Double-digit salary hikes
The Board of Trustees smiled on CUNY’s upper management, granting five-figure salary increases and $5,000 bonuses. The PSC has yet to see a financial offer.

PRO AND CON
Hillary Clinton for president?
In October, the AFT, the PSC’s parent union, announced its endorsement of Hillary Rodham Clinton for president in upcoming primaries.

CAUSE & EFFECT
The adjunct labor system
How does CUNY’s reliance on exploited part-timers affect the University as an institution? Academic freedom and research capacity are curtailed for all.

YOUR RIGHTS
Big win on evaluations
An arbitrator’s ruling affirms contract language requiring evaluations to consider a worker’s total performance. Evaluations cannot be based on a single factor.
Getting answers on Fiterman

In response to your writer’s questions on the deconstruction and deconstruction of the damaged Fiterman Hall and the construction of a new building, we described the transparent process undertaken by the University to keep the community fully informed partner in this complex process, including public meetings, website postings, e-mail alerts and paid newspaper advertising. This transparency included the issue of standpipe operations within the damaged structure. Indeed, our web postings informed the community in Spring 2007 (months before the tragic fire at the former Deutsche Bank building) that prior to the commencement of any remedial work, the standpipe system would be “tested and repaired, if necessary.” (Emphasis added).

At no time has it ever been reported that the standpipe was non-functioning. Yet, your writer ignored the public record and instead chose to misinform your readers by reporting that the standpipe system had been out of service, even after being advised in writing that the system is functional and has been routinely inspected by FDNY, among other agencies. As we move forward, we will continue to provide our community partners with information as it becomes available.

We all share and are focused on the common goals of having Fiterman Hall deconstructed and taken down, a new facility as safely and as quickly as possible.

Michael Arena
University Director of Communications and Marketing

Clarion’s editor responds: The article mentioned above can be found at www.psc-cuny.org/communications.htm, on page 8 of our October 2007 issue.

This letter does not mention that in September, one week before we went to press, we wrote to Michael Arena with ten specific questions about Fiterman Hall — including a question about the past status of the standpipe system. In response, and got a statement that did not answer any of our questions. (The exchange can be read in full at www.psc-cuny.org/FitermanQuestions.htm.)

This is a recurring problem with CUNY’s communications office — we ask direct questions which are ignored, and get a PR statement instead of direct answers.

We asked these questions in good faith, because they deal with serious issues on which our members need information. And we believe our reporting was accurate.

Our article did not state that the standpipe system had been out of service. We quoted Paul Stein, a member of the PSC Employees Federation who works across the street from Fiterman, who said that in his opinion the CUNY web posting ‘strongly suggested’ that the standpipes had been broken. We reported that Stein raised this question at a community meeting, and that the FDNY “inspected the standpipes the next day, and found them to be in working order.”

We have been routinely inspected by the FDNY and other agencies” — but “routinely” is an ambiguous word. Our question asked for a specific date, and conflicting reports over past inspections of the Deutsche Bank building show the importance of a specific answer. CUNY deserves credit for a better plan and a more open process than the unfolding disaster at the Deutsche Bank site. Our reporting reflected this distinction — but that does not mean that no further questions should be asked.

We asked our members, and have filed a request under New York’s Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) to obtain them.

Recognize CLTs

At the October 30 PSC mass meeting, CLTs were omitted from the analysis of wages and inflation and from the speakers’ panel. It was not explained that CLT wage statistics were omitted because of changes in CLT titles some years ago. Providing PLT wage statistics would have at least shown CLT consideration in the process — and if CLT wages had been mentioned, this could have further supported the PSC’s position.

Our current PSC officers have done more to increase CLT wages than any other PSC officers since the Legislative Conference, but they have not been able to ease restrictions on CLT promotions. This problem could have been addressed at the mass meeting when speaking of HEQ promotions or issues still to be accomplished.

Continual PSC omission of CLTs from public reference seems to imply that the CLT is a faculty-only group and that any problem could have been addressed at the mass meeting when speaking of HEQ promotions or issues still to be approached.

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Union leaders laid out a new, multi-contract strategy to nearly 1,000 members at the PSC’s October 30 mass meeting. The union’s goal, they said, is to fix CUNY’s most serious problems – salaries that are too low, a teaching load that is too high and an adjunct labor system that damages the entire University.

“It is a hard fight,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen. “But I believe that if we approach it in a way that is smart, strategic, unified and unafraid, we have a good chance to win.”

The crowd responded with lively and loud as members signaled that they were ready to take action. “There was a lot of energy here tonight,” Rebecca Hill of BMCC said after the meeting was over. “People are really committed to the City University of New York, and they want to see it do much better for the students, faculty and staff.”

The first presentation of the evening came from PSC First Vice President Steve London, on an issue that got everyone’s attention. “I am here to tell...the story of how our salaries have declined over the past 36 years,” London told the quiet crowd. In a series of six slides with jagged graphics, London showed how the inflation-adjusted value of CUNY salaries have nosedived since the 1970s.

**GASPS**

The audience gasped at several points, most loudly when London showed how the bottom step of the assistant professor pay scale has dropped 50% in real dollars over the last generation.

“All right,” he continued. “Let’s be honest, he said. “While we endure and make the best of these circumstances and we do serve our students well, we cannot do our best work and we students are not served when our salaries and working conditions are sub-standard.”

CUNY is now at a critical juncture, London argued, “We have become less competitive, just as we are attempting to hire a whole new generation of faculty.” He urged members to take on the fight to restore salaries, “so that we may rebuild CUNY as a great university. We owe this not only to ourselves, but to our students and to the generations of faculty and professional staff to come.

Members said later that while it was a shock to see the extent of the changes over time, the underlying reality was all too familiar.

“I know we are totally being screwed,” said Ruth Hertz, a science professor at BMCC. “But I was brought up union, and I know if you get people mobilized how powerful they can be.”

Members from different campuses across CUNY next took the stage, addressing key issues in the current contract fight. (See pages 6 and 7.)

Then union President Barbara Bowen presented the union’s contract strategy. Bowen described the union’s last two contracts as “Phase I,” in which the PSC had won “advances that many of us thought were impossible for CUNY.” These included increases in support for scholarships, paid office hours for many adjuncts, equity pay increases and a stabilized Welfare Fund. The gains of Phase I came from creativity at the bargaining table and “the organized force of the membership,” she said.

But while the PSC had “pushed hard against the limits of the contractual settlements offered by the City and State,” she said, it did not significantly exceed those bounds.

“We should be proud of what we were able to do together,” Bowen told members. “But I also want to be honest about what we did not do.” Those two contracts did not address what she named as the three most fundamental problems of CUNY: salary erosion, the adjunct labor system and an outsized teaching load.

**COSTLY FIXES**

Those problems will be very costly to fix, she warned – and that leaves the union with a choice of three alternatives.

First, Bowen said, “we could...accept that fixing CUNY’s larger structural problems is ruled out by the small size of the typical contract settlements in the City and State,” and seek only small, incremental progress within those limits.

Second, she said, “we could lie about how well CUNY is doing and pretend that everything is fine.” Members began laughing, and Bowen responded, “Oh, you recognize this approach?”

But then she turned serious again: “Or the third option: we could decide to fight.”

**FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!**

A voice called out “Yes!” from the back of the hall – and the audience burst into applause and started a staccato chant: “Fight! Fight! Fight!” The crowd was on its feet, chanting and clapping, and it was a couple of minutes before the room settled down.

Bowen went on to set out the goals of each part of this multi-contract campaign. In Phase II, which includes the next contract and possibly successive ones, she said the PSC will “tackle one and a half of the three big issues” – salary erosion and two aspects of the adjunct system, health insurance and job security. In Phase III, she said, the union will prioritize teaching load and equity in adjunct pay, as well as access to promotions for HEOs. Many other fights will be a critical part of these struggles, she said, but these issues will be at the center of union strategy. (See the sidebar and page 11 for more detail.)

The goal of the program was dedicated to organizing. PSC Treasurer Mike Fabricant, co-chair of the Contract Campaign Organizing Committee, said that an immediate focus will be to press CUNY management to take its regressions demands – including elimination of salary steps, removal of department chairs from the PSC, and weakening HEO job security – off the bargaining table. These demands “will not do with the economic decisions of the City and State,” said Bowen – and CUNY could withdraw them at any time.

**CAMPUS ACTIONS**

Local campus actions will be a priority during the rest of this semester, and PSC Secretary Arthurine DeSola urged chapters to meet with college presidents to voice the widespread frustration about these backward demands. Activists noted during the last contract fight, pressure on presidents over the Welfare Fund helped force CUNY management to change its stance.

“It was a wonderful meeting,” said George Brandon, a professor at CCNY’s Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education. “I think people are going to carry the energy from tonight into tomorrow, going to their campuses. I know I am.”

For ideas on what you can do, see page 2.

—With reporting by Stephanie Horvath.
What does it mean for a university when a majority of its faculty are underpaid part-timers with no job security? The “adjunctification” of CUNY affects the University as an institution in ways that are not always obvious, and Clarión will explore them in a series of articles. We begin with a look at academic freedom and the University’s capacity for research.

Adjuncts’ relationship to the question of academic freedom begins with one simple fact: CUNY maintains that adjuncts can be let go at the end of a semester for “any reason, or no reason at all.” Those blunt words came from CUNY General Counsel Frederick Schaffer – and while the union fights unfair firings of adjuncts in many specific cases, it is a fact that part-time faculty and staff at CUNY have no real job security.

Being subject to termination “at will” leaves adjuncts without any meaningful academic freedom – and this undermines academic freedom in the institution as a whole.

Adjuncts are never, ever in a position to take to tasks,” said Glenn Petersen, chair of sociology at Baruch. Academic freedom is fundamentally based on tenure, Petersen observed – it’s why tenure was created. “Yet half our courses are being taught by people who don’t have, and will never have, the kind of freedom we say is so fundamental. What does this mean for students’ education?

A recent report from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Academic Freedom in the 21st-Century College and University, concluded that “half the time, faculty positions from the tenure track and from shared governance structures is the greatest threat to academic freedom today.”

CORROBORATION

“So many of our colleagues are contingent, the corrosive effects bode ill for us all,” said Steve Leberstein, chair of the PSC’s Academic Freedom Committee and a retired full-timer.

Adjunct faculty members’ insecure status threatens their independence in the classroom. Leberstein recalled an incident early in his career, when he taught part-time at Brooklyn College. “Once,” he said, “when I was teaching an elective course about early modern European history, I was observed by a particular student who was a conservative who sharply criticized my use of a particular text – Arnold Hauer’s Church and State in Europe. It was the first time in my career that I felt I had no control over my classroom.

In this case, the department chair agreed to the student’s request, and the course had to be modified accordingly,” he said.

But part-time faculty find that their independence in the classroom is compromised in countless other ways that have little to do with political controversy – for example, in their assessment of student performance.

One adjunct – who, like most interviewed for this article, requested anonymity – recalled a conflict with a department chair about a student’s grade. At the time, the adjunct had taught in the same department for more than 20 years. “My student came to my office and I spent an hour with her, reviewing my extensive comments,” the adjunct told Clarion. The student then went to the department chair – who pressed the adjunct to reconsider. “I thought to myself, ‘It’s not worth fighting. I still thought I was right. But because I’m an adjunct, I’m not in a position to question a chair about anything."

CAN’T SPEAK

“I’ve been told I can’t fail anybody,” said one seven-year veteran of a different department, where there are almost twice as many part-time faculty as full-timers. She said she expects to fail some students this semester – and lose her job.

This part-timer pointed out that the lack of job security also limits adjuncts’ ability to speak out against infringements on the academic freedom of others, whether part-time or full-time. “My colleagues are afraid,” she told Clarion. “My colleague says, ‘I’d love to support you, but I can’t jeopardize my position.’"

Adjuncts also feel unable to criticize college or departmental policy – and not without reason. “Sometimes people who criticize the administration, suddenly there’s no course for them,” said one full-time faculty member at City College.

“Speaking out against the dean or the department chair – I wouldn’t do it,” said one long-serving adjunct. “People won’t say anything about class sizes being too big, out of fear they won’t get a course next semester.”

This is another way that lack of academic freedom hurts students and instructors. And for full-time professors gathering support for a policy change, the task is harder if half of their colleagues will always be silent.

A full solution to this problem, stated the AFT report, requires the restoration of full-time, tenure-track lines. But that is a long-term project – and the report emphasized that adjuncts need protections now.

In its current contract negotiations, the PSC has proposed that adjuncts with a certain number of years of service should earn a Certificate of Continuous Employment (CCE), a job security provision modeled on the CCE now granted to full-time lecturers. This would provide security and protection of academic freedom to adjuncts who have made long-term commitments to CUNY.

“Having to give reasons for terminations is critical to proving whether there is a violation of academic freedom,” said PSC Vice President for Part-time Personnel Marcia Newfield.

Shirley Rauscher, an adjunct at BMCC, agreed. “And the reason given may not be the real reason,” Rauscher added, “so we need due process so we can challenge it if necessary.”

What does it mean for CUNY that most of its faculty are not paid to do research? One obvious consequence is that less research gets done.

“About 50% of our courses are taught by adjuncts,” said Andy Beveridge, chair of the sociology department at Queens College. “We would need another 15 or more lines to get to 80% full-time – and it would make a massive difference.”

“Assuming we could hire people at reasonably competitive salaries,” Beveridge said, “we’d have a department that would be equivalent to most research universities – the equivalent, say, of the sociology department at UCLA. It would mean an incredible increase in our research activity, in both qualitative and the more quantitative approaches to sociology."

LESS TIME

The “adjunctification” of CUNY also means less time for research among the full-timers who remain – since they must shoulder a larger load of department service and other obligations. “Administratively, everybody within the department has to do twice as much work,” than if they were the department were fully staffed, said Pat Lloyd, an assistant professor of chemistry at Kingsborough.

Having fewer colleagues who are active researchers also means fewer opportunities for collaboration. Gerry Markowitz, a distinguished professor of history at John Jay, also teaches in an interdisciplinary studies program. In its early years, when its faculty were almost entirely full-time, the program gave birth to many research projects, Markowitz said.

“Today this is much less a part of the program than it was a generation ago,” he told Clarion. “Some of the adjuncts have continued in that tradition, but it’s been a lot harder for them, and they’ve done a lot harder job.”

Fewer opportunities for collaboration cost CUNY grant money, added Nick Freudenberg, a distinguished professor and director of its program in urban public health.

“Increasingly, biomedical research depends on putting together interdisciplinary teams of investigators,” he said. “Those academic institutions that have the broadest array of faculty researchers are most successful in putting together these teams and securing these grants.”

Students lose, too, in this equation. Fewer full-time faculty “hurts students by reducing the number of faculty researchers to mentor them,” said Freudenberg. Given that CUNY’s large student body is mainly students of color, this has national implications for diversiﬁcation – or the lack of it – in these ﬁelds.

Less research capacity means that CUNY produces less new knowledge – and one particular consequence is less knowledge about New York.

“If CUNY increased its commitment to hire faculty who do research,” said Freudenberg, “this would happen in urban sociology. First, the region would know more about itself. You’d get more information to the City and State, to faculty groups, to the business community.”

“Second,” he said, “studies about New York would become more important in the overall image of urban life in America. The New York voice isn’t there in the field as much as it should be. New York research is certainly going on at CUNY, but not enough.”

ADJUNCT SCHOLARS

As Markowitz noted, some adjuncts do research despite the odds, and the last PSC contract created an Adjunct/CET Professional Development Fund to support research and professional development among part-time faculty. Grants have ranged from $400 to $750, a meager sum in geology to an international conference on bilingual education, and the number and quality of applications have both been high, PSC staff said.

“We’re proud of these members’ research and encourage them to take advantage of this union-negotiated opportunity,” PSC President Barbara Bowen said. “But imagine how much research CUNY could produce if more members worked on full-time, tenure-track lines. Imagine how much richer our department conversations would be. Imagine how much more likely our students would learn during their time at CUNY.”

CUNY’s exploitation of underpaid, inexperienced faculty has damaged the University dramatically – and not for the better. “This is really what’s eroding CUNY,” said Beveridge. “It’s a real problem.”

The lack of job security even at CUNY’s expansion cost a lot, he said. “It’s not just for the sake of this program, it’s for the sake of all these students.”

With reporting by John Tarleton.
Christmas came early for CUNY vice chancellors on September 24, when the Board of Trustees awarded them salary increases that ranged as high as $21,071 per year. College presidents also saw their incomes rise, with most getting raises of nine or ten thousand dollars.

The pay hikes were announced just five days after the PSC-CUNY contract expired. Contract negotiations have been under way since February, but as Clarron went to press management had yet to propose any increases to the salary scale for CUNY’s thousands of faculty and professional staff. CUNY officials said they cannot make a financial offer until a pattern emerges in New York State’s bargaining with its employee unions—who that concern did not prevent top managers from getting five-figure raises.

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CUNY is not family friendly

KEENA LIPSITZ is an assistant professor of political science at Queens College:

You might have noticed on the video that I have a seven-month-old daughter. She is at home tonight with my husband, where she spent all day today and yesterday, because he teaches at a university that offers parental leave. So I’m here to make a point about why you should care about winning parental leave in this contract.

As a new mother and parental leave activist, I’ve heard a lot of maternity leave horror stories recently. I know a woman who had to take a leave a few days after she gave birth because she felt like she couldn’t ask for any help. I know another woman who had her child during her first year at CUNY and as a result was not covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act, so she lost her insurance when she took leave and had to pay $1,000 per month in COBRA payments, on top of not receiving a salary, so her family would have medical insurance.

I also know a woman who had her baby in the middle of the semester and because her chair didn’t want to deal with finding adjuncts to teach her courses in the middle of the semester, she gave her the whole semester off, which sounds like a pretty good deal.

TIME YOUR BABY

But I also know another woman in the same division and at the same school who actually timed her pregnancy for the beginning of the summer. How many women here have been told you should time your pregnancies? [Laughter] Mother Nature isn’t that cooperative sometimes. But she did, and she was finishing up grading when she was going into labor. And because she had timed her pregnancy properly she didn’t get any special deal.

So this is the reality of how maternity leave works in the CUNY system. It’s unfair, it’s unjust and it’s just plain behind the times. When I was on the job market, I interviewed at five schools – and of the five schools, public and private, CUNY was the only one that did not offer a semester of paid maternity leave, if not parental leave. Most of the other schools in the New York area – Columbia, NYU, the New School, Fordham – they all offer some form of paid parental leave.

KEENA LIPSITZ

Keena Lipsitz of Queens College

The point is, if you’re not moved to fight for parental leave by the human rights argument, if you’re not moved by the equity and basic fairness argument, then you should be moved by the recruitment and retention argument. How can CUNY hire the best and the brightest when it can’t convince potential hires that it’s a family-friendly place to work?

And last, but not least, think about our students. We owe it to them to guarantee that they’re going to have the same instructor throughout the semester. But the way the Family and Medical Leave Act works, they have to start the semester with one instructor and end with another. We owe it to them to provide continuity of instruction.

So please, if you care about social justice, if you care about gender equity, if you care about hiring the best at CUNY and if you care about the students, tell the administration we need a decent parental leave policy in this contract.

Other universities offer paid parental leave – but CUNY does not.

FRANK KIRKLAND, chair of the philosophy department at Hunter:

I have served as chairperson of the philosophy department at Hunter College for ten years. Of course I am concerned about CUNY’s demands to remove chairpersons from our union. This is not the first time that management has raised this demand. However, I believe this is the first time management has been strong and relentless in pursuing it at the bargaining table. The PSC has good reason to be strong in their efforts to remove this demand from the table. Removing chairpersons from the union would [make them] be held responsible for their students.

DONNA GILL is a higher education officer assistant (HEO) at Hunter College and a Cross-Campus Officer on the PSC Executive Council.

I’ve worked at Hunter College for 20 years, in various offices and various capacities – in the bursar’s office, the registrar’s office, financial aid. Many HEOs do similar work across the campus. But despite our hard work, day in and day out, we only receive job security, which is called 13.3b, after eight years. I like to call it “pseudo-tenure.” I call it pseudo-tenure because if you receive three unsatisfactory annual evaluations you can be terminated, even after 20 years. Now, in this round of bargaining, management wants to weaken this pseudo-tenure and make it easier for them to terminate HEOs.

So I believe that CUNY is headed in the wrong direction. It is the wrong direction for HEOs – and also for departments, for the college and most of all it’s the wrong direction for our students. Our students depend upon us to stick up for them. We work long and hard hours, even extra hours, to go the extra mile for them. Management does not want to pay for the extra hours we work, so we’ve actually had to take management to court just to get paid for our time.

I’m proud to be part of this union, pushing CUNY to do the right thing; the right thing for us, the right thing for the students and the right thing for the University. We cannot he nationally competitive and serve our students if we are overworked, underpaid and under-promoted.

In the HEO ranks, promotion does not exist. In order to be “re-classified,” you have to show that your job has significantly changed and become a higher-level position over the period that you’ve been there. Despite the fact that members’ jobs have changed a lot over the years, especially with increased use of computers, you still cannot get promoted.

STUCK

Case in point: on certain campuses we have members who were hired as an assistant to HEO, and 20 years later they are still an assistant to HEO. Their jobs have changed, but they’re stuck at the top of their salary scale – and you saw the assistant to HEO salary scale in Steve London’s presentation, so you know what kind of salaries we’re talking about. After 20 years on the job, and long before that, CUNY should recognize their growth with better titles and promotions, to make this a better place for the students and for ourselves.

As HEOs, we know that there’s a lot at stake in this round of bargaining. We are behind the union and the bargaining team 100%. We are enforcing our contract, and we are fighting for a fair contract settlement.

Job security and promotions for HEOs

CUNY members speak out

MARCA NEWFIELD, adjunct lecturer in English at BMCC and PSC vice president for part-time personnel:

Even though I’ve taught at BMCC for 20 years I can never be sure that I’ll have a job the next semester. Thousands of adjuncts serving this University for decades are in the same position. We know our departments, we know our subjects, we know how to guide and advise students and we care. I repeat, we care. And that’s why we stay here working for poverty wages, teaching ten courses a year for under $30,000 a year. CUNY would not have survived without us. Job security for adjuncts would be to everyone’s benefit. It ensures a more stable department, reduces the burden on chairs and full-time faculty members, and provides continuity for our students.

COSTAS PANAVOTAKIS, assistant professor of social science at City Tech and a PSC delegate:

So what’s management up to these days? They want to do away with the step system for faculty. They want to remove department chairs from the union. And they want to weaken job security for Higher Education Officers. These demands are unacceptable. These demands add up to a restructuring of CUNY that increases the administration’s power at the expense of those of us who do the real work that keeps this institution going. We have to mobilize on our campuses so that this does not happen.

Let’s stand up for our students. Let’s stand up for the CUNY of our dreams.

Donna Gill of Hunter College talks about HEO issues.

Clarion | November-December 2007
Parity in health benefits for adjuncts and grad assistants

NANCY THOMPSON is an adjunct lecturer at Medgar Evers College and City Tech and has taught English at Medgar Evers since 1989.

Brother and sister colleagues, my name is Nancy Thompson and I am proud to represent the adjuncts of Medgar Evers College. My CUNY nomenclature, Medgar Wiley Evers, was martyred during the civil rights struggle of the 1960s. He is a venerated ancestor to people all over this land because he stood for and died for equality, dignity and empowerment for all Americans, the vast majority of whom are people like ourselves, American workers.

ACHIEVEMENTS DISRESPECTED

Brother and sister colleagues, our University’s administration spent tens of thousands of dollars on a recent advertising campaign which celebrates the achievements of a few select faculty, because they want New Yorkers to believe that we are a great school, worthy of being a public university of the wealthiest and most influential city in the western hemisphere. And yet this same administration disrespects the daily achievements of the majority of their instructional staff – the men and women who work as adjuncts and graduate assistants, the American workers who teach and coach and guide and develop the skills and talents of the students we serve. We must study for years to achieve advanced degrees and publish and create new curricula, the same way our full-time colleagues do. We carry the “mother load” of course work for this University – and yet how is it that we are faced with retirements that include no health care coverage? And how is it that graduate students who work as adjunct instructors receive no coverage at all? The public University of the City of New York deserves to be, indeed must become, the great institution the administration and their Madison Avenue spinners want others to think it is. But honorable people know that greatness will never belong to this school until all its workers are treated with respect.

NYC INCLUSION

That is why in this round of talks the union is demanding the City include eligible part-timers in the New York City Health Benefits Program. [Applause] I call on you, brother and sister colleagues, to support your union in achieving victory. Write, call, sign the petitions, do whatever you must do to win that which is rightfully yours. Brother and sister colleagues, more than 40 years ago, Medgar Wiley Evers, a man who faced death every day, said to the world, “You can kill a man, but you can’t kill an idea.” Parity in health benefits is an idea whose time has come. Acting in strength and unity we will succeed in making that idea a reality. My name is Nancy Thompson and I thank you for your time.

“We face retirements that include no health care coverage.”

PENNY LEWIS is an instructor in sociology at Borough of Manhattan Community College and coordinator of the Writing Across the Curriculum program at BMCC.

No one I know came to CUNY for the money. [Laughter] But the lack of money is driving people away. In the three years I’ve taught here full-time I’ve seen literally dozens of our colleagues leave, including nearly a third of the recent hires in my department.

The conditions of scarcity that send new faculty walking are more complex than just those salaries and we’re all familiar with their general contours – an unmanageable workload, a lack of appreciation from many administrators, and, as some of my BMCC colleagues have named them, the “petty indignities” that we face everyday. Yet our low salaries put a number of us in the position of saying that CUNY management has us, and act as a tangible block on our ability to do our work well – let alone live our lives well.

UNAFFORDABLE

Last week I visited another department to encourage people to come [to the mass meeting] tonight, and I talked to a junior faculty member whom I’d never met before. He told me that he liked the idea of reassigned time for junior faculty research. But the problem was that if he took his reassigned time, he couldn’t teach an overload that same semester. An overload, for anyone here who doesn’t know, is an additional class on top of your basic course load. We already teach 27 hours at the community colleges, in classes that have grown so big they’re often filled beyond capacity. The reassigned time that we want should be a blessing for our research and our teaching. But my colleague – and there are others like him – feels he can’t afford it. He’s got a family, he lives in New York City, and he needs the money.

So because we don’t have the money, junior faculty give up reassigned time. We don’t attend conferences, we teach summers, we curtain or give up ambitious research, we take on other work for pay. We go into debt while teaching here, like my colleague who is just up for tenure who recently couldn’t afford to fix her car. Forget your roof, canal, preschool for your kids. It’s true.

EVERYONE LOSES

At CUNY we’re forced to make choices that breed cynicism. Students versus research, research versus money, money versus students, family versus everything else. Little by little, everyone loses. So CUNY loses too. Stressed out, overworked, underpaid junior faculty are not what I would put on a recruiting poster. [Applause] We have a revolving door of students, many of whom stick it out, but, at least at BMCC, most of whom leave.

A non-tenured faculty member told our college president at a recent meeting, “BMCC was not my school of last resort. I want to teach here. I want to be part of CUNY. I hope I can afford to stay.” Well, many can’t afford it, and morale is a problem for the people who stay. Morale is high when we can do our work well and when we’re recognized for it. And basically that’s what we’re fighting for in this contract. We’re fighting for the only retention plan for students and faculty that makes sense. Real salary increases and a long-term commitment to reverse decades of underfunding can make CUNY a place where faculty and students stay and thrive.

Nancy Thompson, an adjunct lecturer in English at Medgar Evers, makes a point during the October 30 mass meeting.

PSC members from different campuses spoke at the October 30 mass meeting about key contract issues; these pages present some of their remarks. News coverage at all? The public University of the City of New York inclusion.
In an important win for all members of the PSC-CUNY bargaining unit, an arbitrator determined last month that City College management violated the contract when it failed to employ a higher education associate on the basis of just one factor, instead of overall performance.

In his October 16 ruling, arbitrator Howard Edelman cited the provision of Article 18 of the PSC-CUNY contract, which states, “An evaluation of professional activities shall be based on total professional performance.” Because the single-factor evaluation violated that part of the contract, he concluded, it must be removed from the member’s personnel file.

MEANS WHAT IT SAYS

“Once again, an arbitrator has told management that the contract means what it says,” PSC First Vice President Steve London told Clarion. This case will be important to HEQ-series employees and to faculty and CLTs under evaluation for reappointment, promotion and tenure,” London said. “It will be important for them to carefully monitor their annual written evaluation memoranda and seek the union’s advice if they have any questions or concerns with-in 30 working days of receipt.”

“The case was handled by Charles Schwartz, a grievance counselor at the PSC-CUNY for the past 21 years, and presented at arbitration by attorney Steven Star.

“The union member who filed this grievance had been inappropriately evaluated by a dean,” Schwartz told Clarion. “This was particularly onerous for this member, as she was about to be considered for her Certificate of Administration Service under the contract’s Article 13.b. (HEQ-series employees are granted ‘13.b’ after satisfactorily completing eight years of continuous service; it is a form of job security roughly analogous to tenancy in the faculty ranks.) Schwartz noted that this member had previously received satisfactory evaluations in several high-level positions at the college.

Although the evaluation form lists 15 items, the arbitrator wrote, the evaluation in this case impermissibly focused on the single issue of attendance. The dean attempted to waive attendance through the entire fabric of the evaluation, de-scribing the member’s work as “satisfactory when present, unsatisfactory when absent.” But the arbitrator concluded that in essence, “It is an evaluation based solely on attendance,” noting that the dean’s written comments “are devoted exclusively to that topic.”

ABSENCE AT ISSUE

The dean contended that the member’s use of annual leave, sick leave and floating holidays were excessive — even though he had approved all leave time himself. “He even went so far as to fault the member for not returning on time from California during an epic blizzard in 2005, when New York was buried under 27 inches of snow and all the area’s airports were closed,” said Schwartz. “He never wanted her to take time off — whatever the reason.”

London agreed, noting that “the ab-sences, while many, were explainable and contractually allowed.”

REMOVED

In explaining his order for a reme-dy, the arbitrator wrote, “Where eval-uations are rendered which violate a clause in the labor contract, they must be removed from the individual’s per-sonnel file. Any other result would serve to ignore and even repudiate the terms of the Agreement.”

Schwartz told Clarion that the case is a good example of how con-tract enforcement is vital to thou-sands of union members who may never file a grievance themselves. “Winning a good contract is what we all hope for and work for, but ensuring that those hard-won gains will be worth more than just the paper they are written on is just as important,” Schwartz said. “Whenever there is a breach of the contract, CUNY bylaws or other terms and conditions of em-ployment, it is essential to reassert and restore the authority of the con-tract through the grievance process.”

PSC wins RF union vote at Grad Center

82% of ballots said ‘yes’

By HEATHER APPEL

After a protracted battle for the right to decide on union representation, Graduate Center (GC) staff who are paid by the CUNY Research Foundation (RF) voted overwhelmingly for the PS-CUNY, earning $7,000 more than her hus-band, a professor at Queens College. “That’s not the case anymore — Pierre-Louis hasn’t had a raise in three years, while his salary has steadily in-creased. The maintenance on their co-op has increased by $300 a month, while his salary has increased. The RF delayed the process, but the issues are still very much there. Now the workers can come to-gether to build the power they need to make changes in their working lives.”

The stalling by the RF’s Board — chaired by CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein — was an additional three-month delay be-fore the count could proceed.

The NLRB agreed and in July 2007 ruled that CUNY graduate students who work for the RF do have the right to organize. “It’s disgraceful that the Research Foundation and CUNY leadership attempted to prevent workers at this great institu-tion from becoming union members,” wrote NY Civil Service Labor Council President Neil Tepel in the weekly newspaper ‘The Chief’. “It’s totally unacceptable for a public uni-versity to inhibit employees from joining a labor organization.”

Meanwhile, RF employees at the Graduate Center are feeling hopeful as they look ahead.

“I’m very happy, and I’m opti-mistic that this is going to go for-ward and will make a better work situation for people who work for the Research Foundation,” said Noonan. “And I hope they can extend this to other campuses.”
The right move

By JOHN MOLLENKOPF
CUNY Graduate Center

A
fter eight disastrous years of George Bush, we must field the strongest possible candidate in 2008. Not the most politically correct, not the most left, not the most union-oriented, but the one who can win and govern well. That person is Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton — and in endorsing her, the AFT made the right choice.

She is clearly the most qualified. Her resume leads from Wellesley College to Yale Law School, the Children’s Defense Fund, the House Judiciary Committee staff, first lady of Arkansas, first woman partner of a major corporate law firm, first lady of the United States, and now senator from New York.

On Bill Clinton’s road to the White House in 1992 and during his administration, she faced down and prevailed over every imaginable right-wing assault. She knows how to achieve policy change against great odds. She has drawn lessons from her 1993 experiences with health care reform and other battles, and today is one of the most effective legislators in the Senate. She is smart, organized and hard-driving, but maintains a sense of humor. She surrounds herself with highly talented people and motivates them to work together effectively. And she is comfortable and well received in black churches as in corporate board rooms.

PRO-EDUCATION

Senator Clinton is strongly pro-education. Her policy proposals range from providing universal pre-K to increasing the size of Pell Grants and renewing our national commitment to science. She also calls for measures to help us better balance work and the life, provide affordable health insurance for all, raise the minimum wage and increase to congressional pay, and strengthen the ability of unions to organize. She puts ending the war in Iraq and restoring our moral author- ity to the top of her agenda. She has made clear that her vote in favor of declaring Iran’s Revolutionary Guard a ter- rorist organization was not an au- thorization for the use of force.

The wrong direction

By STEVE LEBERSTEIN & MANNY NESS
Brooklyn College

A
 t the October 30 Democratic candidates’ debate, Hillary Clinton declared that she was “against a rush to war.” Yet she had voted for the Senate resolution sponsored by Sens. Joseph Lieberman and John Kyl, branding part of Iran’s armed forces, the Revolutionary Guard, a “terrorist organization,” thereby raising the Bush-Cheney war fever another notch or two.

This is not an abstract discussion. Kyl and Lieberman both favor bombing Iran.

Seymour Hersh reports in the New Yorker that Vice President Cheney has requested plans for air strikes against Revolutionary Guard facilities in Iran. In the House, Speaker Nancy Pelosi has refused to back the Kyl-Lieberman resolution, saying it would bring us closer to another war.

Since 2002, Clinton has refused to acknowledge that her vote to authorize the war on Iraq was a mistake. She did not criticize the war itself until public opinion had swung decisively against it. And she has consistently voted to reau- thorize funding for a war without end, while the killing and casual- ties continue. When questioned about her support for the war, Clinton responded by suggesting that “there are others to choose from,” if her vote authorizing the war was “the most important thing to any of you.”

Where will Hillary Clinton stand if the death toll ever even load for a strike against Iran? Can we be sure that a President Hillary Clinton would not back a diplomatic road, rather than seek to appear “tough on terror” by unleashing a deadly strike that would under- mine US interest in a stable Middle East?

CONSIDER OTHER CANDIDATES

In response to Democratic dis- cussion of the “war on terror,” Clinton stated her belief that “... any President should make any blanket statements with respect to the use or non-use of nu- clear weapons.” But a US nuclear strike would certainly destabilize and inflame the entire region (in- cluding nuclear-armed Pakistan) — so why won’t Clinton speak out against the idea?

Despite the AFT’s rush to en- dorse Hillary Clinton’s presidential ambition, we urge our members to consider what our union and US labor in general would gain by sup- porting her in the primaries. Con- trary to what her campaign would like us to believe, her nomination as the Democratic presidential can- didate is not inevitable. We should take her suggestion to choose from “other” candidates seriously.

Clinton’s recent campaign over-tures to organized labor are more artifice than substance. Her record shows that she has spent years in tune with the neo-liberal interests of big corporations rather than with the press- ing needs of working people. While she is a sponsor of the Employee Free Choice Act, she has not ad- vanced an overall labor policy, a jobs program or emphasized fight- ing poverty. If elected, how much political capital would she really spend to win labor law reform? Her cozy relationship with cor- porate interests is well known. She sat on the board of Wal-Mart for six years. Clinton’s chief strategist, Mark Penn, is head of the Burson- Marsteller PR firm, which has worked to keep the Cintas laundry chain union-free and more recently burnedish the tainted reputation of Blackwater USA, implicated in killing dozens of unarmed civilians in Iraq.

While Penn says he has recused himself from the firm’s anti-union ambition, we urge our members to consider what our union and US labor in general would gain by sup- porting her in the primaries. Con- trary to what her campaign would like us to believe, her nomination about Barack Obama and John Ed- wards. Senator Obama should have a bright future in American politics and John Edwards has raised the key issues of poverty and economic justice we all care about. In my view, however, they lack Senator Clinton’s qualifications, her ability to fight the fight that lies ahead, and her bold political appeal.

TOUGHEST

Democratic losses in most presi- dential elections of the last genera- tion have demonstrated how the failure of progressives to win presi- dential elections can have devas- tating consequences.

While President Bush’s low standing makes a Democratic vic- tory more likely in 2008, the coun- try remains suspicious of both par- ties. Since moderate, if not conservative, voters predominate in the states that will decide the outcome, this pivotal election is bound to be close. Republicans will likely coalesce around a candidate who distances himself from the White House and appeals to the broad middle. Republican strat- egists have shown just how far they will go to polarize the country to win a majority in the Electoral Col- lege. To win this crucial election, we must go with our strongest, most experienced, best-funded — and, if necessary, toughest — candi- date. That is Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton.

PRO & CON

The AFT endorsement of Hillary Clinton

Editor’s note: On October 3, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Executive Council voted to endorse Hillary Clinton for president. PSC President Barbara Bowen was one of several members who voted against doing so, based on discussion with the PSC Executive Council. PSC members can read more about the AFT’s support for Clinton in a members-only section of the AFT website, at www.aft.org/campaign#login.htm.

As a baby-boomer, like a good many of us in the PSC, she has asked how our generation can best respond, as individuals and as a na- tion, to the characteristic challenges we have faced. A strong woman who has succeeded in the work- place, she has held a dual career family together under difficult cir- cumstances. She has raised a fine daughter and wants to make sure that the options for younger genera- tions are as wide as those we had, or wider. While the Clinton adminis- tration had its disappointments, it produced the longest sustained eco- nomic expansion since the 1950s, raising real earnings, reducing poverty and actually lowering the federal debt. Not only does a record of peace, prosperity and fiscal ratio- nality sound good right now, but it will help win her state wins that have been eluding Democrats.

Senator Clinton has grown con- tinually as a political leader. After winning 55% of the votes in the 2000 Senate election, she built up her suburban and upstate support and won reelection by 67%. She made a point of working with peo- ple across the Senate aisle. After September 11, she was instrumen- tal in crafting the federal aid pack- age that helped New York City to demonstrate its resilience. She be- lieves that progressives must gain support from the center and mod- erate right to govern — and while the left may criticize her for this view, it is exactly what scares the right about her.

There is much to recommend the other Democratic candidates, and PSC members will find a lot to like

Hillarty Clinton accepting the AFT’s endorsement

Until very late in her campaign, Clinton had no health care position except to say that she had “experience” — experience which is not re- wards. Senator Obama should have been eluding Democrats.

The AFT’s endorsement of Clinton is a bad move, especially since it was not coupled with any pro-labor policy commitments. In the ap- proaching primaries, we urge PSC members to consider the candidates on their merits. Neither Clinton’s record nor her currently announced positions warrant our support.
IMMIGRATION

Facts get lost in license debate

By JIM PERLSTEIN
PSC Solidarity Committee

O n September 21, when the governor restored access to a driver’s license to all New Yorkers who could prove identity and residence, regardless of immigration status, all New Yorkers gained. On October 27, when the governor and the federal Department of Homeland Security announced a revision of that policy, all New Yorkers lost. We are, in fact, worse off than when we started.

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Up to a million undocumented immigrants live in New York State. They drive to work, to shop, to take children to school, to visit the doctor. They’ll drive whether New York licenses them or not.

It is better for auto safety if immigrants have taken a road test, an eye test, and an exam that proves that they know the rules of the road. No license means no auto insurance – and that drives up insurance rates for the rest of us. Evidence from New Mexico shows that both accident rates and insurance rates go down when access to a license is restored.

Governor Spitzer saw this way and called a halt to former Governor Pataki’s suspension of the licenses of thousands of immigrants. Pataki’s policy was a piece of political grandstanding that served his short-lived presidential bid. In contrast, Spitzer’s move was a practical, evidence-based response to the daily realities of immigration in the absence of federal reform of our broken immigration system. There were a number of editorials in both upstate and downstate newspapers.

CRITICS & THEIR CODE WORDS

No one anticipated the scale of the backlash. A toxic combination of inadequate information, understandable security anxieties, xenophobia and political opportunism generated a firestorm of criticism for the governor’s initiative. State Republicans did all they could to fan fear and resentment, hoping to exploit the issue to win an election.

Meanwhile the Spitzer/Chertoff “compromise” threatens all New Yorkers. It has no friends on either side of the immigration reform debate. Worst of all, it undermines growing nationwide opposition to REAL ID – its unfunded mandates, bureaucratic burdens and threats to privacy. It dampens the alarmed about the national security state, where anyone is a suspect and everyone is tracked. REAL ID is vague, costly and administratively unworkable. We urgently need to inform ourselves about it and thoroughly discuss its implications for privacy in the era of the surveillance state. New York should not rush to adopt Bush’s internal passport plan without a thorough debate.

The looming threat of Bush’s ‘REAL ID’

Security experts and police officials say that we’re better off when all drivers have verifiable identification based on proof of residence. If another driver dents your fender, or a police officer pulls a car over, it’s better if the driver has identification that shows who they really are. It is better for all of us when immigrants are out of the shadows, willing to report a crime or serve as a witness instead of avoiding all contact with police because they’re afraid.

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CRITICS & THEIR CODE WORDS

No one anticipated the scale of the backlash. A toxic combination of inadequate information, understandable security anxieties, xenophobia and political opportunism generated a firestorm of criticism for the governor’s initiative. State Republicans did all they could to fan fear and resentment, hoping to exploit the issue to avoid an electoral wipeout in 2008.

Racial code words and images soon characterized the debate. A State senator warned that immigrant advocates were out to get “the whole enchilada,” while a Republican leaflet upstate featured a photo of men wearing turbans, charging that Spitzer wanted to hand out driver’s licenses to terrorists.

Meanwhile the governor quietly entered into discussion with Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, and on October 27 they announced a deal. In return for withholding an assault on Spitzer, Homeland Security demanded and got a commitment from the governor to:

1. Drop the idea of one license for all, and replace it with a three-tier license plan. This would include a “super license” for citizens and documented immigrants, compliant with yet-to-be-specified federal identification requirements under the 2005 federal REAL ID Act. This “super license” would be required to board an airplane, enter a federal building and for a potentially endless list of future purposes; and

2. Allow the data collected from applicants applying for NYS licenses to be merged with a national database accessible to the federal government.

INTERNAL PASSPORT?

As the number of instances requiring a “super license” for identification multiply, more and more of those eligible will get one, despite increased cost and inconvenience. The REAL ID Act would create an internal passport, the first of its kind in our history. And access to the data on that passport remains poorly regulated and radically insecure. REAL ID is increasingly controversial – 17 states have declared their opposition, due to both cost and privacy concerns. But New York is now slated to be the national guinea pig for REAL ID.

ONE LICENSE FOR ALL

Meanwhile undocumented immigrants in New York would be stuck with a license stamped “Not valid for federal purposes” – a document that marks them, de facto, as “other.” Rather than display an identity card that invites trouble any time they interact with a government agency, they will retreat back into the shadows.

So we’re back where we started – and you can expect insurance rates and accidents to rise. We still need one license for all, and it will require both persistence and patience to win it.

Meanwhile, the Spitzer/Chertoff “compromise” threatens all New Yorkers. It has no friends on either side of the immigration reform debate. Worst of all, it undermines growing nationwide opposition to REAL ID – its unfunded mandates, bureaucratic burdens and threats to privacy. It dampens the alarmed about the national security state, where anyone is a suspect and everyone is tracked. REAL ID is vague, costly and administratively unworkable. We urgently need to inform ourselves about it and thoroughly discuss its implications for privacy in the era of the surveillance state. New York should not rush to adopt Bush’s internal passport plan without a thorough debate.

POETRY BY TINA CHANG

from: Of God & Strangers

Part I

God had taken to dreaming again, something mythic or fatal. He was wild with the need to have liquor. He filled a glass with spirits and lit the surface on fire. Raw and intoxicated, He knelt in front of His wide window and prayed.

The boxes are stuffed, overflowing with various shapes and sizes of paper, Love is scripted, the definitions of which are scrawled on secret ballots and placed by hands into slots, in a country where people are voting.

He looked at his ancient texts and felt neither blissful nor brilliant. Insomniac, He threatened, sang a little, tapped out a tune which rumbled a plain in Northern India.

On His twenty seventh drink He made an imprint of a dark angel in the snow. In His most sensual gesture, He touched His left hand with His right and made a blade. He cut down, made a being that was born with a mouth ready to drink poison, with a thirst for the unsayable. The moments melted into a paper cup or sea.

The man watched the movement of water, lanterns riding on belief, spreading its affection in flame and splinter and bone.

Part III

Love is scripted, the definitions of which are scrawled on secret ballots and placed by hands into slots, in a country where people are voting. The boxes are stuffed, overflowing with various shapes and sizes of paper, in handwriting that is curled, illegible, smudged. The papers reveal something important about love, though the answers remain unknown.

The boxes are never emptied, the votes never counted, the people sit waiting outside of buildings for answers and consensus, while the day slips in a shade of black, then blacker.

In another dream, the word Love is painted in crude letters, red and dripping, on the side of a missile. The missile is launched and Love travels through the cosmos, piercing sound, flying over peasant farms and worked fields, past the front yard of a boy who is digging in the dirt. The boy looks up once to marvel at some distant flicker. Love crashes down, with boom, hiss, ferociously tumbling its body, spreading its affection in flame and splinter and bone.

Tina Chang, author of Half-Lit Houses, teaches at Hunter College and Sarah Lawrence College. She co-edited Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia, and Beyond (forthcoming, W.W. Norton, 2008).
A new strategy

By BARBARA BOWEN
PSC President

This issue’s column is adapted from my speech at the October 1 mass meeting. Full text of the speech is available on the PSC website, at www.psc-cuny.org/BBowen Oct30th07.htm.

The question before us tonight is what we aim to achieve in this contract and how we plan to achieve it. That is not just a technical or a logistical question, it is necessarily a political one.

To answer that question, I want to offer a new approach, one that is not seen often enough among American unions: a multi-contract strategy. The declining conditions we all experience at CUNY – inadequate salaries, lack of basic supports, unreasonable workloads and the abusive adjunct system – did not develop in the space of one contract; they took 35 years to create. The union will be in the strongest position to reverse those conditions if we think strategically and think in terms of more than one contract at a time.

**Phase I**

I would ask you to see the last two contracts, the 2000-2002 contract and the 2002-2007 contract, as Phase I of an agenda to transform and reclaim the City University of New York.

Phase I fixed several long-standing problems at CUNY and brought to the University provisions such as well-supported sabbaticals and research time for untenured faculty that had been seen as unaffordable luxuries at CUNY. But Phase I was a conceptual and ideological victory as well as a political one: we defeated the unspoken premise, ultimately rooted in racism and contempt for our students, that certain health and safety conditions of an academic workplace were “too good” for CUNY.

The Phase I contracts, however, despite the advances they made, did not succeed in fixing what I see as the three major structural problems of CUNY employment: 1) salary erosion, 2) the adjunct system, and 3) the teaching load.

There are many other issues that cost money and need to be fixed, but these three are at a different level of magnitude, in both their effect on the institution and their cost. While I would not say that we have come to the end of what can be done by the approach of Phase I, I would say we have come to the point where we must decide whether that is enough. Faced with the growing structural problems of salary erosion, abuse of adjunct labor and excessive workloads, the contract at a time. To attempt something this big we have to be strategic, and we have to be united. The union leadership has made the strategic decision to target one-and-a-half of the three big issues in Phase II of the multi-contract strategy: salary erosion and certain aspects of the adjunct system. Phase III will address the teaching load, additional adjunct compensation, and the need for promotional opportunities for HEOs.

**Phases II and III**

It will not be easy to crack any one of these three structural problems – each of which would take more money to solve than was in our entire last contract. To attempt something this big we have to be strategic, and we have to be united. The union leadership has made the strategic decision to target one-and-a-half of the three big issues in Phase II of the multi-contract strategy: salary erosion and certain aspects of the adjunct system. Phase III will address the teaching load, additional adjunct compensation, and the need for promotional opportunities for HEOs.

**Next Steps**

This is a necessary agenda, but – in these reactionary times – an ambitious one. How will the PSC succeed? That question will be answered in this meeting tonight and in the weeks to come, but there are reasons for confidence.

First, we have at least as organized and strategic as those who oppose us. The PSC strategy is an attempt to think beyond the short-term, where unions are often trapped, and also within that long-term, where progressive movements must set their sights.

Second, we are not powerless and we must use the power we have. We occupy an influential position within the city. Forty-six percent of all college students in New York City are students at CUNY.

Third, the PSC has a growing track record of success that signals to others and to ourselves that we can win. The victory this summer on pension equity legislation showed that the PSC can make gains even against the prevailing political trends.

Fourth, the moment is right. Starting tonight, the PSC is launching a public campaign to inform New Yorkers about what has happened to CUNY salaries and why everyone who cares about education and the future of this City has a stake in seeing them made nationally competitive. Governor Spitzer’s Commission on Higher Education is poised to release its report in December. We will time our public campaign for that strategic moment.

Fifth, we will aim our campaign strategically at the different locations of power, working with and, where necessary, confronting CUNY management, the City and the State.

Sixth, we will not fight alone. There is a vast constituency of potential supporters for CUNY, starting with our students and their communities. That power has yet to be mobilized, and when it is, we will have an unstoppable force to demand the university they need.

BIGGER THAN OURSELVES

Last, we are fighting for something bigger than our own salaries and our own working conditions, important as they are. We are fighting for the future of an institution that has one of the most progressive pasts in this country. We are fighting for each individual student whose life we have seen transformed by CUNY. We are fighting for the principle that education is not a privilege or even a right, but a need – a fundamental, defining human endeavor from which no one should be excluded. And we are fighting for an alternative to the greedy, destructive culture that is more interested in sending our students to war than in educating them, that tolerates the intolerable – like nooses hung from schoolyard trees or sent to African-American professors – and that would roll back the gains of a hundred years of progressive struggle.

It’s a hard fight. But I believe that if we approach it in a way that is smart, strategic, unified and unruffled, we have a good chance to win. It’s a project worthy of us; let’s do it together.
Israel Kugler, 1917-2007

Pioneer of unionism in higher education

By IRWIN YELLOWITZ
PSC Retirees Chapter

Israel Kugler, who died on October 1, was a pioneer, a visionary and an activist. Iz, as he was known to everyone, believed in academic unionism when few others did. He argued that faculty and professional staff should be in one union to maximize their bargaining power. He believed that this union should be affiliated with the labor movement and should not only serve the needs and interests of its members through collective bargaining, but also work to achieve social justice in the nation at large.

Iz was always an active leader who could rally support from many sources, and he had the intelligence and drive to carry through on his program. You could disagree with Iz, but not ignore him.

Iz Kugler’s parents were immigrants from Russia who strongly supported the Jewish labor movement, including the fraternal group the Workmen’s Circle. It was a personal fulfillment for Iz to be elected president of the Workmen’s Circle from 1980 to 1984. As a child, Iz accepted the democratic socialism of the Jewish labor movement, but he also drew from the larger society. By the time he was a teenager, Iz had joined the Young People’s Socialist League, an affiliate of the American Socialist Party.

CCNY GRAD
Iz entered City College in the midst of the Great Depression of the 1930s and graduated in 1938. His parents sacrificed to keep him in college – even a free one – despite the privations wrought by the Depression. During his years at City College, Iz participated actively in the vibrant political debates of the day, often carried on from the algae-covered walls of the college cafeteria. Despite the bitter disputes, Iz had with students who supported the Communist Party, he joined with other activists from the Young People’s Socialist League in a sit-down demonstration demanding the reinstatement of Morris Schappes, who had been fired from the faculty at City College because of his support of the Communist Party. Thus Iz’s life-long defense of academic freedom began in his student days.

The political views developed in his youth also undergirded Iz’s commitment to social justice. One example was his support of the civil rights movement, both within the labor movement and in the larger community. In the mid-1960s, after he became a leader in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Iz demanded that the union suspend southern locals that did not allow African Americans to join – and the AFT adopted this policy.

ORGANIZER
After serving in the Navy for four years during World War II, Iz began teaching in 1946 at a predecessor of the New York City College of Technology. He immediately began to organize a union to combat the poor salaries and working conditions, and the president’s operation of the college with scant consultation from the faculty and professional staff. The common wisdom was that educators would not join a union, considered suitable only for blue-collar workers. Iz absolutely rejected this convention, and he was to prove the conventional wisdom wrong for higher education just as the United Federation of Teachers debunked it in the public schools.

By 1956, Iz not only had organized a union at his college, but achieved notable gains in salaries and teaching load as well as achieving statutory tenure for its faculty. In the process, the union broke the paternalistic, top-down culture of the college. Faculty and staff now were participants in their professional lives through their union.

To gain strength, Iz’s union moved into the Teachers’ Guild, a predecessor of the United Federation of Teachers. In 1963, the American Federation of Teachers granted the Iz-led United Federation of College Teachers (UFCT), which became active in both public and private sectors. During the 1960s Iz organized unions and negotiated contracts at the Fashion Institute of Technology, the Merchant Marine Academy, Pratt Institute and Westchester Community College. Clearly the naysayers about unionism in higher education had to reconsider.

In 1966, Iz and the UFCT also led a strike at St. John’s University over the firing of 31 faculty who wanted to form a union. He mounted a vigorous campaign in support of the strikers, including picket lines at the campus, rallies and national publicity. Although the strike was lost in 1967, the widespread attention it gained aided organizing elsewhere in higher education.

Iz was an organizer from his youth to the end of his days.

Iz Kugler, left, with Belle Zeller on a picket line at Brooklyn College.

After the Taylor Law of 1967 allowed for collective bargaining in public institutions in New York, Iz made an even more determined bid to organize at CUNY. His efforts met strong opposition from management and competition from another faculty organization, the Legislative Conference, headed by Belle Zeller.

The rivalry between the organizations led to two collective bargaining units and contracts in 1969. In 1972, the UFCT and Legislative Conference merged to form the Professional Staff Congress, Belle Zeller became president and Iz was the deputy president. The major difference between the two groups had been Iz’s insistence that an academic union had to be part of the larger labor movement. Iz achieved this objective, as the new PSC rapidly became an influential local in the AFT.

CONTINUED ACTIVISM
This power sharing arrangement between Kugler and Zeller never worked, and in 1973 Iz challenged Belle Zeller for the presidency. He lost in a very close election. In 1976, Iz once more ran for president of the PSC against Irwin Polishook, and again he was unsuccessful. He then abandoned his caucus, and despite his personal disappointment at not achieving the presidency of the PSC, urged his supporters to join the majority caucus to strengthen the union. The merger of the two caucuses was a success, and it created a unified leadership for the PSC that helped win several excellent contracts in the 1980s.

Iz retired in 1986, but continued to support the PSC up to his last day. He wrote forceful letters to Clarion, made major contributions to the Retirees Chapter’s Program Committee, and as late as 2004 took part in a union protest at CUNY Central.

Iz was one of the founders of United Federation of Teachers in American higher education, and today’s academic unions serve as a living memorial to the work of Iz Kugler.

Irwin Yellowitz, who had been a member of the UFCT, served as PSC Vice President for Senior Colleges from 1973 to 1984 and as PSC Treasurer from 1984 to 1997. The PSC is planning a memorial; see page 2.