbursement level, which significantly reduces out-of-pocket costs."

Details are available at from the Guardian website or through the WF office.

Here is an example of how the rider affects savings: A root canal (molar) averaged \$1,015 in Manhattan in 2004. The average Guardian

YOUR BENEFITS

dentist's charge was a discounted rate of \$690. Under the regular plan, the member is then reimbursed \$67 after paying the discounted fee. (The main savings is thus via the discount.) But with the rider, the reimbursement is multiplied five-fold. In this case, the reimbursement is \$335, reducing the out-of-pocket cost with a Guardian dentist to \$355.

On a related issue, Morgan noted that the WF "recently became aware that a handful of members elected the riders for themselves but not for dependents. The structure of the program doesn't allow this, and in some cases dental coverage for dependents was inadvertently dropped by the provider." This was an isolated incidence, Morgan said. "There are about a dozen cases that the Fund is aware of, and we have made sure that these errors were corrected."

The WF is ready to act as members' advocate when needed, Morgan added. "Often the quickest way for a member to resolve a problem is simply to call the company involved," he said. "But if that doesn't work, you should give us a call."—PH



EDUCATORS' INCOME TAX GUIDE 2005

Mail to: Membership Dept., Professional Staff Congress
25 West 43rd Street, Fifth Floor, New York, N.Y. 10036

Enclosed is a check in the amount of \$ _____ made out to PSC
for _____ copy(ies) of The Educators' Income Tax Guide @\$6.00 per copy.

Name _____

Address _____

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Clarion FEBRUARY 2005

Newspaper of the Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York, collective bargaining representative of the CUNY instructional staff. Vol. 34, No. 2. PSC/CUNY is affiliated with the American Association of University Professors, the American Federation of Teachers (Local 2334), AFL-CIO, the New York City Central Labor Council and New York State United Teachers. Published by PSC/CUNY, 25 West 43rd Street, New York, NY 10036. Telephone: (212) 354-1252. Web site: www.psc-cuny.org. E-mail: phogness@psccmail.org. All opinions expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the PSC.

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Labor's shrinking pains

Debate on AFL-CIO future

By DANIA RAJENDRA

This year, the AFL-CIO will turn 50, and it's not a happy birthday. When the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations merged in 1955, one-third of all U.S. workers belonged to a union. Today, union membership stands at just 12.5% – and less than 8% in the private sector.

The drop in union representation has had broad consequences for all Americans. Health insurance and a guaranteed pension, since WWII seen as cornerstones of any decent job, are now described as luxuries. This decline in security and benefits pressures unionized workers to compete for less. When CUNY management tells PSC contract negotiators that they should accept benefit

cuts because “many employers don't provide any health insurance,” then it is all too clear how PSC members are affected by declining unionization.

SEIU (Service Employees International Union) called this “the crisis facing working people,” and launched a public debate on its proposed solution: a near-total overhaul of the AFL-CIO. If the AFL-CIO won't reorganize, SEIU – the nation's fastest-growing and largest union – threatened to leave the federation.

INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH

By January, SEIU seemed less likely to walk, but the debate remained intense. SEIU President Andy Stern welcomed the controversy, posting both SEIU's proposal and responses at www.unitetowin.org.

Other unions began to put forward plans of their own, and the AFL-CIO set up a discussion site in January, www.aflcio.org/ourfuture. Nearly two dozen proposals are now posted, with uncensored commentary.

To win improvements, SEIU said, unions need to fight large corporations on an equally large scale. For example, it called for a nationwide campaign to organize Wal-Mart. The key to building union power, argued SEIU, is “union density” – the proportion of unionized workers within an industry or market. If unions organize just a small part of an industry, winning a significant wage increase may mean only that non-union competition puts the union companies out of business. SEIU's solution is massive, industry-wide campaigns.

Such campaigns, it argued, require two things: more money for organizing and fewer, larger unions. SEIU's proposal would mean a drastic shift of financial resources into organizing, and would give the AFL-CIO the power to compel mergers among its affiliates. Today the AFL-

How to solve the crisis for working people

CIO operates by building consensus – not by telling affiliated unions what to do. But SEIU contended that this process is too slow to respond to the urgency of the current situation.

Since it's unions, not the federation, that organize workers, SEIU said that unions that shift their own budgets toward organizing should keep more of the money that they tithe to the AFL-CIO (called “per-

caps,” currently 57 cents per member per month). That would mean cuts to the AFL-CIO's programs and services. On the merger front, SEIU wanted the federation's current 58 national unions reorganized into a much smaller number, organized on clearer industrial lines.

PARTNERSHIPS

Unions also need more political power, SEIU conceded, and in fact its plan included a national push to win universal health insurance. But it pointed to the last election to argue that to succeed in politics, unions must first have more members.

In 2003, SEIU formed an alliance with four other unions around a shared emphasis on organizing, dubbed the New Unity Partnership (NUP). It consisted of SEIU, hotel

Labor roundtable looks forward

On January 26, Clarion hosted a discussion about the current debate over the future of the AFL-CIO. The participants were: **Dorothee Benz**, a long-time labor strategist and writer who has worked for CWA, SEIU and UNITE; she now works for NYU's Brennan Center for Justice. A former member of the PSC, Benz earned her doctorate at CUNY with a study of union organizing.

Bhairavi Desai, director of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, an independent union of 5,525 taxi drivers that has successfully fought for higher fares and capped leases. In 1998, the NYTWA organized a 24-hour strike of 40,000 licensed drivers over their sweatshop conditions.

José La Luz, a Visiting Labor Leader at Cornell ILR, has led campaigns that organized more than 120,000 public employees in Puerto Rico. He is with the AFL-CIO's organizing department, and a formerly Northeast director at AFSCME and education director for ACTWU.

Kim Moody, co-founder of Labor Notes and its director for many years. A member of the PSC, he teaches at Brooklyn College and is an author of *An Injury To All* and *Workers in a Lean World*.

What follows is adapted from their discussion.

Union competition

JOSE LA LUZ: This question of jurisdiction, it has got to be tighter. The [multi-union organizing campaign] in Puerto Rico was horrifying. Everyone looked at it as, ‘can I

add more members than another union?’ The agreements we worked out quickly dissolved and soon different unions were filing election petitions in the same units. We can no longer afford that.

KIM MOODY: I fear honestly that

we are losing the ability to do jurisdictional organizing. For instance, this Steelworkers/PACE merger is a nightmare. United Steelworkers, Paperworkers, Chemical Workers, Energy Workers, Forestry Workers, it's absurd. But unions allied with SEIU have the same problem. The merger between UNITE, garment and textile workers, and HERE, hotel and restaurant workers – what's the logic there?

The Steelworkers say the steel industry is disappearing. Okay, but for some manufacturing unions, that's not the case. This country has got thousands of these little plants with immigrant workers making little pieces of automobiles. Less than 13% of the parts industry is union now, which means only about a third of the whole auto industry is union. And who is the UAW organizing? Adjuncts at NYU, graduate students. It doesn't make any sense.

More or fewer resources to the AFL-CIO?

KM: While I don't really like the SEIU/NUP proposal, I think you have to give the resources to the unions that are going to do the work. The AFL-CIO can train organizers, but it is the unions that do the organizing. Putting more into the federation is not going to accomplish anything.

JL: What I find very contradictory is that the unions calling for a stronger center are also saying, let's wipe out the center by drastically reducing the per-capita! That means hundreds of people laid off, and programs drastically reduced.



Dorothee Benz

I don't understand the intent of proposing both at the same time.

DOROTHEE BENZ: You can't talk about the need for central bodies to be more dynamic and at the same time talk about defunding them.

JL: I would be in favor of a stronger center, along of the lines of what has happened in Brazil and South Africa – if in fact the workers are engaged at the base. In Brazil, when the trade union movement had to be rebuilt from the bottom up, people had conversations in neighborhoods and workplaces about how to build a different kind of labor movement.

Labor law reform

PETER HOGNESS, Clarion editor: Rulings from the National Labor Relations Board, the NLRB, have been increasingly anti-union. Corporations routinely fire workers who organize and pay no real penalty. Can we organize more workers without labor law reform?

BHAIRAVI DESAI: You can't get

caught up in the letter of the law. The NLRB says taxi drivers are independent contractors and don't have a right to a collective bargaining agreement. Whatever their NLRB classification, drivers are workers and all working people have a right to a union. We have to transform the NLRB, but we can't wait for them to validate our obligation to organize.

DB: Is labor law reform a prerequisite for increased unionization? I tend to think it is. The labor movement has shifted resources to organizing, and gone through shifts in strategy. Unions now routinely pressure companies to accept the union without going through an NLRB election, in which the rules are rigged in favor of management. These non-NLRB campaigns are now about 80% of private-sector organizing – that's a huge change.

So unions do win, but the problem is they can never win on a large enough scale. Because it's like World War III to win every single damn battle, whether it's 10



José La Luz

and restaurant workers (HERE), garment and textile workers (UNITE), laborers (LIUNA) and carpenters (IBC – which left the AFL-CIO in 2001). A draft NUP proposal for restructuring the AFL-CIO had extensive unofficial circulation.

'ORGANIZE OR DIE'

The formation of the NUP was condemned by some as a power grab, and the group officially disbanded in January 2005. While there were some reports of internal tensions, its leaders said the reason they founded the group was to force a debate. Now that they had succeeded, they said, they wanted that debate to focus on the issues.

All five unions have been willing to take their own medicine: they shifted big portions of their budgets to organizing, sometimes after difficult internal struggles. In New York, UNITE swapped its high-profile greengrocery workers campaign to the grocery workers union (UFCW) in exchange for UFCW's laundry workers, and UNITE and HERE merged at the national level last July.

Many unions objected to SEIU's plan as top-down and undemocratic. If fully realized, Stern's one-union-per-industry prescription would spell the end of craft unions, like those in the construction trades. But many industrial unions with roots in the old CIO have also lined up against the SEIU plan: the Machinists (IAM) threatened to leave the AFL-CIO if it is adopted.

The debate seemed at an impasse until December, when the Teamsters released a proposal of their own – a scaled-back version of SEIU's demands. Instead of forced mergers, the Teamsters suggested that rebates on per-cap payments be used as an incentive. They, too, advocated trimming AFL-CIO programs to let unions spend more on organizing, but left out SEIU's Wal-Mart and health care campaigns.

UNEXPECTED ALLIANCES

This debate is hard to categorize as a split between left and right: the Teamsters, who backed Bush in 2000, and SEIU, an early endorser of Howard Dean, disagree on many

things. But their proposals share the same premise: workers are better served in fewer, larger, industry-specific organizations.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT; the PSC's national affiliate), disagreed with that premise and proposed changes that go in the opposite direction. The AFT suggested *more* funding for AFL-CIO bodies, particularly at the state and local level, and a loosening of jurisdictional rules.

Union density is important, said the AFT – but what counts is the proportion of workers in *any* union, not the share in a single organization. With so many unorganized workers, the AFT argued, it makes sense to open the doors to any union that wants to organize in a given sector, and then encourage unions to work together. They proposed AFL-CIO-facilitated, inter-union cooperation – joint organizing efforts and coordinated contract campaigns – as the best way to foster mergers on a voluntary basis.

This would be done by creating

what the AFT called "Industry/Occupation Labor Centers," alliances of unions active in the same sector that would share resources and make joint decisions about how to move forward. The AFT cited building trades councils and the coalition of unions at Kaiser Health as examples of effective cooperation.

The Communications Workers of America (CWA) challenged another SEIU premise – that retooling the AFL-CIO's structure is central to revitalizing the labor movement. "If anyone in this room thinks that we're going to change...based on how we structure rather than how we mobilize, they're mistaken," said CWA Executive Vice President Larry Cohen.

EMPHASIS DIFFERS

CWA's proposals put more focus on the workers who already belong to unions. This difference isn't absolute: CWA (and the AFT) both have large organizing programs, and SEIU is known for turning out large numbers of its members in contract struggles and political campaigns. But there is still a clear difference in emphasis: while SEIU's

plashiest proposal was a national organizing drive at Wal-Mart, CWA proposed putting more money into the AFL-CIO to establish a national strike fund, to revitalize the strike as an effective weapon.

Cohen stressed the importance of a strong shop steward system for engaging local union members. He pointed to Canada, where stewards elect delegates to local labor councils, which in turn make decisions on political endorsements. Educating and training stewards, winning strong contracts and reforming labor law were among CWA's top priorities.

The AFL-CIO's Executive Committee meeting in March and its convention in July will bring some decisions. Regardless of the outcome, the last few months of public discussion have been a dramatic departure from business-as-usual in the house of labor. It's too soon to know whether the new openness is a harbinger of things to come, but it's not too late for members to weigh in. Visit www.unitetowin.org or www.aflcio.org/ourfuture to read the proposals and comment.

workers or 10,000. SEIU organized 74,000 homecare workers in Los Angeles, but it took 11 years; CWA organized 6,000 SBC Wireless workers – in five years. It's the work of Sisyphus.

I don't think the density game can be won without fundamental legal reform. That's not going to happen soon, but I do think it's where the emphasis should be. How will we get there? When there is a real movement from below that truly disrupts business-as-usual in this country, economically and politically.

Democracy

JL: The industry-driven approach has worked in Brazil and in South Africa, but it can't be proclamation, a dictate. There has to be a discussion about what it means to have tighter jurisdiction



Kim Moody

and boundaries.

KM: When I first read about the SEIU/NUP reorganization plan, I thought, 'this is a recipe for creating gigantic bureaucratic organizations – exactly the opposite of what we need to do.' Mergers can be good or bad, but the priority is to involve members as much as possible in the decisions.

DB: Sometimes this debate is presented as if as one side is saying, 'Centralize!' and the other is saying, 'No, democratize!' But the two things are not inherently contradictory.

In South Africa in the days of apartheid, unions had centralized structures. But – and this goes to the point that Larry Cohen of CWA makes – the backbone of the labor movement was a huge, vibrant shop steward system. They would go to national meetings with a mandate from their folks back home, who had actually discussed the issues to be decided. They would meet, they would argue and decide, and then they would go on a two-week tour back to their base, from shop to shop, to report back. So the decisions were made in a very central way but also in a very accountable way.

In the back of my head, I can hear Andy Stern saying, 'We don't have time for that, labor is going to become extinct.' And this is what I dislike about the SEIU proposal. They put this urgency on it as though union democracy, as though accountability, as though organic growth of the movement from the base is a luxury we can no longer afford. And in fact these are things we can't afford *not* to have. There is absolutely no quick fix for labor.

JL: Had it not been for SEIU putting forth this proposal, we might not be having this discussion. So some credit has to be given



Bhairavi Desai

to them. But I'm afraid that, since we heard about the NUP being disbanded, some people are beginning to strike deals behind closed doors. When we get to the AFL-CIO convention, I'm afraid there's we may get told, 'Here are the changes, the debate is closed, thank you very much.'

Politics & Member Education

JL: In Brazil the union movement learned a lot from the educational approaches Paulo Friere and others, about what language do you need to engage people in learning. They engaged workers in a conversation, about 'what kind of union do I want to be in?' That has not happened in this debate, because many of the people who are promoting it – they may be progressive, but how to engage people was

not part of their formation.

BD: And when members *are* being engaged, it's only around narrow economic interests.

JL: Look at a study the pollster Peter Hart did for the AFL-CIO in the 1990s. He reported that most union members have no ideological framework for organizing information about politics and public policy in a way that relates to the mission of their unions. Hart found that few union members can articulate any explanation of what has gone wrong with the economy and society in this country. And most importantly, who is responsible.

When workers decide to vote for somebody because he is against homosexuals, when he is also against their own economic interests, whose failure is that? I submit that it is the failure of the only institution that is supposed to educate workers, which is the union.

That failure doesn't have only to do with density or the question of how big we are.

BD: That's what's problematic with the different restructuring proposals. Fundamentally, the shortcomings and failures are ideological issues. There is something about having the wealth created from your labor taken by the owner that provides the seed to your consciousness. Too many unions don't build upon that consciousness. If anything, they undermine it. They have no faith in the workers.

There's no greater institution than the AFL-CIO to be really a strong vehicle for the working class of America. When you look at the amount of resources and organization within the AFL-CIO, nothing else even comes close. But I feel that what's really lacking is a political clarity about how capitalism functions and the potential of working people to be agents of change.

JL: When more resources are put into organizing, that has translated in certain unions as, 'Let's axe the Education Department.' Often this has come from people who advocate density or growth or size as our foremost and perhaps exclusive priority.

There have been some real battles over this – some people fighting to save the education department, while others push to put all those resources into hiring more organizers. Some union leaders simply see no need to do what they called 'training.' But I don't see it as a vocational exercise of developing or sharpening skills, this is about education. I just don't see how you can organize without educating.

How do we make the labor movement strong again?

THE CONTRACT

State of Emergency

By BARBARA BOWEN
PSC President

Last month I wrote that January would be a period of intensified contract negotiations followed by an assessment of whether we were making sufficient progress toward a settlement. If not, I promised, the union would enter into a new level of mobilization and a more militant campaign to win the contract we need. Both things have happened – intense negotiations and serious assessment. The result is that on January 27, the union's Delegate Assembly voted unanimously to declare a state of emergency in the contract negotiations.

While some progress has been made and we have begun to reach tentative agreements on different pieces of the contract, the central problem remains. Management has not budged from the position that our final contract settlement will be at the minimal level forecast by their initial offer. Their December offer of 1.5% over four years (with a \$400 one-time cash payment and a further 1% "increase" to be funded by increased work) points to a final settlement that barely brushes the level of inflation.

There are two overriding reasons such a settlement would be a disaster. The first is that it would mean we lose ground in salaries and make no progress in working conditions, and thus no progress in our ability to serve our students or advance in our own research and professional lives. The second is health care.

HEALTH CARE COSTS

Like almost every group of workers in the country, PSC members are faced with outrageous increases in health care costs, driven by a profit-obsessed pharmaceutical industry. Many of those increases fall on the Welfare Fund (WF), which supports the costs of members' prescription drugs.

After years of underfunding by CUNY management, our WF needs a substantial increase if it is to provide any meaningful support. We have already endured the shift of about a third of the cost of our prescription drugs – and much of our dental care – from the employer to the employee. If CUNY is to offer its faculty and staff an adequate dental plan and any useful drug benefit at all, there must be a significant increase in Welfare Fund contributions. Despite painful

benefit changes and extremely careful management, the Fund's reserve has less than a year left.

Management's response to this at the bargaining table has shocked some of you who have attended negotiating sessions as observers. They coolly take the position that the cost of health care should be subtracted from inflation-level non-raises, or that we should cut benefits, especially for retirees. One of their stated rationales is that "many places don't have any benefits for retirees at

as our class sizes have boomed and workload has increased means nothing. Nor does the argument, obvious to anyone who knows anything about academic life, that real productivity is not measured in the number of student-widgets you process on an academic assembly line: real productivity means smaller class sizes, a manageable courseload, more research time. It's astonishing that the same Chancellor who has built his career at CUNY on the "excellence" of the faculty can now propose cutting into

of disagreement on more global issues. The PSC negotiating team is committed to continuing to work toward progress at the bargaining table, but the chasm has not shrunk. If anything, over the past month, its outline has become clearer.

ACTION

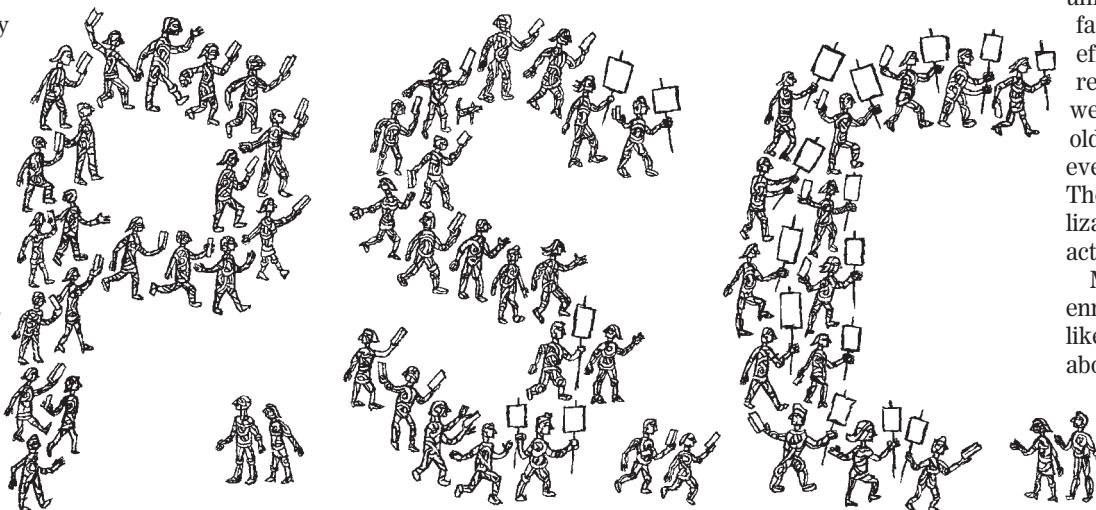
That's why the union's Delegate Assembly declared a state of emergency (the full text of the resolution is worth reading; see www.psc-cuny.org). We resolved that the union would "call on every member of the faculty and staff to become part of the mass effort that will be required, given the current political climate, to win the contract we need; that we rededicate ourselves to old-fashioned, one-on-one organizing so that every member is informed and engaged." The state of emergency is a state of mobilization; we need to be in a position to act as action is needed.

Movements are built one by one, and the enraging truth is that it will take something like a movement to win, when you think about it, a rather modest agenda: to maintain the value of our salaries and health care and to make gains that will strengthen the education we offer.

That such an agenda places us in such sharp conflict with management is a measure of how regressive *their* agenda really is.

The second part of the resolution is a commitment to initiate a union-wide conversation on the tactics the labor movement has historically used to break contractual logjams – and their relevance to our situation. By engaging in a new level of critical conversation throughout the union, you will prepare your delegates to vote on more militant actions that we may be forced to consider this Spring. Meanwhile, the other union officers and I are doing everything we can to increase the pressure behind the scenes: meeting with legislators, working with the statewide teachers' union, and engaging in talks with the City and State.

The message I hear from the membership is that you don't want to be forced to take more militant action but that you are also not willing to give up on your own professional lives and on CUNY. Management may have given up on the intellectual and political promise of CUNY, but we haven't: we are not willing to concede that a serious professional life is impossible at a city university. That's what this contract struggle is about.



George Bates

all." Many places lock the doors so workers can't get out, too. Does CUNY really want to be the university that wins the race to the bottom in health care benefits? Current and future retirees *earned* their WF benefits as part of their compensation while they were working. Health care – including the prescription drugs that increasingly *are* health care – is part of our wage, not a gift of employer largesse.

The other ominous thing we've heard across the table during the past month is a repetition of the City's dictum that we will have to "increase our productivity" just to claw our way up to an inflation-level increase. In other words, work more just to stand still. One example of a "productivity increase" proposed by CUNY management is that full-time faculty would be required to return to campus on August 20 – without any extra compensation or other gains for that work. The fact that we have already experienced huge "productivity increases"

the little time we have for research.

The City's position on "self-funded increases" is being tested in the arbitration process on contracts with police, firefighters, and teachers; and until the first of those decisions is issued, sometime around the end of March, many other municipal negotiations are on hold. Even if the City is forced by a legal decision, however, to provide larger increases to the police union, each other union will have to make its own case. And only the police and fire unions have the option of arbitration that is legally binding.

VAST CHASM

If it's hard to square all of this with my initial report that some progress is being made, I agree. Collective bargaining is an oddly compartmentalized and almost schizophrenic activity: the two sides can work quite productively together on fine points of accrued annual leave or performance evaluations while operating across a vast chasm

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"My Five"

Take an active role in winning a fair contract by participating in the My Five program. Think of five colleagues with whom you'd like to be in continual contact about the contract campaign through the semester. Then, coordinate your five with your chapter chair (find the names and numbers at www.psc-cuny.org). The PSC will send

you information to share and ideas for actions you and your five can participate in.

It will take more than 15 minutes, but hone your "My Five" skills by attending the Organizers' Training (see page 8). For more information, contact MaryAnn Carlese at 212-354-1252 or mcarlese@psccmail.org.