Since September PSC members have been working to elect Senator Barack Obama the next president of the United States. The PSC had one of the first NY labor phone banks up and running. Members called other union members in swing states, mostly Pennsylvania, about supporting Obama and getting to the polls.

In addition to the phone banks, the PSC sent buses to Pennsylvania on three weekends in October. More than two hundred members had taken part by mid-October. Above, Marguerite Spence, a continuing education adjunct at Queens College, talks with a Philadelphia voter.
Union leader on race & election

Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer and former president of the United Mine Workers Union, spoke at the Steelworkers convention on July 1 about racism and the role of unions in the campaign. The speech has received attention online – with more than 430,000 views on YouTube – and in discussions in the labor movement. An excerpt:

You see brothers and sisters, there’s not a single good reason for any worker – especially any union member – to vote against Barack Obama. There’s only one really bad reason to vote against him: because he’s not white.

And I want to talk about that because I saw that for myself during the Pennsylvania primary. I went back home to vote in Nemicolai and I ran into a woman I’d known for years. She was active in Democratic politics when I was still in grade school.

We got to talking and I asked...

Vote for Obama on the Working Families line

@ On November 4, New York ballots will list Barack Obama and other Democratic Party candidates on two lines. In addition to being listed on Row A, they will also appear on Row E, the Working Families Party (WFP) line. For PSC members inclined to vote for Obama (very much including my self), casting our ballots on Row E allows us to express a preference for a progressive candidate without simultaneously registering an endorsement for a major party that is deeply enmeshed in the corporate culture. Voting the WFP ticket helps build a party that aims to represent the political interests of New York’s working people.

The WFP has steadily strengthened its influence in the political arena. In last year’s race for governor, Elliot Spitzer amassed 165,000 votes on the WFP line, more than three times what the party first received in 1998. Last year the WFP attracted more votes than the Republicans in several assembly districts in the Bronx and Brooklyn.

At times, the WFP has presented independent candidates or provided Democrats with the winning margin. It has fought for pro-labor legislation, leading a successful campaign to increase the state minimum wage in 2004.

Please seriously consider voting for Obama on Row E, and alert your family, friends and co-workers to this progressive option.

Gerald Meyer Hostos Community College

Paterson’s wrong choice

@ It is outrageous that Governor Paterson could find no better new trustee for the CUNY Board than the anti-labor lawyer Peter S. Pantaleo. The article in the September Clarion states this clearly: this man’s specialty is corporate labor law – and if a client asks, his firm will do everything possible to prevent unionization among the company’s employees.

Write to Clarion

Letters must be less than 200 words and are subject to editing.

Vote for Obama on the Working Families line

Part-timers: Who you gonna call?

From left: Nick Cruz (PSC staff) and part-time organizers Bill Rooney (KCC), Kay Neal (York), Michael Batson (CS), Linda Hart (QCC), and PSC Part-Time Personnel Officer Diane Mensa were among those who gathered for a workshop as part of the union’s focus on local, campus-based organizing this academic year. A list of part-time organizers is at www.psc-cuny.org/PTOrganizers.htm. Contact yours to help fight for everything from pay parity to computers in your office.

Paterson’s wrong choice

@ It is outrageous that Governor Paterson could find no better new trustee for the CUNY Board than the anti-labor lawyer Peter S. Pantaleo. The article in the September Clarion states this clearly: this man’s specialty is corporate labor law – and if a client asks, his firm will do everything possible to prevent unionization among the company’s employees.

Write to Clarion

Letters must be less than 200 words and are subject to editing.
PSC goes to Pennsylvania

By PAT ARNOW

In an election year with many surprises, one thing seems certain: Barack Obama will carry New York state, and it won’t be close. So hundreds of PSC members have volunteered to campaign in Pennsylvania, a state that could decide the outcome of the national election.

Daily phone banking and three Saturday bus trips organized by the PSC are part of organized labor’s push to help Obama win the presidential election on November 4. The two main labor federations, the AFL-CIO and Change to Win, have united to reach more than a million members of organized labor’s swing states.

Federal lawmakers are calling for a “blank-check bailout” of the financial industry. PSC President Barbara Bowen, who also joined the Philadelphia canvassing. “But there is no question about which candidate is more supportive of access to higher education and the rights of workers. The PSC is working for Obama both to ensure his election and to build a broader movement for progressive policies.”

Ron Hayduk, associate professor of political science at BMCC, recalled one Pennsylvania union member who laid it all out. “He said that this election is a moment, but the struggle is for a lifetime,” Hayduk said. “For him, the most important result of this election was organizing people to become active in the political process – registering to vote, getting active in their union and their community.”

Working to win state for Obama

Call for regulation & oversight

By DANA RAJENDRA

More than a thousand union members rallied across the street from the New York Stock Exchange on September 25 as Congress debated the shape of the next federal economic stimulus plan. PSC President Barbara Bowen was one of several labor leaders who encouraged the New York Central Labor Council to call an emergency protest to voice opposition to the Bush administration’s proposal as a “blank-check bailout” for Wall Street.

Union leaders and members demanded that Congress include more accountability, oversight and regulation, plus an equity stake for taxpayers in any banks that receive assistance. They also demanded help for the average homeowner and wage-earner and stimulate measures to keep a deepening recession from sliding into depression.

NO MORE MISTAKES

“We can’t afford any more mistakes from this administration,” AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka told the crowd. “We must put working families first in line.” He also called for consequences for “the perpetrators of this disaster.”

Many other union leaders join Sweeney at the rally, including Bowen and AFT President Randi Weingarten. Jesse Jackson also appeared.

“Keep hearing that we have to sign this blank check because Wall Street firms are too big to fail,” Bowen told the crowd. “Why isn’t national healthcare too big to fail? Why isn’t public education too big to fail? And why wasn’t New Orleans too big to fail? Because when it comes to the life and death of working people, no money can be found.”

Union members from across New York City and the US agreed. Tyrone Wilson, an IAM member from Minneapolis, said that he and about 30 Northwest coworkers flew in to join the rally. “I’m going to make the rich richer and the poor and middle classes poorer,” he argued.

Union leaders realize in all fairness that something has to be done, but it has to include the people who are suffering around this country,” said Murray Morrisey, executive vice president of RWDSU/UFCW Local 338.

New York municipal workers voiced their frustration. “If I gamble away my money, no one bails me out!” said Vanessa Smith, a CWA Local 1180 member. “If I go to Atlantic City and lose all my money – no one helps me buy groceries!”

DINVESTMENT

“This crisis is a direct consequence of the deregulation” of the last 20 years, said Gary Goff, first vice president of AFSCME Local 287. “All the things that were part of the New Deal to prevent this sort of economic meltdown from happening have been eroded.”

The PSC contingent convened in front of the union’s central office at 61 Broadway, and members stood outside the building in protest. “I came because I’m very upset about the bailout,” said Sybil Shaver, an adjunct faculty member at City Tech and Brooklyn College. “This is what happens when people refuse to invest in the public good,” said Ashley Dawson, who teaches at CSI and the Graduate Center.

The rally made local and national headlines in mainstream and union media, and portions of Bowen’s speech were broadcast on CNN.

The bailout package that Congress eventually passed did include some reform measures demanded by the labor movement – including more oversight – but lacked many others. The final legislation “will make Main Street as We Know It.” A deep and sustained recovery, he argued, will require the promise of change becomes the change we really need.”
CUNY gives raises to top execs

By PETER HOGNESS and KARAH WOODWARD

On September 22, the CUNY Board of Trustees approved pay increases for vice chairmen and college presidents that ranged from $7,067 to $11,218, adding new college presidents and paying off their retirement benefits out-of-pocket. Most got five-figure increases, for pay hikes of 5 to 6%. The highest paid vice chairman is Allan Doran, the University’s chief operating officer, whose $13,183 raise brings his salary to $78,847 per year. The next highest is Top Vice Chairman for Legal Affairs Frederick Schaffer, who is now paid $253,050 after a raise of $12,050.

Presidents get up to 5.5%

The lowest-paid vice chairman is VC for Student Development Carrie Moore, now earning $200,304 after a $7,704 boost. Moore was one of three vice chairmen to receive an additional $5,000 bonus, which is not added to base pay.

EXEC PAY

College presidents received smaller raises than executives at 800th Street. Only three of 18 got more than $10,000, and in percentage terms all but a few got between 4 and 5.5%. At $78,061, Gregory Williams of City College remains CUNY’s highest-paid college president. His $14,235 raise, or 5.5%, was far by the largest, in both percentage and absolute terms.

Williams may in fact receive considerably more. In the past, he has also received a paycheck from the CUNY Research Foundation (CRF). In 2005-2006 academic year, the last period for which figures are publicly available, Williams was paid an additional $85,313 by the RF, plus $70,613 for “expense account and other allowances.” Though Williams sits on the RF board, the foundation has stated that he “did not receive compensation for serving on the board, but rather for his activities for the RF.”

CUNY Director of Communications and Marketing Michael Arena declined to respond to questions from Clarion about whether Williams or other top CUNY administrators currently receive extra pay from the RF. A portion of Chancellor Goldstein’s salary was similarly paid by the RF from 2001 until 2006, but all his pay now comes from tax-levy funds.

Reside Williams, the two college presidents whose raises exceeded $10,000 were Kathleen Wal- dron of Baruch ($11,218, for a salary of $260,563) and Brook- lyn College’s Christoph Kim- mich ($10,534, for annual pay of $224,610, a 4.5% increase in both cases.

The smallest increases among presidents went to Carolyn Williams of Bronx Community College ($1,867, with a $209,869 salary) Edison Jack- son of Medgar Evers College ($7,461, and annual pay of $220,460) and Dolores Fernández of Hostos CC ($7,723, for a new salary of $201,058). This amounts to raises of 5.5% for Williams and Jackson, and 8% for Fernández.

ALMOST DOUBLED

Since Goldstein was hired as chan- cellor in 1999 his pay has almost doubled, rising from $250,000 to $450,000 today. His other compensation, as re- ported last year by the Chronicle of Higher Education, includes a $80,000 housing allowance, payment of “club dues,” and a car and driver.

The latest increase came in two parts: a retroactive increase of $25,000 covering the period of Octo- ber 1, 2007 through September 30, 2008, and another $50,000 effective 10/1/08. Goldstein’s last raise was in October 2006, while presidents and vice chan- cellors got their last in- crease in September 2007.

All the raises were de- scribed as “performance-based,” and the board singled out the chancellor for special praise. “It is clear that Chancel- lor Goldstein’s performance continues to be of the highest rank,” the board stated. In explaining their decision, the trustees argued that the increase was “consistent with data from comparable institutions,” and cited the heads of Rutgers, Uni- versity of Maryland, Columbia and NYU as examples.

A full list of the raises for CUNY’s top executives is on the web at www.psc-cuny.org/ExecRaises 2008.htm.

LABOR

IN BRIEF

Strike against a sour deal

Some 16,000 Colombian workers, members of the National Union of Sugarcane Cutters, have been on strike since September 15.

The cutters receive poverty wages for 14-hour work days and seven-day weeks under dangerous conditions and pay for their health and retirement benefits out-of-pocket. Their employers, government-promoted “cooperatives” that sell cane to large mills and ethanol plants, are not obligated to bargain with the union.

Utility workers back single-payer plan

The Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA) began the 19th international union to endorse HR 676, the bill for single-payer health insurance introduced by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.).

HR 676 would expand upon the existing Medicare system to cover every person in the United States for all necessary medical care including prescription drugs, preventive care, dental vision, chiropractic and long term care without co-payments or deductibles. All US residents and residents of US territories would be covered regardless of employment, income or health care status. HR 676 would still save billions annually by eliminating the high overhead and profits of the private health insurance in- dustry.

HR 676 has been endorsed by 466 union organizations – including the PSC – in 49 states, includ- ing 116 Central Labor Councils and Area Labor Federations.

Fiterman Hall stuck without City funds

Bloomberg won’t match State PSC levy funds

By KARAH WOODWARD

On September 10, 500 students, facul- ty and staff from Borough of Manhattan Community College de- manded that the City provide its share of the funding needed to re- place BMCC’s Fiterman Hall, which was damaged beyond repair in the 9/11 attacks. The rally on West Broadway was orga- nized to commemorate the 15th anniversary of Miles and Shirley Fiterman’s gift of the building to BMCC.

The wrecked structure loomed in the background as PSC Chapter Chair Rebecca Hill, union President Barbara Bowen and BMCC President Antonio Pérez took turns at the podium. City Councilmembers Charles Barron and Alan Gerson also spoke and called for the City to do its part.

$70 MILLION SHORT

CUNY is slated to provide $143 million to pay for Fiterman to be de- molished and then replaced, with the City and State to share the re- maining $182 million cost. Albany al- located $91 million in its budget this year, but required that the City match these funds in order to re- place BMCC’s Fiterman Hall, which was damaged beyond repair in the 9/11 attacks. The rally on West Broadway was orga- nized to commemorate the 15th anniversary of Miles and Shirley Fiterman’s gift of the building to BMCC.

The wrecked structure loomed in the background as PSC Chapter Chair Rebecca Hill, union President Barbara Bowen and BMCC President Antonio Pérez took turns at the podium. City Councilmembers Charles Barron and Alan Gerson also spoke and called for the City to do its part.

$70 MILLION SHORT

CUNY is slated to provide $143 million to pay for Fiterman to be de- molished and then replaced, with the City and State to share the re- maining $182 million cost. Albany al- located $91 million in its budget this year, but required that the City match these funds in order to re- place BMCC’s Fiterman Hall, which was damaged beyond repair in the 9/11 attacks. The rally on West Broadway was orga- nized to commemorate the 15th anniversary of Miles and Shirley Fiterman’s gift of the building to BMCC.

The wrecked structure loomed in the background as PSC Chapter Chair Rebecca Hill, union President Barbara Bowen and BMCC President Antonio Pérez took turns at the podium. City Councilmembers Charles Barron and Alan Gerson also spoke and called for the City to do its part.

$70 MILLION SHORT

CUNY is slated to provide $143 million to pay for Fiterman to be de- molished and then replaced, with the City and State to share the re- maining $182 million cost. Albany al- located $91 million in its budget this year, but required that the City match these funds in order to re- place BMCC’s Fiterman Hall, which was damaged beyond repair in the 9/11 attacks. The rally on West Broadway was orga- nized to commemorate the 15th anniversary of Miles and Shirley Fiterman’s gift of the building to BMCC.

The wrecked structure loomed in the background as PSC Chapter Chair Rebecca Hill, union President Barbara Bowen and BMCC President Antonio Pérez took turns at the podium. City Councilmembers Charles Barron and Alan Gerson also spoke and called for the City to do its part.

$70 MILLION SHORT

CUNY is slated to provide $143 million to pay for Fiterman to be de- molished and then replaced, with the City and State to share the re- maining $182 million cost. Albany al- located $91 million in its budget this year, but required that the City match these funds in order to re- place BMCC’s Fiterman Hall, which was damaged beyond repair in the 9/11 attacks. The rally on West Broadway was orga- nized to commemorate the 15th anniversary of Miles and Shirley Fiterman’s gift of the building to BMCC.

The wrecked structure loomed in the background as PSC Chapter Chair Rebecca Hill, union President Barbara Bowen and BMCC President Antonio Pérez took turns at the podium. City Councilmembers Charles Barron and Alan Gerson also spoke and called for the City to do its part.

$70 MILLION SHORT

CUNY is slated to provide $143 million to pay for Fiterman to be de- molished and then replaced, with the City and State to share the re- maining $182 million cost. Albany al- located $91 million in its budget this year, but required that the City match these funds in order to re- place BMCC’s Fiterman Hall, which was damaged beyond repair in the 9/11 attacks. The rally on West Broadway was orga- nized to commemorate the 15th anniversary of Miles and Shirley Fiterman’s gift of the building to BMCC.

The wrecked structure loomed in the background as PSC Chapter Chair Rebecca Hill, union President Barbara Bowen and BMCC President Antonio Pérez took turns at the podium. City Councilmembers Charles Barron and Alan Gerson also spoke and called for the City to do its part.
By DANIA RAJENDRA

Unions, social service agencies and community groups are opposing threatened City and State budget cuts through a coalition called “One New York.”

“The PSC is participating in the coalition because we want to stop these cuts,” said PSC Treasurer Michael Fabricant. “No single union or community organization can do that on its own. A larger, collaborative effort will enlarge our power and increase the possibility of turning some of these cuts around.”

The approximately 90 organizations in the coalition include unions like the Federation of Teachers and DC37 and community and social service groups like Education Voters of New York and the University Settlement House.

Students oppose tuition increase

By KARAH WOODWARD

Top CUNY administrators have made it clear that they will seek a tuition increase in next year’s budget. They have not tried to draw public attention to this proposal, but students are already voicing concern and opposition.

“It’s huge for me – I’m a full-time student and I need the money,” said Sameen Farooq, a student at Brooklyn Community College. “It’s going to help me continue going to school.”

“It’s a public university, and here on campus you can already see people struggling economically,” Jason Jere-mias, chair of the Student Conference at Lehman College, told the Riverdale Press. “If we don’t re-...you’re going to watch students be recycled into poverty.”

NET LOSS

Advocates for a tuition hike often portray it as regrettable necessity, a way to ease CUNY’s chronic shortage of funds. But historically tuition hikes and budget cuts have turned out to be two sides of the same coin.

“It looks good on paper, but what has happened in the past is that the school then reduces its funding of CUNY, in the amount of the tuition hike or more,” said Bob Cermele, chair of the PSC chapter at City Tech. “So what the students give with one hand, the City and State take back with the other.”

The result has been a net reduction in CUNY’s resources. City University raised tuition three times in the 1990s – yet by the end of the decade, CUNY had $280 million less in total funds.

In 1990, 20% of CUNY’s operating budget came from students’ tuition payments. By 2006, that figure was 41%, CUNY students have already absorbed an across-the-board increase in their technology fee this semester, which rose 33% for full-time students, from $37.50 to $50 and for part-time students from $37.50 to $50.

“The record of the last two decades is clear: the State has not done its share,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen. “Adjusted for inflation, New York State’s spending in public higher education fell by 28% between 1987 and 2007. That’s the worst record of any state. It’s specious to argue that students should – or could – fill a gap that will prevent me from graduating on time.”

“If you cut public universities, and here on campus you can already see people struggling economically,” Jason Jere-mias, chair of the Student Conference at Lehman College, told the Riverdale Press. “If we don’t re-...you’re going to watch students be recycled into poverty.”

AFFORDABILITY

Keeping CUNY affordable is a pri-ority for NYPIRG, the New York Public Interest Research Group. “We certainly don’t like the idea of tuition hikes,” said Fran Clark of NYPIRG.

“$800 million in cuts have hit SUNY and CUNY in just the last six months. We are urging no more cuts – it’s time to invest in affordable higher education.”

The twin threats of a tuition hike and budget cuts emerged as key issues at a September organizing workshop offered by the United States Student Association in con-junction with the PSC. “We brought this up because we are all reading about the national crisis going on and how it will affect New York State and CUNY,” said Sameen Farooq, a stu-dent at Brooklyn College and one of about 30 students from five CUNY campuses who took part.

Lydia Vinas, a student activist from City Tech, said that her classmates are mostly unaware of CUNY’s plans to raise tuition. “When they realize that their rights are at risk they want to get involved and do things to fight tuition in-creases,” Vinas said.

Many who attended are now working with the union on the post-card campaign. Allen, who is Treasurer of the Student Senate at Bronx Community College, said that a stack of the postcards are kept in the Senate office, and students often walk in to pick up cards or bring back ones that have been completed.

Opposition to a tuition hike was a theme of a September 22 demonstration at the CUNY Graduate Center, organized by the newly formed group CUNY Contingents Unit. About 50 people, a mix of part-time faculty, graduate students and undergradu-ates, marched to Governor Paterson’s office and listed their three demands: restoration of funding; a moratorium on mid-year cuts; and stop plans to deregulate tuition and end CUNY’s two-tier labor system.

ON THE EDGE

“Most CUNY students already live on the edge,” said David Skinner, an adjutant in political science at Hunter who joined the march. “Working, tak-ing care of loved ones while trying to

get an education. Paterson’s budget cuts will only make it worse.”

When CUNY management ar-gues for “a rational tuition policy,” it argues that students who cannot af-ford it will be “held harmless” thanks to financial aid. “That’s a myth,” responded PSC Secretary Arthurine DeSola. “TAP already falls far short of the need for working adults, part-time students and thousands of immigrants. It will not cover every student, and it will close the doors to thousands.”

“For many students, $50, $100 or $200 can shut the doors of opportu-nity,” said Nelson Reynoso, director of counseling at Bronx Community College and the PSC chapter’s stu-dent liaison. Students say, “I cannot re-register because I owe $200.”

The hardest thing is to see these talent-ed students, who could make such contributions to society, be denied because we could not keep our fund- ing or maintain the cost of tuition.”

PSC members interested in working with student activists should contact Kate Pfeifredner at 212-344-152. For postcards, contact Chris Aikin at caikin@pscmall.org. A list of tabling times on each campus, plus budget updates, is at www.psc-cuny.org/budget/2008.htm.
CUNY IN BRIEF

Retiree gets MacArthur award

A retired CUNY professor is one recipient of this year’s MacArthur Foundation Fellowship known as the “genius grant.” Distinguished professor emerita Mary Alice Pica, 71, received her PhD at CUNY in 1970 and taught at Hunter and the Graduate Center until 2003, when she retired. She is a medical historian who studies the impact of medical theory and practice on Renaissance society, culture and religion.

Her “erudite and insightful works have opened up new areas of inquiry,” the foundation says on its website.

“I am deeply appreciative. I was completely overwhelmed,” said Sirois. The award will allow her to make trips to Europe and access the libraries and historical resources necessary for her work, she said.

Her book, “History, Medicine, and the Traditions of Renaissance Learning,” was published last year.

The $500,000 award will be distributed over five years from the John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Sirois is one of 25 fellows named this year.

“I Keffie NY” event held at Medgar Evers College

The French Embassy held part of its “I Keffie NY” festival at Medgar Evers College – the only CUNY campus to have an event. “Keffie is French-Arabic slang for “being crazy about,” and the festival celebrated French urban culture. Medgar Evers hosted a film presentation and panel discussion on French and American hip-hop cultures.

The embassy chose the school because of its location in the heart of Brooklyn, as well as its predominately African-American student body. It is one of the few historically black colleges in the North.

Education from the Inside, Out

SUNY College at Old Westbury will host a one-day forum on Nov. 13 on restoring public funding to increase access to higher education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. “Education from the Inside, Out” is presented by the College and Community Partnership. The event will feature presentations by the Department of New York and the Correctional Association of New York.

Panelists include: Assemblymembers John D. Dusseau, Jo Anne Gluck and CCF Executive Director Vi- vian Nixon among others. For more information see www.correctionalassociation.org/news/HIGHER_Ed_Forum.htm

By KARAH WOODWARD

In 2007, one in 99 adults in the United States was incarcerated – the highest rate of any nation in the world.

Keeping 2.3 million people behind bars costs US taxpayers about $60 billion each year, and high recidivism rates are one reason those numbers are so large. Within three years of release, 67% of former prisoners are re-arrested and 52% are re-incarcerated.

One cost-effective way to help former prisoners stay out of jail is to provide them with access to higher education while still in prison. “College education for prisoners is life transforming,” said Dr. Michelle Fine, distinguished professor of psychology at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Fine’s study of inmates in a New York women’s prison found that 76% of those who took college classes were four times more likely to remain out of prison over a three-year period after release. More than 15 other studies have also linked college study behind bars with lower rates of reincarceration. The size of the effect may vary, the studies have different strengths and weaknesses, but almost all research points in the same direction.

“If we know this and we know this works, why isn’t every college program in every prison?” asked Sean Pica, executive director of Hudson Link, a prisoner education program serving inmates at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. Such programs in fact are scarce. Though CUNY helps many former inmates reenter society, it offers no college programs for men and women currently in prison. The reasons are bound up with the politics of crime, where an emphasis on punishment over rehabilitation has ruled for the last few decades. Those who work in prison education are hopeful, however, that this is beginning to change.

PUNISHMENT VS. REHABILITATION

For almost 25 years, the federal government provided Pell Grants for all students in financial need, including those serving prison sentences. From 1970 until 1994 incarcerated students were eligible to receive federal tuition assistance. Higher education programs extended throughout the nation’s prison system, with 550 college programs in 45 states.

Then in 1994, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act was passed by Congress and signed by President Clinton. This overturned a section of the Higher Education Act of 1965 by eliminating prisoner eligibility for Federal Grants.

The number of programs nationwide dropped to fewer than 10. In New York State there were nearly 70 post-secondary prison programs in April 1994. Within four months, only four remained.

In 1995 New York’s Governor Pataki elimi- nated the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) for incarcerated individuals and barred the use of public funds for college programs in prison.

“At that point in time, it was believed that politicians got elected to office by being tough on crime,” said Fine.

Thirteen years later, post-second- ary prison education at the national level is a shell of its former self. In that landscape, Pica said that New York State is doing better than most.

Today there are 16 college programs within the 69 fa- cilities of the New York State Department of Cor- rectional Services (DOCS). All are coordinated with private colleges and universi- ties, and most rely upon private funding.

Many of the supportive faculty and advocates are from public institutions, but in contrast with states such as North Car-olina or Texas, public colleges in New York are not institutionally involved.

Today about 1% of New York prison- ers are enrolled in on-site pro- grams of higher education. College programs originally spread through New York state prison facilities in response to prisoner demands for improved living conditions in the wake of the Attica uprising of 1971. In 1973, former At- tica inmates transferred to Green Haven Correctional Facility in Poughkeepsie worked with prison administrators and community members to start a bachelor’s de- gree program with Marist College.

Other institutions followed suit. When programs were cut due to the funding restrictions of the mid-1990s, it was again through prisoner advocacy that higher education slowly began to return. Prisoners at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and, later, at Sing Sing petitioned for college degree programs at their respective facilities after student aid for prisoners was eliminated. Bed- ford Hills started offering a private- ly funded degree program in 1997. The Hudson Link degree program at Sing Sing began in 2000, also funded by private donations and grants.

According to Pica, none of the Hudson Link graduates has returned to prison. “Our programs at Sing and are shattering reincarceration numbers all over the country,” he said. As someone who went to prison at age 16, Pica has witnessed the transformative results of educa- tion firsthand. By the time he left at age 33, he had acquired his GED and bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Af- ter release he earned a second mas- ter’s degree at the Hunter School of Social Work.

POSITIVE EFFECTS

Bedford Hills, New York’s only maximum security women’s prison, has one of the best known college programs across the country, called College Bound. Affiliated with Mary- mount Manhattan College, it has served as a model for other state programs including Hudson Link, which partners with Mercy College.

The study of the program at Bed- ford Hills, titled “Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum Secu- rity Prison,” completed in 2001, was undertaken by a participatory re- search team that included seven women prisoners in Bedford and five researchers from the Graduate Cen- ter at CUNY. A three-year reedivism study, conducted by the New York State DOCS, found a recidivism rate of 7.7% among the 274 inmates who took college courses, compared to 29.9% among 2,001 who did not. Participants in the college program were also far less likely to violate parole: only 1.1% did so, compared to 17.5% of those with no involvement in college study (http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/changing_minds.pdf).

Selection bias is of course a poten- tial issue and hard to control for in this kind of research. But in a cau- tious review of the literature on all types of prison education, Gerald Gaes, former director of the Office of Research and Evaluation at the Fed- eral Bureau of Prisons, concluded that programs “are effective in controlling for stronger motivation or other selec- tion effects” still demonstrated re- duction in recidivism and positive effects on labor market outcomes.”

Effects shown in these studies were not as large, Gaes told a conference on prisoner education at John Jay last spring – but he noted that “even small effect sizes can produce sub- stantial net cost-benefits.”

The involved component of the Bedford Hills study “explicitly sought evidence that could dis- criminate between spurious and authen- tic” effects, Gaes wrote, interviewing women who had dropped out of the program or who were dissatisfied with it. But the in- terviews, with both prisoners and guards, still pointed to a range of strong positive effects. Guards were unanimous in the opinion that the college program improved safety and discipline inside the prison walls – even those guards who were not supportive of college for the women conceded the positive effects on the women, their children and the prison disciplinary environment.

SUPPORT

Beyond the recidivism numbers, the interviews in the Bedford Hills study indicated that college of college study changed women’s sense of themselves and their relationships with others, including guards and oth-

“For these inmates a college edu- cation is a lifetime, a new identity, a new self,” said Fine, who worked with college programs at Bedford Hills from 1994 to 2001. “People really need a strong liberal arts education, not only vocational training. They need to read, write, think and reflect.”

A broader education, she told Clarion, allows students to develop critical and reflective thinking skills, to see, as one student noted, “my own intellectual signature for the first time.” Learning from mistakes and revising, increasing one’s ability to understand different points of view, understanding the past and reimaging the future, and taking responsibility for the crime and for tomorrow are skills that apply to life beyond the prison walls.

The current program at Bedford Hills started in 1997, three years after its predecessor shut down due to the loss of public funding. One of the lead- ers of the effort was Regina Peruggi, Samuel Farrell’s program serves at-risk youth, including many at Rikers Island.

The impact of college... Higher ed linked to lower recidivism rates...
after President George W. Bush's release in December of last year. Each semester about 200
students benefit from its services, which help clients bridge the gap between prison release and a college
program. Tutoring, mentoring and help with college applications are among its offerings. A stipend
helps cover the cost of participants’ books if they maintain their academic performance and work to give
back to the community.

“They use college as part of their plan to re-integrate into society because it’s a real anchor and helps
with their identity – they can say I am a student,” explained Renay Babenstein, the program’s director. To
date, the recidivism rate for College Initiative participants is just 2.2%.

Other programs at CUNY are the College and Community Fellowship (CCF) at the Graduate Cen-
ter, the Prisoner Reentry Institute at John Jay College and CUNY CATCH, a youth program that oper-
ates out of three college campuses.

At the Graduate Center, the College and Community Fellowship began in 2000. CCF was founded to serve
formerly incarcerated women to help them overcome barriers to transition into work and school. Close to 200 people have benefited from the program, with more than 30 going on to obtain post-secondary degrees. In its 8 years of operation, less than 2% of program particip-
ants have returned to prison.

Today CCF has about 125 participants, with about 50 enrolled at CUNY and the rest at other area
schools.

CCF’s director, Vivian Nixon, is herself an alumna of the program. “In today’s world, education will be the
only way that people can stop the cycle,” said Nixon. “Places like CI and CCF need to be everywhere.”

“Reentry is a popular buzzword,” she added. “But it’s superficial until we understand that the way for peo-
ple to stay out of prison is through educating people for jobs that will sustain a different way of life.”

The Prisoner Reentry Institute (PRI) was established in 2005 at John Jay and is housed within the college’s Office of Continuing and Professional Studies. Rather than providing direct services to ex-of-
fenders, PRI’s mission is to promote education and public policy that support successful reentry into society for for-
mer prisoners.

One example is the training and technical assistance programs for CUNY Career Placement Centers that PRI
recently initiated. After hearing from College Initiative and CCF students that there was a gap in services, PRI began working with the career centers to help advisors provide
better career counseling to ex-of-
fenders.

“The Career Placement Centers lacked the expertise to work with this population,” explained Debbie Mukamal, the institute’s director. “And when these students went to employment programs outside of the colleges, such as the Fortune So-
ciety, where most of the clients do not have college degrees, the pro-
grames were unfamiliar with how to deal with an educated base. We are providing training curriculum and making resources available to help them do a better job.”

“Education of all kinds is an excel-

lent vehicle for re-integration,” said Mukamal, noting that not everyone is ready for college and many for-
mer inmates will need pre-college preparation.

Such pre-college preparation is one of the missions of the CUNY Col-
lege Alliance for Transitional Career Help (CUNY CAST), a program based at LaGuardia Community Col-
lege, Bronx CC and Medgar Evers College. In collaboration with the NYC Department of Education, CUNY CAST works with adoles-
cents in City jails, on probation or just at risk, among both high school stu-
dents and dropouts. The program provides outreach and career coun-
seling, with an emphasis on GED test preparation and pre-college prep.

“What we are doing in the pro-
gram is teaching transitional skills,” explained Samuel Farrell, adminis-
istrative director of CUNY CAST. In operation for the last 15 years, it is the longest running program at CUNY that works with prisoners and ex-of-
fenders. Many of its participants at any given time are at Rikers’ Island, making CUNY CAST the only pro-
gram at City University to provide educational services directly to peo-
ple currently behind bars.

MISSION

“In all the years we have offered GED classes, we have not needed to do outreach,” Farrell said. “The fact that we don’t have to do any out-
reach to get students shows that the need is great.”

These four CUNY programs pro-
vide vital assistance to those they serve. But college classes for prison inmates are still not part of the mix, and Pine argues that this needs to change. “Our mission is to educate all the people of the city,” said Pine, adding that more than 55% of inmates in New York State prisons are New York City residents. “CUNY has the intellectual and political know-how to build such a program.”

“A couple of years ago we tried to initiate a program to teach a course at John Jay College and Lincoln Correctional Facility, a New York State work release prison in Man-
hattan, that would be comprised of both John Jay College undergradu-
ates and former prisoners,” said PRI’s Debbie Mukamal. The course didn’t get off the ground, she said, but the discussions led the New York State DOCS and CUNY to ex-
plore new ways they might collabora-
te to provide higher education to people with criminal records.

MODELS

Manfred Philip, chair of the Uni-
versity Faculty Senate, would like to see CUNY take the lead by seeking State funding for higher education in prison. State law needs to change, he said, to enable CUNY to play the role that it should. The University Faculty Senate advocated for this proposal to be included in the Uni-
versity’s 2006-2012 Master Plan. But to Philip’s disappointment, the idea was not incorporated in the doc-
ument.

“Governor Pataki arranged it so that State money could not be used,” said Philip. “But if it were accom-
plished, those individuals should be able to be productive and have an oppor-
tunity to go beyond what got them there in the first place. This would really help CUNY fulfill its mission of being an institution in the public interest.”

New York State provides one
model of how post-secondary educa-
tion can be provided throughout a state prison system. A state-spon-
sored tuition is one of the keys to success in North Carolina,” accord-
ing to a paper presented by Jeanne Coates and Michelle Tobert at last spring’s prisoner education con-
ference at John Jay.

PRO EDUCATION

“The State does not make specific appropriations for prison education; rather, it treats inmates enrolled in college courses the same as non-incar-
cerated students,” wrote Contar-
di, director of programs for the Higher Education Forum, and Tobert, a senior researcher at MPR Associates. The cost of prison-
ers’ tuition is then covered by a “pro-
tocol funding structure,” including both waivers and education grants.

New York has yet to move in that direction, but prisoner education ad-
vocates are hopeful. They see signs of a shift away from a purely puni-
tive approach in the growing use of drug courts and other alternative sentencing measures and the recent partial reform of New York’s Rock-
efuller drug laws.

“Right now people in parole and corrections are very pro-education,” said the College Initiative’s Benay Rubenstein. “It’s the first time in a long time that there has been a collaboration on all parts – colleges, parole officers and prison staff. I’ve been waiting for this for 15 years.”

Fine argues that making college widely available to all prisoners would also mean a substantial in-
vestment in prevention and sup-
porting families. “We save dollars when we keep people out of prison,” she adds. “And when we return we create stronger communities,” said Fine.

“There are lots of good reasons,” says Mukamal, “why now the time is right.”

Michelle Fine of the Graduate Center co-authored a study on how college transforms prisoners’ lives.

change

The results included a more posi-
tive attitude within the prison, Peruggi said, with 60% of inmates in-
volved in some type of education. “The program makes a real differ-
ence. It’s starting to show just how much it can do in the lives of women.”

For years the impact of College Bound was little known outside of Bedford Hills, but Peruggi credits Fine’s research with changing that. “Her study was very important to show what college can offer you,” she said.

“Governor Pataki arranged it so that State money could not be used,” said Philip. “But if it were accom-
plished, those individuals should be able to be productive and have an opportu-
ity to go beyond what got them there in the first place. This would really help CUNY fulfill its mission of being an institution in the public interest.”

New York State provides one
model of how post-secondary educa-
tion can be provided throughout a state prison system. A state-spon-
sored tuition is one of the keys to success in North Carolina,” accord-
ing to a paper presented by Jeanne Coates and Michelle Tobert at last spring’s prisoner education con-
ference at John Jay.

PRO EDUCATION

“The State does not make specific appropriations for prison education; rather, it treats inmates enrolled in college courses the same as non-incar-
cerated students,” wrote Contar-
di, director of programs for the Higher Education Forum, and Tobert, a senior researcher at MPR Associates. The cost of prison-
ers’ tuition is then covered by a “pro-
tocol funding structure,” including both waivers and education grants.

New York has yet to move in that direction, but prisoner education ad-
vocates are hopeful. They see signs of a shift away from a purely puni-
tive approach in the growing use of drug courts and other alternative sentencing measures and the recent partial reform of New York’s Rock-
efuller drug laws.

“Right now people in parole and corrections are very pro-education,” said the College Initiative’s Benay Rubenstein. “It’s the first time in a long time that there has been a collaboration on all parts – colleges, parole officers and prison staff. I’ve been waiting for this for 15 years.”

Fine argues that making college widely available to all prisoners would also mean a substantial in-
vestment in prevention and sup-
porting families. “We save dollars when we keep people out of prison,” she adds. “And when we return we create stronger communities,” said Fine.

“There are lots of good reasons,” says Mukamal, “why now the time is right.”

College classes can open doors to a new outlook.

College classes can open doors to a new outlook.

Michelle Fine of the Graduate Center co-authored a study on how college transforms prisoners’ lives.
November is also the “open enrollment” month for doctoral student employees to enroll in the NYS Student Health Insurance Program scheduled to take effect in January 2009. Doctoral students employed at CUNY who are not currently funds or teaching or non-teaching adjuncts who did not attend the Graduate Center information sessions in Oc-
tober should contact Finance Officer John-
son in the GC Human Resources Office for details. In particular, doc-
torally employed at CUNY community colleges should contact
Johnson directly to ensure cover-
age. Doctoral students employed as adjuncts will no longer be eligible for
coverage through the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund.

What your pension system has to say

Like many U.S. workers, PSC mem-
ers have been concerned about their
retirement funds because of the
recent volatility in the stock
market. Below are links to state-
ments from different pension
systems to which PSC members be-
long, with a few short excerpts.
Many of these links are accessible
directly from the PSC website’s
pensions page, at www.psc-cuny.org/
pensions.htm.

New York State United Teachers
(NYSUT), the PSC’s state affiliate,
spoke directly to the most basic
issue in the October 3 issue of New
York Teacher. “All of the pension
funds that cover NYSUT members remain
adequately funded to meet their
obligations to current and future re-
tirees,” NYSUT’s statement said.
Members’ questions will vary de-
pending on their choice of pension
system, so start by finding your own
system below.

TRS: An update from the Teach-
ers Retirement System of the City
of New York (TRS) is on the TRS
website, at www.trs.nyc.ny.us/htm/
inews.htm.

TRS members’ benefits are also
State Constitution guarantees [that]
no public retirement allowance will be
decreased once it is implement-
ed,” a NYSUT statement reminded
members.

In addition to its basic defined-
benefit pension plan, which pays re-
tirees a set amount based on their
prior service and their pay in the pe-
riod preceding retirement, TRS also
offers optional investment choices
through its Passport Funds. These
are discussed in the statement
above or can be found in more
detail in the April 2008 Clarion,
on page 6 (see www.psc-cuny.org/com-
munications.htm).

TIAA-CREF: CUNY’s Optional Re-
tirement Program includes all the
University’s defined-contribution
plans; the largest of the ORP plans
is TIAA-CREF. A basic Q&A from
TIAA-CREF about recent market
changes is at www.tiaa-cref.org/sup-
port/help/financial-str
ong.html.

MetLife: Also part of the ORP,
MetLife did not have a statement
can be found on its homepage at
www.metlife.com or this page
for individual benefit information
(http://tinyurl.com/6dy7v).

What’s happening to the market

During this time, you may switch
benefits or drop any in the
benefits period preceding retirement, TRS also

PSC supports Stella D’Oro strikers

The 15 percent owned by the
Community College District, has
disclosed losses related to troubled financial
markets. Only a minimal amount (approximately one-third of
Guardian’s total investment portfolio) was
impaired by credit losses related to troubled financial
institutions.”

MetLife: Also part of the ORP,
MetLife did not have a statement
disclosed losses related to troubled financial

MetLife: Also part of the ORP,
MetLife did not have a statement
posted on its homepage as Clarion
to press/publications/
market_monitor.html

Guardian: Another ORP plan, the
Guardian, has posted a message
from President and CEO Dennis
Manning at www.theguardian
life.com/company_info/financial_str
ong.html.

Heath plan change period

By PATRICK SMITH
PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund

All non-retired PSC-CUNY Welfare
Fund members (full-time and ad-
junct) and other eligible employees
may change their basic health in-
surance coverage during this fall’s
health benefits transfer period, No-
ember 3 to 28. Because 2008 is an
even-numbered year, retirees are
also eligible to participate.

During this time, you may switch
from your current basic health plan
to any other plan for which you are
eligible. You may also add or drop
optional rider coverage to your pre-
sent plan. All changes will become

effective January 1, 2009.

In order to make transfers, addi-
tions or drops in basic health cover-
age, full-time faculty and staff must
submit a new health benefits appli-
cation, available from campus

The WF website, www.pscunywf.org,
is the place for benefits info.

For more information on the transfer pe-
riod and the benefits available to
PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund members,
please visit the Welfare Fund web-

November 3-28, retirees included

November 3-28, retirees included

November 3-28, retirees included

November 3-28, retirees included
Organizing power for the long run

By MIKE FABRICANT
PSC Treasurer
and CHRIS AKIN
PSC Director of Organizing

The developing financial and economic crisis will put our union to the test. A storm is coming, and CUNY is in its path. To protect our members and our University, we need to strengthen the PSC. The union has a plan – and we ask you to join us.

The strongest unions are the ones with expansive and deep member participation. The power of a union comes from a web of human connection, from building robust and enduring relationships in every part of the bargaining unit. In the coming months the PSC will engage members chapter by chapter, working to solve local problems that if unattended can damage both working and learning conditions. This local organizing, one relationship at a time, is essential to expanding the collective power of the PSC and its members over the next few years.

At the same time, to stand against the stiff budget-cutting wind blowing toward CUNY, we need strong alliances with groups who share our goals for the University. The twin objectives of our organizing are to sink deep roots on campus and build broad alliances across the city and state. Over time, this can cohere into a powerful force not only of resisting the budget cuts, but also advancing a program for substantially greater investment in CUNY.

The financial meltdown: The drastic contraction of credit and the stock market’s roller-coaster ride have prompted government to construct a seat-of-the-pants bailout plan for financial corporations that are tanking. We can expect that State and City revenue will decline financially preferable to raise taxes on the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share. This is an especially salient point because of their history of involvement in public education struggles and/or their chronic underfunding.

Union has a plan – and we ask you to join us.

Developing a statewide alliance for public higher education: An important step in enlarging the power of the PSC is building alliances with other CUNY stakeholders. The PSC is taking on this work in at least three arenas. We’ve been working with the United University Professions (our SUNY sister union), with NYSTUT and, where our positions converge, with CUNY management to build a unified front for securing the resources that CUNY needs. Between 1987 and 2007, New York State ranked 50th out of 50 states in growth in state investment in public higher education, with a 26% decline in spending. Clearly, we must do much better. But any serious effort to resist cuts and reverse this trend requires a statewide presence, advocating day in and day out for substantial investment in public higher education.

Collaborating with students: Any effort to build a broad-based alliance for CUNY must involve students. CUNY students number nearly a quarter million and if organized can be a powerful force for increased public investment. Recently the PSC developed a program with the United States Student Association to train student organizers on a cross-section of campuses (see page 12). Faculty members will work with these students to help structure organizing initiatives at each college, strengthening students’ capacity to fight for their interests, together we can form a more powerful alliance.

Building community and labor solidarity: The PSC’s Solidarity Committee has led a series of conversations with community-based organizations, local unions and churches on campus and community to public higher education. The organizations were selected because of their history of involvement in public education struggles and/or their record of involvement with the PSC. These preliminary conversations are expected to lay the groundwork for new forms of solidarity and common action, so that we can win the budget battles for CUNY and for public investment in New York State.

But organizing with other stakeholders will only be effective if we have successfully organized our own members. We have large challenges ahead of us that may seem daunting, but can be dealt with. The key is to approach these tasks in a systematic way and from the ground up. With an involved and active membership on every campus, we can bring more strength to a broad alliance.

Chapter organizing: “The only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time.” The only way to build the union’s organizing power is one conversation at a time. To build the PSC’s organizational power, the union will connect individual members with colleagues to address issues that affect them every day, from health and safety concerns to departmental workload. The goal is to engage every member of the PSC on the workplace issues that matter to them most. Local organizing can begin quite modestly or with only one or two dedicated members in a given department. For example, if unsafe lab conditions have been a persistent problem in a biology department, a couple of PSC members can initiate organizing that leads to action. A logical first step would be to meet with several colleagues in the department and devise a systematic way of discussing lab concerns with every union member who is affected: full-time and part-time, both faculty and staff.

The next step might be for the PSC chapter to support small, organized actions to bring attention to the conditions: college senate resolutions, a release of a report from the CEP chapter about lab dangers, a demonstration to highlight the problem, etc. Out of this work, two or three department leaders might begin to direct a chapter-based campaign to remedy the problem.

Whatever the details, effective organizing begins with one-on-one discussions and with faculty and staff identifying the issues that matter most to them. Over time, these small conversations and new member networks can yield greater power through expanded membership education and unified action. This trajectory, from conversation to developing a network to collective action, can ultimately win solutions. It may lead to a formal agreement in a labor-management meeting, or may simply spur long-delayed action by the administration once they start to feel the heat.

This approach has been key to the local victories we have already won, from restoring free speech on the campus e-mail system at LaGuardia, to fixing the fame foods in science labs at John Jay. Our task now is to build on these examples in a more systematic way.

Our capacity for this kind of local organizing will increase as more chapters establish a structure of departmental representatives. PSC chapters at Bronx Community College, Brooklyn College and elsewhere have begun ambitious plans and they have been successful.

Working on such a local scale may seem three steps removed from the financial crisis and Albany’s decisions on CUNY’s budget – but in reality it is part of the same fight.

PERSISTENT PROBLEMS

On every CUNY campus there are persistent problems that have come to be seen as “normal” simply because they have existed for so long without complaint. Maybe you teach in a classroom that’s freezing cold every winter. If no one says anything or if all you do is “go through the motions,” you can be sure that things will not just go on as they are.

“Small” problems also have much bigger implications: they can be powerful examples of how CUNY’s chronic underfunding shortchanges students. A campaign on a local campus problem might be the first step towards the attention of a community newspaper to show how budget decisions in Albany are felt in Flushing or Flushing.

With the PSC’s new borough-based legislative committees, chapter activists can invite local elected officials to tour their campus and see conditions firsthand.

By helping more muscle to deal with the “small” issues that face all members every day at work, we can build the strength we need for the huge budget fights ahead. With strong networks of organized PSC members in each chapter in this academic year and joining this enlarged base of activists to external alliance work, we’ll be in a stronger position in the upcoming city- and state-wide struggles around CUNY funding, taxes and public services.

HIGH STAKES

To protect our University during this period of fiscal crisis, and to ultimately produce the public investment that CUNY deserves, we must build an unprecedented power for tax reform and for public investment. Thousands of PSC members need to take part in the defense of public higher education – and the only way to ensure a good showing on the larger stage is to start small at the local level.

Before we can get 3,000 to a rally to defend CUNY funding, we need 300 at a campus rally to fix a local problem or 30 people to take a “small” action to fix a problem in one department. We need to build our strength one day and one PSC relationship at a time.

That work begins with you and the people you work with. That’s how we begin to prepare for the time to get involved with the PSC. Please join us in this critically important academic work: defending and improving our working conditions and the conditions in which our students learn.

To get involved in organizing on your campus, contact your chapter chair (www.psc-cuny.org/chapterdirectory.htm).

Local issues and the big picture
**PUBLIC INVESTMENT**

**N needs vision, not cuts**

By ERROL LOUIS

As the financial crisis deepens and whole sectors of the economy slow to a crawl, a dangerous myth is dominating public discussion about what we should do next. Politicians, economists and conservative think-tank types are shouting from the rooftops that federal, state and local governments all need to cut spending.

That wrongheaded approach will only make matters worse. Right now, when our economy is on the brink of disaster, is precisely when we need sensible spending, delivered on an emergency basis – and only government is big enough to handle the task.

And yet everyone from Gov. Paterson to Mayor Bloomberg is talking about chopping government services next year, as layoffs and shuttered businesses result in fewer tax dollars flowing into the public treasury.

The politicians and pundits have it all wrong, according to economist James Galbraith of the University of Texas at Austin.

“The wave of spending cuts that are being proposed in New York and California and elsewhere to try and cope with collapsing property tax revenues is totally dysfunctional,” he told me. “It is the kind of thing that will accelerate the decline of the economy and really runs the risk of putting us in a severe recession with many, many lost jobs.”

The mechanism is easy to grasp. Adding government layoffs to the army of 750,000 mostly private-sector workers who have already lost jobs this year will leave more households with reduced incomes, causing more foreclosures and bankruptcies.

**REDUCTIONS**

And trimming vital services that leave streets unpaved and, unclean and neighborhoods unsafe, risks replaying the worst days of the fiscal crisis, when middle-class families fled the city and state – and took their tax dollars with them. Instead of talking all austerity all the time, government officials should be unveiling smart, job-producing programs designed to get people working and help tide families over until the economy recovers.

Now would be a good time for state and local politicians to press for a National Infrastructure Bank – an idea that’s been kicking around for decades – to provide federal funding for bridges, roads, sewers, airports, railways, schools, levees and other improvements.

Digital infrastructure projects, like nationwide access to broadband internet, are also critically important in today’s economy.

This would create jobs and improve commerce and quality of life for everyone. The same is true for investments in job-training programs.

But even before the current clamor for cuts, the Bush administration slashed workforce training dollars by more than $2 billion over the past six years, according to a recent report by the Center for an Urban Future, a Manhattan-based think tank.

New York City has especially suffered.

Now is the time to create jobs.

**LABOR LAW**

The right to choose a union

By THOMAS FRANK

This is the season for hypocrisy spewing. Pandits have pounced on the moral contradiction presented by the pregnant but unwed daughter of the right’s latest family-values champion. They have figured out that riding the Amtrak to Delaware doesn’t automatically make Joe Biden a regular guy.

But even when discussing personal failings of the mighty, it’s easy to overlook the great, yawning hypocrisies that make up the very substance of political life. Take the venomous backlash against the Employee Free Choice Act, a bit of union-backed legislation that might allow labor to start reverting decades of decline. Almost wherever there is a close race for a Senate seat, you can see TV commercials assailing the initiative in the most strident terms.

Currently, employees at a given workplace can form a union after a majority of them choose to do so in an election. The new legislation would allow them to do it after a majority of them sign cards. This “card check” system would make it easier to start unions, and naturally it is heavily opposed by the business community, which – get this – doesn’t much like organized labor.

DISTASTE

But that distaste isn’t the real issue, to hear card check’s opponents tell it. What offends, rather, is the threat that card check poses to democracy when this is not just one thing, but something low and ugly like money. This is a fight for principle, for the American Way. It is about the sacredness of the secret ballot, about every individual’s right to express him or herself freely in elections at work.

The Employee Freedom Action Committee, a “nonpartisan” group based in Washington, DC, declares that by fighting card check it is “protecting your right to vote on the job.” Meanwhile, the Coalition for a Democratic Workplace, a creature of the Chamber of Commerce and other business groups, is running a series of TV commercials showing us the dark side of the melodrama, suggesting that card check will permit the intimidation of workers by union hoodlums and even worse.

Threats to move the operation abroad if the union wins the election; compulsory meetings; one-on-one meetings; 70% sent out “anti-union letters”; 55% showed “anti-union videos”; 34% gave “bribes or special favors” to workers to vote against the union; 92% of companies facing union elections made employees attend weekly “supervisor one-on-one” meetings; 70% sent out “anti-union letters”; 35% showed “anti-union videos”; 34% gave “bribes or special favors” to anti-union employees; and 25% simply fired pro-union employees. If American business was its own country, it would probably come in for sanctions from the State Department.

SECRET’S OUT

There has been no such thing as a secret ballot for the 20 years I’ve been studying elections,” Brandenburger told me a few days ago. “Employers know exactly which way an employee is going to vote.”

...But it’s more than the hypocrisy that should concern us, and it’s even more than the ongoing violation of people’s rights, human or civil. The destruction of the labor movement by tactics like these is a big part of the reason why wage-earners no longer rise as the economy grows, why some day soon we will speak of the great middle-class nation in the past tense.

**Corporations don’t like ‘card check’ bill.**

Among its findings: In 51% of union organizing drives, management made some sort of threat to close its operation down if the union won the election. Ninety-two percent of companies facing union elections made employees attend “captive audience meetings”; 67% had employees attend weekly “supervisor one-on-one” meetings; 70% sent out “anti-union letters”; 35% showed “anti-union videos”; 34% gave “bribes or special favors” to anti-union employees; and 25% simply fired pro-union employees. If American business was its own country, it would probably come in for sanctions from the State Department.

**SECRET’S OUT**
What role does racial animus play?

By FRANK DEALE
CUNY School of Law

The November 4 election can be viewed from many different levels of perception. Many Republic-an supporters of John McCain will vote for him because they wish to maintain the reins of power seized by the Bush administration eight years ago. Many Democratic supporters of Barack Obama will cast their ballot for him because they see eight years of war, greed, lies, corruption and illegality.

But many others will see this election as part of something much bigger. They will see it as an opportunity for the voters of America to demonstrate to the world that they aim to reject the 400-year legacy of racial discrimination against black Americans and to select the best candidate for the most powerful job in the world without regard for that person’s race. This weighty opportunity will follow millions of people into the voting booth on November 4, and the entire world will anxiously await the outcome.

OPPORTUNITY

We know that a small percentage of voters will reject Obama because he is not white, their minds made up long before their ballots are cast. Some are visceral believers in white supremacy and have been the subject of news reports on the distribution of racist campaign literature, threats of violence against Obama campaign workers and threats against the candidate. Fortunately, unless the election is unreasonably close, the outcome will not be determined by this relatively tiny cohort.

There is another, larger, group of white voters who do not support white supremacy, but are hesitant to back Obama. Those who are working and middle class stand to benefit enormously from an end to Republican govern-ance of the country, especially on economic policy. The fact that they are nonetheless undecided is even more fascinating. Obama has led many to suspect that these voters experience ‘‘apehrone over having a black man at the helm’’ and persuade,’’ Lewis said, ‘‘Sen. McCain and Romney would have their votes attributed to a desire to preserve class privileges – a universally accepted use of the ballot – and not to racism. Discussion of racially driven voting has focused almost exclusively on undecided working and middle class white voters, who would benefit from Obama’s policies but may lean toward McCain. There is something wrong with a public discourse that attributes ulterior motives in voting behavior to whites who have suffered most under Bush, while accepting the voting motive of those who have most benefited.

The question of what role racial animus plays in the electoral behavior of conserva-tive white elites is all the more relevant given that the Republican Party has not been a neutral bystander with regard to race bias in the voting public. Since the defeat of Jim Crow, white racial resentment has often been the Republican Party’s ticket to power. Hours after signing the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Lyndon Johnson said, ‘‘I think we just delivered the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come’’ – and he was right.

RACE-BASED FEARS

In both the South and the North, Republicans have often tapped into race-based fears through coded language, as in the infamous Willie Horton ad of 1988. Like voting regulations that appear racially neutral but in fact disadvantage minorities, on the surface it was an ad about crime. Just below the sur-face, it was an appeal to prejudice. Designed as an appeal to unconscious racism, this kind of attack allows the targeted voter to tell themselves that what they are really concerned about is not race but something else, such as crime or welfare.

The South has continued this tradition of trying to have it both ways. Its first ad of the general election proclaimed that McCain would be ‘‘the American president Americans have been waiting for.’’ In a campaign against a man named Barack Hussein Obama, whose father came from Kenya, the nature of this appeal is clear, even if implicit. The same can be said of Sarah Palin’s charge that Obama is ‘‘not one of us,’’ and the overall effort to portray Obama as differ-ent, foreign dangers. All this takes place when the landscape of American racism is shifting, with growing Latino and Asian populations that may make white people a minority within two generations.

DIVISIONS

This time around, older racial fears are linked to the post-9/11 wave of hostility toward Arabs and Muslims, and ads and speeches portraying Obama as a friend of ‘‘terrorists’’ have pushed these buttons. ‘‘Palin’s words avoid repulsing voters with overt racism,’’ commented a writer for the Associated Press. ‘‘But is there another sub-text for creating the false image of a black presidential nominee ‘palling around with terrorists’ while warning that Muslims ‘don’t see their America?’’

Crowds at Republican rallies have responded to these efforts. Obama’s name incen-tivatingly sparked shouts of ‘‘traitor,’’ ‘‘terrorist,’’ ‘‘liar,’’ ‘‘treason’’ – even ‘‘off with his head,’’ ‘‘kill him’’ and (at a rally in Geor-gia) ‘‘bomb Obama.’’ At one event, racial epithets were hurled at a black member of a TV crew; at another, a McCain supporter responded to these efforts. Obama’s name in-creasingly sparked shouts of ‘‘traitor,’’ ‘‘terrorist,’’ ‘‘liar,’’ ‘‘treason’’ – even ‘‘off with his head,’’ ‘‘kill him’’ and (at a rally in Geor-gia) ‘‘bomb Obama.’’ At one event, racial epithets were hurled at a black member of a TV crew; at another, a McCain supporter declared she couldn’t trust Obama because ‘‘he’s an Arab.’’

For many, this reaction evokes the violent resistance to desegregation in decades past. On October 11, Rep. John Lewis declared that the McCain campaign was ‘‘seeding the seeds of hatred and division,’’ and the civil rights veteran urged them to change course. ‘‘As a people we have the power to influence and persuade,’’ Lewis said, ‘‘Sen. McCain and Gov. Palin are playing with fire, and if they are not careful, that fire will consume us all.’’

PROFOUND CHANGE

These open displays of hate support those who claim that there really is no unconscious bias if, after political campaign manipula-tion, it can so easily surface as ‘‘conscious’’ racism. It suggests, at least, that there is not a clear-cut separation between the two.

The harsh attacks on Obama did not seem to improve McCain’s standing in the polls, and many commentators declared that they had been counterproductive. Certainly these tactics cost McCain some votes while gaining others – but it was hard to be sure about the net result. The nation’s financial crisis has hurt McCain’s support so badly that it could be overwhelming other factors.

Appeals to racism have been a regular part of the American political lexicon because they win more votes than they lose, and this is not go-ing to change all at once or in a single election. But when that is no longer true, it will mean a huge change in the American electoral equation.

The column drew over 400 responses on Kristof’s blog, some of which charged proponents of this research of seeking to ‘‘guilt-trip’’ undecided whites into voting for Obama. But this was a minority position among responders. Overall, discussion of this research in the media may decrease the likelihood of unconscious racial voting by drawing more attention to it.

One problematic feature of this research of seeking to ‘‘guilt-trip’’ undecided whites into voting for Obama is pervasive; (3) implicit prejudice produces discrimi-nary behavior. Although not free from controversy, these studies serve to alert us that much work is needed to unearth hidden biases that drive our behavior when making ex-tremely important decisions.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

In polls, these potential voters cite other reasons for their choice, and those reasons may be the biggest factor in how their votes are cast. But if race prejudice is a significant factor for some, that could be enough to de-termine the outcome of the election.

Racism can affect elections in many, and sometimes subtle, ways. Voting rights litiga-tion has often identified structural barriers that appear neutral on their face but operate to dampen minority group participation and engagement in the electoral process. Exam-ples from the past include the poll tax and the literacy test, and at-large electoral schemes.

But while voting in election rights has had some success in utilizing social science tech-niques to understand and counteract govern-mental tactics to full electoral participation by all racial groups, none of these tools have been designed to assess racial bias expressed in the privacy of a voting booth.

In the context of employment discrimina-tion law, civil rights attorneys have relied on social science studies that seek to measure cognitive bias – subconscious racism – and how it affects real-world decision making. What they have discovered from studies of the Implicit Association Test and other sources is that (1) implicit prejudice is dis-tinct from explicit prejudice; (2) implicit prejudice is pervasive; (3) implicit prejudice typically operates beyond conscious control; and (4) implicit prejudice produces discrimiination against black Americans and to select the best candidate for the most powerful job in the world without regard for that person’s race. This weighty opportunity will follow millions of people into the voting booth on November 4, and the entire world will anxiously await the outcome.

We know that a small percentage of voters will reject Obama because he is not white, their minds made up long before their ballots are cast. Some are visceral believers in white supremacy and have been the subject of news reports on the distribution of racist campaign literature, threats of violence against Obama campaign workers and threats against the candidate. Fortunately, unless the election is unreasonably close, the outcome will not be determined by this relatively tiny cohort.

There is another, larger, group of white voters who do not support white supremacy, but are hesitant to back Obama. Those who are working and middle class stand to benefit enormously from an end to Republican govern-ance of the country, especially on economic policy. The fact that they are nonetheless undecided is even more fascinating. Obama has led many to suspect that these voters experience ‘‘apehrone over having a black man at the helm’’ and persuade,’’ Lewis said, ‘‘Sen. McCain and Romney would have their votes attributed to a desire to preserve class privileges – a universally accepted use of the ballot – and not to racism. Discussion of racially driven voting has focused almost exclusively on undecided working and middle class white voters, who would benefit from Obama’s policies but may lean toward McCain. There is something wrong with a public discourse that attributes ulterior motives in voting behavior to whites who have suffered most under Bush, while accepting the voting motive of those who have most benefited.

The question of what role racial animus plays in the electoral behavior of conserva-tive white elites is all the more relevant given that the Republican Party has not been a neutral bystander with regard to race bias in the voting public. Since the defeat of Jim Crow, white racial resentment has often been the Republican Party’s ticket to power. Hours after signing the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Lyndon Johnson said, ‘‘I think we just delivered the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come’’ – and he was right.

In both the South and the North, Republicans have often tapped into race-based fears through coded language, as in the infamous Willie Horton ad of 1988. Like voting regulations that appear racially neutral but in fact disadvantage minorities, on the surface it was an ad about crime. Just below the sur-face, it was an appeal to prejudice. Designed as an appeal to unconscious racism, this kind of attack allows the targeted voter to tell themselves that what they are really concerned about is not race but something else, such as crime or welfare.

The South has continued this tradition of trying to have it both ways. Its first ad of the general election proclaimed that McCain would be ‘‘the American president Americans have been waiting for.’’ In a campaign against a man named Barack Hussein Obama, whose father came from Kenya, the nature of this appeal is clear, even if implicit. The same can be said of Sarah Palin’s charge that Obama is ‘‘not one of us,’’ and the overall effort to portray Obama as differ-ent, foreign dangers. All this takes place when the landscape of American racism is shifting, with growing Latino and Asian populations that may make white people a minority within two generations.

These open displays of hate support those who claim that there really is no unconscious bias if, after political campaign manipula-tion, it can so easily surface as ‘‘conscious’’ racism. It suggests, at least, that there is not a clear-cut separation between the two.

The harsh attacks on Obama did not seem to improve McCain’s standing in the polls, and many commentators declared that they had been counterproductive. Certainly these tactics cost McCain some votes while gain-ing others – but it was hard to be sure about the net result. The nation’s financial crisis has hurt McCain’s support so badly that it could be overwhelming other factors.

Appeals to racism have been a regular part of the American political lexicon because they win more votes than they lose, and this is not go-ing to change all at once or in a single election. But when that is no longer true, it will mean a huge change in the American electoral equation.

Stanford study: racism might cost Obama 6%
This year the PSC is focused on local campus organizing and building alliances – and the Hostos chapter has started off with a bang.

In an energetic two-day outreach campaign, union activists worked with students and community members to gather 2,500 signatures on postcards against tuition hikes and budget cuts at City University. They also registered 173 voters at the South Bronx campus.

The group set up shop just outside the college on the Grand Concourse on September 24. The sounds of bachata music and a video presentation drew attention to a table loaded with cards, while union members and students approached passersby and asked if they’d like to support CUNY or register to vote.

A freestanding tent made the table hard to miss and helped create a welcoming atmosphere. A former Hostos student, Organizing Coordinator Sussie Lozada, secured the mock voting booth from another union, DC37, that her group has worked with in the past. NYCPP also pledged to call all newly registered voters on Election Day to remind them to get out and vote.

The two-day tabling event also had the support of the Hostos Student Government Association, and Colon said it provided an opportunity for the Hostos chapter to build a stronger relationship with student leadership. Students walked away from the table with hatchets of postcards calling for investment in CUNY that they can distribute to and collect from their classmates. The postcard campaign is an initiative of the PSC’s CUNY Rising project, which aims to foster alliances with students and community organizations.

RELATIONSHIPS

Sonia Maldonado, the Hostos PSC chapter’s new liaison to student organizers, recruited 10 students to join in the tabling effort. Maldonado told Clarion that whether students choose to get active depends on education about the political process. “If they don’t understand the impact that these cards can have, they will not get involved,” she explained. “But students can move anything ahead if they are organized and believe they can do it.”

POSTCARDS

“I will distribute them to my friends and approach other students on campus and get them to sign, because this affects all of us,” said Hostos student Yesmin Peña. If tuition is increased, “I don’t know how I will afford it,” she said. “I don’t get financial aid. When I was working, I was saving all the money I could.”

Péna was one of seven students from Hostos to attend the Grassroots Organizing Weekend (GROW), a training workshop jointly sponsored by the PSC and the United States Student Association in mid-September. Student activists from five CUNY campuses took part, and another session is planned for next semester.

STRONG TIES

“We can already see the effect of their receiving this training and wanting to be involved,” said Colon, noting that several students are now working on the CUNY Rising postcard campaign. Building close ties with students and the community is one key to a stronger union, Colon said. Meyer agreed, adding that this is a lesson taught by Hostos’s history.

“This college was saved because of the community,” said Meyer. In the mid-1970s, the City’s fiscal crisis led to a threat that the school would be closed. The Save Hostos movement involved the PSC, community groups and students in a successful campaign to keep the college open and later to win better facilities. (Meyer’s account of that struggle, in which he was deeply involved, is in the Summer 2006 Clarion at www.psc-cuny.org/communica
tions.htm.)

“Through the Save Hostos Coalition established strong relations with students and the community,” said Colon, “and we want to go back to that model.”

The chapter’s organizing push this semester emphasizes outreach to every affected constituency. At Hostos, that means that effective outreach to students has to include non-citizens. “At least half of our students are immigrants,” said Meyer. “If you have a campaign that leaves them out, then it doesn’t build unity.” So in addition to voter registration, the tables also distributed hundreds of pamphlets on naturalization to those interested in pursuing citizenship. “Then if students let us know they’re not citizens, we still have something to give them,” Meyer said. “And we have students non-citizens who help us.”

NETWORKS

For the Hostos chapter, broad outreach is not a substitute for getting faculty and staff more involved – it’s been a vehicle for it. “The days that we had the table, many faculty members were asking for cards and handing in cards,” said Kaplan. “I think faculty and staff were happy to be doing something with respect to budget cuts, to have an outlet for their frustration, and they were happy that the union was taking this initiative.”

POWER

Like several other chapters, the Hostos PSC chapter is starting to build a structure of departmental union representatives. The goal is for every department in the college to have someone who can serve as a contact person for union information and activity.

“We want to make sure people have information about the contract, and know that the union is committed to making the contract work,” said Felipe Pimentel, who will serve as union representative in the behavioral and social sciences department. “The idea is to have better communication,” he said, “to reach out beyond our core of activists and to build a better network.”

As the history of Hostos shows, a strong network means power.

Thousands of postcards collected

Lizette Colón (left) and her colleagues at Hostos collected thousands of postcards and registered new voters with the help of student allies.

15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

Gather ye postcards while ye may

Activists on every campus are collecting signed CUNY Rising postcards that call on Gov. Paterson, Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Goldstein to invest in CUNY with public dollars, not tuition hikes. Stop by the table on your campus and help out. If you can’t stay long, grab a stack to distribute among your colleagues and students. Signed cards should be returned by Nov. 14. The union will then take tens of thousands of postcards to Albany for the Nov. 18 special session considering proposed budget cuts, to remind legislators that New Yorkers depend on CUNY. (See www.psc-cuny.org/budget0809.htm for tabling schedule.)