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WORKING OVERTIME

HEOs file grievance

Workers start a class action for fair pay.

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BAD FAITH?

The PSC bargained in good faith, and expected the same from CUNY. But two months after the two sides agreed on a "conceptual framework," CUNY may be indicating it will be unable to deliver City and State support. The union

demanded a bargaining session with direct City and State participation, and reiterated that members need real raises, a solution to the Welfare Fund crisis and advances on equity issues.

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Pataki's plan falls short

Governor Pataki's proposed budget would mean bigger tuition hikes and a gap in state funding for SUNY and CUNY.

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Governor's budget fails CUNY

By PETER HOGNESS

Governor George Pataki unveiled his state budget blueprint on January 17, a \$111 billion proposal that puts a high priority on tax cuts. The plan calls for decreasing state revenue by \$16 billion over the next five years, a formula that would spell trouble for CUNY.

State funding for the operating budget of CUNY's senior colleges would be set at \$775.3 million, an increase of 2.1%. This is less than the rate of inflation, and CUNY officials say it would not be enough to cover mandatory cost increases.

SHORTFALL

To address this shortfall, the governor is proposing a tuition hike of 7.5%, or \$300, at CUNY's senior colleges. The executive budget also asks for a \$500 hike at SUNY, and includes changes to the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) in ways that would disadvantage students. At the community colleges, state aid per full-time equivalent student (or FTE) would rise by \$100, or less than half of what CUNY had requested.

State budgets that shortchange CUNY are part of a long-running trend, PSC First Vice President Steve London testified at a January 30 committee hearing in Albany. He told legislators that since 1990, state funding for CUNY has dropped by 31% in real dollars while tuition has doubled.

New York's support for public higher education is inadequate across the board, London said – but

PSC presses for more state dollars



PSC First Vice President Steve London testified in Albany on January 30. "There is no substitute for public funding" of CUNY, he told lawmakers.

the treatment of CUNY has been particularly unfair. "In 2003 CUNY senior colleges were only funded at 55% of SUNY state-operated colleges" in terms of funding per FTE, he said. In 1990, this figure was 81%. In other words, this disparity is not only large – it is growing.

RACIAL IMBALANCE

"It is hard to imagine that the CUNY/SUNY funding gap doesn't have something to do with race," London added, noting that 72 percent of CUNY students are non-white. "Along with all other New York State residents, they deserve an equal opportunity to attend a

well-funded public university."

CUNY's administration has asked the State Legislature for \$36 million more than the amounts proposed by Pataki. CUNY's proposal still includes a tuition increase, but a smaller one, and includes spending on new initiatives such as 200 additional full-time faculty lines. The PSC supports the University's request for additional public support, but argues that it is not enough.

"In the last three years, student enrollment at CUNY has increased by the equivalent of two additional colleges," London said. Because hiring has not kept pace, "the University has been losing ground in its

goal to [have] 70% of courses taught by full-time faculty." Between 2002 and 2004, the percentage of instruction by full-time faculty at CUNY's senior colleges did not go up – it went down.

In response, the PSC urged funding for an additional 600 new full-time lines, for a total of 800. This total includes 500 lines "to convert long-serving adjuncts to full-time positions," London said. Many adjuncts have taught at CUNY for years, he noted, and "they excel at their profession" but are not given adequate pay or recognition. These conversion lines would help to meet those needs, and would also address the needs of CUNY's students, he said.

These 800 new lines and related support positions would cost \$25 million, which London said was "a reasonable investment" in light of a budget surplus currently estimated at \$2-3 billion. "Spending this year's state surplus on billions of dollars more in tax breaks for the wealthy is the wrong choice," he argued.

WRONG CHOICES

The governor's budget echoed his past proposals to hold back a portion of student's financial aid grants through TAP. In his current plan, colleges would be required to "pre-finance" TAP aid to students who have a GED instead of a high school diploma, money that the state would make up only after the student had completed 24 credits. Pataki would also change the defin-

ition of "full-time" study from 12 to 15 credit-hours – a move that would prevent many CUNY students from getting a full TAP award. Such changes would cut spending on TAP by \$190 million.

The smaller tuition increase proposed by CUNY administration is based on an indexing plan that Chancellor Goldstein put forward last Fall. The chancellor has called for a "compact" with the state, in which Albany would cover the University's mandatory costs, while "modest" annual tuition hikes go to fund new positions and programs.

INFLATION

Pataki's budget plan supports the idea of annual tuition hikes – and in the future, would let CUNY raise tuition without legislative approval and allow different tuition rates at different campuses. But despite the talk of "indexing,"

Pataki's proposed tuition increase is far above inflation – and it provides for above-inflation tuition hikes in any future year when state funding for CUNY is cut.

"In other words," commented London, "the compact is violated at the outset." Far from being based on political realism, he argued, this shows that the compact is a losing strategy that lets state government off the hook. "There is no substitute for public funding," London said. He urged full public funding of CUNY's budget needs, instead of "making our already overburdened students bear extra costs."



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It's time to modify the Taylor Law

● When Mayor Bloomberg chastised TWU members before their strike, pointing out that other City unions have waited three or more years without a contract to reach a settlement, I was deeply offended by his implicit use of our unfortunate plight as a role model.

Of course it is the Taylor Law penalties imposed on unions and their members that make it possible for the City to drag its feet in negotiating contracts with its employees.

Therefore I suggest that the Taylor Law be amended to provide "cost of living increases" while municipal employees wait for a new contract to be negotiated.

The public would benefit because there would be fewer strikes. Management would have more incentive to start bargaining in earnest before contracts expire. Union members could better plan their financial future while living in an increasingly expensive city.

The CUNY Board of Trustees recently passed a plan for "cost of living" tuition increases, saying that this will enable the City University as well as its students better plan their financial affairs. Should not the same prerogative be extended to CUNY employees?

Finally, the City itself would benefit by having better relations with its employees and their unions. We could then all work together to provide better services for all New Yorkers.

Robert Cowen
Queens College

On the line with the transit workers

● Our billionaire mayor called the strikers "greedy," our maximize-profits mayor called them "selfish," our racist mayor called them "thuggish." This racist propaganda seemed calculated to incite some people to violence against the mostly black and Latino strikers, and it did. On the TWU picket line I twice

saw missiles hurled at us: once an egg thrown from the thirteenth floor of an apartment building landed on the boot of the African-American bus driver I was talking to. He said it felt like a brick had hit his toe. Other workers showed me the egg splashes on the wall behind us, and said a potato was thrown the day before.

The next day a young PSCer had his eight-year-old daughter on the line with us, and while a mechanic from the Windward Isles crouched down to Sophie's eye level to gently explain the story of the strike, I found myself instinctively moving in front of her in case another egg was thrown.

The same day, on the line near an elevated highway, I was talking to the Latino health and safety guy when we

all recoiled at a loud clang just over our heads and a thud on the ground a few yards away. Some selfish thug had thrown a car speaker at us from the highway. It hit a metal structure and bounced harmlessly away, but it could have killed someone.

The mechanics' steward, Irish-American like me, had us all take cover under the highway itself. As we stood there a little stunned for a moment, it felt like war had been declared on us. Then – black, Latino, and white – we started marching and chanting and talking politics again.

I guess we are at war. I was glad to serve three days with the TWU, a union like ours that fights for its retirees.

Tony O'Brien
Queens College (retired)

Write to Clarion

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

Contract framework at risk

By PETER HOGNESS

At the January 25 meeting of the union's Delegate Assembly, PSC President Barbara Bowen spoke on the state of negotiations – and it was a sobering report.

Although the union and CUNY management had agreed on a “conceptual framework” for a settlement in mid-November, Bowen said, there are increasing signs that CUNY may not deliver on those terms. (See page 11 for Bowen's column.)

On November 4, the PSC Executive Council had announced that a conceptual framework for an acceptable contract settlement was within reach. “We bargained intensively for the next several days,” Bowen told delegates in January. “The union bargained in good faith, and we came to agreement on that framework.”

But now, more than two months later, it appears that CUNY may decline to follow through with a contract along these lines. “Throughout negotiations,” Bowen told *Clarion*, “CUNY indicated that while they would have to get final approval from the City and State, they were adhering to the collective bargaining patterns the City and State had approved.” As of early February, however, it was the backing of the City and State that CUNY has apparently failed to deliver.

NO BACKING

The conceptual framework that was hashed out in November, Bowen told delegates, “was extremely detailed. Its elements were costed-out down to hundredths of a decimal point.” On November 14, CUNY e-mailed the provisions that union and management had hammered out to City and State officials.

Union negotiators understood that final City and State approval was required, and that they would have to verify the cost figures with their own calculations. “Yes, it takes some time to do these calculations,” Bowen said. “It might take two weeks – but not two months.” As the time dragged on, the union became increasingly concerned.

PRESSED ON

In the meantime, the PSC was not a passive spectator. “We pressed CUNY management for answers, we spoke directly with City and State representatives,” Bowen said. “We worked with our affiliate, NY State United Teachers, and with the NYC Central Labor Council and NYS AFL-CIO, who all brought influence to bear.” Still, there was no definitive response.

In January, “we demanded bargaining immediately, and demanded that people with the authority to close the deal be at the table,” Bowen told delegates. “No more sit-

Signs that CUNY won't deliver OK from State, City



Clockwise from left, PSC President Barbara Bowen, Penny Lewis, Phil Pecorino, Holly Clarke, and Alan Feigenberg at the Jan. 25 Delegate Assembly.



ting at the table with someone who says, ‘Now, I’ll get approval.’” CUNY's Vice Chancellor for Faculty and Staff Relations responded that “it would be premature to schedule a bargaining session until we have a firm response from the City and State as to their position.” On January 25, CUNY informed the PSC that City and State representatives were finally prepared to meet, and proposed a date more than halfway into February. The union pushed to hold that session sooner. (See www.psc-cuny.org for updates.)

“At that meeting,” Bowen said, “CUNY will present a formal proposal indicating whether they are holding to the framework we agreed on.”

Nothing in the City and State response is official, she cautioned, until it is presented across the negotiating table.

Bowen emphasized that the PSC was committed to following through on this framework when it was worked out in November. “We didn’t work day after day, and often into the night, for a fiction,” she told the Delegate Assembly. “We didn’t love every single thing in the agreed-on framework, but we said we are ready to bring this to our Executive Council, and ask the EC to bring it to the DA.”

“If what they come across the table with is unacceptable to us,” she told *Clarion*, “the bargaining team is prepared to respond. If the terms can’t be made acceptable, we are prepared to pursue political, legal and organizing strategies to win what the members need.”

MIDSTREAM

In the rest of her report, Bowen laid out the main provisions of the November framework. “This is something that negotiating teams generally don’t want to do in mid-stream,” she said. “Hearing a list of

specific provisions can tempt us to start bargaining among ourselves,” she said, and can become divisive if not approached with care. “But the Executive Council felt strongly that we were not willing to come before you one more time and say simply, ‘We’re working on it,’” she told delegates.

GAINS

In the framework, the union agreed to a contract of more than four years, with new language on full-time faculty office hours and up to a three-day change in the start date of the Fall semester; it also agreed to drop its opposition to lengthening the time to tenure. In turn, management agreed to raise its proposed wage increase, to double junior faculty released time and to boost sabbatical pay. The two sides also agreed on a range of equity improvements, and management dropped most of its concessionary demands. (For details, see page 11.)

The framework did not encompass a full solution to the needs of the Welfare Fund (WF), Bowen said, explaining that the union is seeking direct assistance from the State, as unions such as PEF and UUP, the union of SUNY's instructional staff, have received in the past.

CONTEXT MATTERS

If CUNY disowns the framework it supported in November, Bowen warned, “we will not be willing to make some of the structural changes that we were willing to consider in the context of other improvements.” For example, she said, the PSC cannot support a change in the tenure clock “if the conditions that support scholarship do not improve.”

In the discussion that followed, several delegates focused on the content of the November framework, though its future was now in doubt. Charlie Post and Penny

surance. Bargaining team member Mike Fabricant suggested that a real challenge to the structural inequities facing part-timers would take a campaign even larger than the one the union has waged on the Welfare Fund in the current round of bargaining.

Greg Dunkel, a Higher Education Officer, said that the framework did not seem to include many gains for Higher Education Officers (HEOs). Bowen answered that it had taken a big effort to defeat management's demands for severe concessions in HEO working conditions, particularly on job security and annual leave.

CLASSIC TACTIC

Other delegates focused on what should be the PSC's next step. One urged that a charge of bad-faith bargaining be filed against CUNY at the Public Employment Relations Board, while another suggested the time might be ripe for a vote of “no confidence” in CUNY's chancellor.

Bowen said that the union leadership was preparing for a number of ways to respond, and urged delegates to remain strong. “Delay is a classic tactic to make members more willing to take anything,” she said. “But our commitment is to stay firm to the principles that we laid out for you: to achieve a non-austerity agreement; to increase salaries by at least 10%; to improve our Welfare Fund; and to win some advances in equity.”

Before adjourning, delegates unanimously voted to ask PSC members to contact the Chancellor, and demand that CUNY return to the bargaining table prepared to sign an acceptable settlement (see page 12).

The three phases of bargaining with CUNY

PSC bargaining for a new contract has gone through three phases since the union first asked to open negotiations in September 2002.

Regular talks began the following May – but for the next year and a half, CUNY made no economic offer. “We held talks for 18 months with no offer of money, and when they finally brought one forward, it was for just 1.5%,” Bowen told union delegates on January 25. “They did not come forward with a serious economic offer until last March.”

This marked the second phase of bargaining, with discussions of management's proposal of 6.25% over four years, plus an additional \$200 per capita annually for the Welfare Fund. CUNY improved this offer somewhat in May, and the union made a counterproposal in

June: wage increase above 10%, funding for restoration of WF benefits and improvements in working conditions and equity. The two sides, however, remained apart.

Summer and early fall of 2005 saw contract settlements for the police and public-school teacher unions. Meanwhile the PSC held its largest membership meeting ever on September 29, and the union set a deadline of November 3 for substantial progress as it considered whether to hold a referendum on a possible strike. The new PSC mobilization and the settlements combined to spark the third phase of bargaining, which led to agreement on the November framework.

But nearly three months later, the future of that framework is in doubt.

Member action moved CUNY.

HEOs grieve together for fair pay

By PETER HOGNESS

It's a common problem for Higher Education Officers and those in related titles. They are constantly expected to work far more than the 35-hour week specified in the union contract, without compensation.

"It's because there are not enough bodies to go around," said Donna Gill, a HEO grievance counselor. "CUNY wants 'to do more with less,' and for HEOs that means we're overtaxed and stressed. You can't do your job properly when you're trying to do three people's work."

ENOUGH!

At LaGuardia Community College, a group of PSC members have decided to say, "Enough!" The PSC has filed a class-action grievance seeking pay for people in HEO-series titles (often just called "HEOs") who work in LaGuardia's Enrollment Management Services. They are seeking compensation for the time they have worked beyond 35 hours, week after week after week.

The problem is at its peak during registration, said Robert Bandelt, who works in Enrollment Management Services. "There are occasions when people worked from 8:30 in the morning to 10:30 or 11:00 at night," he told *Clarion*. "What happens is that the staff gets dog-tired, they get burnt out. At the end of the last registration period, you could see the

Pay shouldn't stop at 35 hours



Nancy Santangelo and her coworkers are fighting for their time.

wear and tear on the people. People were getting sick."

The group grievance is seeking back pay and pay going forward for time worked beyond the 35-hour work week that the contract specifies for HEOs. "The contract sets a salary for employees in HEO-series titles," said Debra Bergen, the PSC's

director of contract administration, "and that salary is based on a 35-hour work week. We believe that when a HEO-series employee works beyond the contractual 35 hours, they are entitled to be paid for every minute. The contract does not say that they must work for free."

Management exploits the fact that

HEOs are dedicated to their jobs, said Gill. "We don't mind doing the work when it's needed," she said, "but we should be compensated."

"It boils down to two words: time and respect," said Bandelt. "They expect us to give our time, but don't want to pay us for it. CUNY has been very successful at getting students to enroll, and if we're helping to make the University successful, we'd like to share in that."

CUNY MUST PAY

CUNY has not only violated the union contract – it has also violated the law. "Many jobs in the HEO series are covered by provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act that require paying time-and-a-half after 40 hours of work in a single week," explained PSC Legal Director Nathaniel Charny. "CUNY admits this, but not one of these employees has gotten paid at time-and-a-half."

Though CUNY concedes it must pay these employees time-and-a-half after 40 hours, it insists that it does not need to pay a dime for time worked between 35 hours and 40. "According to them, that's pro-bono work," Bandelt said wryly. Steve London, chair of the union's Contract Enforcement Committee, called CUNY's stand "outrageous." The union is evaluating the best way to make sure that covered em-

ployees are paid what they are owed under the law.

Many HEOs feel that as long as their extra hours don't cost CUNY a cent, management will always push them to work beyond the contract's 35 hours – not just as an exception, but as the rule. "We give up being with our families and have nothing to show for it," Bandelt said.

"I believe we should get paid, and I hope that we will," said Nancy Santangelo, an assistant to HEO who works in LaGuardia's student information center. "I have kept track of all my hours. I know which days I worked late, and for how long." In a four-week period last Fall, she told *Clarion*, she worked 59 hours of overtime. Bergen urged all HEOs with uncompensated overtime to document their situation, and to contact a union grievance officer immediately.

CONSEQUENCES

"There are consequences to not speaking up," said Gill, who argued the grievance in a January 12 hearing. "It means you'll keep working those long uncompensated hours. There are consequences for working those hours – to your family, to your self, to your life."

Through this class-action grievance, HEOs are joining together to speak up for change.

Grievance counseling

By DANIA RAJENDRA

Howard Prince and Leo Deuster are two of the PSC's longest-serving grievance counselors, with nearly four decades of experience between them. Prince is professor emeritus of social science at BMCC, while Deuster is a retired HEO in Academic Affairs at the CUNY Central Office. Recently *Clarion* talked with each of them about the grievance process.

What brought you into grievance work?

Howard Prince: I was active in the union from the time I was hired, in 1972. I went to union meetings and did local stuff on campus, then the chapter leadership asked me to serve as grievance counselor in 1975. I began grievance counseling at the PSC/CUNY central office about three years later.

In 1985, I became associate dean at BMCC, so I was management for 11 years. CUNY contends that once you serve as management, you can't go back to union representation until at least two years pass. I call it penance [laughs]. The union invited

Two veterans' reflections

me back in 1998 and I've been at it ever since.

I was always interested in labor history. My grandmother was a proud member of the ILGWU, and a shop steward – she got me curious about the whole union thing.

Leo Deuster: Growing up in Wisconsin, my father was dead set against unions. Early in my working career, I was never opposed to unions but I also was not a staunch supporter, either. But in the mid-80s a friend of mine organized a strong PSC chapter at 80th Street and I supported him. When he retired, he asked me to do the grievance work and I accepted.

Working at 80th Street also gave me an insider's look into the workings of the university. But it wasn't until I became a full participant in union matters that everything began to fall into place.

What's fun about it?

LD: Winning! It's like scoring a touchdown, winning a Super Bowl. It's virtually guaranteed that in

everyone's working career, they are going to be at cross-purposes with someone in authority. We want to avoid serious conflict – but when we have no choice, we have the contract to defend our members' rights.

HP: Doing grievances is like playing chess. I've been a chess player since I was about 12 years old. I like the analytic aspects of the game, and this has helped me in grievances. You're forced to think and plan ahead. You have to anticipate counter-moves by your opponent. So if you raise an issue in the context of the grievance, you have to anticipate that your adversary is going to have something else to say to counter that, and you have to be able to reply accordingly.

Why do you think grievance counseling is worth doing?

LD: An administrator could come in and work here for three years, terminate an employee for personal reasons – and now this person's life is shattered, while the administrator is gone. For those people, their

only out is support from a union like the PSC. If we can help them, we do.

No one ever wants to be in the circumstances of having to file a grievance. But no one should ever miss the opportunity to pursue a defense of his or her rights. And by winning these grievances, we are strengthening the rights of everyone.

HP: For me, grievances are the guts of everyday union work. When the union was first in place, in order to achieve the benefits of the collective bargaining agreement there had to be an enforcement mechanism, so our rights could be protected. In that context I felt becoming a grievance counselor was important.

Over the years, the grievance and arbitration process has considerably enhanced the rights and benefits of the instructional staff.

For example?

HP: When we attained the right to be given reasons for non-reappointment [for full-timers], we had to bargain for it. But then college presidents tried to get away with giving vague and unspecific reasons. They'd say, "In my academic judgment you have not reached the standards requisite to be reappointed with tenure." What did the individual do wrong? It was fancy language that said nothing.

We've had case after case, almost

a dozen cases, where the University tried to get away with vacuous reasons. Through the grievance and arbitration process, we made it clear that the reasons had to be concrete and specific. And if the person was never informed of these alleged shortcomings, or if the reasons are factually incorrect, this can be a basis for challenging the decision. We have won for faculty and staff security that they otherwise would not have attained.

What does the PSC's grievance effort look like today?

LD: In the last five years, we've taken more cases to arbitration and subsequently won more cases. The union leadership has communicated that they will vigorously defend members' rights through the grievance process and they have backed that commitment with additional funding.

As a result, we now have more counselors and more legal representation. We've won good cases about issues on which we struggled for years – for example, on evaluations and the procedures for evaluations.

We are filing more grievances, taking many more grievances to arbitration than ever before and we are having many more positive outcomes. And the timeliness of the grievance process has vastly improved.

Transit workers reject contract

By DAVE SANDERS

In a move that caught many observers by surprise, members of Transit Workers Union Local 100 rejected a proposed contract by a margin of 7 out of 22,451 votes. It was the first time that city transit workers voted down a contract offer after going out on strike.

At *Clarion* press time, no date had been set for new contract talks. The MTA was seeking binding arbitration, a move that was strongly opposed by the union.

PENSIONS

The failed settlement included salary increases of 10.5% over three years; lifetime health coverage (a bridge to Medicare for members who retire before age 65); and a refund of past extra payments on pension contributions. The MTA dropped its demands for an expansion of one-person train operation and other work rule changes.

The union's most significant win was beating back the MTA's attempt to impose a two-tier system for pension payments. Management wanted to require all new hires to contribute 6% of their wages in pension contributions, up from the 2% paid by current employees. Rejecting this on the grounds that it would divide the union and weaken it for years to come, Toussaint pledged

Health care premium sparks defeat

not to sell out the "unborn" – the union's future members.

In bargaining with other municipal unions, Mayor Bloomberg's administration has pushed hard for two-tier wage agreements, and won significant cuts in starting pay from the largest unions of police, firefighters and non-unionized employees. Local 100 not only rejected a two-tier approach to pensions, it won an MTA commitment to refund extra pension payments that about half of the local's members made between 1994 and 2000.

Although Local 100's executive board endorsed the deal by a vote of 37 to 4, the rank and file balked at the proposal's one big concession: paying a health insurance premium of 1.5% of their wages. "Members recognize the package just did not deliver what they were expecting," said Local 100 Vice President Ainsley Stewart, one of the four "no" votes on the executive board. "We went out on strike to protect the pension of the unborn, so to speak, only to come back with everyone – born and unborn – having to pay a 1.5% premium." Stewart and other critics argued that the strike was called off too soon.

Opponents of the settlement pointed out that it allowed the MTA to

raise premium charges if "the rate of increase in the cost of health benefits exceeds general wage increases." No municipal union member is now required to pay health care premiums, but since the strike Mayor Bloomberg has declared that he will push to change that.

Local 100 President Roger Toussaint said that the union was willing to consider the premium only as part of a deal for lifetime health coverage, important to a workforce that suffers from occupational illnesses such as steel dust in the lungs and bad knees from buses' air brakes.

While about half of Local 100's members concluded that the agreement offered too little, conservative newspapers from the *NY Post* to the *Wall Street Journal* charged that the MTA had rewarded an illegal strike and given away the store. The main object of their outrage was the pension refund, particularly upsetting to those who want to see public worker pensions slashed (see p. 11).

In response, Governor and presidential candidate George Pataki claimed that he had not been informed of this part of the deal, and he urged the MTA to reverse itself and reject it. Toussaint charged that

Pataki's backtracking had raised doubts among union members and contributed to the "no" vote.

Bloomberg denounced the strikers as "thuggish" and "selfish," and the class and race overtones of this harsh language from the billionaire mayor provoked some public backlash. Most Local 100 members are black or Latino; the union says that 60% pay more than half their salary for rent. While the transit shutdown was a frustrating experience for every bus or subway rider, many reporters and commentators expressed surprise at the number of people who voiced support for the union.

STRIKE FUND

The week before the strike, Central Labor Council head Brian McLaughlin called for a solidarity fund of \$1.5 million, an amount that could be raised by a \$1 donation from every union worker in NYC. City labor leaders stood beside Toussaint just before the walkout started, at a nighttime rally and a press conference.

Once the strike was actually underway, however, there was little sign of a concerted labor mobilization. *The New York Times* reported that on the second day, Toussaint told other union leaders, "I don't need anyone standing on the side-

lines holding my coats – I need someone to take off their coats."

If a citywide strike fund had already been in place, Local 100 could have decided to stay out longer, said Manny Ness of Brooklyn College, editor of *Working USA*. "To have a strong union movement in NYC, we need a strike fund that goes beyond our immediate unions," said Ness.

On January 25, MTA officials filed for impasse at the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB), the first step in attempting to impose a deal through binding arbitration. TWU secretary-treasurer Ed Watt told reporters the union would fight binding arbitration "with all our power" because it would prevent members from voting on any resulting contract – one point on which Local 100's leadership and union dissidents agreed.

Opponents of the defeated deal called for dialogue within the union, and Local 100 announced plans to poll members on what course they would support.

In the short run, another walkout appeared unlikely, particularly given the divisions within the union. But in late January the MTA staked out a new hard line, demanding big give-backs on *both* pensions and health care. A front-page article in the *Times* warned this might backfire, if union members conclude that they must choose between unacceptable demands and another strike.

College faculty salaries in NYC

By ANDREW BEVERIDGE
Queens College

Although few people see New York City as a college town, the truth is that the city has the most institutions of higher learning in the entire nation, the most students – and the most teachers as well. At least 25,000 academics teach about 425,000 students in the city's 57 colleges and universities.

These teachers do not just educate the next generation of New Yorkers, they also enhance the city's cultural reputation and strengthen its economy.

TURMOIL

But what does the City do for them? As a whole, teachers of higher learning in New York earn less than City elementary school teachers. This helps explain some of the current turmoil in academia, with a strike by graduate assistants at NYU, and stalled contract negotiations between the administration of CUNY and the PSC.

Faculty salaries vary widely at NYC's colleges and universities. As a full professor at NYU, you could make \$135,000; as an assistant professor at Boricua College, you could make under \$35,000. But the truth is, more teachers make toward the lower end than toward the higher.



NYU graduate workers continue their strike.

The median income for full-time professors with at least a master's degree is \$57,000 – or \$3,000 less than the median income for all New Yorkers with master's degrees.

And this is only the full-time faculty; there are no more than 16,000 people who teach full-time in New York at the university level. Another 11,000 who call academia their primary occupation teach only part-time; their median income is only \$22,000. Academics forced to accept adjunct positions are often paid roughly \$3,000 per course.

This means the median earnings

in the year 2000 of New Yorkers whose primary occupation was academia (and who had at least a master's degree) was \$45,000 – or a thousand dollars less than the median income for elementary and secondary school teachers in the city.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE

There are a wide variety of colleges and schools in New York City, and since 1980, private and religiously affiliated institutions of higher learning in NYC have overtaken the public university in many ways. While salaries for full profes-

sors (the most experienced and the most sought after) at City University's senior colleges were once competitive with their peers at private colleges, now they are far less. CUNY full professors make, on average, \$93,000, while those at non-sectarian private colleges in NYC average about \$124,000.

STRUGGLING

In 1980, those teaching at religiously affiliated private colleges were earning about \$4,000 less than CUNY senior faculty; now they earn about \$10,000 more. Given these data, it is not surprising that City University faculty are severely discontented with their pay.

Academics in New York City, especially part-time academics, are struggling. New York City's large public university in no way is keeping up with the other four-year colleges in the city. Graduate students are on strike at NYU; there are grumblings at Columbia; many CUNY graduate students commute by subway from campus to campus.

Yet New York City is still a place where many academics would be pleased to work – if they could find a job, and afford to live here.

A longer version of this article, which originally appeared in Gotham Gazette, can be found at www.gothamgazette.com/article/demographics/20060124/51732, with tables and additional statistics, a note on sources, and a breakdown on each CUNY college.

Bargaining for more

Comparative data on CUNY salaries has been a key part of the PSC's argument at the bargaining table, union negotiators say.

"We've made a clear case to CUNY that our salaries are not competitive and must be raised," said First Vice President Steve London. Using data from the AAUP's annual salary survey, he said, "we've shown that CUNY has fallen behind not only in this region but nationally – and when we conduct searches, we must compete on a national level."

To take its case to the public, the union has highlighted the problem of "the missing professors" at rallies and in legislative testimony – dramatizing examples of promising job candidates or departed colleagues, lost because of CUNY's non-competitive salaries.

The 2002 contract settlement was the first in a decade to provide wage increases above inflation. But with so much lost ground to recover, the PSC has emphasized, CUNY salaries are still lower in real-dollar terms than they were in 1972. In fact, they are worth about a third less than a generation ago – and a gap that large will not be easy to close.

– PH

HIGHER ED IN BRIEF

New chancellor for SUNY

On December 19, the SUNY Board of Trustees named John Ryan, a retired vice admiral in the US Navy, as chancellor of the 64-campus SUNY system. His predecessor, Robert King, had no formal experience leading colleges prior to his 1999 appointment. In contrast, Ryan has been president of three different institutions, including SUNY Maritime College, SUNY Albany, and the US Naval Academy. Some conservative trustees have pushed for SUNY to endorse the controversial "Academic Bill of Rights" developed by right-wing pundit David Horowitz, but Ryan is not keen on the idea, according to William Scheuerman, head of the union for SUNY's faculty and professional staff. Scheuerman, president of United University Professions, told *Inside Higher Education* that Ryan "is very supportive of academic freedom."

Florida State returns gift

Florida State University returned a gift of \$11 million dollars to Professor Robert Holton, a chemistry professor at FSU. Holton made a fortune on his 1980's research that led to Taxol, an anti-cancer drug.

Holton and his foundation have tried to give tens of millions of dollars to FSU for a new chemistry building, but FSU officials say the gifts have strings attached – namely, that the department focus on Holton's specialty, synthetic organic chemistry.

"No professor has the right to create a shrine to his own research area with public funds," said FSU president T. K. Wetherell.

Holton and FSU were scheduled to attempt court-ordered mediation to work out the difficulties involved with the gifts. FSU has made some \$200 million off the rights to Taxol, and Holton has also made separate money for inventing the process by which Taxol is made.

In a CIA prison on bad information

"Wrongful Imprisonment," an investigative report in the December 4 *Washington Post*, included one passage of particular interest to academics:

"[T]here is no tribunal or judge to check the evidence against those picked up by the CIA. The same bureaucracy that decides to capture and transfer a suspect for interrogation – a process called 'rendition' – is also responsible for policing itself for errors.

"The CIA inspector general is investigating a growing number of what it calls 'erroneous renditions'....The list includes several people whose identities were offered by al Qaeda figures during CIA interrogations, officials said. One turned out to be an innocent college professor who had given the al Qaeda member a bad grade...."

FY 2006 – the PSC budget

By JOHN HYLAND
PSC Treasurer

Five main areas of expense

The PSC budget organizes the financial resources of the union. The main goal of the budget is to manage the PSC's finances in a way that maximizes the union's effectiveness in serving our members, and in building and channeling the power of the membership.

Each year, the union's budget is presented in *Clarion*; the current budget is for the fiscal year of September 1, 2005, through August 31, 2006. As shown in the accompanying table, the union's income comes mainly from members' dues and non-members' "fair share" fees. Other important sources are support from our national affiliate

**Affiliates,
personnel,
operations,
outreach,
enforcement**

(the American Federation of Teachers, or AFT) and our state affiliate (NY State United Teachers, or NYSUT); returns on investment of reserve funds; and fees for services rendered to the Welfare Fund and the Credit Union.

EXPENDITURES

On the expenditure side, the PSC pays significant dues to NYSUT, the state federation of educators' unions, which also includes school-related personnel and some units of nurses. NYSUT has over 550,000 members in institutions from K-12 and higher education. As professional workers in public institutions, we are deeply affected by New York State in terms of funding and

working conditions. NYSUT works with the PSC in promoting our interests at the state level, particularly in relation to the State budget, legislation and elections.

We are also affected by Federal policies in terms of funding and legislation. The premise of being in a statewide or national federation is that we have more political clout. We work on national issues with and through our national affiliate, the AFT, to whom we also pay significant dues and from whom we receive reimbursement for certain activities, such as organizing.

AFFILIATES

The PSC also participates in the American Association of University Professors, the State Federation of the AFL-CIO, the New York City Central Labor Council and the Municipal Labor Committee. These organizations work with the PSC on issues such as academic freedom and tenure, and State and City funding for higher education. While the strength of the PSC is rooted first of all in the actions of its own membership and leadership, we are politically stronger because of our links with these affiliates and the services and support they bring.

The second biggest category of expenditure is personnel. This is the cost of the people who do a sig-

nificant part of the union's work. Paid in money or reassigned time, they often times work beyond their remuneration.

We have 12 professional staff who lead, supervise and support the main areas of union activity. There are 10 support staff who carry out other key functions. Reassigned time and stipends are allocated to chapter chairs, grievance counselors, and project leaders.

A third important aspect of the expenditures is union operations. This covers the union's physical infrastructure – office space, equipment (telephones, computers, copiers), services, and materials.

A fourth component of expenditures is mobilization and outreach. In many ways it is the key to the strength of the union, since it includes communication with the members, meetings of members and affiliates, campaigns, and committees. Yet the funds allocated in the budget appear less than other support areas. Why? Because budget categories do not break out how union personnel or operations contribute to mobilization and outreach. For example, a large proportion of the funds for professional staff and support staff are actually

spent on people doing mobilization and outreach. The compensation of the associate executive director is listed under professional staff, but her activity is entirely focused on organizing and mobilizing. Therefore, the union actually spends more resources on mobilizing and outreach than \$816,000.

The fifth major area is contract enforcement, which includes grievances, arbitration, and legal work. Similarly to mobilizing and outreach, the expenditures for union staff who work on contract enforcement are accounted for under personnel. In that way the union expends more resources on that important priority.

MOVING

This fiscal year the PSC budget has two special, one-shot elements: on the income side, additional dues/fees from an expected contract settlement with retroactive money, and, on the expenditure side, costs related to the PSC's office move to lower Manhattan later this year. A large portion of the construction costs will be borne by the landlord, but the PSC has expenditures for architectural, legal, and construction oversight.

For more details on the PSC budget, visit the union website at www.psc-cuny.org/documents.htm.

Our money at work

During the past year I have participated in meetings of the AFT Organizing Committee for the PSC. It has been an important learning experience in terms of understanding organized labor among educators, from kindergarten through graduate school. One important aspect is related to PSC dues to our national affiliate, the AFT.

Sometimes members wonder what we receive for our almost two million dollars in dues. Without giving a complete rundown of every way the PSC benefits, there is one element which I have come to appreciate in a new way through conversations at these meetings – the support we give to our colleagues in parts of the country where educational workers' unions are vulnerable, especially in the South and Southwest.

A former AFT Vice President from Texas spoke with great appreciation of the financial support from the national union, and the visits by UFT members during the summer to "talk union" with Texas teachers. In the Midwest an AFT Vice President from Ohio was very pleased

with the PSC's efforts to recruit members to help in their graduate student employee organizing drive at Ohio State.

There are 23 so-called "right-to-work" states where union rights are restricted; many do not allow collective bargaining for public employees. In many states, income of teachers, professors, and related staff are lower than in New York. To a considerable degree, the PSC is helping to keep alive teacher and academic unionism on a national scale.

**Sustaining
teacher and
academic
unionism**

While geographically distant, these unions are important to the PSC because important policy and funding decisions are made nationally. In addition, if educators' unions across the country are eliminated or weakened, we may become an "island of privilege" in the eyes of other workers and vulnerable to attacks on our salary schedules, pension and health benefits.

Supporting teachers' unions across the country is not an act of charity. By supporting other public education unions, we support ourselves.

– JH

PSC Budget 9/1/05 – 8/31/06

Income	
Dues and fees	\$ 9,139,000
NYSUT reimbursement	\$ 1,356,000
AFT reimbursement	\$ 129,000
Investments, rental income, services	\$ 483,000
Total	\$ 11,161,000

Expenditures	
Affiliate dues (NYSUT, AFT, AAUP, MLC)	\$ 5,620,000
Union operations	\$ 1,172,000
Personnel and related expenses	\$ 3,184,000
Mobilization and outreach	\$ 816,000
Contract enforcement and related expenses	\$ 195,000
Contingencies	\$ 15,000
Total	\$ 11,002,000

Operating budget surplus	\$ 159,000
Dues/fees related to retroactive salary increases (one-time)	\$ 139,000
Surplus with one-time income from dues/fees	\$ 298,000
Expenses related to move to 61 Broadway (architect, attorney, project manager, engineers, moving, telephone, A/V, IT consultants)	\$ 344,000
Overall: deficit (6 minus 5)	\$ 46,000

Amortizable costs for 61 Broadway (from Reserves)	
Construction costs (additional design elements)	\$ 100,000
Furniture	\$ 125,000
Equipment (telephone, AV, computer-related)	\$ 160,000
Total	\$ 385,000

Hunter academic freedom report

By PETER HOGNESS
and DANIA RAJENDRA

Disagreements about “climate of fear”

The Hunter College Senate’s Select Committee on Academic Freedom reported in December that it was concerned about “perceptions of a climate of fear” in public discussion of college issues. The committee presented its report (available at www.hunter.cuny.edu/senate) to the college’s Senate on December 14, where it drew both criticism and praise.

In an announcement issued in March 2005, the committee invited members of the college community who had “substantive examples of what has been called a...‘culture of fear’” to meet with the committee and share their concerns. In the months that followed, it received private testimony from 27 people – including 21 tenured professors, or 5% of the tenured faculty. Twelve untenured professors contacted committee members, but chose not to testify because they said they feared retaliation, even though the committee had pledged to keep all details confidential.

INTERFERENCE?

In its report, the committee said it had received no accounts of interference with classroom teaching. But it cited a number of reports of administrative interference on issues of curriculum and research, as well as in decisions on hiring, promotion and tenure. Administration disrespect for shared governance was the focus of several complaints. Finally, it said, “the most consistent – and disturbing – finding, heard from numerous testifiers discussing very different issues, was a perception that dissent could lead to retaliation.”

Acting Provost Vita Rabinowitz strongly disputed the report, charging that the committee “did not begin this inquiry with an open mind.” She challenged the committee’s procedure as bad social science, arguing that “the vagueness of the alleged offenses” and the number of people involved meant it was impossible to draw any conclusions. “We can no more conclude that there is a climate of fear than we could conclude that 95% of the tenured faculty are delighted with state of academic freedom,” she said at the December 14 Senate meeting.

CRITICISM

Similar criticisms were heard from some faculty members. Jason Young, head of Hunter’s Faculty Delegate Assembly, told the Senate that “in light of the supporting evidence that is provided,” the report’s conclusions “are far too general.” Given the lack of detail in the report, he said, “there is very little to give an indication of how broad these issues are.”

In January, Young told *Clarion* that while he understood why the



Lisa Quinones

Members discussed their different takes on administrative attention at a December Hunter Senate meeting.

committee had offered complete confidentiality – “they wanted to find out what the grievances are” – it limited the report’s value. “I don’t know what we’re supposed to do with generalities,” he said. He said the suggestion that there is a climate of fear at Hunter is “wildly overblown.”

Two department chairs who spoke at the Senate meeting, Ada Peluso of the math department and Jay Roman of film and media studies, said they had not perceived any such negative climate; Peluso referred to it as “this so-called ‘fear.’”

APPLAUSE

Other faculty members applauded the report for bringing what they said had been a common topic in private out into the open for discussion. The fact that many faculty members are afraid to speak openly on college issues “is not a big secret,” Bill Sweeney, a professor of chemistry, told the Senate. “The fact that 5% of the tenured faculty have come forward with specific complaints of a violation of academic freedom is horrifying,” he added, as was the fact that a dozen untenured faculty were so concerned about retaliation that they would not even testify in private about problems they had observed.

“What we ought to be doing is opening up a dialog [to] discuss this,” agreed Sandra Clarkson, professor of mathematics. She said she found it unlikely that “the 27 people who went to the committee lied or hallucinated...about what went on.”

The report itself acknowledges that it is limited: “As the committee

did not have investigatory powers, and as all who testified were guaranteed confidentiality, it was unable to verify all accounts or hear different perspectives on the reported incidents...[O]thers may have different perspectives.” The report’s authors described themselves as being in something of a bind: the guarantee of confidentiality “prevents the Committee on Academic Freedom from reporting the specific details that most concerned it.”

Committee Chair Stuart Ewen, distinguished professor of film and media studies, described the report as an important first step. He said in January that the significance of the testimony that the committee received is not only in the number of complaints, but in the widespread anxiety about remaining anonymous. “It’s one thing if one or two people have a certain kind of perception,” he told *Clarion*. Instead, said Ewen, “we had a significant number of people come forward....A lot of them were senior people, and everyone was nervous about retaliation. And that’s a problem.”

In presenting the report to the Senate, Ewen emphasized that “vague generalizations were neither solicited nor considered.” The committee only accepted testimony from “people with firsthand experience and/or observations of what they believed to be a violation...of academic freedom,” he said. As for being one-sided, he noted to *Clarion* that the committee invited administration representa-

tives to meet with the committee but that they had not done so.

Frank Kirkland, chair of the philosophy department, told *Clarion* that while the specific allegations in the report must be approached with caution, the concerns that it raised deserved attention.

Questions about shared governance

“Since the committee had no investigative power,” he said, “there could be things in it that are inflated. Who knows?” But this does not mean that it can be ignored, he said. “It’s important that it identified a certain kind of sentiment,” Kirkland explained. “Whether this sentiment is more widely shared should be ascertained.”

DEBATE

A major point of contention, in the Senate discussion and after, has been over the definition of academic freedom. Rabinowitz charged that the committee had used an “overbroad definition of academic freedom,” and that the report “often appears to conflate academic freedom with shared governance.” She told the Senate, “I urge you to resist the temptation to frame difficulties with shared governance on our campus as infringements of academic freedom.”

Asked about the relationship between the two, Rabinowitz told *Clarion* that “at its best, shared governance is a foundation for academic freedom.”

Senate President Joan Tronto answered the same question with a different emphasis. “Among the things that professors need to be

able to discuss freely and openly are the conditions of their academic institution,” Tronto said. From this vantage point, she said, the issue of fear of administrative retaliation in disputes or debates over college policy is very much an academic freedom issue.

SHARED GOVERNANCE

While it has not been addressed as directly in discussion of the committee’s report, the nature of shared governance has been at issue as well. At the December Senate meeting, Rabinowitz cited a national trend of increasing conflicts between faculty and administration about decision-making, and called Hunter’s climate one of “transition” rather than fear. She suggested that traditional shared governance may be in need of redefinition, asking, “What does effective shared governance look like in a world of performance objectives, results-oriented management, broad civic participation, declining state aid, and brutal market forces?”

Tronto told *Clarion* that such factors lead her to conclude that “we need more shared governance, not less.”

The report’s recommendations, emphasizing the need for open discussion, were due to be considered by the Senate in February. Interestingly, one of them – a call for the Hunter community to cooperate with a current AAUP inquiry on the state of academic freedom at CUNY, including Hunter – received some support from faculty with very different views.

AAUP SURVEY

“My understanding is that the AAUP is going to administer a survey instrument, developed by AAUP, to all faculty and professional staff, full-time and part-time, on administration respect for faculty rights,” said Ewen. “I think people need to speak out through this instrument, and they need to speak out in other contexts.”

Young said that the AAUP survey could offer a way to address some of what he thought were the biggest limitations of the report. “What we have now is a core group of vocal people who are concerned,” he said. “Is this really a college-wide issue, or is it localized?” The survey should shed some light on this, Young said.

Kirkland also cited the AAUP survey as a valuable next step. “The point remains as to whether the committee report captured a more general sentiment,” he told *Clarion*. “The AAUP is looking into this issue, and the manner in which they do so is time-tested.” A strength of the survey, he added, is that it is nationally normed and so provides a basis for comparison. “Unlike the administration, I don’t think that bringing in a third party to get a better sense of these matters is wrong,” Kirkland concluded.

CALENDAR

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10: 6:00 pm / Labor Goes to the Movies shows *Nothing But a Man*, see review on page 9. At CCNY Center for Worker Education, 99 Hudson Street, 6th floor. For more information, contact Dania Rajendra, drajendra@pscmail.org. No RSVPs.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14: 6:00 pm / Women's Committee meeting at the PSC office, 25 West 43rd Street, 5th floor. For more information, contact Norah Chase, nchase391@aol.com.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21: 6:00 pm / Solidarity Committee meeting at the PSC office. For more information, contact Jim Perlstein, jperlstein@bassmeadow.com.

MONDAY, MARCH 13: 6:00 pm / Solidarity Committee meeting at the PSC office. For more information, contact Jim Perlstein, at jperlstein@bassmeadow.com.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16: 5:30 pm / Health and Safety Watchdogs host an official from the New York City Office of Emergency Management at the PSC office. For more information contact Dave Kotelchuck, dkotelch@hunter.cuny.edu.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24: 6:00 pm / Labor Goes to the Movies and the PSC International Committee show *Granito de Arena*, a documentary about the fight to save public education in Mexico. At CCNY Center for Worker Education. For more information, contact Dania Rajendra, drajendra@pscmail.org. No RSVPs.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26: 9:30 am / International Committee meeting. Contact Renate Bridenthal for location, RBriden1@juno.com.

MONDAY, MARCH 6: 1:00 pm / Retiree Chapter meeting featuring Susanne Paul of Global Action and Judith Rudman of NYSUT. At the CUNY Graduate Center, rooms 9404-9405.

MONDAY, MARCH 6: 6:00 pm / HEO-CLT Professional Development Fund Committee meeting. Committee meets to review applications for professional development grants. Applications will be reviewed on the first Monday of each month through June. Contact Linda Slifkin, 212-354-1252, lslifkin@pscmail.org.

FRIDAY, MARCH 10 / The PSC Women's Committee hosts an International Women's Day event. Time, place TBA. For more information, contact Norah Chase, nchase391@aol.com.

FRIDAY, MARCH 10: 6:00 pm / Labor Goes to the Movies shows *Ten*, an Iranian film about a women cab driver and the stories of her passengers. At CCNY Center for Worker Education. For more information, contact Dania Rajendra, drajendra@pscmail.org. No RSVPs.

THURSDAY, MARCH 16: 5:30 pm / Health and Safety Watchdogs meeting. For more information, contact Dave Kotelchuck, dkotelch@hunter.cuny.edu

Identity theft at TRS

By CLARION STAFF

In January, PSC leaders were furious to learn that some members in the New York City Teachers Retirement System (TRS) may have been victims of identity theft. As described in news reports, some City employees, both active and retired, who are members of the TRS had money illegally taken from their private bank accounts. Identity thieves reportedly used a temporary employee working in the TRS office to gain private information on members and beneficiaries.

TRS says that Social Security numbers and bank account information for members and their beneficiaries may have been compromised and it has contacted those it believes to have been affected. While information on more than 5,000 accounts was accessed, only a small percentage are accounts of PSC members. In a few cases, personal bank accounts were accessed by thieves and funds withdrawn. Several people have been arrested in connection with the case.

ACCOUNTABILITY

"The PSC is doing everything we can to assist members with this problem," said Deborah Bell, PSC executive director. "We are also demanding that TRS take steps to ensure better accountability in the future."

Unfortunately, TRS cannot tell

Few PSC members affected

the union conclusively who was affected by this theft of information, because the investigation is ongoing. So even though the odds are small that you were affected, it is important to take precautions.

PRECAUTIONS

There are several steps that the PSC advises you to take:

1. Examine bank account statements over the past two years for any accounts for which TRS has been given the account numbers. It is important that you check for any unauthorized withdrawals. If you have beneficiaries with account numbers in TRS's system, they

YOUR BENEFITS

should also be advised to check their accounts.

2. If you feel your account may have been compromised, close your account and open a new bank account with a new bank. If your pension check is deposited via Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) and you don't want an interruption in services, TRS asks you to let them know by the 20th of the month when you change your account, and they will send you a paper check. The TRS Call Center is accepting EFT

cancellation requests over the phone if the member uses his or her PIN. Members who wish to submit written cancellations should use TRS Form BK19 – available at the TRS website (go to www.trs.nyc.ny.us and click on "Forms," then on "Post-Retirement"). TRS is expediting the processing of these forms.

3. Make sure you fill out the proper paperwork with TRS to notify them of your account change. Please let the PSC know if you have closed your account. We do not want account information, just your name. We will then follow up with TRS to make sure they have updated your information. Please call or email Clarissa Gilbert Weiss at 212-354-1252 or cweiss@pscmail.org.

4. Contact a commercial credit protection service. NYSUT has made arrangements with Equifax to provide PSC members with three months free service and a deeply discounted annual charge for this service.

5. This is a good time for you to request a free credit report. For information on that and more on protecting your identity, go to this government website: www.consumer.gov/idtheft/

Also, if you received a letter on this topic from TRS, please contact

Clarissa Gilbert Weiss at 212-354-1252 or email cweiss@pscmail.org. The PSC has been in contact with TRS and will continue to monitor this situation.

FALSE ALARM AT TIAA-CREF

Recently, the state comptroller sent some members of the CUNY instructional staff who are members of TIAA/CREF a letter stating that a file sent from the comptrollers' office was missing. That file has been found and it was intact – it had simply been delivered to the wrong address. The comptrollers' office has since sent a follow-up letter explaining that no personal information was compromised. The PSC is in touch with both TIAA-CREF and the state comptroller's office and will continue to monitor this situation.

TRS must safeguard members' identity.

While it was a relief to be told that this had been a false alarm, the incident is still a good reminder of the dangers of identity theft, and the PSC strongly urges people to monitor their personal accounts. This is also a good time to request a free credit report from www.consumer.gov/idtheft.

More information on how to protect yourself against identity theft can be found in an article on page 9 of the December 2003 *Clarion*, available on the web at www.psc-cuny.org/communications.htm.

LABOR IN BRIEF

Sago coal co. can't shut out union

Safety experts from the United Mine Workers of America have the right to enter the Sago coal mine to take part in the investigation of the mining accident that killed 12 workers in West Virginia, ruled federal Judge Robert Maxwell. As per federal regulations on mine safety, a group of Sago mine workers, who are not unionized, designated the UMWA to represent them in the investigation. But International Coal Group, whose subsidiary owns the mine, barred union staffers, accusing the UMWA of trying to interfere in the investigation and improperly conducting an organizing campaign. Cecil Roberts, president of the UMWA, called ICG's attacks baseless and asked, "Is there something there that they don't want independent, outside eyes to see?"

Adjuncts score union wins in DC, Syracuse

The National Labor Relations Board ruled that George Washington University is breaking the law and must recognize adjunct pro-



On Martin Luther King Day, thousands of 1199/SEIU members and supporters took part in a march and rally for home care workers' rights – including a living wage.

fessors organized under the Service Employees International Union. With 700 adjuncts voting, unionization was endorsed by a 10-vote margin in an October 2004. The university is asking the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia to review the labor board's decision, claiming that 30 more university employees should have had the chance to vote.

In December, Syracuse University adjuncts voted 182-122 to unionize as members of the New York State United Teachers/American Federation of Teachers. "This is a significant victory for NYSUT in our effort to build union density

among adjuncts in private colleges and universities throughout the state," said Mark Chaykin, NYSUT's director of field operations.

100,000 Ontario public employees OK strike

Members of Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) in Ontario, which represents over 100,000 public workers throughout Canada's most populated province, authorized their executive committee to call a strike if provincial legislation over municipal employees' pension plans isn't reworked. Sid Ryan, Ontario

President of CUPE, told the *London Free Press* that the province's Liberal Party government "is going to learn that you don't touch people's pension plans and make these kinds of rapid changes without a fight." The proposed legislation would transfer control of the pensions from the province to local municipalities. CUPE says that the bill does not give unions proper representation on pension boards, and that it would not hold pension managers accountable. The union is demanding that it be allowed to negotiate the terms of any changes to members' pensions.

Election notice

The Election Notice in the January *Clarion* omitted the two new positions of Retiree Executive Council Officer. The PSC sent a letter to all retirees informing them that the election schedule for those positions are the same as all others: nominating petitions must be received by 5:00 p.m. on March 1. Mail ballots will be sent out on April 3 and must be received by the American Arbitration Association by 5:00 p.m. on April 24. If you do not receive a ballot by April 10, call the AAA at 800-529-5218. Only members of the Retiree Chapter may vote for these positions. *Clarion* regrets the omission.

NOTHING BUT A MAN

Simple and still revolutionary

By BRIDGETT M. DAVIS

Nineteen sixty-four was a year in which black men made headlines. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. won the Nobel Peace Prize. *Inspiring*. A jury let the killers of civil-rights activist Medgar Evers walk free. *A blow*. A man named Cassius Clay won the world heavyweight championship; within two weeks he was a member of the Nation of Islam named Muhammad Ali. *Defiant*. Civil-rights worker James Chaney was murdered in Mississippi, along with his white comrades Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman. *Another blow*. Across the globe, South African freedom fighter Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life in prison. Each of these men in the news fought, was imprisoned or died for the basic right to live with human dignity.

DIGNITY

Amidst all the upheavals of that year, it is a wonder that a small, independent film managed to do in its quiet and elegant way the same thing those making headlines were attempting – champion the black man's dignity. *Nothing But a Man* had a simple but revolutionary storyline: Duff (Ivan Dixon), a black man who travels the South working on the railroad, falls in love with and marries Josie, a teacher and preacher's daughter (Abbey Lincoln). When he tries to settle into a "normal" life in small-town Alabama, Duff finds that his demand for basic respect from whites is seen as radical, troublemaking and unacceptable. He loses one job, then another. He refuses to pick cotton for \$2.50 a day. His wife becomes pregnant. He needs work. Pressure mounts, and his anger grows, causing a downward spiral that threatens all that he has come to value – before he catches himself and decides to live with dignity regardless of the consequences.

SEMINAL

Forty years hence, it's hard to fully appreciate how seminal *Nothing But a Man* was at the time. The film debuted five years before Gordon Parks became the first black man to direct a Hollywood feature, with his sweet, palatable film *The Learning Tree*. And it would be seven years before Melvin Van Peebles titillated black audiences with his in-your-face black macho film *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*. When *Nothing But a Man* was released in theaters, movie-going audiences had seen of black life mostly mummies, butlers, buffoons, coons, slaves, maids, whores and pimps. The exception was the Sidney Poitier films, which profiled exemplary black male characters who were beyond reproach and beyond everyday reality. (Interestingly, Poitier turned down the part of Duff before it was offered to Ivan Dixon).

See it Feb. 10

Nothing But a Man screens as part of the PSC's film series on Friday, February 10 (see page 8 for details.) The film is also available on DVD and video.

Abbey Lincoln and Ivan Dixon play the central characters in *Nothing But a Man*.

Michael Roemer and Robert Young, former Harvard classmates and television documentary filmmakers, made the film with a six-person crew, drawing on their expertise to give the film its authentic, documentary feel. Roemer directed, Young photographed and the two shared screenwriting credits. Both Roemer and Young were white men, and I've often wondered how much the black actors and actresses on the set helped to create the nuanced dialogue that was so insightful about black life.

The range and complexity of portrayals is extraordinary. We see all types of black men behaving in a variety of ways – jokester, drunkard, skeptic, Uncle Tom, traitor, hapless father, preacher, pillar of society. In each portrayal we see how and why they've become what they are; and we don't judge them. We get it. Each and every one of those black men is figuring out how to survive, how to be in a society that is hell-bent on negating their humanity. The film, solemn and textured, is an unflinching portrayal of the daily indignities that awaited a black man in America in the '60's.

What other film before or since has so effectively illustrated the corrosive effects of racism, showing how it can make black men chameleons at best, unknown to themselves at worst? As Duff says to his preacher father-in-law, "You been stoopin' so long, Reverend, you don't know how to stand straight anymore. You're just half a man."

UNSETTLING

The film, with its tinny Motown soundtrack, evocative and crisp black and white photography, its cinema-verité style, and its use of veteran actors mixed in with real people, is more unsettling than the slew of blax-

ploitation films that followed in the next decade. The biggest distinction is that *Nothing But a Man* captures black folks as they really are, in all their messy complexity. No one is larger-than-life, and most importantly, no one is caricatured or stereotyped, or for that matter, made to look "positive." Instead, thanks to subtle yet strong performances, we are given a glimpse into a world seldom seen in American popular culture – that of a black man's internal life.

RESONATING

It is an equally resonating portrayal of black women. No sassing, no hands-on-hips, no bitchiness. Rather, the incomparable Abbey Lincoln (who as a jazz singer made her acting debut in this film) shows alongside other key actresses the powerful strain that black women have come under in trying to nurture the wounded souls of their men. Her pain is palpable, but so are her deeper understanding and her love for her husband. "It's not as hard on a girl," she tells Duff after his fruitless day of searching for work. "They're not afraid of us."

That phenomenon of black men watching their women being given more opportunity because they were seen as less threatening, coupled with black men's frustration over not finding work at all, often led those men to leave their homes in futility. Duff nearly makes that choice. When, one year after the film came out, the Moynihan Report described how systemic racism had led to "the weakened role of the man in the Negro family," it caused a firestorm of protest. Yet, watching the film makes it clear how devastating it is to a family when a man is not allowed to "be a man." Indeed, it weakens him.

The corrosive effects of racism, and the complexity of real life.

It's worth noting too, that the expression of love and playfulness between a black man and black woman in the film was equally revolutionary for its time (and even now), as it shows genuine affection rather than blunt sexuality.

Nothing But a Man was a critical success when it was released, debuting at the Venice Film Festival as the only American film in competition, where it won the Prix San Giorgio and the City of Venice prize. It immediately resonated with American critics as a socially conscious outgrowth of the civil rights movement. Its release was relegated to art houses, however. So ahead of its time, the film had little national exposure beyond the underground success it enjoyed amongst black cinéastes with 16-mm projectors. In 1993, nearly 30 years after it first came out, the film had a brief re-release and was added to the National Film Registry.

REVOLUTIONARY

Through the prism of today's visual aesthetics, *Nothing But a Man* has a quaint, studied quality. In an effort to avoid sentimentalism as well as sensationalism, the director chose an unmannered, stripped-down style with his actors. Characters sometimes appear emotionless. (And you wonder why Abbey Lincoln was made to wear that awful wig throughout, given how unnatural it looked.) If only all those fine actors had been allowed to relax into the roles a bit, inhabit them more, as Ivan Dixon so clearly did.

Still, those are small criticisms of the filmmakers' larger success of portraying black dignity on the big screen. Having watched the film again recently, I wonder how it was that the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement, which together spawned a black arts movement in literature, music, and fine art, didn't do likewise for black film?

Sure, there was the militancy and sexual bravado of the blaxploitation films, and the 80's and 90's saw a spate of engaging films about black life in and out of the ghetto. Even now, we can look to several black actors – Denzel Washington, Samuel L. Jackson, Don Cheadle, Jeffrey Wright, Terrance Howard and Jamie Foxx most come to mind – who have embodied roles that bring humanity to the portrayals of extraordinary African American men, or ordinary African American men in extraordinary circumstances.

But few have followed the precedent set by *Nothing But a Man*; that is, few contemporary films set out to convey the complex humanity of everyday black men in everyday situations. (Charles Burnett's films *Killer of Sheep* and *To Sleep With Anger* and Billy Woodberry's *Bless Their Little Hearts* are three exceptions, but those films were made 15 to nearly 30 years ago).

Things are better for the black man in 2006 than they were in 1964. Or so it would seem. But that raises the question: Why is it that *Nothing But a Man* is as revolutionary today as it was then?

Bridgett M. Davis is a professor of journalism and creative writing at Baruch College. Her feature film, Naked Acts, was released in 1998, and is now available on DVD and video. Her novel, Shifting Through Neutral, was released in paperback in 2005.

IS RETIREMENT HISTORY?

Pensions in the crosshairs

By WILLIAM TABB
Queens College

Each day we read about another major corporation ending or freezing its pension benefits. IBM, Verizon and Motorola are among the many corporations that have made recent headlines.

Americans these days have more power as voters than as workers, and it was voter backlash that defeated President Bush's effort to take away Social Security benefits. However, where unions have been militant they have won important victories on retirement security. The recent New York City transit strike was caused by the MTA's attempt to cut pension benefits for new workers, something the union refused to consider and that workers were willing to strike to prevent.

UNDER ATTACK

As these events suggest, developments in the private sector can make things harder for public employees, including members of the PSC. Difficult as it is for many professionals in our union to accept, we are members of the working class and the threats our union is facing in negotiations are part of a larger attack on working-class living standards. Specifically, what is happening to other workers' health and pension benefits does affect us. This connection is important to the politics the PSC engages in and the attitude members take to that work.

Companies in the Standard & Poor's 500 now have over a trillion dollars in underfunded pension liabilities hidden from stockholders and workers. The main reason for this trend is that many companies failed to make adequate contributions to their pension funds in good times, counting on appreciation of stock holdings and high shareholder returns. Now that the market rise no longer covers their obligations, they are refusing to make up for this irresponsibility.

While today 60% of private pensions are underfunded, only 20% of the underfunding is at companies that are considered financially weak. In most cases, the company is profitable but is pushing to extract as much profit as possible at the expense of its workers.

STEALING WORKERS' MONEY

At those companies that are in trouble, there are executives who are turning losses into profits by taking more from their workers. Consider one man, Robert S. Miller, who specializes in "unlocking hidden value" in companies that are losing money. As chief executive of Bethlehem Steel, Miller shut down its pension plan and left \$3.7 billion in unfunded obligations to a federal agency. Two years later he was CEO at Federal-Mogul, where he did the same thing. Today he is at Delphi, the giant auto parts maker that GM spun off in 1999, where he is dismantling the pension plan and asking for pay cuts of up to two-thirds while giving himself and other top executives an estimated \$21.5 million in the first six months of a proposed financial plan.

Mr. Miller is not the only one busy destroying the golden years of American



care benefits for new employees. Governor Murkowski was helped by Ruben Barrales, President Bush's director of intergovernmental affairs, who lobbied wavering Republican legislators to support replacing public pensions with private savings accounts. Now medical benefits for those already retired are under attack in a number of cities and states. New York City under Mayor Bloomberg is working on an actuarial study which will undoubtedly show an "alarming" increase in the city's future obligations which we will likely be told must be brought under control.

For the right wing, the gutting of pensions in the private sector is not a sign that our country is on the wrong track – rather, it is evidence that public worker pensions must be slashed as well. In the subway strike, The Manhattan Institute's E.J. McMahon complained that even if the MTA won all its pension demands, "transit workers would continue to enjoy guaranteed pensions that are lavish by private-sector standards." Since any pension is "lavish" compared to no pension at all, McMahon is accurate, but that does not justify his proposals for further cuts.

UNJUSTIFIED

The underlying argument of the Manhattan Institute and others is that maintaining strong union contracts will bankrupt America, because U.S. competitiveness requires that labor surrender its hard-won gains. But the way for our society to thrive is by expanding social protections and extending them to all Americans. If we want a high-wage, high-benefit economy instead of a Wal-Mart future, it is not enough to defend the shrinking pensions of today – necessary though that is. We must also wage a long-run fight to establish social benefits on a national basis, as other economically advanced countries do, and not tie them to employment.

As long as pensions and health care are tied to employment, employers will tell workers that they must sacrifice their wages to maintain their benefits, or vice-versa. And unless we fight for security for everyone, the right will use the employer-based patchwork to divide and conquer. "Since you don't have old-age security," they will ask the public, "why should it exist for city workers or industrial unions?"

In today's neoliberal economic climate, employers see the chance to renege on the promises they made to workers in retire-

workers – and as a result, the federal Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC) is picking up more cases than it can handle. The Government Accounting Office estimates federal fiscal exposure to private pension liabilities is now almost a trillion dollars. This is true even though the PBGC does not in fact pay each worker what they were promised by their employer. Modest upper limits cost many workers a large chunk of their benefits.

LOSING BENEFITS

A generation ago, about 40% of private-sector employees had a guaranteed pension. Today, the figure is less than 20%. With the trend in the private sector well-established, state and local governments are following suit, cutting back benefits for retirees and denying coverage to new workers. In a recent instance, the governor of Alaska called a special session of the legislature to cut pension and retirement health

Any pension is lavish compared to none.

Clarion FEBRUARY 2006

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TIAA-CREF:
the next target?

PSC members who are in TIAA-CREF or similar plans also have reason to be concerned about attacks on traditional defined-benefit pensions.

The ultimate goal of the current assault on pension benefits is to shift costs and risk from employers to workers. Both corporations and the political right want to "free" employers from responsibility for whether or not workers have a decent income in retirement.

A recent article in the Manhattan Institute's *City Journal* made clear why the right wing prefers 401(k)-type plans. It noted approvingly that private-sector workers are more and more likely to be in "401(k)s, to which their employers sometimes contribute, but only while they are working. Their employers have no obligation after they retire."

That obligation – to provide workers with a secure retirement – is precisely what the right wing doesn't like. That obligation is also the reason why a defined-contribution plan, like TIAA-CREF, includes an employer contribution.

The right's ideological arguments against traditional pensions apply with just as much force to the idea of employer contributions to a 401(k) or similar plan. Those who believe all risk should be born by the individual would prefer that the employer contribute nothing, leaving each employee "free" to decide how much they can afford to save for retirement.

"To which their employers *sometimes* contribute..." That phrase hints at the next target of the political right. If they succeed in eliminating traditional pensions for public workers, don't be surprised if the employer contribution is next to come under attack.

– PETER HOGNESS

ment. When the market is the arbiter of everything, older workers who cease to be economically active have no value – so why pay them?

RENEGING ON RETIREES

The attack on pensions can, however, be resisted. When California's Governor Schwarzenegger mounted a campaign to eliminate pensions for public employees and replace them with 401(k)-style plans, nurses, teachers, firefighters and other public workers fought back. Every one of Schwarzenegger's ballot initiatives went down to defeat, and his political popularity is now at an all-time low.

If we defend our current rights, and also think boldly about the fundamental changes that this country needs, we can reverse the current move towards economic Social Darwinism. But we cannot do it alone. When we support transit workers or Delphi employees, we are also fighting for ourselves. Our union and we as individuals must be part of this larger struggle.

THE CONTRACT

Report on negotiations

By **BARBARA BOWEN**
PSC President

On November 14, 2005 – three years after the expiration of the last contract – the Professional Staff Congress and CUNY management reached a tentative agreement on a framework for a settlement. Since then, the City and State have been reviewing the settlement prior to giving it their approval. On January 13, 2006 – two months after the union and management came to an agreement – CUNY Vice Chancellor Brenda Malone wrote in a letter to me: “the City and State expressed concerns about some items and requested additional information about others.”

We do not yet have a formal report on those “concerns,” but as members, you have waited long enough, and I want to report to you on the status of negotiations.

The union bargained in good faith. We expected CUNY to do the same. In what follows, I outline how the “conceptual framework” was reached, the major elements it includes, and how the union plans to respond if we find that CUNY has failed to gain City and State approval for the framework we reached.

MEMBER PRESSURE

CUNY management began to negotiate seriously with the PSC only after we exerted constant membership pressure, including a new level of mobilization as we prepared for a possible referendum on a strike.

Remember, it took CUNY two years to make any economic offer at all, and that offer was for 1.5% over four years. The intense membership pressure leading up to the September 29, 2005 mass meeting, coupled with a series of contract settlements for other public-employee unions in New York City, pushed CUNY to increase its economic offer in early November. By November 3, the deadline the union had set, the PSC Executive Council determined that we had an acceptable framework for a settlement.

Negotiations accelerated in the next two weeks, and we hammered out details of costs and language. It took us two weeks of intense and often heated bargaining sessions, but by November 14 the PSC and management arrived at a framework whose cost was worked out down to hundredths of a decimal point. Each provision, both economic and non-economic, had been discussed in detail; points as fine as contractual language had been settled.

The PSC bargained hard and in good faith. We didn’t think the agreement was perfect, but we believed it held true to the principles we had articulated and members had fought for. While the PSC bargaining team is aware of the legal requirement for City and State approval of our contract, we expected CUNY to come to the table each time with the authority to close the deal.

The union identified and organized for three goals in this contract: 1) salary increases of at least 10%; 2) stabilization of the Welfare Fund and a restoration of the dental benefit; and 3) improvements in equity and working conditions. It’s a measure of the hostile political climate we face that those relatively modest goals are absurdly difficult to achieve. We also took a strong stand against a contract based on concessions. The PSC refused to sell out “the unborn,” as future employees are sometimes called, or to sell out those who might be called “the reborn” – retirees, who depend on the Welfare Fund for prescription drugs. We demanded a principled contract that recognizes the work we do, improves rather than cuts our

context, the PSC negotiating team agreed to consider some proposals management introduced late in the bargaining – as long as they would lead to substantial salary increases and other real advances in working conditions. As part of the conceptual framework, we agreed to support a change in the time to tenure from five years to seven, and to have full-time faculty hold one additional office hour per week – in exchange for salary increases above 12%, a doubling of reassigned time for junior faculty, substantially improved sabbatical pay and other gains.

CONCESSIONS REMOVED

In addition, we got management’s demand to remove department chairs from the union

to have a much more extensive discussion with the membership of the issue of time to tenure (though the provision we tentatively agreed to would not affect current junior faculty and would also not affect CLTs). The union leadership has taken the position that time to tenure is a subject CUNY has to negotiate with us, not impose unilaterally, and that an increase in the untenured period has to be accompanied by a significant increase in support for research. We would also like to discuss with you the issue of an additional office hour: the negotiating team believed that in the context of a good economic settlement we could support a provision for four office hours a week. I want to emphasize, however, that none of these elements is final.

I share them with you because I feel you are entitled to know what is under discussion in this contract and why it has taken so long.

Of course everything changes if the City and State fail to approve the conceptual framework. We have had several indications that the framework will not be approved. The union negotiating team remains prepared to listen to the presentation by CUNY, the City and the State, but we cannot accept major changes on such issues as office hours and time to tenure if the settlement as a whole does not represent a significant advance.

ADVANCE

At the January 26 Delegate Assembly, PSC leaders unanimously passed a resolution calling on members to

<http://i-rui.com>



health benefits, and advances our individual and collective professional lives.

In addition, we pressed for direct assistance from the State of New York to preserve supplemental health benefits through the Welfare Fund. The State provides more than 80% of the government funding for CUNY, and has intervened in the past with other union welfare funds to ensure that benefits are preserved. The PSC leadership has also sought to have the City cover health insurance for part-time instructional staff who meet eligibility requirements, just as the City covers health insurance for other part-time employees.

CHANGE IN CLIMATE

During the summer of 2005, the context for public employee bargaining in New York began to shift. The police union received an arbitration award that offset higher salaries for current workers with deep salary cuts for new employees, and the UFT settled a contract with the City that included higher salaries as well as “productivity increases” and “reforms” sought by the City. In this

off the table, and we resisted a number of other concessions, such as cuts in holidays for HEOs and CLTs and the weakening of HEO job security. We moved management off their demand to end annual leave on August 22, and instead agreed on a formula for starting the fall semester up to three weekdays before August 30. Meanwhile, we also won agreement on an array of improvements in equity, including a reduction to 24 hours of the teaching load at New York City Tech, the introduction of paid sick days for non-teaching adjuncts and adjunct CLTs, the restoration of faculty counselor annual leave, a professional development fund for adjuncts, reassigned time for research for junior faculty in Library and Counseling, an increase in the starting pay for CLIP faculty, and the creation of 100 new full-time lines for which only experienced CUNY adjuncts would be eligible to apply.

These are the elements of the framework we negotiated in good faith. I understand that there are major changes here, and issues about which people will take different positions. The union leadership would like

demand that CUNY, the City and the State come to the bargaining table immediately and settle a fair contract with the PSC. A bargaining session is currently being scheduled, and the union is pressing for it to be within the next week. We need immediate movement toward a settlement. If CUNY does not deliver on City and State approval for the conceptual framework, the union is fully prepared to take all necessary action to achieve a settlement consistent with our goals.

Thank you for the patience and support you have shown during this long fight for a fair contract. PSC members have fought hard for three years – too hard to give up under pressure from City and State governments that have demanded ever-increasing concessions from public employees. You have held out because you believe that faculty and staff at New York City’s public university are entitled to decent pay and working conditions. That is what the negotiating team is committed to achieving. With your support, I believe we can.

This report was written immediately after the PSC Delegate Assembly meeting of January 25, where the main agenda item was a discussion of contract talks. It was first distributed by e-mail; if you would like to receive future e-mail contract updates, please enter your address at www.psc-cuny.org/updates.htm.

The union bargained in good faith and we expected CUNY to do the same.

SOLIDARITY FOREVER

PSC members take a stand with the TWU on the picket line

On December 15, the PSC Delegate Assembly urged members to join transit workers on the picket line in the event of a bus and subway strike – and about 100 PSC members did so. Here are a few of their stories.

Details of the job

Ashley Dawson
College of Staten Island

I went there with my daughter, who's nine and a half, and it was interesting to see how the workers on the picket line related to her.

This one guy was really big, built like a linebacker. With this big, deep voice he spoke to my daughter in a very gentle tone. He was a mechanic, working with bus batteries, and explained to her in detail the work he does.

Obviously he was someone who has kids, or is frequently around kids, and he turned it almost into a chemistry lesson. He asked if she knew what an acid is, what carbon is, and all the different constituents that are needed to make a battery work.

Besides the danger of being splashed by hydrochloric acid, he talked about the effect on his lungs, working in an environment like that. He explained how the MTA didn't want to pay for his health insurance, and asked if she thought that was fair. It made a very strong impression on her.

I was very impressed that he didn't treat my daughter like a baby, that he spoke to her directly about his experience – it was a sort of magical exchange between the two of them.

My daughter, being a typical nine-year-old, had been feeling uncomfortable when we arrived. She was feeling on the margins of things, and not that interested, so it was wonderful that he spoke directly to her.

And it was interesting to hear in such physical detail what's involved in the work that's needed for



TWU and PSC members picketed together at Triboro Coach in Queens.

the bus you ride on to keep running. The bus you ride on every day, and you don't even think about it.

The strikers seemed very aware of the broader context for what they were doing. Another guy was telling me that in the past, City labor unions bargained their contracts all together and were stronger. Today, he said, we're dying a death of 1,000 cuts. The City tries to bargain down one union at a time, and separately we can't use our collective power. Maybe we can learn something from that history.

Public support

Carolina Bank Muñoz
Brooklyn College

I went to a picket line at the train station right off of the Brooklyn Bridge, by City Hall. It was really, really cold! But also very high-energy.

The transit workers on the line were having conversation with a lot of folks who were walking by. I thought they all had a really good message. They said, look, this is not just for us. Unions have been

getting really bad contracts, giving back and giving back. They said, "We can't just let this keep happening." They were inspiring.

Most people who walked by were supportive. Two yelled something nasty, but everyone else was positive. There were teachers who said, "We're glad you're out here, we support you all the way." A lot of people gave us the thumbs-up.

I talked for a while with one striker who lives in Jersey. He told me how he was glad to have a decent job, a union job, how it had helped him to have a better life. He was really proud of his kid, who's applying to college. He was very clear about the two-tier issue, and said he doesn't want to see the opportunity he's had eroded for future generations.

Later I went to another line, at the Mike Quill Bus Depot on 11th Avenue. As the cars went by, there were a lot of people honking in support. Truck drivers especially, but even a police car honked!

I talked with one guy there, he was West Indian. He talked for a while about how in his country, teachers are really respected. He

said that when he was growing up, a teacher was considered a big icon because of what an important job it is.

When he came to the US, he was shocked to see how teachers are disrespected. And he said today, he felt he was fighting for teachers, for everybody, not just transit workers.

In addition to the small local picket lines, I think there should have been a huge mass rally at Penn Station, on first day of strike or soon after. People didn't realize that there was a lot of support for the strike, because there was no one huge line or protest to make it visible.

Extraordinary graciousness

Mary O'Riordan
City Tech

I spent several hours on the picket line at the Woodlawn terminus of the #4 line in the Bronx. It was very emotional, because they were so glad to see me there. They stopped picketing and introduced me, and I was greet-

ed by much applause. I didn't think I was doing anything special, I just had a homemade sign that said, "PSC/CUNY supports TWU 100." In fact, I was a little embarrassed that it didn't look better – but they told me, "Your sign is perfect!"

I was touched not only by their commitment but also by their extraordinary graciousness. They came up individually to thank me for my support, they all wanted to talk with me, and they repeatedly offered me food and hot coffee. I think they were particularly impressed that CUNY professors would come out to support them – it meant a lot. I was like a star on the picket line!

I spoke at length with Matthew, a technician who, in all types of weather, goes down on the elevated tracks to address electrical problems. He and his wife, a Hostos graduate and a nurse at North Central Bronx Hospital, struggle to pay tuition of more than \$20,000 a year for their two children. I also spoke with Harrington, a subway conductor, and a former Lehman student, who was one of those who sued the MTA for the right to wear his turban on the job.

I talked for long time with Phyllis, a subway cleaner and a single mother of six. She was a very serious, hardworking person, very devoted to her family. She was not a militant rabble-rouser. After you talk to someone like that, it's disturbing to hear the mayor characterize them as selfish. Having a job with decent benefits had made a big difference for her children, and that is why she was out on strike.

I don't know what's going to happen next, but I think it's important that we continue to give transit workers our support. Not just to support another union, but also out of self-interest – their success will impact on our own ability to sign a contract and restore our health benefits. I certainly support them in their effort to draw the line, to make a stand for labor.

"A lot of people gave us the thumbs up!"

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15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

Real bargaining now

Check the PSC website, www.psc-cuny.org, for contract updates and contract actions. On January 25, the Delegate Assembly voted to continue the pressure on Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, so check the Act Now portion of a letter telling him, the governor and the mayor,

"Settle the contract now: Implement the November 14 conceptual framework agreement." As the PSC meets with City and State representatives in February, there may be more news and possibly more actions to take. Find out at www.psc-cuny.org.