If you care about getting a fair contract, come to the PSC’s mass membership on Thursday, September 29 at 6:00 pm in the Great Hall at Cooper Union, East 7th Street and Third Avenue in Manhattan. The meeting will feature the latest information from the PSC bargaining team, as well as a discussion of the action we will take to achieve a good settlement. The union’s strength is built on your participation – so plan to come and invite your colleagues. PAGES 6, 7, 11

POLITICS

Primary endorsements
The PSC throws its support to local and City-wide candidates strong on union issues and CUNY.

LABOR DAY

United parade in NYC Sept. 10
The national labor movement splits, but New York activists are focusing on solidarity.

TIAA-CREF

CUNY drops ‘one-third rule’
The PSC fought long and hard for a change in pension policy. CUNY Trustees made the change in June.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Academic bill of wrongs
The right wing is using state legislatures to undermine academic freedom and silence dissent.
Welfare Fund changes adjunct health care

Cost hike forced move

By PETER HOGNESS

On July 27, PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund Trustees approved a major change in adjunct health insurance.

Qualified adjuncts previously received individual coverage with no monthly premium through Empire Blue Cross Direct Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), although co-pays were required. Starting this fall, a no-premium option will still be available, but through HIP Prime HMO. Adjuncts electing to stay with their current Empire Blue Cross HMO will be required to pay a monthly premium of $59 per month for individual coverage.

OPTIONS

(Adjuncts with health coverage through the Welfare Fund will receive a mailing soon with the effective date and other details. Those who live in New Jersey, upstate New York and Connecticut will have slightly different options.)

The change was sparked by an increase of 15.5% in the group premium that Empire charges to the Welfare Fund for adjunct coverage.

“The current situation of the Welfare Fund, the Trustees felt the Fund was in no position to absorb this rate increase, which went into effect June 1,” said WP Executive Director Larry Morgan.

“It was very reluctant to support this,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London, who is also Executive Officer of the Welfare Fund. “Ad- juncts did not have equivalent health insurance to full-timers even before this change. However, the financial realities are such that the Trustees felt we had to have a contribution from adjuncts for the increased cost of the Empire plan.” He noted that WP restructuring had already required increased expenditures from full-time active employees and retirees.

“We understand that this is a disruption for everyone affected,” Morgan told Clarion. “It is a disruption for those who have to change physicians, and it’s a disruption for those who stay with the Empire plan but must now pay $59 a month.”

“It’s tragic,” said Marcia Newfield, PSC Vice President for Part-Time Affairs. “If you’re attached to your doctor, having to change to someone new can cause a lot of angst.” While some adjuncts will find that their current physician does belong to the HIP network, which is quite large, she said, many adjuncts will find their doctors do not.

Under both HIP Prime and Empire, co-pays will stay the same as they were previously under the Empire plan. HIP Prime coverage includes a prescription drug benefit, so adjuncts who switch will now get their medications through HIP.

PRIORITIES

“When the Trustees were deciding how to respond to Empire’s price increase,” London said, “one of our priorities was to make sure that adjuncts could still get individual health insurance without paying a monthly premium. Through HIP, this option will still be available.”

This is particularly important for adjuncts, London said, given their low wages.

Unlike full-timers, adjuncts already had to pay the full cost of the additional premium if they wanted family coverage. The additional cost of family coverage under the Empire plan will now rise to $819 per month. For adjuncts who choose HIP Prime, family coverage will now cost $475 – actually $60 less than the cost under Empire’s old rates.

In addition to the high cost of family coverage, Morgan noted, adjuncts do not get any coverage in retirement. “Their situation is very similar to that of home care workers, who I worked with when I was with another union,” Morgan said. “No health insurance means they can’t afford to retire.”

London noted that CUNY’s contributions cover only three-fifths of the cost of adjunct coverage. “This leaves a structural deficit which is impossible to close by charging premiums,” he explained.

“If we tried to do that, the cost of the premiums would be so high that it would be impossible for adjuncts to afford it — it would be the same as not offering it at all.”

UNDERFUNDED

For that reason, the WF Trustees were reluctant to charge a premium in response to Empire’s rate increase, London added. “The structural problem comes from the fact that this benefit is underfunded by CUNY, and no premium can change that,” he explained. “That’s why the union has been pushing for the last two rounds of negotiations to get adjuncts the same health coverage as other part-time City employees. But so far the City has been unwilling to make that move.”

“Being in the City plan would allow adjuncts to get family coverage without the current premium, and leave health coverage as a retirement benefit,” Newfield said. “The University needs to stop evading responsibility for the health care of the people who do most of the teaching at CUNY.”

— Robert David Johnson

Brooklyn College

“We have slightly different options.”

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 25 W. 43RD STREET, FIFTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10036. E-MAIL: PHOGNESS@PSCMAIL.ORG. FAX: 212-302-7815.

Scholarship & the fight for social justice

By BILL CRAIN

@ Thank you for reprinting the autobiographical essay by Kenneth B. Clark, who taught psychology at City College for 34 years. Clark was a leading figure in U.S. civil rights history, and his essay in the Summer Clarion reveals the early roots of his activism.

Clark is best known for the research, carried out with his wife Mamie Phipps Clark, which convinced the 1954 US Supreme Court that racism was damaging African-American children’s core identities. African American children were presented with a white doll and a brown (African American) doll and asked which one they preferred. A majority rejected. Some even identified themselves with the white doll. Others left the room in tears.

The results upset the Clarks greatly, as Clark described in a 1975 interview with his CCNY colleague Lawrence Nyman, who included portions of the interview in the summer issue of the journal I edit, Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice. If you would like a copy, please write me at the Department of Psychology, CCNY, 158th St. and Convent Ave., New York, NY 10031.

“Bill Crain
Brooklyn College

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In July the administration of LaGuardia Community College lost another dispute with the PSC. It was the third case in six months in which an arbitration on just the facts that LaGuardia had violated the union contract.

In the latest ruling, an arbitrator found that LaGuardia President Gail Mellow had improperly denied a promotion to Gene Yao, who sought an associate professorship. Professors at the campus say Mellow's high-handed management style has alienated faculty and lowered morale.

“Whatever she did to me is very wrong,” said Yao, who is in the Computer Information Systems Department. “I was really held hostage.”

ADVISORY TO WITHDRAW

Yao had applied for promotion to associate professor in 2001. The departmental and college-wide P&EB committees approved his promotion, but Mellow rejected it. She told Yao he should find a senior faculty mentor other than department chair Gerald Meyer and complete an externship outside the college to learn new skills for the promotion. Yao told Clarion that when he did both and reapplied, administrators told him, “You don’t stand a chance,” and advised him to withdraw his application.

“I was very upset,” Yao remembered. “It’s only fair that anyone who applies should not be prejudged and should have a chance to be reviewed.” In response, he set up a meeting with Vice President for Academic Affairs John Bihn, who was his new mentor and Meyer. The purpose of the meeting was to find out what was really going on, he said. “I wanted to know why I didn’t stand a chance to be promoted.” But at the meeting, Yao said, Bihn criticized Yao out of hand, and said nothing about why he was not looked upon favorably for promotion.

When the college Personnel & Budget Committee met, it again voted to approve Yao’s promotion. Mellow looked “angry and upset after the vote,” Meyer testified at the arbitration hearing. Soon after the vote, Meyer testified, Mellow summoned him to his office and said, “I want you to know that Gene Yao will never thrive in this college as long as you are the chair.”

CREDIBILITY DOUBTED

Mellow testified that he had never said this, but Yao did not believe her. Reviewing the evidence, arbitrator Bonnie Silverstein wrote that she “perceived that the administration’s motives in examining Yao were not to seek the president’s testimony, Mellow had in fact made this statement. Meyer “had offered to step down (as chair) to Mr. Yao when that proposal was rejected, but Mr. Yao rejected that suggestion,” the ruling stated. Mey er was re-elected as department chair on May 22, and Mellow denied Yao’s promotion on June 12.

DECISION ‘INFECTED’

Beyond questioning Mellow’s credibility, Weinstock concluded that the president’s decision was in violation of the contract. “The arbitrator simply finds that the process was infected by improper considerations,” she wrote. “President Mellow’s judgment was tainted by her disagreement with the Chair of the CIS Department.” The arbitrator also listed “a series of factual errors” in the president’s statement of reasons for denying Yao’s promotion.

Weinstock’s sharply worded ruling comes on the heels of two recent rekebuses to the LaGuardia administration. The first was decided in court last February, when a judge ordered an arbitrator to award back pay to faculty in Cooperative Education. The second came on July 1, when an arbitrator found that LaGuardia had violated the contract when it arbitrarily stopped paying counseling faculty for returning early from annual leave.

Gene Yao waited 3 years for fair consideration of his application for promotion.

In July, the case, the arbitrator ordered that his promotion be decided by a select faculty committee, instead of the administration.

The three cases reflect an overall lack of respect for faculty and for the union contract, PSC members at LaGuardia say. One LaGuardia professor told Clarion that three members of his department had filed grievances in the past year and a half. “People are being targeted and harassed unduly,” he said, “and morale in the department has dwindled.”

“There’s an atmosphere of intimidation on campus, and many people find it demoralizing to work here,” said Joan Greenbaum, chapter chair at LaGuardia and a professor in the CIS department. “But these union grievance victories show that, through the union, people can win fair treatment.”

LaGuardia backs off dress code

In April, management at LaGuardia Community College told employees in Enrollment Services that they would have to follow a dress code and get their supervisor’s approval for office decorations.

These were among several new rules in a set of “protocols” that PSC members were told to sign. But members didn’t stand for the unilateral move. HEO Abram Bolovui sent a copy of the protocols to the union right away.

“I signed it because they wanted it immediately,” he explained. “But because I didn’t think it was legal, I decided to call the union.”

Bolovui was right. Unilateral changes in conditions of employment violate the PSC-con tract and New York State labor law, explained PSC Legal Director Nathaniel Charny. “The law is beyond clear on this point,” Charny said. “Dress codes must be bargained.”

After the PSC objected to CUNY central administration, LaGuardia rescinded the protocols.

Charny noted that member vigilance in alerting the PSC allowed “tainted.”

The arbitrator found the decision was

Morale diminished

“Thes rulings raise real concerns about the administration of the college,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London. The three successive losses ought to persuade the administration to change its approach to labor relations, he told Clarion. “The union will do whatever is necessary to see that people are treated fairly and with respect,” London said, “but we would prefer to see President Mellow simply abide by her contractual obligations in the first place. To do otherwise is to breed conflict, sow resentment and lower morale.”

English professor Danny Lynch, who serves as the chap ter’s delegate to the CIS com mittee, said he hopes the recent decisions encourage Mellow to adopt “a greater spirit of cooperation” in labor-management meetings and elsewhere.

“Everything has gone up but our salaries,” he said. “We would like to see the union back pay to faculty for missed opportunities.”

IMPROPER CONSIDERATIONS

The administration was infected by improper considerations in decision making in two recent arbitrations, Weinstock concluded. "It is the duty of the arbitrator to find out whether there has been an improper consideration and, if so, to set aside the decision," she wrote. "It is the arbitrator’s responsibility to explain how the decision was reached have a fair chance of being reviewed.

In July, the PSC Delegate Assembly passed a resolution allowing for special elections for Grad Center representative and to fill vacancies at CUNY Central Office, Hunter College, and CCNY. The elections will be held on September 30, and must be returned by October 28. Ballots will then be mailed on November 18 and must be returned by December 9. The ballots will be counted on December 12. For more information, or to obtain a petition, contact Barbara Gabriel at the PSC office, 212-354-1523 or bgabriel@pscmail.org.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16: 6:30 pm / College of Staten Island chapter shows The Oil Factor with discussion afterwards. Part of the US and Globalization: Deconstructing the Iraq War film series. At Green Dolphin Lounge Student Center at CSI.

Special Chapter elections

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PSC endorsements in primary vote

By CLARIION STAFF

In June the PSC Delegate Assembly endorsed Norman Siegel for public advocate and several candidates for City Council in the September 13 primary.

Eileen Moran, co-chair of the union's Legislative Committee said, “We are only supporting candidates who have strong records in support of our members, CUNY and the labor movement.”

PUBLIC ADVOCATE

“With the increase in attacks on free speech and academic freedom, including at CUNY, New Yorkers must have a strong public advocate who is unafraid to speak out,” said Moran.

Norman Siegel is a graduate of Brooklyn College and an avid fan of CUNY and its role in the city, added Moran. He is strong on PSC and CUNY issues. She also praised Siegel’s “innovative ideas” for local advocacy networks across the City.

Siegel headed the New York Civil Liberties Union for more than 15 years. His consistent stance against the USA PATRIOT Act and advocacy of New Yorkers’ concerns after 9/11 have led to endorsements from progressive activists, firefighters, families of 9/11 victims and even fair and conservative Democratic clubs.

DISTRICT 2: MANHATTAN

Lower East Side

Rosie Mendez is a former tenant organizer and attorney at Brooklyn Legal Services. The PSC is one of many labor unions that endorsed Mendez, who has pledged to be the “labor’s advocate” if elected to the City Council. “Mendez is a grassroots organizer and the only serious candidate who did not move into the District to run for office,” said Legislative Committee member Manny Ness.

DISTRICT 4: MANHATTAN

East Side

As a lawyer, Jack Lester has an extensive record of pro bono work and advocacy for tenants and community groups. A former member of his Community Board, Lester began his career fighting for students’ right to vote where they attend college; he is a strong supporter of academic freedom and critical of the Taylor Law.

DISTRICT 5: MANHATTAN

Upper East Side/Roosevelt Island

Chief of staff for Council Speaker Gifford Miller, Jessica Lappin is an active participant in several community groups in the district. “She understands and supports PSC issues, and has a sophisticated analysis of how the Council works and could be improved,” said Moran.

DISTRICT 9: MANHATTAN

Harlem

Active with community groups helping prisoners and families struggling with AIDS, Inez Dickerson sees her family’s real estate business, which has deep roots in Harlem. She warns that Harlem’s current hot housing market is squeezing out longtime residents and businesses. A long-time Democratic Party activist, Dickerson has been endorsed by Manhattan political leaders including David Dinkins, David Patterson and Charles Rangel.

DISTRICT 13: BRONX

Pelham, Morris Park, Throgs Neck

Jimmy Vacca, an adjunct faculty member in urban studies at Queens College, built a strong record as District Manager of his Community Board for 25 years. Legislative Committee members say. With Olga Mendez retiring, Vacca would replace a hostile, conserva
tive councilman by a pro-CUNY, pro-PSC representative.

DISTRICT 28: BROOKLYN

Red Hook, Sunset Park

Edgie Rodriguez is a visiting faculty member at Seton Hall Law School’s Center for Social Justice. “As an academic he understands issues of academic freedom, and will make education a priority,” said Moran. Rodriguez worked in the office of Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, served as president of School Board 15, and was a member of the Central Labor Council’s sub-committee on immigrant rights.

DISTRICT 29: QUEENS

Jackson Heights, East Elmhurst, Corona

Bryan Pu-Folkes, a graduate of Queens College, is the founder and executive director of New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE), which organizes new immigrants to be “active, informed, and influential” in civic affairs. A close race is expected in this primary, which pits Pu-Folkes against incumbent Helen Sears. “It’s in the PSC’s interest to support progressive insurgents,” says Legislative Committee member Ron Haydak, “particularly one who has a serious shot and a promising political future.”

INCUMBENTS

Following is a list of Council incumbents endorsed by the PSC, most of whom do not face strong primary challenges.

BRONX: Oliver Koppell (Dist. 11); Larry Seabrook (Dist. 12); Helen Foster (Dist. 16)

BROOKLYN: Bill de Blasio (Dist. 39); Yvette Clarke (Dist. 40); Kendall Stewart (Dist. 43); Lewis Fidler (Dist. 46)

MANHATTAN: Christine Quinn (Dist. 3); Gail Brewer (Dist. 6); Miguel Martinez (Dist. 10)

QUEENS: Tony Avella (Dist. 19); John Liu (Dist. 20); Hiram Monserrate (Dist. 21); David Weprin (Dist. 20); Charles Rangel (Dist. 20); David Weprin (Dist. 20);

STATEN ISLAND: Michael McMahon (Dist. 49)

PSC holds anti-racist training workshop

By PETER RIGNESS

In June about 40 PSC activists — including Executive Council members, chapter leadership and staff — attended a two-day anti-racist training workshop. “It was a good first step,” said PSC Secretary Cecelia McCall.

“We now have some common language and principles that should help us frame strategies for organizing at our local campuses and union-wide to increase the participation of members of color at both levels,” said Samuel Farrell, chair of the PSC’s Diversity Committee. “Our present challenges are about how people of color can help perpetuate the problem,” said Farrell.

RESEARCH NEEDED

In a follow-up discussion on June 29, participants talked about how the workshop had affected their work on campus or within the union. “We had a meeting of the Contract Enforcement Committee that was looking at a group of disciplinary cases,” said McCull. “Suddenly I realized that a majority of these members were people of color. We need to do some research to see whether this is an institutional pattern.”

“I started looking around on my own campus,” said Alexandra Tarasko, a professor of nursing and PSC grievance counselor at Queensborough. “When I opened up the textbooks, or looked at educational videos, it hit me that the images were mainly of white people.” This stands in stark contrast to CUNY’s student body or New York’s population, she observed, “and I’m starting to pay more attention.”

The workshop got me thinking about how people of color can help perpetuate the problem,” said Executive Council member Iris DeLuerto, “by not saying what we think, by making excuses for things instead of dealing with them.”

A frequent criticism was that the sessions should have been structured to create more space for raising questions in small-group discussion. “Each segment would have been enriched if there had been more periods of that kind of discussion,” said DeLuerto. “I did feel that we really needed another day.”

A related comment, also common, was that more time was needed to talk specifically about how racism affects CUNY and the PSC. “The question I was left with is, how do I apply this?” said CLT Chapter Chair Shelly Mendlinger, who said the workshop had sparked a lot of discussion within his chapter.

One of the main gains of the workshop, several people said, was simply to open up the conversation on a topic that people often shy away from. “There are moments of discomfort any time you talk about racism,” observed DeLuerto. “But that’s OK — we still have to talk about it.”

Jonathan Buchsbaum, chapter chair at Queens College, said, “People certainly care about the issue, but we don’t as a group deal with it very much.” It’s very important that people not be inhibited about discussing it.

And discussion, Buchsbaum and others agreed, is just a first step. “The people who participated in the workshop almost demanded a plan for follow-up,” said Buchsbaum, a professor of library science at Baruch. “They said this workshop had to be a launching pad for future action.”

Buchsbaum is also a member of the Diversity Committee, which first proposed the workshop.

A steering committee to propose next steps, led at the June 29 follow-up meeting; its members include Riddell, Buchsbaum, Farrell, McCull and PSC President Barbara Bowen, who was also a workshop participant.

“We need to acknowledge that both CUNY and the PSC have not done enough in recruiting, hiring, retaining and promoting people of color,” said Farrell. “The leadership of both organizations does not reflect the diversity and experience of CUNY employees, students or the New York City population.”

A NATIONAL ISSUE

Farrell pointed to a resolution on diversity passed at the recent AFL-CIO convention, which he said requires the AFL-CIO and its affiliates to develop plans to ensure that diversity is reflected in elected leadership. “If we don’t have diversity that’s very important to not just the CUNY employees, students or the New York City population.”

Election is September 15

Norman Siegel advocates for the families of firefighters killed on 9/11.
**After debate, AFL-CIO splits in two**

**United Labor Day parade in NYC on Sept. 10**

**By DANA RAJENDRA**

At its 50th anniversary convention, the AFL-CIO saw three of its largest affiliates quit the federation, citing differences over organizing strategy. The Service Employees International Union (SIU), Teamsters, and United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) had made up more than one-third of the AFL-CIO’s membership.

The split came after months of uncharacteristically open and sometimes rancorous discussion. SEIU President Andy Stern kicked off the debate after Bush’s re-election, calling for dramatic changes in the AFL-CIO’s structure that he said were needed to reverse the steep decline in US union membership.

**ALL EYES ON PARADE**

In the wake of the split, local labor leaders pledged to continue working together, despite the angry disagreements on the national level. New York City Central Labor Council President Brian McLaughlin said that the City’s September 11 Labor Day Parade would include unions both in and out of the AFL-CIO. In fact, the chair of the parade, Stuart Appelbaum, represents a union that has left the federation.

“This will be the most important Labor Day parade in decades,” said Appelbaum, who heads a UFCW affiliate, the retail union RWDSU. At a meeting in August, Appelbaum told union activists that all eyes — including those of politicians and employers — will be on the parade, watching to see if labor has been weakened by the split.

“We need to make a success of this Labor Day,” agreed McLaughlin, and he urged union members to show their strength and unity in the streets.

McLaughlin predicted that local activists will “continue to draw on friendships, alliances and networks built over the years — no matter what jersey your team is wearing.”

With greater media attention on this year’s parade, it offers an opportunity to let the public know about the PSC’s contract fight, said Jim Parent, executive director of the union’s SEIU Local 32BJ.

Parade most important in years, local activists say

Parade organizers were pleased to see a wide range of groups wanting to participate, calling for drumming disaffiliated unions out of local Central Labor Councils and state bodies. In early August the federation’s Executive Committee moved to create “Solidarity Charters,” to allow locals of disaffiliated unions to remain in CLCs and state structures. It’s not these locals’ fault that their national unions left the AFL-CIO,” McLaughlin said, explaining why he changed his mind.

**TEMPERS COOLING**

Some labor organizations said even before the split that they would not expel non-AFL-CIO unions. For example, the International Labor Communications Association (of which Clarion is a member) and Pride at Work, a national organization of lesbian and gay union members, announced they would be open to the AFL-CIO.

Temperatures seem to have cooled considerably since July, when AFL-CIO Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson included the dissident unions’ Change to Win Coalition in a list of forces trying “to tear us apart,” along with George W. Bush, Wal-Mart and the US Chamber of Commerce. But when the Change to Win unions meet in Cincinnati at the end of September to found a new national labor group, the anger and bitterness on display in May may resurface.

In the months leading up to the AFL-CIO convention in Chicago, the union in Change to Win argued that US union membership would continue to decline unless the federation could require affiliates to spend much more portions of their budgets on new organizing. SEIU President Stern also contended that building union power requires having just one union per industry sector, and he has called for forced mergers of smaller unions to achieve that goal.

AFL-CIO lobbyists said that this proposal shift of resources to organizing went too far, and urged the federation’s focus to remain on electoral politics. They resisted Stern’s call for a more centralized authority, which they said limited local autonomy and union democracy. Left-wing unionists such as José La Luz and Bill Fletcher maintained that the debate’s focus on structure missed the point, and that only a bolder political vision could give US labor the strength and energy of unions in South Africa or Brazil. (See the roundtable discussion in the February Clarion, at www.pscuny.org/communications.htm.)

**SOME IN, SOME OUT**

The seven unions in the Change to Win coalition are SEIU, the Teamsters, UFCW, the Carpenters, UNITE HERE (garment and hotel workers), the Laborers, and the United Farm Workers. The Carpenters left the AFL-CIO in 2001, and the last three unions, at this point, remain in the federation.

The American Federation of Teachers, the PSC’s national affiliate, remained in the AFL-CIO and expressed strong support for Sweeney’s leadership. The United Auto Workers (which represents graduate assistants at NYU and Columbia) stayed in the federation, as did the Communications Workers, AFSCME (public workers) and the rest of the building trades.
Higher Ed in Brief

Diversity, or lack thereof, at Baruch
In a front-page story, the Amsterdam News questioned Baruch’s commitment to diversity among the college’s faculty and administration. US News and World Report named Baruch’s student body “most diverse” – but the faculty and leadership don’t measure up, the newspaper found.

A college spokesperson attributed that, in part, to a generation gap, saying, “20 or 30 years ago, there weren’t as many minorities” in the Baruch student body – from which current faculty and leadership are often drawn. But Baruch professor Stanton Birdle checked the statistics. “It turns out that the student body was more diverse in 1974 and 1984 than it is today. The number of Asians is up now, but the number of blacks and Latinos is significantly down,” he noted.

Prof wins tenure
University of California at Berkeley reversed a decision denying tenure to a biology professor who publicly criticized the university’s relationship with biotech giant Syngenta (formerly Novartis). Syngenta and UC Berkeley had a deal allowing the company to claim first rights to selling products based on faculty research.

The professor, Ignacio Chapela, told the Chronicle of Higher Education that the reversal came as a surprise. The university’s denial of Chapela’s tenure provoked an angry outburst among academics. An outside committee found evidence of conflict of interest, and UC Berkeley’s chancellor granted Chapela tenure in May.

Grad assistant updates
Last month, the California State University System set up a collective bargaining agreement with its approximately 6,000 graduate assistants, who are represented by the United Auto Workers (UAW). In their first contract, they won increases of 10.5% compounded over three years, basic health coverage, guaranteed vacation, and a grievance procedure.

But back in New York, NYU re-scinded its July 23 meeting with the graduate workers’ union – the first union of graduate workers at a private university. Those workers, also represented by the UAW, plan to fight back. In June, the National Labor Relations Board decided that graduate students do have the right to organize at private universities – but not protected under the law.

A rally was planned for August 31, and a number of experts reported that NYU President John Sexton was “surprised” by the backlash he has encountered on campus since announcing that he would no longer negotiate with the union.

Key issues remain unresolved
CUNY’s stance on contract shows little change
By Peter Hogness
PSC representatives met repeatedly with management this summer, in formal contract bargaining as well as informal conversations. But at the fall term began, there was still a large gap between the two sides on fundamental questions.

“There are still key outstanding issues on the table,” said Anne Friedman, PSC vice president for community colleges. “Management’s proposal is something that the PSC simply cannot agree to, in terms of the monetary package and the Welfare Fund. Those numbers are just not acceptable.”

SIMPLY UNACCEPTABLE
“We have worked hard to reach an agreement, and are still trying,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen. “But so far we have not found a way to bridge the gap.”

The problem, Bowen explained, is that management is demanding major concessions and its financial offer is too low to pay for both a real wage increase and the needs of the Welfare Fund. Management’s economic offer has not changed since the spring. It calls for no salary increase in the contract’s first year, raises of 6.25% over the next three years, and an additional 1% wage hike in the fourth year if the PSC agrees to pay for it through a “productivity increase.” The net effect would be that PSC members’ pay would fall substantially behind inflation.

The union’s proposal calls for pay increases of more than 10% plus an $800 cash increase to base salary (pro-rated for part-timers), and another $500 boost to base pay for longevity. Up to 1% in the fourth and final year would fund improvements in equity and working conditions, including progress toward fair pay for adjuncts.

The cost of Welfare Fund (WF) benefits, especially prescription drug coverage, has been rising far faster than CUNY’s contributions. (See also page 2.) In response to the union’s insistence on increased funding for the WF, management amended its proposal during the spring to include a one-time payment of $800 per member (pro-rated for part-timers) to the WF reserve, plus a $200 per capita increase in CUNY’s ongoing contributions. On the last day of the contract, the equivalent of a 1% pay hike would be applied to CUNY’s WF contribution rate.

Management’s proposal would temporarily help the Welfare Fund, but would not provide enough to restore the dental benefit and would leave the Fund in crisis within a few years. In contrast, the PSC counterproposal provides for an increase in CUNY’s ongoing WF contribution rate at the start of the agreement, raising it by the equivalent of a 1.25% pay increase. Retroactive money from this increase would go into the WF reserve. If the agreement of the year of the agreement would see CUNY’s WF contribution rate increase to 6.75%, for a total of 2%.

CUNY MUST PAY
“Our proposal would give the fund financial security and significantly enhance the dental benefit,” said PSC First Vice President Steven London.

A major area of disagreement is CUNY management’s continuing demand for major concessions from the PSC. Under management’s proposal, annual leave for full-time faculty would end on August 22. Department chairs would be excluded from union membership, as would certain HEQOs. Union negotiators have rejected these proposals.

The union’s bargaining team met repeatedly over the summer to consider alternatives and try to find a way to move forward. In addition to formal contract negotiations on June 14 and 22, the two sides held several informal discussions to see if they could identify a path toward a fair settlement.

“After the PSC Delegate Assembly passed a resolution authorizing a job action referendum, management requested that we hold some informal discussions,” Bowen told Clarión. “They invited us to informal conversations.” These discussions had not led to any breakthroughs, she said. “But any time management has asked to talk with us, we have said yes.”

Clarión wins local, state, national awards
“Best paper” of its size
By Clarión Staff
This summer Clarion was named the best union newspaper of its size by the International Labor Communications Association, the labor media group for unions in the US and Canada. This award for general excellence was one of several that Clarion earned for its work in the past year.

The ILCA also cited “Organizing the Research Foundation,” by PSC Executive Council member Nancy Romer, as the best article on organizing published by any local union. Judges praised the article as “a creative, detailed, and very clear discussion of the complexities of subcontracting, outsourcing and part-time work. Its thoroughness and accuracy” the employer has created outside the collective bargaining agreement. “A September 2004 article by editor Peter Hogness, on the PSC’s lobbying and electoral work, was named as the best news story among papers in Clarion’s circulation class.

NOT SO DENSE
The awards were presented at the ILCA’s convention, held in Chicago in late July just prior to the convention of the AFL-CIO (see page 5). Clarion assistant editor Dania Rajendra was elected to a two-year term on the ILCA’s national board, before she came to Clarion last fall. Rajendra worked as editor of the Minneapolis Labor Review and communications coordinator for Committee of Interns & Residents.

Earlier in July, the American Federation of Teachers Communications Association (AFTCA) named Clarion as the best union magazine in circulation class, based on health issues.

Top honors for writing, design and photography
Clarión photo by Gary Schoichet and Romer’s article on organizing the Research Foundation also won first-place awards.

In April, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) gave Clarion top honors in its circulation class for best feature story and runner-up for an article on health issues. PSC President Barbara Bowen’s column on “The Adjunct Problem” was named as best editorial, and a layman’s guide to student aid was judged “somewhat dense” at times.

Reporting losses, too
In May, the Metro New York Labor Communications Council gave Clarion first place for general excellence in its circulation class. Like the ILCA, the NYC labor press group chose Clarion’s article on the PSC’s growing political influence as best news story. “It is refreshing to see a discussion of this subject that includes losses as well as victories,” the judges wrote. A Clarion photo by Gary Schoichet and Romer’s article on organizing the Research Foundation also won first-place awards.

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Mass membership meeting Sept. 29

By DANIJA RAJENDRA

A mass membership meeting on September 29 is at the center of the PSC’s mobilization for a fair contract at the start of the semester. Over the summer union leadership met to lay plans for a network of campus-based “picket captains,” to strengthen links between members and prepare for future action.

At the mass meeting, union leadership will report on the latest developments in negotiations, and plans to pressure management past “the finish line that management envisions” – as reflected in their current offer – and to achieve “the finish line that the union envisions,” said Mike Fabricant, PSC vice president for senior colleges and a member of the bargaining team. “The mass meeting will update members on the contract and the substantial gulf that still separates management and union members.”

POWER

“There’s power in bringing everyone together, because we’re going to have to win it together,” said PSC Vice President for Community Colleges Anne Friedman. “Coming to the mass meeting is a way to show that you’re not happy with what management is offering.”

The meeting will be held at 6:00 pm on Thursday, September 29, in the Great Hall at Cooper Union, located at East 7th Street and Third Avenue in Manhattan. (For more information, see www.psc-cuny.org or call 212-354-1252.)

For the vast majority of union members, Fabricant said, management’s contract proposal is simply unacceptable. “What, then, is the alternative to rolling over and accepting management’s demands for concessions and its inadequate economic offer?” he said. At the meeting, we’ll discuss why a referendum on a job action could be a logical next step in intensifying the pressure to get the contract that members deserve.

The option of a referendum was put forward in a resolution passed by the PSC’s Delegate Assembly on May 26. The resolution committed the union to “make every effort” and “work throughout the summer” to settle the contract fairly. If no settlement was reached by September 1, it authorized the union’s Executive Council “to determine whether and when to conduct a referendum, either by campus or union-wide, on the question of whether the PSC Executive Council should authorize a job action.”

“The delegates agreed that we needed to find a way to up the ante, to shift the balance of power in our favor,” said Friedman.

On September 29, PSC President Barbara Bowen, other members of the bargaining team and legal counsel will give the latest information on negotiations and provide answers to some of members’ common questions. “Fundamentally, this is going to be a working meeting,” Fabricant said.

New York State law bans public employees from collectively holding their labor – but some public-sector unions have nevertheless conducted strikes or other job actions. The meeting will provide members with information on the law, and the experiences of other unions.

OUTREACH

While the mass meeting is at the center of the PSC’s agenda for September, the union is also organizing on several other fronts. A key element of the union’s organizing plan is increased activity at the campus level. Meetings over the summer began to build a structure of “captains” for one-on-one communication with members about the contract campaign (see sidebar).

Shefali Mendlinger, chair of the College Lab Technicians chapter, said his chapter has started working through its existing network of department representatives. They are the initial captains, and are recruiting others.

For the CLT chapter, as for others, the focus is on the September 29 mass meeting. “Come to the meeting so your voice will be heard,” Mendlinger said. “It’s the best way to stand up and be counted, and to find out the latest information directly from the leadership.” — DR

The union’s mobilization for a fair contract campaign is developing a structure of campus-based representatives responsible for communicating with a specific group of members. These “captains” will be responsible for getting the union’s news about negotiations to those members, and conveying members’ thoughts about the campaign to the union leadership. Several chapters spent time this summer “mapping” their campuses – drawing up plans that link each union member to a local captain.

MAPS & CAPTAINS

York Chapter Chair Janice Cline wrote to several members on her campus in August, inviting them to volunteer to create a local campus map to reach every PSC member and speak to them one by one; she wrote. Captains will be asked to attend a one-hour training session, talk with each of the members for whom they’re responsible, and encourage members to attend the September 29 mass meeting and contract activities on campus.

“Essentially what we need to do is take the pulse of the rank and file,” said William Ashton, an assistant professor in psychology at York. Ashton said he signed up to be a captain because “unless we fight for what we want in the contract, we’re not going to get anything.”

TAKING THE PULSE

“When people ask, ‘what’s going on with the contract?’ it’s a good opening to talk about the organizing we’re doing,” noted City Tech chapter chair Bob Cermee. “Our chapter executive committee met back in July. Those present all volunteered to be picket captains, and chose 30 members to be in touch with.” When the semester begins, Cermee said, they will recruit more captains and get the rest of the campus covered. In some chapters, local campus meetings will help build for the mass meeting on September 29.

“We’re planning a general membership meeting on September 14,” Jay Appleman, chapter chair at Queensborough, told Clarion. “Usually it’s not that early in the semester.”

At BMCC, “When the fall semes ter begins, a two-page Gadfly [the

This demonstration in May 2004 was one tactic to pressure management. The mass meeting will discuss what else the union can do to win a settlement.

chapters determining what the union should do next. Who should come on September 29? Anyone who cares about the contract, said Fabricant. “If you want a chance at a real salary increase, you’ll go,” he said. “If you want to stabilize and restore the Welfare Fund, you’ll go. If you want to keep department chairs in the union, you’ll go. If you care about equity, you’ll go.”

CONCESSIONS

The two stubborn problems in contract negotiations, said Friedman, are management’s continuing demand for concessions (such as ending annual leave for full-time faculty on August 22), and its refusal to offer enough money for both pay hikes and the needs of the Welfare Fund. “We could sign a contract tomorrow if we were willing to accept those terms,” Friedman said. “But they’re unacceptable to PSC members.”

She urged members to attend the September 29 meeting to show their dissatisfaction with management’s offer and be part of the discussion about what the union should do next.

Welfare Fund

McCall told Clarion the union sent letters explaining CUNY’s under-funding of the Welfare Fund benefits, and the contract struggle generally. Now the committee is phoning officials and candidates, especially those endorsed by the PSC, asking them to march in the union contingent in the Labor Day parade (see page 5) and take an active role.

There is power in bringing everyone together.

In the course of this outreach work, McCall added, the committee learned that when CUNY management has met with legislators, they have tried to blame the shortfall in the Welfare Fund on “whomever they can, including retirees and adjuncts” – on anything but the real cause, the failure of CUNY’s contributions to keep up with rising health care costs.

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NEWS

Chapters gear up for fall campaign
A guide to TIAA-CREF at CUNY

By PETER HOGNESS

A detailed guide to CUNY’s rules for the TIAA-CREF retirement plan is now available at www.psc-cuny.org/benefits.htm. The PSC Retirees Chapter oversaw TIAA-CREF Issues Committee production of the guide.

“Until now there was no booklet that dealt specifically with the CUNY version of TIAA-CREF,” said Irwin Yellowitz, chair of the Retirees Chapter. “We wanted to have everything about the CUNY version of the plan in one place, so that people would not have to consult four or five different sources.”

KNOW THE RULES

“It’s very important for active employees as well as retirees,” said Suzanne Karp Manning, chair of the chapter’s TIAA-CREF Issues Committee, “perhaps even more so. It’s important to be aware of how decisions made while you’re active will affect you in retirement, Manning said. “It’s important to be aware of the rules, and many people aren’t,” she said. “TIAA-CREF has become more complex – and what you don’t know can hurt you.

Because of that complexity, the guide took more than two years to produce,” Yellowitz said. “It took a long time because of the complexity of the task, and to ensure that it was both accurate and comprehensive,” he explained. “It was a tremendous project, and took a lot of work.”

The actual writing of the guide was done by TIAA-CREF staff, especially Rosemary Markowski. “At first, one of our members had this idea to write the brochure himself,” said Manning. “But we soon realized this wasn’t possible – it had to be done by TIAA-CREF.”

ITERATIONS

“It was a long process,” said Howard Reznikoff, who coordinat ed much of the Retiree Chapter’s work on the document. “Rosemary and I, together with some others, drafted an outline of what should be in it,” Reznikoff recalled. “It went through many iterations. And every time you made a change, it had to go through TIAA Compliance [staff], and that took forever.”

“After more than two years, it was finally available,” Yellowitz said. “The guide is available only on the internet. Yellowitz explained that the Retirees Chapter was told not to distribute the guide by email, but only through the TIAA-CREF website that is linked to the CUNY/TIAA-CREF guide.

On June 27, the Board of Trustees approved several changes to CUNY’s Optional Retirement Program that had long been advocated by the PSC. Over 65% of the full-time instructional staff who are members of the PSC may participate in the Optional Retirement Program (ORP), which includes TIAA-CREF, Guardian or MetLife.

“The union had pressed hard for this change at the bargaining table, and we’re glad to win it through another route,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen.

Many of the recent changes have been PSC contract demands for over three years. The complicating factor was adopted by the illogical one-third rule. The CUNY Board of Trustees passed resolutions allowing for the transfer of CREF monies to either MetLife or the Guardian plans, and at retirement to other funds chosen by the retiree.

The current cost to retirees for family coverage under GH’s high-option rider is $12 per month. For retirees who also purchase optional coverage for long-term care or catastrophic insurance, the cost is significantly higher. But the amount at stake is never anything more than one-third of any cash in CREF. The gap between those two figures – the amount required to remain within TIAA-CREF to guarantee the health benefits. The Trustees voted that one-third of an employee’s pension portfolio (not including any SRA funds) would have to be kept within TIAA-CREF to guarantee the health benefits. The Trustees cited their consultations with TIAA-CREF and the newness of this entire process, but the union objected to the one-third requirement as unfair and unnecessary.

In testimony to the CUNY Board of Trustees, PSC President Barbara Bowen described the number of members who “are bewildered and angry at the CUNY regulations that require participants in the ORP to retain 35% of their retirement accounts with TIAA-CREF.” Bowen told the Trustees that “the restrictions on the use of TIAA-CREF, which are exclusive to CUNY and do not apply, for instance, at SUNY, feel like one more insult added on top of salaries whose real-dollar value is declining every day we don’t get a raise.”

UNJUSTIFIABLY HIGH

After many years of pressing for an end to the one-third rule, the union welcomed the change to a flat $50,000. The PSC contends that this amount is still unjustifiably high, however, and won a commitment from the University to revisit the pension provisions within three years and modify them if warranted.

The Trustees approved several other changes to the Optional Retirement Program at their June 27 meeting. Individuals who wish to transfer their monies out of the TIAA-CREF retirement plan to an independent account such as Guardian or MetLife can make a direct transfer without first having to purchase CREF units and then making the transfer. This eliminates an unnecessary and burdensome step, which had also delayed the transfer.

TERMINAL ILLNESS

In addition, active employees who are fully retired but who are certified as terminally ill are now entitled to draw on their TIAA-CREF, Guardian or MetLife funds prior to retirement or death. Employees who need to pay extraordinary bills as a result of their illness will no longer lose the advantage of a ready source of funds without having to retire first. Employees who are in the NYC Teachers Retirement System had legislation enacted two years ago that accomplishes the same thing.

Full-time employees who leave CUNY and later work in another institution which has TIAA-CREF and who continue to be eligible for health benefits from CUNY when they retire will follow CUNY rules, i.e. keep $50,000 in TIAA-CREF, for the monies that CUNY put in to the pension plan. This will ensure that when employees begin collecting their TIAA-CREF pensions, the City-provided retiree health benefits will continue as well. Before employees start to collect their pensions, they should contact the personnel officer to ensure that any monies they may have been employed in order to file the appropriate forms for the resumption of their health benefits.

HELP FOR ADJUNCTS

Finally, as reported in the Sum mer Management Meetings, mem bers of the NYC Teachers Retire ment System who are purchasing prior service may use the monies in their Supplemental Retirement Ac counts with either TIAA-CREF or HRC Financial Service as a rollover for this purchase. This provision will be particularly helpful to adjuncts, whose only pension option currently is TRS and who may wish to purchase prior service. In her testimony before the Board of Trustees, Bowen also pressed management to extend to part-time instructional staff the right to join the ORP. Citing “the tenuous nature of adjunct employment at CUNY,” Bowen said that the provision would “improve the opportunity for adjuncts to vest and count on a modicum of after-employment income should they need it.”

Further information on all of these changes can be obtained either from the personnel offices at the college or the PSC Department of Pension & Welfare Fund Benefits.
Choosing your pension

A permanent decision

By ELLEN BALLEISEN
PSC Pension Counselor

Pensions probably don’t top the list of concerns for most newly hired CUNY faculty and staff. Yet new full-time CUNY employees must choose between two radically different pension plans within 30 calendar days of their first day on the CUNY payroll. The decision is irrevocable, and making a wise choice requires careful consideration of several factors.

If you started this semester and already chose, yes, you can change, but only during your first 30 days on CUNY’s payroll.

Your basic choice is between a defined-benefit plan and a defined-contribution plan. CUNY’s defined-benefit plan is provided by the New York City Teachers’ Retirement System, a municipal government agency. The defined-contribution plan is known as the Optional Retirement Program (ORP), which is a part of CUNY’s Retirement System, a municipal government agency.

Below is some information to help new full-timers make the decision. (Pension information for part-time CUNY employees is available at www.psc.cuny.org/communications.htm, on page 9 of the February 2004 Clarion.)

THE BASICS: ORP

The NYC Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS) guarantees retirees a pension when the retiree is 62 or older. For those who leave CUNY for another position or if they retire early, benefits are much smaller. However, ORP employees can keep their health insurance in retirement after just 10 years on the job.

Prior work history is another factor. A new full-timer with many years of adjunct service or other work for a New York City or State agency can get TRS pension credit this work. A new full-timer who already has an open-vested TIAA-CREF retirement account from another institution can vest immediately.

The choice requires careful consideration of several factors. To choose between the two pension plans, you will need to look at several financial factors, including:

- The present value of the pension
- The value of the pension in the ORP
- The value of the pension in the TRS
- The value of the pension in the CUNY Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS)

Medicare Part D: buyer beware!

By LARRY MORGAN

The senior prescription drug program, which started last year, Medicare Part D, is a very flawed benefit. It means big profits for drug companies, but gives only limited help to Medicare recipients, who must pay to enroll in the program.

If you are a CUNY retiree with Medco drug coverage through the SCU/CUNY Welfare Fund (WFP), you already have a far better drug plan — and the WFP trustees strongly recommend that you not enroll in Medicare Part D.

PRIVATE PROVIDERS BENEFIT

Because private providers stand to make a lot of money from Part D, we can predict that they will use a variety of tactics to “sell” retirees on signing up with their plan. These companies will warn that if you delay enrollment, the cost of a future Part D payment will skyrocket by 1% per month. However, this increase doesn’t apply to anyone who has equivalent or better drug coverage when the Medicare drug plan starts — and the SCU/CUNY Welfare Fund drug benefit meets this criterion.

That’s not just an opinion; it’s been determined by independent actuaries. The WFP will inform all qualifying members with a “Notice of Creditability” this fall. This generally won’t matter to retirees who are Medicare covered or eligible. The federal Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services requires that we identify each person under the program by Social Security number and date of birth. We already have this information for CUNY retirees, but in order to protect your spouse it will be critical that the Fund have his or her SSN and birth date as well.

Your basic choice is between a defined-benefit plan and a defined-contribution plan. CUNY’s defined-benefit plan is provided by the New York City Teachers’ Retirement System, a municipal government agency. The defined-contribution plan is known as the Optional Retirement Program (ORP), which is a part of CUNY’s Retirement System, a municipal government agency.

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THE BASICS: ORP

In the Optional Retirement Program (ORP), there is a retirement account in the employee’s name that is funded by both employer and employee contributions. Employees contribute 3% of their gross pay for the entire time that they work at CUNY and do not pay federal taxes on this money. At the same time, CUNY makes contributions equal to 3% of their gross pay during the first seven years that an employee is at the university; from the eighth year on, this contribution is increased to 10%. The employee decides how much money in this retirement account is invested.

Investment choices include stock, bond, fixed-rate and real estate funds managed by TIAA-CREF. The Optional Retirement Program must invest at least 60% of investments in MetLife or Guardian funds. A retirement account may be invested in several different funds, and employees may periodically change their allocations among different accounts.

An ORP pension is funded by the amount of money in the individual employee’s account. There is no way to predict how much the account will be worth at retirement because investment values change constantly.

VESTING

What does vesting mean? When you are vested, even if you do not wish to begin receiving a retirement income immediately or are not yet eligible to receive a retirement allowance, the contributions made by you and your employer remain in your account regardless of where your future employment takes you. ORP participants are vested once they have five years of TRS credited service. ORP participants are vested after they have worked at CUNY for 366 days; vesting is immediate for those who come to CUNY with an open-vested TIAA-CREF retirement account from a previous employer. Employees who leave CUNY before meeting the vesting requirements will get back their own contributions to their retirement account and any interest that has accrued to the account.

RETIREMENT AGE AND HEALTH INSURANCE IN RETIREMENT

TRS participants become eligible to retire with an unreduced pension once they are 62 years old. They may also retire with an unreduced pension if they are 55 years old and have at least 30 years of credited service. TRS members between 55 and 61 who do not have 30 years of service can retire with a reduced pension. All TRS participants who are receiving a pension and who have at least 10 years of service credit can keep both their City of New York health insurance and the benefits provided through the SCU/CUNY Welfare Fund.

ORP participants may retire at any age but can only maintain their health benefits if they have 15 years of continuous service at CUNY. These health benefits take effect only when the retiree is 62 or older.

PRIOR NEW YORK CITY AND STATE SERVICE

TRS participants can get pension credit for any work done for the City or State of New York before they became full-time CUNY employees. ORP participants cannot.

PORTABILITY/INHERITANCE

ORP participants in TIAA-CREF can continue their TIAA-CREF accounts if they leave CUNY for another employer that provides TIAA-CREF pensions. TRS pensions can be transferred to other New York City and State retirement systems but cannot be transferred to private or out-of-state employers.

ORP participants can leave the entire balance of their accounts to their families after they die. TRS participants can designate one beneficiary who will receive a lifetime annuity after they die.

MAKING THE CHOICE

So which plan is better for you? Age is one key factor in the decision.

The history of ORP investments suggests that over a 25-year period, the value of a pension in the ORP is likely to exceed the value of a TRS pension. This consideration may be especially important for new employees in their 20s and 30s. Older starting employees may gain greater weight to the fact that TRS participants can keep their health insurance in retirement after just 10 years on the job.

DEADLINE: FIRST 30 DAYS

You can contact the PSC (212-354-1352) if you would like to discuss your decision with a pension advisor.

New full-timers CUNY employees who have already made a choice but now want to change it can do so within their first 30 days on payroll. See your college’s human resources office for more information.

Alert new colleagues

Newly hired full-time faculty and staff must make a final choice of pension plan during their first 30 days on payroll. But new hires do not receive Clarion until after their first few pay periods — so please show this article to your new colleagues right away.
The mis-named "Academic Bill of Rights"

By STEVE LEBERSTEIN
Chair, PSC Academic Freedom Committee

over the past several years the climate for university faculty and students to express their views has been less hospitable than it has been in 50 years. Teachers and researchers have come under intense if unpredictable scrutiny, and their speech and writing – both in the classroom and outside it – has been subject to vilification if it offends particular groups.

Their actual or purported views may be attacked – on websites such as CampusWatch.org; in the tabloid press, such as the New York Post’s dishonest reports on the October 2001 teach-in at City College, or the New York Sun’s targeting of two Brooklyn College professors in May; or in raucous public demonstrations, such as those confronting Hamilton College trustees after the school hired Susan Rosenberg to teach a course in anti-War studies. The latter dispute led the president of John Jay College to ban Rosenberg from ever teaching there again.

Those unlucky enough to come into the crosshairs of the guardians of orthodoxy can pay a high price for the privilege of speaking their mind in the classroom and elsewhere. While there have not yet been wholesale firings on the basis of political tests, public attacks have led to administrative investigations and sanctions. The AAUP has documented the current and potential crises facing academic freedom.

The stakes in this battle are high, and they are even higher – and less well-known – restrictions on the free exchange of ideas, the exchange of sources and viewpoints, and the diversity of student learning. The stakes are higher still when the university is a place where faculty members are called on to defend the nation in the service of the state. The stakes are immense when the faculty is attacked.

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By pursuing their own opinions. His belief in this respect, he said, was based mainly on a single complaint he had heard of a student who claimed she had suffered discrimination as a result of her views. They are American Council of Trustees and Alumni and the conservative groups such as the New York Post, the New York Sun, and the National Review. They are the ones who have been formed to document the current crisis and to build a collective defense network for those who are threatened.

Now is the time to speak out in defense of acoustic freedom. If we don’t, we’ll soon be mourning its passing.
By BARBARA BOWEN
PSC President

The last time the PSC held a mass meeting to discuss how to beat a regressive contract regime was 1972. It is time for such a meeting weekly throughout the summer, exploring whether those discussions throughout the summer, exploring whether there is any way to reach an agreement that meets our needs on salary, Welfare Fund benefits and working conditions without having to consider a strike or other job action.

FIRM REJECTION

I hope the discussions bear fruit, and I will report to you as soon as possible if there is any progress. But it is important to remember that even this much responsiveness on management’s part occurred only after we as a union demonstrated that we were firm in our rejection of a contract that would leave us worse off than before.

The negotiating team is pursuing every avenue we can to get a fair contract — working closely with other city unions as well as engaging in discussion with management — but the only thing we can count on is our collective power as the people who make CUNY work. The Delegate Assembly resolution authorizing a referendum on job action committed the PSC to becoming the kind of union that is prepared — if necessary — to conduct a strike. Activists across the University have been mobilized by the resolution, and scores of faculty and staff have already signed on as organizers or picket captains for their campuses. A steering committee has been meeting weekly throughout the summer, laying the groundwork the union would need if we were to take action: members have been building support among students, politicians, community groups and other unions, while putting in place the necessary financial and legal support.

I am writing now to ask you to take seriously the possibility that you will be asked to vote on whether the PSC should engage in a collective withholding of our labor. The best way to prepare for your decision in such a vote is to come to the mass meeting on September 29.

And by your presence in large numbers you will signal to CUNY management that you are not content to accept a substandard contract. Do not underestimate the message we will send simply by amassing in significant numbers and demonstrating by our presence that we are engaged in this fight. Whatever your view now of the union’s next best move, coming to the mass meeting is a way to signal that you do not accept management’s sub-par offer. This isn’t a standoff about a few dollars in your paycheck: it’s a battle about whether

New York is going to pay for public higher education. In 1972, the top full professor and HDU salary was worth $147,000 in current dollars. Now the top salary is $83,507 — a drop of 36.4% in real terms. Other CUNY salaries have declined in value even more. Those figures tell a story of refusal to invest in the people we entrusted with public higher education at a time when higher education is virtually a prerequisite for a decent life.

Say ‘no’ to a contract that devalues our work

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Say ‘no’ to a contract that devalues our work
Modern poetry and grievance policy

Charles Molesworth is a professor of English at Queens College. He earned a BA from the University of St. Thomas, in Houston, Texas, and a PhD in English from SUNY Buffalo in 1968. He came to Queens College in 1967, and has taught there ever since.

Molesworth served as department chair for nine years and is the author of several books, including two volumes of poetry and works on Marianne Moore, Gary Snyder and Donald Barthelme. He is also active in the PSC, and currently serves as chair of the union’s Grievance Policy Committee. He lives with his wife Carol in Forest Hills, Queens; the two celebrated their 40th anniversary in July. Molesworth spoke with Dania Rayendra.

What first drew you to CUNY? Everyone I went to graduate school with applied to CUNY’s senior colleges. They were thought of as good-paying jobs, and very rigorous — that is, you had to publish or perish. Of all the public universities in the country, the City University was seen as one of the most desirable.

What do you teach? Mostly literary theory and modern poetry. Literary theory is very philosophical and I’ve always been interested in philosophy, so I gravitated toward theory because of that. And modern poetry has interested me since I was an undergraduate, reading T.S. Eliot and Marianne Moore.

In your research, what are you working on now? I’m currently writing a biography of Alain Locke, an African American philosopher, critic, and one of the founders of the Harlem Renaissance. His archives are very large — 200 boxes of material — and they’re at Howard University in Washington, DC. I got a PSC/CUNY research grant to go and study the archive in June. This January, I’ll be a fellow at the American Academy in Berlin, and I’ll be using the fellowship to complete my book. It’s being published by the University of Chicago.

I say this not to blow my own horn, but to let people know you can both do union work and do scholarly research. That is really important.

Just to dilate on that for a moment.... One of the real advantages that we have in the academy is being able to pursue several different important interests at the same time, in the same career. You can have a life in the public arena, and you can also maintain in the same career. You can have a life in different important interests at the same time, and knowledge, but I do share their interests in wine and in contemporary art. It is great fun.

What do you like best about teaching at Queens? I like the students a lot. I used to be chair of the department, so I would conduct searches. And everybody who came as a job candidate was impressed by the diversity of the students. I think some of us inside CUNY take that for granted. It really is a very special experience to teach a class made up of people from such different backgrounds.

What do you like least? I dislike college presidents who could do good with very little effort, but fail to do so. Because they’re so distracted by a need to raise funds, and often lack a real interest in faculty research, most college presidents are drags on the system. Make sure you don’t say ‘drags on the system.’ [laughs] Some-where between a drag and a dreg, they’re pretty, pretty — uh, unhelpful, let’s say.

Did you come in 1967 expecting to be a union activist? No, there was no union then! It was a tea party. So in a sense, both of my hobbies are really important. One of the real advantages that we have in the academy is being able to pursue several different important interests at the same time, in the same career. You can have a life in the public arena, and you can also maintain in the same career. You can have a life in different important interests at the same time, and knowledge, but I do share their interests in wine and in contemporary art. It is great fun.