NYU graduate workers protest

NYU’s refusal to negotiate a second contract was met with a huge protest including a mass arrest.

PAGE 4

MASS MEETING

Building the power to win

An excerpt from PSC President Barbara Bowen’s speech on the contract talks.

PAGES 10-11

BENEFITS

Dental rider deadline

The enrollment period for additional coverage for Guardian members ends November 18.

PAGE 8

1,200 ATTEND BIGGEST MEETING IN PSC HISTORY

Members packed Cooper Union’s Great Hall – some waiting an hour to get in – in the largest meeting in the union’s history. On November 3 the PSC Executive Council will decide if a framework for a fair contract has been achieved – or whether, and when, to call for a referendum on a possible job action. Negotiations resumed in October and campus organizing intensified as the PSC does all it can to win a contract.

PAGES 3, 5 & 11

ON CAMPUS

York resource center

Union chapter’s persistence pays off.

PAGE 9

UNION BUSTING

NYU graduate workers protest

NYU’s refusal to negotiate a second contract was met with a huge protest including a mass arrest.

PAGE 4

MASS MEETING

Building the power to win

An excerpt from PSC President Barbara Bowen’s speech on the contract talks.

PAGES 10-11

BENEFITS

Dental rider deadline

The enrollment period for additional coverage for Guardian members ends November 18.

PAGE 8

KATRINA

Structural damage

There is nothing natural about the suffering that followed Hurricane Katrina.

PAGE 9
Union solidarity versus giveback demands

At the PSC’s mass meeting at Cooper Union, there wasn’t enough room to hold everybody who showed up. CUNY faculty want at least a 10% increase in base salary over four years. We are demanding this after the cops got 10% over two years. Bloomberg is insulting us with 6.25% over four years and is demanding that department chairs no longer be represented by the union. This is absurd since department chairs also teach, and chairmanships often change. With demands for many other givebacks, it feels like they’re spitting on us.

CUNY has 5 full-time CLTs

CLTs are losing new positions to non-tenure-bearing titles and to non-academic unions. And management is trying to save money by replacing full-time CLTs with part-time positions, with numbers far exceeding full-time CLT staff on many campuses.

At a time when the City has an extensive budget surplus, isn’t it time we fight for adequate full-time staff to support CUNY’s academic programs and give students the high-quality technical services they deserve?

Ellen P. Steinberg
Vice-Chair, CLT Chapter

Defending our interests

In discussing the idea of a referendum on a job action with colleagues, a vexed question often comes up – why must the choice be posed so starkly? Aren’t there intermediate possibilities, less drastic alternatives than either a job action or accepting a lousy contract? My answer is this: if we show our realness to defend our interests come what may, more favorable options may arise.

The intransigence of the CUNY management, and of the city administration, is predicated on the expectation that we will not be prepared to do whatever it takes. That intransigence can – and must – be defeated by challenging the expectation behind it.

Another frequent concern is the effect of a job action on our students: colleagues are understandably uncomfortable adding further disruption to the lives of students. Here a further consideration should be weighing the disruption of a job action against the further erosion of our working conditions – which means the conditions of our students’ education – resulting from a contract such as the one we are being asked by management to accept.

Would our students not be better served by our resistance to a University administration that seems intent on gutting the University they claim to represent?

Defending our interests

In the upcoming referendum on a job action with colleagues, a vexed question often arises: what may, more favorable options may arise.

The intransigence of the CUNY management, and of the city administration, is predicated on the expectation that we will not be prepared to do whatever it takes. That intransigence can – and must – be defeated by challenging the expectation behind it.

Another frequent concern is the effect of a job action on our students: colleagues are understandably uncomfortable adding further disruption to the lives of students. Here a further consideration should be weighing the disruption of a job action against the further erosion of our working conditions – which means the conditions of our students’ education – resulting from a contract such as the one we are being asked by management to accept.

Would our students not be better served by our resistance to a University administration that seems intent on gutting the University they claim to represent?

Defending our interests

In the upcoming referendum on a job action with colleagues, a vexed question often arises: what may, more favorable options may arise.

The intransigence of the CUNY management, and of the city administration, is predicated on the expectation that we will not be prepared to do whatever it takes. That intransigence can – and must – be defeated by challenging the expectation behind it.

Another frequent concern is the effect of a job action on our students: colleagues are understandably uncomfortable adding further disruption to the lives of students. Here a further consideration should be weighing the disruption of a job action against the further erosion of our working conditions – which means the conditions of our students’ education – resulting from a contract such as the one we are being asked by management to accept.

Would our students not be better served by our resistance to a University administration that seems intent on gutting the University they claim to represent?

Defending our interests

In the upcoming referendum on a job action with colleagues, a vexed question often arises: what may, more favorable options may arise.

The intransigence of the CUNY management, and of the city administration, is predicated on the expectation that we will not be prepared to do whatever it takes. That intransigence can – and must – be defeated by challenging the expectation behind it.

Another frequent concern is the effect of a job action on our students: colleagues are understandably uncomfortable adding further disruption to the lives of students. Here a further consideration should be weighing the disruption of a job action against the further erosion of our working conditions – which means the conditions of our students’ education – resulting from a contract such as the one we are being asked by management to accept.

Would our students not be better served by our resistance to a University administration that seems intent on gutting the University they claim to represent?
In the largest mass meeting in PSC history, 1,200 people gathered on September 29 in Cooper Union’s Great Hall. With cheers, applause, boos and sometimes, the hissing of the crowd made clear its angry rejection of CUNY management’s contract offer and its support for the PSC’s key demands.

“Management’s offer is ridiculous,” Costas Papayotakis, an assistant professor at City Tech, told Clarion. Barbara Comins, Professor in English at LaGuardia, agreed: “The work I do is priceless,” said Comins, “but it is not valued by the administration.”

PSC Secretary Cecilia McCull welcomed the gathering and noted the Great Hall’s history. Abraham Lincoln spoke there during his presidential campaign, and the Hall hosted the birth of the NAACP at early meetings of the women’s suffrage movement. “This is a good place to feel Lincoln’s good vibrations, to share fellowship with one another and express resistance to an administration that has yet to honor the value of our labor with a just offer of a settlement,” McCull said.

In that spirit, the union leadership announced a seven-point plan for winning a fair contract. Speakers emphasized that the PSC’s chances for success depend heavily on the strength of member involvement in the coming month.

“No one is going to ‘get’ us a good contract,” said PSC Treasurer John Hyland, “We must win it ourselves.”

**SOLIDARITY**

In that struggle, Hyland said, the PSC is finding support from another front of several labor representatives, Walid Raad of the faculty union at Cooper Union, who pledged his local’s support for the PSC.

Next up was Alan Lubin, executive vice president of New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), he has been working with the PSC in Albany in an effort to secure additional State support for the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund. “You have support from Buffalo to Montauk,” Lubin told the crowd.

“We at the AFT stand firmly behind you,” declared Toni Cortese, executive vice president of the American Federation of Teachers. “CUNY is right to recognize that there is no institution without the faculty,” she told Clarion.

**MANAGEMENT’S AGENDA**

PSC First Vice President Steve London criticized management’s agenda and had the University’s “CUNY management wants to take us in the direction of a hierarchical, corporate structure,” London said, “with departments competing for money by management, constantly exploited by part-time and contingent faculty, less job security for HDQs, lowered pay and hours, least time for research and writing.”

The PSC will return to the bargaining table on October 6 and call on management to move toward their current offer. The union will do everything we can to reach a fair settlement at the table.

The PSC executive council has set a deadline of November 3 to assess a framework of the settlement for PSC members. If not, it will decide whether and when to hold a referendum.

INSPIRING UNITY

The last part of the mass meeting focused on the PSC’s campus organizing. Three picket captains – HDQ Assistant Arthurine DeSola, Adjunct Assistant Professor Walter Dubreton and Distinguished Professor Rosalind Petchesky – each talked about why they had volunteered. “It’s critical that we realize that the union is not a service organization,” DeSola said. “The union is us!”

**MEMBER SUGGESTIONS**

During the question-and-answer period that followed, several members advanced suggestions for the contract campaign. For example, Evelyn Berg of LaGuardia called for the union to buy advertising in NYC’s ethnic and immigrant press.

By DANIA RAJENDRA & PETER HOGNESS

HOW TO WIN A FAIR CONTRACT

At the PSC’s mass meeting on September 29, the union’s leadership laid out the following action plan for winning a fair contract:

- **The union will continue its plan to reach every member for a conversation with a member-organizer, a picket captain, about the contract and a possible job action.** PSC chapters will hold loud, angry but informational picketing and organizing on their campuses. The PSC will call on HDQ to provide a fair contract.
- **PSC chapters will hold loud, angry but informational picketing and organizing on their campuses.** The PSC will call on HDQ to provide a fair contract.
- **PSC chapters will hold loud, angry but informational picketing and organizing on their campuses.** The PSC will call on HDQ to provide a fair contract.

INSPIRING UNITY

The large turnout and high energy of the meeting spurred animated conversations among members as they filed out of the Great Hall. “I’ve never been so inspired!” said Rozqullah Muldoor, an assistant professor of media studies at Queens.

“Your union seems very strong,” said Vetti Coleman, a member of CWA 1180. “I hope this solidarity is contagious!”

**1,200 at PSC mass meeting**

The PSC will return to the bargaining table on October 6 and call on management to move toward their current offer. The union will do everything we can to reach a fair settlement at the table.

The PSC executive council has set a deadline of November 3 to assess a framework of the settlement for PSC members. If not, it will decide whether and when to hold a referendum.

How to win a fair contract

The union will continue its plan to reach every member for a conversation with a member-organizer, a picket captain, about the contract and a possible job action. PSC chapters will hold loud, angry but informational picketing and organizing on their campuses.

The PSC will call on HDQ to provide a fair contract. The PSC will call on HDQ to provide a fair contract.

The PSC will call on HDQ to provide a fair contract.

The PSC will call on HDQ to provide a fair contract.

The PSC will call on HDQ to provide a fair contract.
Huge protest vs. union busting at NYU

By LETICIA TAYLOR

More than 1100 people rallied on August 31 to protest NYU’s refusal to negotiate a second union contract for graduate employees. In an act of civil disobedience, 76 members and supporters of NYU’s Graduate Student Organizing Committee (GSOC) blocked the entrance to Bobst Library and were taken into police custody. Those arrested included AFL-CIO President John Sweeney; UNITE-HERE President Bruce Raynor; PSC Treasurer John Hyland; SUNY faculty union president William Scheuerman; PSC member Kathy Krupat; union president William Scheurer; PSC member Kitty Krupat; and State Senator Thomas Duane.

NYU was the first private university in the country to recognize a graduate employees’ union. “It’s outrageous that the University has just slammed the door in our face and refused to bargain,” said Mishi Chatterji, teaching assistant in the American Studies Department, “but it’s really inspiring to see so many people come out here to join us in support for their union.”

STUDENTS ARE WORKERS TOO

The school’s refusal to negotiate came after the Republican-dominated National Labor Relations Board ruled in 2004 that graduate teaching and research assistants at private universities are not workers and cannot form unions. Reversing an NLRB decision from 2000 in a case at NYU, the Board held that teaching and research work by graduate students is not wage labor but simply part of their education – a position that unionists call ridiculous.

Unionized graduate assistants point out that their work often has nothing to do with their specific field of study and that universities use them as a cut-rate workforce.

“The administration knows you’re workers when they give you tests and papers to grade, when they give you classes to teach,” said Elizabeth Bunn, secretary-treasurer of the United Auto Workers. “The only time they don’t know you’re workers is when you try to organize.” (GSOC and graduate unions at Columbia and the New School are affiliated with the UAW.)

While Bunn and others in the sit-in were being arrested, the rest of the demonstrators filled the street in front of the library with a huge, noisy picket line. The crowd included members of GSOC, the PSC, Muslim students Local 926, Communications Workers, UNITE-HERE, the AAUP and American Federation of Teachers locals at NYU and the NYC public schools.

Full-time faculty from NYU and universities in California, Illinois and Georgia also stood with the graduate workers. “What happens at NYU affects the rest of the country,” said Pamela Voekel, a professor at the University of Georgia who is working to organize her colleagues.

GSOC members expressed appreciation for the outpouring of support, and stressed that solidarity is said to be a two-way street. “We’re in this together with PSC and other academics,” said Mike Palm, GSOC Unit Chair. “Your fight is our fight.”

The labor movement is making solidarity with NYU’s graduate assistants a high priority. “The Bush Labor Board [has] denied another group of workers the protected status under federal labor law,” said a leaflet from the NYC Central Labor Council. “First it was workers at the Department of Homeland Security, and then it was airport screeners. Now it’s graduate employees – who will be next?”

THE UNION DIFFERENCE

The AFL-CIO’s Sweeney said the protest was not a one-day affair. “We’re in it for as long as it takes,” he declared.

GSOC’s first contract with the university made significant improvements in working conditions including increased stipends, health care, overtime compensation and a grievance procedure, members said. “It’s a real shame,” said Simon Jackson, a graduate assistant in the history department. “I had a problem with a professor in the past, and it was easy to resolve with union assistance. Now, without a contract or union rules, those situations can become personal problems.”

SIT-IN SPARKS DOZENS OF ARRESTS

But those laid off will no longer have the right to appeal their terminations or to negotiate a second union contract for their colleagues.

Other provisions of the settlement would strip teachers of rights to temporary assignments, including increased stipends, health care, overtime compensation and a grievance procedure, members said.

“Your fight is our fight.”

Sit-in sparks dozens of arrests

The new contract would expire on October 12, 2007 – far enough in the future to avoid the 3 percent cut NYU threatened to impose on all non-union employees, though the union shop would remain.

As Clarion went to press, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the Bloomberg administration reached agreement on a contract settlement, which would provide current teachers with a pay increase of about 15% over three years.

Teachers would be required to work an extra ten minutes per day, and start the school year two days earlier. Teachers who work in Brooklyn and Queens would also give up a day off that had applied only to them.

There will no longer be “forced” transfers, giving school principals more authority over hiring. Layoffs will still be done on a seniority basis, but those with the longest seniority will be given the right to bump more junior teachers from their positions in another school.

NO SALARY CUT

The agreement would bring the maximum teacher’s salary from its current level of $88,812 to $95,416. Starting pay for teachers newly hired in the future would go up from $39,000 to $42,512 - a 9% increase over last year, though the pay gap between hard-working educators and their colleagues in the suburbs.

The new contract would expire on October 12, 2007 – a longer term than other recent City contracts, and one that both sides said would give the public schools more stability. The accord calls for a 2% raise effective December 1, 2003; a 3.5% increase a year later; a 5.5% boost on November 1 of this year, and a 3.25% raise on October 1, 2006. These add up to 14.25% in raises, worth about 15% after compounding.

It would be a longer contract than that suggested in the non-binding recommendations of a fact-finding panel, and the first raises would come earlier in the life of the agreement. This would mean a larger amount of retroactive pay if the agreement is ratified.

Other provisions of the settlement would strip teachers of the right to grieve letters placed in their personnel file (though they would have the right to add their own letter in response), and give principals more control of assignments to monitor lunchrooms and hallways.

Advances for the union include a ban on specific types of micromanagement that had caused great resentment among teachers, such as being disciplined for how bulletin boards or classroom furniture are arranged, or departing from rules on the exact length of different parts of a lesson plan. New “lead teacher” positions would be created, in which veterans could earn an extra $10,000 per year working in under-achieving schools, mentoring those with less experience. (Until now these posts have only existed in a pilot program.)

Public school teachers had been working under an expired contract since June 2001, and negotiations for a new agreement had been drawn out and contentious. Last July-May or Bloomberg predicted a deal before the start of the school year, but the two sides made no progress over the summer.

FACT FINDING

On September 13 a fact-finding panel issued its recommendations for a new agreement. Teachers expressed anger at its proposal that they work longer hours and give up some existing contract rules in exchange for pay raises. “We can’t take the pay gap with suburban schools and improved test scores were reason enough to give them a raise.”

Although there was sharp debate at the UFT’s Delegate Assembly on September 26, the 2,000 delegates voted in favor of the fact-finding report by 2,337-245. The report, the fifth in a series, focuses on the 2004-05 contract, in which teachers were the only group to accept a pay raise, while administrators and other non-union employees received increases greater than the Consumer Price Index.

The resolution approved on September 26 reflects the need for a settlement before the start of the school year. The final contract will be negotiated in the coming weeks and will go to the UFT’s Delegate Assembly on October 26 for a vote, with the possibility of a strike if a settlement is not reached.

The resolution also recognizes the need for the proposed agreement to be voted on each year, with ballots to be counted in early November. At that time, the exact date has not yet been set.
Why did you volunteer to organize on your campus?

On every CUNY campus, PSC members are volunteering as picket captains – local organizers who talk with colleagues about the contract negotiations and what the union should do next. Our Boving Reporter spoke with some of them.

ANNETTE OPLER
Assistant Professor, Biology
Bronx Community College

I volunteered because I believe the union is only as strong as its membership. To me it’s important to get every single member involved, whether they’re adjunct or full-time or HEOSs or whatever. The union is us.

I’ve talked to probably 15 colleagues. Their reactions run the gamut from very cautious to “I think we should have been out already!”

I’m probably as much at the top in rank and salary as anyone and I still had to fire my dentist of 20 years because I couldn’t afford him. So I have a stake in the outcome, and I have a stake in the process.

Talking to my colleagues, I’ve found a kind of double consciousness. They are unanimous in rejecting the offer from management. It’s demeaning and shameful and we won’t accept it! But many have not taken the next step to ask “what can we do?” The “we-ness” of it hasn’t yet sunk in, and that’s where we picket captains can make a difference.

For me this is a struggle for democracy. What this union has done is make CUNY a space for democratic deliberation.

ROSALIND PETCHESY
Distinguished Prof., Political Science
Hunter College & Graduate Center

I signed up because I already serve as a department representative, and on my chapter’s executive committee, plus I’m an officer at-large on the campus chapter.

Management’s offer is negative – it’s insulting. They are looking for a lot of give-backs that seem completely unnecessary. The minimum I expect is a cost-of-living increase. Anything less is a decrease in salary, that’s the bottom line. Everything is going up but our salaries, so a lot of people are going to leave the system. It’s really hard to get by, and they can make more on the outside.

This contract is a very important one for us. We will never be able to maintain a quality educational institution without proper support.

WALTER DUFRESNE
Adjunct Assist. Prof., Graphic Arts,
NYC College of Technology

I’ve watched this union become the defenders of the poorest, the weakest, the least powerful members of its union and for that I am deeply grateful. That’s the reason I’m a picket captain.

Now, I’m going to talk more with fellow adjuncts. I learn so much from speaking with them. Not only is it a chance to talk about the contract, but we brainstorm and solve all kinds of problems related to being an adjunct – relationships with department chairs, benefits and more. We strategize together, and it’s so great to spend time with them.

LYNDA DAY
Chair, Dept. of Africana Studies
Brooklyn College

I am polling the members of my department to see what they think about the contract. I am the chairperson of my department, so management’s offer would mean I wouldn’t be in the union, and I don’t like that!

I am a representative of my colleagues, and I work to support their work in the department overall.

About 50% of CUNY courses are taught by adjuncts and we need to be supportive of them, because they’re teaching so many of our students. Their working conditions really are our students’ learning conditions.

---

Union, CUNY return to table

Management’s position unchanged so far

By PETER HOGNESS & DANIA RAJENDRA

As the PSC and CUNY management began a series of bargaining sessions in October, the basic positions of the two sides were unchanged since early summer.

CUNY management’s proposal includes removal of department chairs from the union, a cut in annual leave and other concessions. CUNY’s proposed salary increase – 6.25% over four years – is less than the rate of inflation, and would thus mean a pay cut in real-dollar terms.

The PSC’s counter-proposal would provide for salary increases that total more than 10%. In the fourth year of the new contract, members would receive an additional raise of $800, pro-rated for part-timers. Under the union plan, the fourth year would also see an additional $500 longevity increase and improvements in equity and working conditions.

Management’s proposal for the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund would be insufficient for financial stability. Along with one-time cash amounts, CUNY has offered increases in its contributions worth about 1.3%. While providing some short-term help, management’s plan would mean an additional financial crisis in the near future.

CUNY MUST PAY

The PSC’s bargaining proposal emphasizes the need to go beyond stop-gap measures and devote more resources to the Welfare Fund on an ongoing basis. It would require an economic increase of 2% to CUNY’s contributions to the Fund – an amount that would stabilize the Welfare Fund and allow restoration of the dental benefit.

Management has said it would consider putting more into the Welfare Fund, but only if this money comes out of the amount that in other municipal contracts has gone into salaries.

CUNY leadership continued to meet privately with CUNY management in September, in an effort to find a path that could lead to a settlement.

The two sides resumed negotiations in October.

The PSC has repeatedly told management that the union welcomes democracy and institutionalized engagement in collective bargaining.

Fall semester saw continued controversy over one issue: a tentative agreement between the two sides – contingent on reaching an overall settlement – that would restore full annual leave to faculty counselors hired after 1998 and would allow CUNY to hire Higher Education Officers with the appropriate degree as clinical psychologists for students.

At a September 12 meeting with union negotiators, several faculty counselors expressed their displeasure at the HEO proposal, saying that HEOs lack important rights and protections that come with faculty status. On most campuses, HEOs cannot vote on college governance bodies, and some faculty counselors said this would limit their ability to act as advocates for students.

Others contended that allowing HEOs to provide psychological counseling would mean an end to hiring on faculty counselor lines, and that this would lead to less racial diversity among CUNY’s professors.

Faculty counselors who support the proposal emphasized the divisiveness and unfairness of the current two-tier system in faculty counselor’s annual leave, where those hired after 1998 start with only four weeks per year. “The leadership is fully committed to working with counselors, the administration and politicians to emphasize the importance of hiring in the faculty counselor line,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London.

Union negotiators pointed out that about half of faculty counselors are currently hired in the lecturer title and unable to advance, while the proposed change would require that HEO counselors be hired into one of the two top titles in the HEO series, with correspondingly higher salaries.
**Union solidarity with Katrina victims**

**Residents demand fair reconstruction**

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, unions across the country stepped into the gap left by the inadequate response of local and federal government. Labor organizations have deployed cash-and-file volunteers and raised millions of dollars, providing emergency medical care, cash assistance, help with communications and more.

The Pacific Services Council is one of many local unions that has contributed to the labor effort, donating $2,000. The union allocated $600 to the AFL-CIO’s Union Community Fund, $600 to the AFT Disaster Relief Fund and $1,200 to Community Labor United, a community labor union.

By CHRISTINA INGOGLIA

By Leticia Taylor & Peter Hoganess

**PSC candidates win Council primaries**

No endorsement yet in November mayoral race

By CHRISTINA INGOGLIA

Twenty-seven out of thirty PSC-endorsed candidates for City Council won their primary races on September 13 and are expected to win in November. In the union’s one endorsement in a city-wide race, civil liberties advocate Norman Siegel lost the Democratic nomination for public advocate to incumbent Betsy Gotbaum.

“The PSC candidates who won their primaries will definitely be re-elected and we expect them to be strong advocates for CUNY, continuing to restore funds that the Mayor has attempted to cut on several occasions,” said Eileen Moran, co-chair of the union’s Legislative Committee. “We also expect them to hold the line on tuition.”

**CUNY ADVOCATES**

At Clarion press time, the union had not yet made an endorsement in November’s mayoral election. While Democratic candidate Fernando Ferrer “does support public higher education and does support CUNY, that does not necessarily translate to support for the union and our contract issues,” said Legislator Coordinator Creecia McColl. “At a breakfast meeting in September, and in November, we encouraged Ferrer to talk about CUNY, the PSC and how our contract affects the public.” Some of the Council members that the union backed for re-election have been particularly strong allies of the PSC, going far beyond simple opposition to Bloomberg’s budget cuts. "Charles Barron is a very good friend of this union and CUNY, and he won overwhelmingly," noted McColl. "He is a strong advocate for faculty, staff and students. We're hoping he will have a public hearing on CUNY employment practices, to look at the issues from the workers' point of view.”

**STaunch Support**

Councilman Robert Jackson has also been a staunch union supporter and a friend to public education, noted McColl. Jackson is a long-time education activist and a lead plaintiff in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity’s successful lawsuit against the underfunding of NYC’s public schools.

“He’s played a key role in the struggle to fund public education,” observed Moran. “If NYC collects that money, it will help to prepare CUNY’s future students.”

The victories of first-time City Council candidates were supported by the PSC who will boost the union’s political clout in the future. "Rosie Mendez, Jessica Lappin, Inez Dickens and Jimmy Vacca will all be good for us,” said McColl.

---

**Citizens of New Orleans need jobs to return home.**

UTNO President Mitchell told members she had been meeting with New Orleans and Louisiana education officials. "I am asking them the questions you would ask if you were meeting them," Mitchell wrote. "When will teachers receive the $530 state supplement approved by the legislature and the money owed from the sick leave/sabbatical settlement UTNO fought for?…What plans are there for getting our schools back in operation?"

---

**CONTROL**

The question of who will control the reconstruction has begun to emerge as a pressing issue. Community Labor United, a coalition bringing together unions such as UTNO and UNITE HERE with community organizations such as ACORN, the NAACP and the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, is demanding that the inequities that were part of the initial response to Katrina not be repeated in the reconstruction. The coalition has launched a Peoples’ Hurricane Relief Fund and OverSight Coalition, uniting over 40 local organizations that want grassroots voices heard and funds are funneled into rebuilding casinos, schools, and the wealthy white districts of New Orleans like the French Quarter and the Garden District, the Coalition declared in a founding statement.

“Really need to put pressure on local and national government to begin the process of bringing people home,” said CLU organizer Malcolm Stoddart. "Tens of thousands of workers are being imported when there are New Orleanians who can do the work of the cleanup. We need a seat at the table and to demand that people from New Orleans can do this work so they can begin the process of returning home."

To donate, to help and for more information please visit:


**AFL-CIO help for Hurricane Kat-**

**rina survivors –** www.afl-cio.org/aboutus/n063121963.cfm

**laborunited.net**
Campus Equity Week highlights adjuncts’ contributions to CUNY

By MARCIA NEWFIELD
PSC Vice President for Part-Time Personnel

There are a million part-time and adjunct faculty, graduate employees, full-time non-tenure-track faculty and continuing education teachers throughout the US. This number grew 41% in a 10-year period, according to Department of Education data for 2003. As of Spring 2005, CUNY had 9,600 part-timers teaching more than 50 percent of its courses.

BI-ANNUAL EVENT

Campus Equity Week (CEW), October 31 to November 4, is a bi-annual event that aims to educate universities, the public and policymakers on the inequities of contingent work in academia. Participating groups in the US, Canada and Mexico design their own events for the week, with the goal of raising awareness of the need for equitable labor policies and standards that encourage fairness and dignity for all members of the campus community.

Inaugurated in 2001, CEW grew rapidly and in 2003 over 250 campuses in North America took part. The logo for this year’s tri-part theme – fair employment, campus unity and quality education – is built around the equality symbol that has accompanied CEW since its inception.

The logo for this year’s tri-part theme – fair employment, campus unity and quality education – is built around the equality symbol that has accompanied CEW since its inception.

October 31 to November 4

The PSC Committee on Part-time Personnel (also known as the First Friday Group) has come up with plans to commemorate the week at CUNY. A “Seniority Scroll,” indicating the names and number of years that long-serving part-time faculty have worked at CUNY, will be unfurled.

Holly Clarke, who has taught economics and public administration at John Jay for 17 years, came up with the idea for the scroll. “The seniority scroll represents years of dedicated service given to CUNY and its students,” Clarke explains, “by adjuncts and other part-time faculty who are given the most minimal job protections: job security, accumulated sick days, reasons for dismissal and disability insurance.”

THE FUTURE

Other plans for CEW include a forum at the Graduate Center on “The Future of Academic Labor,” a book party, and lunchtime “teach-out” – lectures for the New York public, to showcase the work that adjuncts do.

Details of these and other events will be posted on the PSC website, www.psc-cuny.org, along with the resolution of support for Campus Equity Week passed at the union’s September Delegate Assembly.

The website will also have information on the PSC’s legislative agenda for 2005-06, including a renewed campaign to change New York labor law to allow adjuncts to collectively bargain for employment insurance during periods when they are not working.

Campus Equity Week (called Fair Employment Week in Canada) was conceived at the fourth Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) conference in San Jose, California in 2001. COCAL has no regular staff, and a shifting steering committee of volunteers. The bi-annual conference is coordinated by the host committee (COCAL VI is slated for Vancouver, British Columbia, in August 2006). National labor organizations – including the AFT, NEA, AAUP, National Writers’ Union and the AFL-CIO – have endorsed and contributed to COCAL and CEW, as have the PSC and other local unions.

NAPFE, the North American Alliance for Fair Employment, is coordinating the activities and website for CEW 2005 (www.campusequityweek.org). NAPFE is an alliance of organizations across a broad range of constituencies affected by problems associated with nonstandard work, such as part-time, temporary and contract employment. Its goal is to ensure the well-being of all workers and communities. (For more information on NAPFE, see www.fairjobs.org.)

CONTINGENT LABOR

Joe Berry, author of the newly published book Reclaiming the Ivory Tower: Organizing Adjuncts to Change Higher Education, the first comprehensive analysis of the contingent organizing movement, argues that winning broad public support will be key to its success. “A national strategy,” he maintains, “must understand that contingent faculty are part of a casualized workforce and must be organized as a whole workforce, on the job and in the community.” CEW 2005 aims to be one step in that direction.

Sick of SUNY missing payments

By CHRISTINA INGOLIA

PS members at the four Education Opportunity Centers (EOC) in New York City have submitted a petition to SUNY demanding an end to problems with their pension payments and other deductions, which have occurred repeatedly since 2001.

Four years ago, faculty at the Queens EOC opened letters that left them in shock: TIAA-CREF had sent each a notice stating that their accounts had been frozen because no payments had been made to either their pension accounts or their voluntary 403(b) annuities.

FINDINGS MISSISS

Facia White, then PSC chapter chair at the Queens EOC, investigated and discovered that even though pension contributions had been subtracted from her paycheck every two weeks, the Queens EOC had not forwarded any funds to TIAA-CREF. Ms. White and other PSC members at the Queens EOC wanted this mess straightened out immediately, and they confronted the Center’s director.

The director told the employees that the problem was that the EOCs had not been receiving regular funding payments from SUNY. “We thought this was ridiculous,” White told Clarion. “We thought that if the money was taken regularly from our paychecks.”

SUNY PROGRAM

The EOCs are a SUNY program operated under a contract between SUNY and CUNY, providing a combination of job-skills courses and preparation for college. CUNY colleges provide administrative and academic oversight, while facilities are provided under the SUNY budget directly to each Center.

EOC employees at the Queens, Brooklyn, Bronx and Manhattan centers all receive their salary biweekly, and employee pension contributions along with voluntary 403(b) contributions are deducted from each paycheck. This money should be immediately transmitted to TIAA-CREF – but it turned out that the Queens EOC was improperly holding on to the funds for several months at a time. While the money was eventually paid, EOC employees lost whatever financial gains would have accrued from interest if the payments had been made on time.

Funding for the EOCs in NYC is part of the overall SUNY budget, and monies are forwarded to the Centers by SUNY in lump-sum payments. When approval of the State budget is delayed, the lump-sum payments are delayed as well and the Centers have to scramble for cash.

But such problems do not relieve management of its obligation to pay workers’ wages and benefits, emphasized the PSC. “These delays are the equivalent of not paying our members’ wages on time,” said PSC Executive Director Deborah Bell.

When EOC chapter chairs met last year to discuss the contract campaign, they realized that it was not only the Queens EOC that had problems with timely transmittal of employee deductions. The Bronx and Brooklyn EOCs had experienced this also, if not to such a dramatic extent. In addition, the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund reports that the EOCs’ employer contributions are routinely several months behind schedule.

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

After this discussion, PSC negotiators raised the subject at the bargaining table on behalf of the EOCs. Bell reminded CUNY and SUNY EOC representatives that it was their legal responsibility to ensure that their members’ wage and benefit contributions and annuity funds were made fully and on time – even if they had to walk the monies to TIAA-CREF themselves. Management promised that the problem would be fixed. But despite these assurances, the delays have continued.

INVESTMENT VALUE LOSS

After meeting with PSC Secretary Cecelia McCall, all four EOC union chapters decided to circulate a petition, and members have eagerly signed it. The union decided that the highest levels of SUNY management need to be made aware of what is going on, so the petition was formally addressed to SUNY Senior Associate Provost Rick Steiner and was sent out on August 17. The union has asked that members be made whole according to a TIAA-CREF calculation for investment value lost.

“It’s never a problem to convince anyone to sign the petition,” said Sherwin Hunte, a PSC member at the Queens EOC. “People are very upset because they are losing the annuity payments and other critical federal safety net programs. The combination of Bush’s tax cuts, the war in Iraq and Hurricane Katrina has led to an explosion in the federal deficit, and the Republican leadership has announced that higher education spending is on the chopping block as a result. But according to the AFT, some Republicans in both House and Senate are reluctant to pass a bill that hurts low- and middle-income students in the wake of the hurricane disaster. House action on the budget is expected soon.

Higher Ed Insiders

Hesitation on the hatchet?

Congress is considering a $36 billion budget bill that would authorize deep cuts in student aid and other critical federal safety net programs. The combination of Bush’s tax cuts, the war in Iraq and Hurricane Katrina has led to an explosion in the federal deficit, and the Republican leadership has announced that higher education spending is on the chopping block as a result. But according to the AFT, some Republicans in both House and Senate are reluctant to pass a bill that hurts low- and middle-income students in the wake of the hurricane disaster. House action on the budget is expected soon.

Go tell the Spartans

M. Peter McPherson will be the next president of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. President of Michigan State University for over a decade, McPherson was also a Bush of America executive, deputy secretary of the Treasury Department and administrator of the US Agency for International Development. During 2003 he was director of economic policy for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. McPherson will become the leader of the association on January 1; he currently serves as co-chair of the Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa, which he helped found five years ago.
Flexible spending accounts
Sign up now to save in 2006

By CLARISSA GILBERT WEISS
PSC Director of Pension & Welfare Benefits

Between October 3 and November 30, 2005, full-time CUNY employees can sign up for flexible spending accounts for health care or dependent care.

These federal programs allow employees to set aside pre-tax dollars from their salary to pay for out-of-pocket costs for medical treatment or care for dependents. By reducing your gross salary for federal and social security tax purposes, you lower your tax bill -- and for some people, the savings can be substantial.

But be careful how much you set aside: any money not spent within a certain period is forfeited. (Note that the sign-up period, October 3 through November 30, is not the same as the transfer period for City health insurance.)

HEALTH CARE

Through the Health Care Flexible Spending Account (HCFSA), employees can be reimbursed for eligible out-of-pocket medical and dental expenses not covered by insurance. You can set aside between $200 and $5,000 for expenses incurred for you, your spouse or eligible dependents. An HCFSA can be used to pay for deductible, co-insurance and out-of-pocket costs for medical dental, vision and hearing expenses.

Physicals, psychologist's fees, braces, prescription glasses and contact lenses are also eligible. In a new provision, employees can also pay for care for dependents while you or your spouse work or attend school full-time. The maximum contribution is $500 and the maximum is $5,000.

Under this program, an eligible dependent is defined as a child under age 13 or any dependent who is mentally or physically incapable of caring for himself/herself and spends at least eight hours a day in your home, such as a dependent parent. The types of expenses that are covered include babysitting, nursery school, preschool, summer day camp and other dependent care.

EMPLOYEE ESTIMATES

In both of these programs, the employee estimates how much will be needed for these types of expenses in the coming year. The account is funded through automatic payroll deductions, based on the annual amount you specify. When an expense has occurred, you submit a claim for your eligible expenses and receive a reimbursement check from your account. Both plans are administered by the NYC Employee Benefits Program. Each participant in the HCSFSA receives a personal account statement every quarter; participants in the dependent care program get an account statement every month.

USE OR LOSE RULES

By reducing your gross salary for federal and social security tax purposes you lower your tax bill -- and for some people, the savings can be substantial.

But be careful how much you set aside: any money not spent within a certain period is forfeited. (Note that the sign-up period, October 3 through November 30, is not the same as the transfer period for City health insurance.)

YOUR BENEFITS

The amount that you have set aside in the account, the unused amount will be forfeited. This is in accordance with IRS rules. However, recently the IRS slightly relaxed this “use it or lose it” provision. Employers may now permit employees to carry forward balances for a maximum of two and one half months after the end of the calendar year, and to receive reimbursements for qualified expenses incurred during those months.

Full-time CUNY employees should also be aware of the City’s Health Benefits Buy-Out Waiver Program, which allows participants in the City health plan to receive an annual incentive payment for waiving this coverage when non-City health insurance is available to them. An employee will receive $1,000 annually for waiving family coverage or $500 annually for waiving individual coverage. Payments are made semi-annually in June and December and will be included in the employee’s taxable income.

OUTLOOK

After signing up for the Buy-Out Program, employees can opt out of it if a “qualifying event” occurs. Qualifying events include marriage, death, divorce or a change in a spouse’s or domestic partner’s insurance coverage such as termination of employment, or a spouse or partner’s change from full-time to part-time work.

All three plans are available only to employees (not retirees) who are eligible to receive City health benefits. Applications are available online from the NYC Office of Labor Relations, or by calling them at 212-360-7780 from your college personnel office.

Adjunct health insurance changes are revised

By PETER HOGNESS

The September Clarion announced a move to higher deductibles in the HCSFSA under the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund. But as this issue goes to press, those changes have been revised and improved after further negotiations with providers.

“There were a number of open issues that remained to be negotiated with carriers in the New York/New Jersey area,” explained Welfare Fund Executive Director Larry Morgan. “As negotiations continued, it became clear that it might be possible to offer a lower-cost or no-cost Blue Cross option alongside the new HIP program. We have now adjusted some co-payments in order to make the revised Blue Cross plan a more attractive option, with higher co-pays instead of a monthly premium.” For those who would find these somewhat higher point-of-service co-payments burdensome, Morgan said, the HIP Prime option will be available with co-pays equivalent to the original Blue Cross plan. Morgan told Clarion that the Welfare Fund announced the change in September even though details were not final because members deserved to know that modifications were in the works. “This information was not something that we had any right to keep to ourselves,” he said. “Transparency is very important in the Fund’s relationship with members.”

WORK IN PROGRESS

The revised plan has been approved by the WF Board of Trustees. Affected WF members will receive details in the mail soon. “We have done our best to establish a program of reasonable alternatives and still contain our costs,” Morgan said.

For City health plan, WF dental rider change period ends Nov. 18

By CLARION STAFF

This year full-time active CUNY employees may change their choice of health plan between October 17 and November 18. If you choose a new plan, the change will take effect in January, but your campus human resources office for details.

Retirees are allowed to change plans only in even-numbered years, so they will next have the chance to make a switch in the Fall of 2006.

BETTER COVERAGE

The PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund adopted the same dates, October 17 to November 18, as the enrollment period for members in the Guardian dental program who wish to purchase a higher level of coverage through an optional rider. The rider allows a higher level of reimbursement for dental services and is useful when you will need more than standard preventive procedures.

The dental rider proved popular when it was first offered last year, and enrollment soon reached over 3,200 members. Those who already have the rider do not need to take any action to have it continued.

The bi-weekly cost is still under negotiation. Guardian will post details at www.guardianmarketing.com/pscuny, by October 17.

“When our basic dental benefit was stripped to bare bones because of budgetary issues, we focused on providing preventive care and providers who would discount charges,” said Welfare Fund Executive Director Larry Morgan. “But anyone who has substantial work done – even with a participating dentist – feels it in the pocketbook. You have the right to keep to ourselves,” he said. “Transparency is very important in the Fund’s relationship with members.”

LIMITATIONS

Morgan noted that the rider has its own limitations, including an annual limit of $1,500 per person. Members with families cannot get individual coverage; they must take family coverage if they want to sign up. Further details are available from www.guardianmarketing.com/pscuny or the Fund Office.

Transit benefit for both full-time & part-time

By DIANNE MENNA
PSC Part-Time Personnel Officer

Want to save money when you commute via the buses and trains of NYC Transit? The TransitBenefit Transportation Spending Account (TSA) is now available to all instructional staff at CUNY, both full-time and part-time. Through a TSA, you use pre-tax payroll dollars to pay for public transportation in the five boroughs of NYC, with the result that you pay lower taxes. Deductions are taken out of each paycheck, with a small service fee of 84 cents or more, depending on salary.

You have the right to discontinue the plan during the summer months or cancel at any time. Application forms are available at your campus Human Resources Department. You will be sent a TSA Chase E-Pucks Debit Card. Insert the card into a MetroCard vending machine and type in your PIN number to receive your MetroCard. Additional information available at www.cuny.edu/transitbenefit.
NEW ORLEANS & THE GULF

The Bush Hurricane

By NEIL SMITH
Distinguished Professor, Center for Place, Culture and Politics, CUNY Graduate Center

I is an axiom of environmental geography that there is no such thing as a natural disaster. In preparedness, response, reconstruction—the hand of social discrimination casts a far larger shadow than meteorology. Although we will never know the real figures, it is now clear that perhaps 1.200 people in Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi died unnecessarily in the aftermath of Hurrican Katrina, not just because of incompetence but because of longstanding and willful class and race contempt.

Taking the naturalness out of natural disasters in no way denies the power of natural processes. To understand why earthquakes and blizzards, droughts and hurricanes occur we need to know geophysics, physical geography and climatology, but to understand what makes these events disasters is a much larger question. A severe earthquake in the remotest reaches of the globe may not be a disaster at all, whereas an event of the same scope and intensity in LA could kill tens of thousands. After the simple fact of the physical event, who gets to live and who dies is very much a social calculus.

Meanwhile political hacks were put in charge; the supremely unqualified Michael Brown was only one of many. “Our professionals who were being systematically re- placed by politically connected novices and contractors,” an officer of FEMA’s employees’ union told Congress in 2004. As many as four days after the hurricane, Bush—flying from one photo-op to another but still not daring to enter New Orleans—maintained that private charity was the best solution to the Katrina disaster. “Try the Salvation Army, Bush Tells Refugees,” was the headline in Glasgow’s Daily Herald, as the death toll mounted. Bush was not simply stupid or in- nocently out of touch; rather, the habitual class and race cocoon he occupied was ex- posed for all to see.

Katrina revealed that the government cared less about protecting its own citizens than about maintaining a cor- rupt network of favors, influ- ence and classcronyism, built atop a blind allegiance to neoliberal marketization. “The people of New Orleans weren’t just abandoned dur- ing the hurricane,” was how Senator Barack Obama put it. “They were abandoned long ago.” Over the longer term, the Democratic as well as Re- publican administrations that gutted the postwar social welfare system share respon- sibility for that abandonment.

CLASSQUAKE

So-called natural disasters don’t simply wash the land- scape flat, rather they deepen the social grooves of the soci- eties they hit. Those trapped in the New Orleans Super- dome and Convention Center were not wrong to think they were being “abandoned to die.” The first instinct of the Bush admin- istration, as scared of and alienated from its own citizens as from the people of Iraq, was to send troops, not food and water—to se- cure property before securing lives. Promised evacuation buses never arrived. National guard water trucks sped past hun- gry, dehydrated throbs high in sewage, excrement and bodies.

The same divisions were seen at the local level. While sheriffs ordered police to fire on mainly black crowds of anguished evacuees to keep them from entering the suburb of Gretna. They said they acted to keep their town from becoming “another Superdome,” as a Times-Picayune editorial writer wrote, “They assumed the people were bringing the Superdome with them.” Encampments of people struggling to organize their own survival were seen as potentially threaten- ing mobs, and troops and sheriffs used guns and helicopters to break them up.

Looting there surely was, but gangs of young men also organized to liberate water, food and diapers for women, babies, the aged. Denise Moore, living in the Convention Center, said they were “exactly like Robin Hood, and that’s why I got so mad [that] they’re calling these guys “animals.”” The early military response actively thwarted these desperate survival efforts out of a fear that was rooted in race and class.

Guatemalan peasants after the mammoth 1976 earthquake, which killed 23,000 and made 1.5 million homeless, got it right when they came to explain their predicament as a “classquake.” More recently, Asian fisher- men made homeless by the 2004 tsunamis are being prevented at gunpoint from returning to the coast to resume their livelihood be- cause the authorities want to reserve the coasts for tourist resorts. The fishermen increasingly refer to reconstruction as “the second tsunami.” In New Orleans today peo- ple are talking about the Bush Hurricane.

If previous disasters are any guide, the class and race ruts of the global South, right here in America, are likely to be deepened as New Orleans is reconstructed. Already there are plans to put some 130,000 refugee families in mobile homes in far-flung state parks and camp sites, while developers are hanging down the doors to buy up flood- damaged property in the city. Government’s first reconstruction plans are eerily frag- like. Bechtel and the Fluor Corp. have al- ready been awarded no-bid $100 million con- tracts, and Halliburton, too, is at the trough. And the supposed naturalness of the sacred neoliberal obligation to compete, workers are being subjected to competition’s cruelest winds. In the disaster area George Bush has suspended the 1931 Davis-Bacon Act, which requires corporations with feder- al construction contracts to pay the prevail- ing wage.

Put bluntly, for the ruling class, the hurri- cane has accomplished what decades of gen- eralization and denial could not. The best hope for New Orleans...We couldn’t do it, but God did.” When George Bush pro- claims that “out of New Or- leans is going to come that great city again,” no one thinks that high-quality and affordable public housing is what he has in mind. If Bush, Bechtel and the developers have their way, New Orleans may never recover, as it was before, a city that is two-thirds black. “This could be their dream come true,” one resident told The Nation. “Get rid of all the poor African Americans and turn the place into Disneyland.”

ALTERNATIVES EXIST

There are alternatives. “We will not stand idly by while this disaster is used as an oppor- tunity to replace our homes with newly built man- sions and condos in a gentrifi- ed New Orleans,” reads a statement from a citywide coalition of New Orleans low- income community groups. “Labor United. CLU insists that those evacuated from New Orleans must have the prima- ry power over how the re- building of the city proceeds. It will be hard for them to have such a voice from hun- dreds of miles away. But as Naomi Klein has reported, “roughly 70,000 of New Orleans’s poorest homeless evacuees could move back into the city...without a single new structure being built.” Westheimer areas like the French Quar- ter or the Lower Garden District had a sur- prisingly high number of empty apartments before the storm, and these neighborhoods on higher ground were barely flooded.

BOTTOM-UP RECONSTRUCTION

The question of what gets reconstructed where is first and foremost a political ques- tion. The same corporate and federal aban- donment that fostered such a widespread disaster can hardly be expected to perform an about-turn by empowering a disempow- ered population. Yet given the visceral anger of thousands of survivors, attempts to impose a top-down solution by force may in- cite a powerful response from below.

There is no such thing as a natural disas- ter, and the supposed naturalness of the market is the last place to look for a solution to this momentous tragedy. Conviviality, the best hope for New Orleans comes not from the invisible hand, but from the visible and called hands of the city’s working class, rebuilding their city from the bottom up.

Who lives and who dies is a social calculus.
I will talk tonight about why this contract has been so difficult, what is at stake in winning a good settlement and how the union plans to consolidate the power to win. You will hear the union’s timeline and strategy for bringing the negotiations to a successful close. I also want to talk with you about the way PSC negotiators and other unions in this fight have begun to transform the union and holds the key to the power we need.

What has made this round of contract negotiations so difficult is politics. As academics, we’ve organized our lives around logic and argument, and we can sometimes find it hard to believe that negotiating a contract is not just about who makes the better arguments. Strong arguments for our demands are important, and we’ve made them, but the struggle at this point is not about arguments...

We’re up against a well-developed agenda of dismantling the public sector, in part by stealth, in part by force, by reducing the rights and benefits of public servants. I sometimes hear members say that if the union just had more lawyers at the bargaining table or if we could just make our argument differently, we would have a contract by now. We might have a contract, but we wouldn’t have a good one.

**POLITICAL FRAMEWORK**

To ignore the political nature of our negotiations is fundamentally to misperceive the process and the conditions that we’ve had to engage in...to misjudge the strategy and thus to misjudge the strategy and the power to win. You will hear tonight about why this contract has been so difficult, what is at stake in winning a good settlement and how the union plans to consolidate the power to win. I also want to talk with you about the way PSC negotiators and other unions in this fight have begun to transform the union and holds the key to the power we need.

What has made this round of contract negotiations so difficult is politics. As academics, we’ve organized our lives around logic and argument, and we can sometimes find it hard to believe that negotiating a contract is not just about who makes the better arguments. Strong arguments for our demands are important, and we’ve made them, but the struggle at this point is not about arguments... We’re up against a well-developed agenda of dismantling the public sector, in part by stealth, in part by force, by reducing the rights and benefits of public servants. I sometimes hear members say that if the union just had more lawyers at the bargaining table or if we could just make our argument differently, we would have a contract by now. We might have a contract, but we wouldn’t have a good one.

**SUBSIDIZING CUNY**

I don’t think I need to say why we didn’t change that line, why the union has held firm...in the last five years in beginning to reverse a series of austerity contracts in the last five years at work…. Larger increases, but larger increases – in other words, decreases – public funding for CUNY was being eviscerated. Since 1990 the real-dollar value of CUNY’s public funding has been slashed by 40% – nearly in half. We all live that history every day, in the thousands of silent accommodations we make to a culture of scarcity: no chalk in classrooms so you bring your own: no time to spend with individual students when there are 40 in a class so you devote four hours after midnight by e-mail; no funds for quality lab equipment so you fish the unbroken test tubes out of the box of discount supplies; no money for adequate staff to care for the health of children to a college where the faculty had refused substandard wages, benefits and conditions...and so important – because in a certain way, our students were never meant to survive either.

**ORGANIZING POWER**

The PSC faces an additional challenge in this round of bargaining: a decade and a half of austerity contracts have left our Welfare Fund in crisis. The simple arithmetic is that drug costs, the major expense of academic freedom, but by part-timers paid at the time-honored corporate way – by replacing a Gate into a contract, worth over 5%, that meant introducing a new, lower salary scale for incoming workers. The police union contract starts with that same 4.17%, adds a small differential for the additional risks of uniformed workers, and then reaches 10% with larger giveaways. Each new recruit will lose $48,000 in salary over the first five and a half years at work. Larger increases, but larger increases – in other words, decreases – public funding for CUNY was being eviscerated. Since 1990 the real-dollar value of CUNY’s public funding has been slashed by 40% – nearly in half. We all live that history every day, in the thousands of silent accommodations we make to a culture of scarcity: no chalk in classrooms so you bring your own: no time to spend with individual students when there are 40 in a class so you devote four hours after midnight by e-mail; no funds for quality lab equipment so you fish the unbroken test tubes out of the box of discount supplies; no money for adequate staff to care for the health of children to a college where the faculty had refused substandard wages, benefits and conditions...and so important – because in a certain way, our students were never meant to survive either.

**THE AGREEMENT**

The Union has come to the point in negotiations and the State must sign off on our contract. We are public employees, and so important – because in a certain way, our students were never meant to survive either.

**AUSTERITY HURTS STUDENTS**

What we’re fighting against when we refuse substandard wages, benefits and conditions for ourselves is a substantial future for our students. Do you think Mayor Bloomberg, Governor Pataki and Chancellor Goldstein would be content to send their children to a college where the faculty had no time to spend with individual students, no support for research? The governing class that advocates austerity for us and our students would never dream of visiting it on their own children. At heart, the austerity agenda for CUNY is an expression of contempt for our students. It’s a declaration that a real university – one where faculty don’t have to worry about how they’ll pay their dental bills, one where young scholars are not fleeing for other jobs and senior scholars are not fleeing for other jobs and senior scholars are not fleeing for other jobs and senior scholars...and so important – because in a certain way, our students were never meant to survive either. What we’re fighting against when we refuse substandard wages, benefits and conditions for ourselves is a substantial future for our students. Do you think Mayor Bloomberg, Governor Pataki and Chancellor Goldstein would be content to send their children to a college where the faculty had no time to spend with individual students, no support for research? The governing class that advocates austerity for us and our students would never dream of visiting it on their own children. At heart, the austerity agenda for CUNY is an expression of contempt for our students. It’s a declaration that a real university – one where faculty don’t have to worry about how they’ll pay their dental bills, one where young scholars are not fleeing for other jobs and senior scholars are not fleeing for other jobs and senior scholars are not fleeing for other jobs and senior scholars...

**ENDANGERED FUND**

The PSC faces an additional challenge in this round of bargaining: a decade and a half of austerity contracts have left our Welfare Fund in crisis. The simple arithmetic is that drug costs, the major expense of academic freedom, but by part-timers paid at the time-honored corporate way – by replacing a Gate into a contract, worth over 5%, that meant introducing a new, lower salary scale for incoming workers. The police union contract starts with that same 4.17%, adds a small differential for the additional risks of uniformed workers, and then reaches 10% with larger giveaways. Each new recruit will lose $48,000 in salary over the first five and a half years at work. Larger increases, but larger increases – public funding for CUNY was being eviscerated. Since 1990 the real-dollar value of CUNY’s public funding has been slashed by 40% – nearly in half. We all live that history every day, in the thousands of silent accommodations we make to a culture of scarcity: no chalk in classrooms so you bring your own: no time to spend with individual students when there are 40 in a class so you devote four hours after midnight by e-mail; no funds for quality lab equipment so you fish the unbroken test tubes out of the box of discount supplies; no money for adequate staff to care for the health of children to a college where the faculty had refused substandard wages, benefits and conditions...and so important – because in a certain way, our students were never meant to survive either.

**ORGANIZING POWER**

The PSC has made tremendous progress in reversing the pattern of budget cuts for CUNY, but ultimately we don’t control the State and City budgets. Nor do we control the national political agenda that lies behind them. There is one thing we do control, however, and that’s the contract. We have the power to say “no” to one more round of deepening poverty for CUNY by refusing to agree to a poverty contract. I am far from underestimating the obstacles we face... but I am confident that we have the support and the strategy and the power to win.

So how do we do it? The only answer is, we organize. But the question demands a fuller response, given our particular position as university workers, the entrenched politics we’re up against, the lack of mass labor resistance to the austerity agenda for New York’s...
Any decision on authorizing a job action will be made by our members.

member one-on-one about what a referendum means. November 3 is also days before the mayoral election, when the city's attention will be more focused on the future than ever before. The attention will be on the University -- and management is taking notice. Hundreds of members have volunteered to be grassroots organizers – picket captains – committed to talking to other members in person about the contract. They are armed with that expression of support, for the contract we need. Only if necessary would we call for a strike or other job action.

JOB ACTION EXPLAINED

What is a job action? It's typically defined as a collective withholding of labor. Unions have used anything from an indefinite strike to a one-week or one-day strike to a rolling series of strikes in different places. Other unions have used work-to-rule tactics, sick-outs or withholding of specific, strategic forms of labor, such as grading. Some academic job actions have turned the community into a classroom and held thousands of class meetings in campus, synagogues and community centers. If we do hold a referendum and if we get a yes vote, we would

forced to consider our next most potent weapon as a union. Just as we have the power to say "no" to an unacceptable contract, we have the power to withhold the labor on which the University depends.

DEMOCRATIC DECISION

That's not a step any union would take lightly, and the PSC Delegate Assembly understood that in the resolution it passed in May. The resolution first mandates that the union leadership continue to do everything it can to reach a good settlement at the bargaining table. And we are doing that, through intense and productive discussions throughout the summer, now with a return to the formal bargaining table. The two sides will meet across the table on October 6, with a series of sessions scheduled throughout the month. By being here tonight, you give us power at the table; you have made it unmistakable that hundreds of PSC members are deeply engaged in this issue. But if we are not able to reach a settlement when negotiations resume, the union's Executive Council now has the authority to conduct a referendum on whether to authorize the leadership to call for a strike or other job action. Why so many steps? Because we want to make this decision as democratic and authentic as we can. If the union leadership holds a referendum, all PSC members in good standing will have the chance to vote yes or no. You will be voting not on an immediate action but on whether to authorize the union leadership to take the next step and call for a withholding of labor.

We will work tirelessly over the next month to achieve a settlement before November 3. On that night, the union's Executive Council will assess whether we have the framework for an acceptable settlement or whether and when we will hold a referendum. We chose November 3 because it is a strategic date. It gives us one month to complete the project of talking to every union third party, just as we conduct a contract ratification vote. I hope that we can reach a settlement without conducting a strike or job action, and I am doing everything in my power, including working directly with the Governor's office, to achieve that. But if we don't achieve it, we will know by November 3.

If the Executive Council then decides to hold the referendum, I will be asking you not just to vote, but to vote yes. A yes vote would enable the negotiating team to press harder, third party, just as we conduct a contract ratification vote. I hope that we can reach a settlement without conducting a strike or job action, and I am doing everything in my power, including working directly with the Governor's office, to achieve that. But if we don't achieve it, we will know by November 3. If the Executive Council then decides to hold the referendum, I will be asking you not just to vote, but to vote yes.... A yes vote would enable the negotiating team to press harder, first use that vote to pressure management to settle, and only if that failed would we plan for a strike or other action.

IMPLICATIONS OF A STRIKE

We are many steps away from a strike, but if we hold it, will be conducted by secret ballot. If we hold it, will be conducted by secret ballot. If the Executive Council then decides to hold the referendum, we will provide you with full information about the Taylor Law. We will inform you about your rights as a member of a public-employee union. The union offers, the financial assistance available to those who need it and the political context that influences how the law is applied. A strike or other job action is serious business; there is no way to do it without sacrifice, at least short-term sacrifice, and risk. This union leadership will not soft-pedal that risk – but nor will we soft-pedal the power we have if we organize. Nothing has been won by the labor movement without risk – not the eight-hour day or the weekend or the right to form a union. We are doing everything we can to win a good contract before November 3 without having to take this step, and tonight I'm asking for your support.

COLLECTIVE POWER

The way we win is to make an unprecedented effort in the coming month. I want us to leave this room with a commitment to reorder our priorities for the next few weeks and make the contract fight primary. That may mean putting a writing project on hold for a while or getting up an hour earlier to grade papers every day, but we will not win this if you leave it up to a handful of die-hards. If this is worth fighting for – and I think you believe it is – we can't do it through business-as-usual. Already, something transformative is sweeping across the University – and management is taking notice. Hundreds of members have volunteered to be grassroots organizers – picket captains – committed to talking to other members in person about the contract. They are already signed on for this work, and as a result, the conversation in this union has changed. In thousands of individual encounters, we have begun to grapple with the hard questions – as rich as any we consider in our scholarly work – about power, education and collective struggle. The attention management has paid to our resolution making a referendum a possibility should convince us that we command a new kind of power when we consider collective action.

We start tonight with these seven points of power, including working directly with the Governor's office, to achieve that. But if we don't achieve it, we will know by November 3. If the Executive Council then decides to hold the referendum, we will provide you with full information about the Taylor Law. We will inform you about your rights as a member of a public-employee union. The union offers, the financial assistance available to those who need it and the political context that influences how the law is applied. A strike or other job action is serious business; there is no way to do it without sacrifice, at least short-term sacrifice, and risk. This union leadership will not soft-pedal that risk – but nor will we soft-pedal the power we have if we organize. Nothing has been won by the labor movement without risk – not the eight-hour day or the weekend or the right to form a union. We are doing everything we can to win a good contract before November 3 without having to take this step, and tonight I'm asking for your support.

COLLECTIVE POWER

The way we win is to make an unprecedented effort in the coming month. I want us to leave this room with a commitment to reorder our priorities for the next few weeks and make the contract fight primary. That may mean putting a writing project on hold for a while or getting up an hour earlier to grade papers every day, but we will not win this if you leave it up to a handful of die-hards. If this is worth fighting for – and I think you believe it is – we can’t do it through business-as-usual. Already, something transformative is sweeping across the University – and management is taking notice. Hundreds of members have volunteered to be grassroots organizers – picket captains – committed to talking to other members in person about the contract. They are already signed on for this work, and as a result, the conversation in this union has changed. In thousands of individual encounters, we have begun to grapple with the hard questions – as rich as any we consider in our scholarly work – about power, education and collective struggle. The attention management has paid to our resolution making a referendum a possibility should convince us that we command a new kind of power when we consider collective action.

We start tonight with these seven points of power, including working directly with the Governor's office, to achieve that. But if we don't achieve it, we will know by November 3. If the Executive Council then decides to hold the referendum, we will provide you with full information about the Taylor Law. We will inform you about your rights as a member of a public-employee union. The union offers, the financial assistance available to those who need it and the political context that influences how the law is applied. A strike or other job action is serious business; there is no way to do it without sacrifice, at least short-term sacrifice, and risk. This union leadership will not soft-pedal that risk – but nor will we soft-pedal the power we have if we organize. Nothing has been won by the labor movement without risk – not the eight-hour day or the weekend or the right to form a union. We are doing everything we can to win a good contract before November 3 without having to take this step, and tonight I’m asking for your support.

Democrat power

This is a powerful moment in the history of this union. It’s a moment we’ve imagined ourselves in an intellectual and political alliance with those whom CUNY’s founders called “the children of the whole country’s largest public urban university would have. But a strike can be also be very, very hard – to prepare to talk about a strike or other job action, but you are entitled to know as you think about it that the same political climate that brings us austerity for union contracts and CUNY students brings us a labor law that contains severe penalties on public-employee unions that strike – and almost no penalties on employers that refuse to settle fair contracts. If the union moves to a referendum, we will provide you with full information about the Taylor Law. We will inform you of your rights as a member of a public-employee union. The union offers the financial assistance available to those who need it and the political context that influences how the law is applied. A strike or other job action is serious business; there is no way to do it without sacrifice, at least short-term sacrifice, and risk. This union leadership will not soft-pedal that risk – but nor will we soft-pedal the power we have if we organize. Nothing has been won by the labor movement without risk – not the eight-hour day or the weekend or the right to form a union. We are doing everything we can to win a good contract before November 3 without having to take this step, and tonight I’m asking for your support.

Democrat power

This is a powerful moment in the history of this union. It’s a moment we’ve imagined ourselves in an intellectual and political alliance with those whom CUNY’s founders called “the children of the whole country’s largest public urban university would have. But a strike can be also be very, very hard – to prepare to talk about a strike or other job action, but you are entitled to know as you think about it that the same political climate that brings us austerity for union contracts and CUNY students brings us a labor law that contains severe penalties on public-employee unions that strike – and almost no penalties on employers that refuse to settle fair contracts. If the union moves to a referendum, we will provide you with full information about the Taylor Law. We will inform you of your rights as a member of a public-employee union. The union offers the financial assistance available to those who need it and the political context that influences how the law is applied. A strike or other job action is serious business; there is no way to do it without sacrifice, at least short-term sacrifice, and risk. This union leadership will not soft-pedal that risk – but nor will we soft-pedal the power we have if we organize. Nothing has been won by the labor movement without risk – not the eight-hour day or the weekend or the right to form a union. We are doing everything we can to win a good contract before November 3 without having to take this step, and tonight I’m asking for your support.
York PSC chapter gets results

By DANIJA RAJENDRA

As the “migrant laborers” of the CUNY system, adjunct faculty face frustrating practical problems as they try to do their daily work. They are often forced to compete with new employees for campus computers to create or print class materials, they have to write exams with students hovering over their shoulders, they plead with security to open offices so they can make copies.

Shirley Frank knows these problems all too well. An adjunct associate professor at York College, she has taught English there for the past six years. Like many of CUNY’s 9,000 adjuncts, Frank teaches at two CUNY colleges to make ends meet. And at City Tech, she had seen how a resource center exclusively dedicated to faculty use, with computers and other tools of the trade, could make a difference.

PUBLIC CHALLENGE

PSC Chapter Chair Janice Cline and other union members agreed that this made perfect sense, and the PSC chapter began to raise the idea with York’s previous administration at labor-management meetings. “We discussed it at every labor-management meeting for at least two years,” said Cline.

At a forum last December, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein announced another of the frequent changes in York’s leadership. At the meeting, Cline stood up and publicly challenged Goldstein to fund a Faculty Resource Center on campus. Under fire for CUNY’s second-class treatment of York, Goldstein agreed. “It’s yours,” he told her, Cline recalled.

HEAVY USAGE

The Faculty Resource Center opened at the beginning of this semester, and it is already a big success.

“It’s very helpful and very useful – a wonderful idea,” said Edwin Stein, assistant to HEO in the public safety department. “This way, when faculty members get their ID cards they can access it at any time, and public safety officers aren’t stuck opening the door every day,” he said. “It allows us to better serve students.” Early data show the room is getting heavy use, Barrera said.

That didn’t just happen, explained Cline and Frank. Through-out CUNY, adjuncts often don’t get information they need, even for basic facts about their jobs like health care or pension rights. So the York PSC chapter publicized the Center through flyers and word-of-mouth. “We got flyers out to all department chairs and all new faculty in all departments,” said Cline. “We also asked that chairs announce it the first week of school.”

Virginia Thompson, also an adjunct in the math department, said she learned about the Center from a PSC flyer in her mailbox. “When I got the flyer, I was skeptical,” she told Clarion. “But once I saw it – wow. It’s not crowded, and there are enough supplies. It helps me get my job done.” Thompson said construction in York’s math department means she has been without a reliable computer and private workspace since the beginning of the semester. “Without the Center, I don’t know how I would have managed getting the material ready for my class,” she said.

HEADING ACCESS

Faculty feedback means continuing improvements to the Center. Thompson requested installation of the program Mathematica – and it was, on one computer, by the time she revisited the Center. Barrera also noted that one computer is handicapped accessible.

CUNY adjuncts often share office space with several – or several dozen – colleagues, and coveted desk space, explained Barrera. To increase the square inches available, he is coordinating the installation of stands to hold the computers (the CPU “towers”) under the desks, to allow more room for professors to spread out their materials.

York, like other colleges in the CUNY system, has more adjuncts than full-timers. Just like full-time faculty, we need to be able to check our e-mail and prepare classroom materials,” said Frank. “Up till now, we’ve done these things at our day jobs, at Kinko’s, etc. But that’s not fair, nor is it efficient. Adjuncts do enough running around on the sub-way system as it is, and they certainly don’t make enough money to pay for printing and photocopying that the university should provide.”

All parties agreed that the Center came together because of cooperation and effort from York’s new president, Marcia Keizs, her administration, PSC members and CUNY Central Administration. Architec-Noel Gamboa and Barrera, both HEOs, were integral to getting the Center open, Cline said. “It was a group effort,” Barrera said.

ONE NEED MET

The Resource Center has the added bonus of bringing together faculty across departments, noted Cline, who teaches English. “The diversity of people I’ve met down here has been fantastic,” she said.

Frank, who serves as PSC Adjunct Organizer for York, agreed. “Many adjuncts are telling me that this is the greatest thing that’s happened here,” Frank said.

“Our cause, part-timers have a lot of other unmet needs – equal pay, job security, better benefits and more. I want other adjuncts and PSC chapters to know that if you persist it’s possible to accomplish something.”

Add your name

Join the hundreds of people who have signed their names to the public statement (below) demanding a fair contract. Show management – and fellow academics – that you’re part of the chorus calling for a settlement that meets members’ needs: real increases and health benefits. The statement will form the basis of an advertisement in the Chronicle of Higher Education. Sign on by visiting the union’s website, www.psc-cuny.org.

CUNY faculty and staff: We deserve better

We the undersigned are faculty and professional staff at the City University of New York (CUNY), represented by the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY, and accountable to the promises of public higher education. As public servants, we call on Chancellor Goldstein, Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Pataki to offer us a contract that provides fair salary increases, funding to restore benefits, and improve-ments in equity and daily working conditions. For our students, our city, and ourselves – we cannot afford to accept anything less.