



One thousand strong

By BARBARA BOWEN
PSC President

Spirited PSC rally on May 24

On May 24 we were *one thousand strong*. Think about what that means: the biggest PSC rally in memory, a thousand members with a single message. United, we demanded a contract that meets our needs for salaries, restoration of Welfare Fund benefits, and improvements in equity and working conditions. As you can see from the photos here, the experience of rallying together with such focus produced a sense of exhilaration as well as power.

Press accounts of political demonstrations regularly report that the atmosphere was "carnival-like," as if that were a bad thing, as if the joy that goes with the best of these events undermines their seriousness. The joy is part of the seriousness, it seems to me, and that was clearly in evidence on May 24. Not just the blues band or the larger-than-life puppets, but the release we felt in being together and re-seeing the University from the perspective of its workers made May 24 a memorable experience. I was struck

by how reluctant people were to go home once the rally was over; we lingered in little knots of conversation and found ourselves gravitating to the same cafés for more talk afterwards. It was clear that there's another university to be made at CUNY, one based on a more expansive vision than has yet been offered by the Board of Trustees. May 24 allowed us to imagine a CUNY that might finally live up to the beautiful metaphor of the word "university" itself: "what can be encompassed in *one turn*, the whole world."

The rally was a clear success. The political effect of our mobilization was apparent immediately; in fact, even before the rally began. On the morning of May 24, Chancellor Goldstein issued an e-mail message to the entire University, denying that there would be an "austerity agenda" in this round of bargaining, and asserting that he has been "a staunch advocate" of "competitive salaries" and increased funding for research. Pushed

by the rally, Goldstein also announced that the central administration was "pursuing State and City support for the recognition of compensation for faculty that takes into account the high cost of living in New York City." Although the message took issue with our analysis of management's failure to provide adequate funding for the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund, it demonstrated that the PSC's demand for Welfare Fund benefit restorations had been understood. The Chancellor is now on record against an austerity contract, and the union will support his efforts to make the case for CUNY with the City and State while we continue to press our demands at the bargaining table and on the campuses.

LABOR MOVES

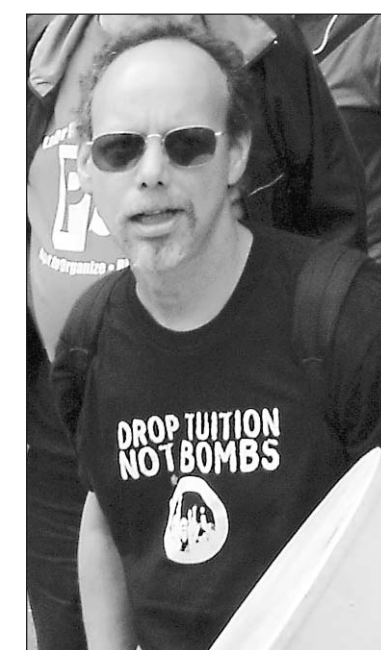
Meanwhile, the labor landscape in the city was also shifting. Our rally was the precursor of a wave of labor action that rolled across the city in June. Municipal workers in almost every sector expressed their outrage that a city with a \$1.3 billion budget surplus would try to shortchange city workers. Daycare

teachers and home health care aides, two of the most underpaid groups in the city, staged courageous strikes early in the month, and both made progress as a result. On June 8 three major city unions – teachers, firefighters and police – held a mass rally for fair contracts. And on June 19 thousands of workers marched across Brooklyn Bridge to City Hall demanding increased funding for health care. PSC contingents participated in all of these actions.

The success of our own mobilization, especially against the backdrop of the surge in labor action in the city, made the point that it's time for a new approach to collective bargaining with CUNY. Bargaining needs to start from the aim of providing what a university needs rather than spending as little as possible on public employees. A minimal contract will not work for CUNY, and a minimal CUNY will not work for New York. If the City and State are serious about a renaissance at CUNY, the PSC must be offered a contract that supports serious academic work. Union members made that argument powerfully on May 24; now we have to make sure that management acts on what they heard.



Anthony Andrews of York College, above, shows his union spirit. Laurence Kirby, professor of mathematics at Baruch, said, "I'm on the side of the people and so is the PSC. I think the issue is whether we want the kind of society that values war more than education or whether we want our young people to have a good education."



Photos: Gary Schacht

Approximately 1,000 people rallied outside the Board of Trustees meeting on May 24 to demand a fair contract for the PSC. "I support public education very strongly and a free society," said Lucia Lermond, adjunct associate professor of philosophy at Queens College. "This contract is not just for faculty and staff. It's for students as well."