BAD

FAITH?

The PSC bargained in good faith, and expected the same from CUNY. But two months after the two sides agreed on a “conceptual framework,” CUNY may be indicating it will be unable to deliver City and State support. The union demanded a bargaining session with direct City and State participation, and reiterated that members need real raises, a solution to the Welfare Fund crisis and advances on equity issues.

PAGES 3 & 11

STATE BUDGET
Pataki’s plan falls short
Governor Pataki’s proposed budget would mean bigger tuition hikes and a gap in state funding for SUNY and CUNY.

PAGE 2

ACADEMIC FREEDOM
Hunter Senate releases report
The Hunter College Senate’s Select Committee on Academic Freedom released its findings, sparking a campus conversation.

PAGE 7

LOSING GROUND
Faculty salaries in NYC are down
From NYU to CUNY, faculty make, on average, less than NYC elementary school teachers. It is a race to the bottom.

PAGE 5

BENEFITS
Pensions under fire
The right wing has set its sights on pension plans. Does this mean a secure retirement will become a thing of the past?

PAGE 10
Governor’s budget fails CUNY

By PETER HOGNESS

Governor George Pataki unveiled his state budget blueprint on Janu-
ary 17, a $111 billion proposal that pos-
ted a higher priority on tax cuts. The
plan calls for decreasing state re-
venue by $16 billion over the next five
years, a formula that would spell
trouble for CUNY.

State funding for the operating bud-
get of CUNY’s senior colleges
would be set at $775.5 million, an in-
crease of 2.1%. This is less than the
rate of inflation, and CUNY officials
say it would not be enough to cover
mandatory cost increases.

SHORTFALL

To address this shortfall, the governor is proposing a tuition
hike of 7.5%, or $300, at CUNY’s se-
ior colleges. The executive budget
also asks for a $500 hike at SUNY,
and includes changes to the Tu-
ition Assistance Program (TAP) in
ways that would disadvantage stu-
dents. At the community colleges,
state aid per full-time equivalent
student (or FTE) would rise by $300,
or less than half of what CUNY had
requested.

State budgets that shortchange
CUNY are part of a long-running trend. The PSC First Vice President
Steve London testified in Albany on January 30. “There
is no substitute for public funding of CUNY,” he told lawmakers.

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is no substitute for public funding of CUNY,” he told lawmakers.

The public would benefit because
the treatment of CUNY has been
particularly unfair. “In 2003 CUNY
senior colleges were only funded at
55% of SUNY state-operated col-
ges” in terms of funding per FTE, he
said. In 1990, this figure was 81%. In
other words, this disparity is not
only large – it is growing.

RACIAL IMBALANCE

“It is hard to imagine that the
CUNY/SUNY funding gap doesn’t have something to do with race,” London added, noting that 72 per-
cent of CUNY’s students are non-
white. “Along with all other New
York State residents, they deserve
an equal opportunity to attend a
well-funded public university.”

CUNY’s administration has asked the State Legislature for $36 million
more than the amounts proposed by
Pataki. CUNY’s proposal still in-
cludes a tuition increase, but a smaller one, and includes spending
on new initiatives such as 200 addi-
tional full-time faculty lines. The
PSC supports the University’s re-
quest for additional public support,
but argues that it is not enough.

“In the last three years, student
enrollment at CUNY has increased
by the equivalent of two additional
colleges,” London said. Because hir-
ing has not kept pace, “the Univer-
sity has been losing ground in its
goal to [have] 70% of courses taught
by full-time faculty.” Between 2002
and 2004, the percentage of instruc-
tion by full-time faculty at CUNY’s senior colleges did not go up – it
went down.

In response, the PSC urged fund-
ing for an additional 600 new full-
time lines, for a total of 800. This to-
tal includes 500 lines “to convert
long-serving adjuncts to full-time po-
sitions,” London said. Many adjuncts
have taught at CUNY for years, he
noted, and “they excel at their pro-
fession” but are not given adequate
pay or recognition. These conver-
sion lines would help to meet those
needs, and would also address the
needs of CUNY’s students, he said.

These new lines and related
support positions would cost $25 million, which Lon-
don said was “a reasonable investment” in light of a
budget surplus currently
estimated at $2.3 billion.

“Spending this year’s state surplus on billions of dollars more in tax
breaks for the wealthy is the wrong
choice,” he argued.

WRONG CHOICES

The governor’s budget echoed
his past proposals to hold back a
portion of student financial aid
grants through TAP. In his current
plan, colleges would be required to “pre-finance” TAP aid to students
who have a GED instead of a high
school diploma, money that the
state would make up only after the
student had completed 24 credits.
Pataki would also change the defin-
tion of “full-time” study from 12 to
15 credit-hours – a move that would
prevent many CUNY students from
getting a full TAP award. Such
changes would cut spending on
TAP by $30 million.

The smaller tuition increase pro-
posed by CUNY administration is
based on an indexing plan that
Chancellor Goldstein put forward
last fall. The chancellor has called
for a “compact” with the state, in
which Albany would cover the Uni-
sity’s mandatory costs, while “modest” annual tuition hikes go to
fund new programs and positions.

INFLATION

Pataki’s budget plan supports the
idea of annual tuition hikes – and in
the future, would let CUNY
raise tuition without legis-
lative approval and allow
different tuition rates at dif-
cerent campuses. But de-
spite the talk of “indexing,”
Pataki’s proposed tuition increase is
far above inflation – and it provides
for above-inflation tuition hikes in
any future year when state funding
for CUNY is cut.

“In other words,” commented
London, “the compact is violated at
the outset.” Far from being based
on political realism, he argued, this
shows that the compact is a losing
strategy that lets state government
off the hook. “There is no substitute
for public funding,” London said. He
urged full public funding of CUNY’s
budget needs, instead of “making
our already overburdened students
bear extra costs.”

PSC presses for more state dollars

Finally, the City itself would ben-
efit by having better relations with
its employees. We could then
work all together to provide
better services for all New
Yorkers.

Robert Cowen
Queens College

On the line with the transit workers

Our billionaire mayor called the
strikers “greedy,” our maximize-
profits mayor called them “selfish,”
our racist mayor called them “thug-
gish.” This racist propaganda
seemed calculated to incite some
people to violence against the most
black and Latino strikers, and it
did. On the TWUicket line I twice
saw missiles hurled at us: once an
egg thrown from the thirteenth floor
of an apartment building landed on
the boot of the African-American
bus driver I was talking to. He said it
felt like a brick had hit his toe. Other
workers showed me the egg splash-
hes on the wall behind us, and said
a potato was thrown the day before.

The next day a young PSCer had
his eight-year-old daughter on the
line. She was crying as she talked
from the Windward Isles crouched
down to Sophie’s eye level to gently
explain the story of the strike, I
found myself instinctively moving in
front of her in case another egg was
thrown.

The same day, on the line near an
American like me, had us all take
cover under the highway itself. As
we stood there a little stunned for a
moment, it felt like war had been de-
clared on us. Then – black, Latino,
declared on us. Then – black, Latino,
we stood there a little stunned for a
moment, it felt like war had been de-
clared on us. Then – black, Latino,
our heads and a thud on the ground a

It’s time to modify the Taylor Law

When Mayor Bloomberg chas-
tised TWU members before their
strike, pointing out that other City
unions have waited three or more
years without a contract to reach a
settlement, I was deeply offended by
his implicit use of our unfortunate
plight as a role model.

Of course it is the Taylor Law
penalties imposed on unions and
their members that make it possi-
ble for the City to drag its feet in
negotiating contracts with its
employees.

Write to Clarion
Letters should be no more than
150-200 words in length, and are
subject to editing.

Robert Cowen
Queens College

Therefore I suggest that the Tay-
lor Law be amended to provide “cost
of living increases” while municipal
employees wait for a new contract
to be negotiated.

“The public would benefit because
there would be fewer strikes. Man-
agement would have more incentive
to start bargaining in earnest before
contracts expire. Union members
could better plan their financial fu-
ture while living in an increasingly
expensive city.

The CUNY Board of Trustees re-
cently passed a plan for “cost of liv-
ing” tuition increases, saying that
this will enable the City University
as well as its students better plan
their financial affairs. Should not
the same prerogative be extended to
CUNY employees?

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egg thrown from the thirteenth floor
of an apartment building landed on
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his eight-year-old daughter on the
line. She was crying as she talked
from the Windward Isles crouched
down to Sophie’s eye level to gently
explain the story of the strike, I
found myself instinctively moving in
front of her in case another egg was
thrown.

The same day, on the line near an
elevated highway, I was talking to
the Latino health and safety guy when we
all recoiled at a loud clang just over
our heads and a thud on the ground a
few yards away. Some selfish thug
had thrown a car speaker at us from
the highway. It hit a metal structure
and bounced harmlessly away, but it
could have killed someone.

The mechanics’ steward, Irish-
American like me, had us all take
cover under the highway itself. As
we stood there a little stunned for a
moment, it felt like war had been de-
clared on us. Then – black, Latino,
and white – we started marching and
chanting and talking politics again.

Tony O’Brien
Queens College (retired)
Contract framework at risk

By PETER HOGNESS

At the January 25 meeting of the union’s Delegate Assembly, PSC President Barbara Bowen spoke on the state of negotiations – and it was a sobering report.

Although the union and CUNY management had agreed on a “conceptual framework” for a settlement in mid-November, Bowen said, there are increasing signs that CUNY may not deliver on those terms. (See page 11 for Bowen’s column.)

On November 4, the PSC Executive Council had announced that a conceptual framework for an acceptable contract settlement was within reach. “We bargained intensively for the next several days,” Bowen told delegates in January. “The union bargained in good faith, and we came to agreement on that framework.”

But now, more than two months later, it appears that CUNY may decline to follow through with a contract along these lines. “Through negotiations,” Bowen told Clarion, “CUNY indicated that while they would have to get final approval from the City and State, they were adhering to the collective bargaining rules that the City and State had approved.” As of early February, however, it was the backing of the City and State that CUNY has apparently failed to deliver.

NO BACKING

The conceptual framework that was hashed out in November, Bowen told delegates, “was extremely detailed. Its elements were costed-out to the hundreds of a decimal point.” On November 14, CUNY e-mailed the provisions that union and management had hammered out to City and State officials.

Union negotiators understood that final City and State approval was required, and that they would have to verify the cost figures with their own calculations. “Yes, it takes some time to do these calculations,” Bowen said. “It might take two weeks – but not two months.” As the time dragged on, the union became increasingly concerned.

PRESSED ON

In the meantime, the PSC was not a passive spectator. “We pressed CUNY management for answers, we spoke directly with City and State representatives,” Bowen said.

“We worked with our affiliate, NY State United Teachers, and with the NYC Central Labor Council and NYS AFL-CIO, who all brought influence to bear.” Still, there was no definite word on progress.

In January, “we demanded bargaining immediately, and demanded that people with the authority to close the deal be at the table,” Bowen told delegates. “No more sitting at the table with someone who says, ‘Now, I’ll get approval.’” CUNY’s Vice Chancellor for Faculty and Staff Relations responded that “it would be premature to schedule a bargaining session until we have a firm response from the City and State as to their position.” On January 25, CUNY informed the PSC that City and State representatives were finally prepared to meet, and proposed a date more than halfway into February. The union pushed to hold that session sooner. (See www.psc-cuny.org for updates.)

At that meeting, Bowen said, “CUNY will present a formal proposal indicating whether they are holding to the framework we agreed on.”

Nothing in the City and State response is official, she cautioned, until it is presented across the negotiating table.

Bowen emphasized that they were committed to following through on this framework, which was worked out in November. “We didn’t work day after day, and often into the night, for a fiction,” she told the Delegate Assembly. “We didn’t love every single thing in the agreed-on framework, but we said we are ready to bring this to our Executive Council, and ask the EC to bring it to the DA.”

“If what they come across the table with is unacceptable to us,” she told Clarion, “the bargaining team is prepared to respond. If the terms can’t be made acceptable, we are prepared to pursue political, legal and organizing strategies to win what the members need.”

MIDSTREAM

In the rest of her report, Bowen laid out the main provisions of the November framework. “This is something that negotiating teams generally don’t want to do in midstream,” she said. “Hearing a list of specific provisions can tempt us to start bargaining among ourselves,” she said, and can become divisive if not approached with care. “But the Executive Council felt strongly that we were not willing to come before you one more time and say simply, ‘We’re working on it,’” she told delegates.

GAINS

In the framework, the union agreed to a contract of more than four years, with new language on full-time faculty office hours and up to a three-day change in the start date of the Fall semester; it also agreed to drop its opposition to lengthening the time to tenure. In turn, management agreed to raise its proposed wage increase, to double junior faculty released time and to boost sabbatical pay. The two sides also agreed on a range of equity improvements, and management dropped the inclusion of sign-on bonuses.

(In the discussion that followed, several delegates focused on the content of the November framework, though its future was now in doubt. Charlie Post and Penny Lewis of BMCC both said that they recognized the difficult choices that faced the bargaining team, but posed some serious questions about changes to the tenure clock, particularly at community colleges. They expressed concern that management’s goal is to reduce the number of faculty who get tenure and to create a junior faculty revolving door. Holly Clarke of John Jay asked why some high-priority adjunct demands were not part of the framework. Bowen responded that stabilizing the Welfare Fund was a critical demand for adjuncts, since the WP provides their basic health insurance. Bargaining team member Micaela Costa said that the union faced a real challenge to the structural inequities facing part-timers who would take a campus even larger than that of the one they have waged on the Welfare Fund in the current round of bargaining. Greg Dunkel, a Higher Education Officer, said that the framework did not seem to include many gains for Higher Education Officers (HBOs). Bowen answered that it had taken a big effort to defeat management’s demands for severe concessions in HBO working conditions, particularly per diem and annual leave.)

CLASSIC TACTIC

Other delegates focused on what should be the PSC’s next step. One urged that a charge of bad-faith bargaining be filed against CUNY at the Public Employment Relations Board, while another suggested the time might be ripe for a vote of “no confidence” in CUNY’s chancellor.

Bowen said that the union leadership was preparing for a number of ways to respond, and urged delegates to remain strong. “Delay is a classic tactic to make members more willing to take anything,” she said. “But our commitment is to stay firm to the packages that we laid out for you; to achieve a non-austerity agreement; to increase salaries by at least 10%; to improve our Welfare Fund; and to win some advances in equity.” Before adjourning, delegates unanimously voted to ask PSC members to contact their chancellor and demand that CUNY return to the bargaining table prepared to sign an acceptable settlement (see page 12).

PSC bargaining for a new contract has gone through three phases since the union first asked to open negotiations in September 2002.

Regular talks began the following May: for the first time, CUNY made no economic offer. “We held talks for 18 months with no offer of money, and when they finally brought one forward, it was for just 1.5%,” Bowen told union delegates on January 25. “They did not come forward with a serious economic offer until late March.”

This marked the second phase of bargaining, with discussions of management’s proposal of 6.25% over four years, plus an additional $200 per capita annually for the Welfare Fund. CUNY improved this offer somewhat in May, and the union made a counterproposal in June: wage increase above 10%, funding for restoration of WP benefits and improvements in working conditions and equity. The two sides, however, remained apart.

Summer and early fall of 2005 saw contract settlements for the police and public-school teacher unions. Meanwhile the PSC held its largest membership meeting ever on September 29, and the union set a deadline of November 3 for subsequent meetings. Members were considered whether to hold a referendum on a possible strike. The new PSC mobilization and the settlements marked the beginning of the third phase of bargaining, which led to agreement on the November framework.

But nearly three months later, the future of that framework is in doubt.

—— PH
Grievance counseling

By DANIA RAJENDRA

Howard Prince and Leo Deuster are two of the PSC’s longest-serving grievance counselors, with nearly four decades on the job. Prince is a retired HEO in the Social Science department at BMCC, while Deuster remains an HEO at LaGuardia, where he won a Super Bowl ring in 1986.

Howard Prince: I was active in the union from the time I was hired, in 1972. I went to union meetings and did local stuff on campus, then the chapter leadership asked me to serve as grievance counselor in 1991. I began grievance counseling at the BMCC/CUNY central office about three years later.

Leo Deuster: Growing up in Wisconsin, my father was dead set against unions. Early in my working career, I was never opposed to unions but I also was not a staunch supporter, either. But in the mid-80s a friend of mine organized a strong case to work for the university. We want to avoid serious conflict — but we have no choice, we have to protect the interests of everyone. We have a strong support from a union like CUNY. If we can help them, we do.

Prince: If we can help them, we do.

Deuster: Systematic, methodical. We have a strong support from a union like CUNY. If we can help them, we do.

What about the PSC’s grievance effort look like today?

LD: In the last five years, we’ve taken even more serious steps to arbitration and we’ve seen some cases where the University has had to go to arbitration.

HP: For me, grievances are the guts of everyday union work. When the union is first in place, in order to achieve the benefits of the collective bargaining agreement there had to be an enforcement mechanism, or at least the things everyone.

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What’s the PSC’s grievance resolution process look like today?

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What does the PSC’s grievance resolution process look like today?
In a move that caught many observers by surprise, members of Transit Workers Union Local 100 rejected a proposed contract by a margin of 7 out of 22,431 votes. It was the first time in the 13-year history of transit workers voting down a contract offer after going out on strike.

At Clurton press time, no date had been set for new contract talks. The MTA was seeking binding arbitration, a move that was strongly opposed by the union.

## PENSIONS

The failed settlement included salary increases of 10.5% over three years; lifetime health coverage (a bridge to Medicare for members who retired before age 65); and a refund of past extra payments on pension contributions. The MTA dropped its demands for an expansion of one-person train operation and other work rule changes.

The union’s most significant win was beating back the MTA’s attempt to impose a two-tier system for pension payments. Management wanted to require all new hires to contribute 6% of their wages in pension contributions, up from the 2% paid by current employees. Rejecting this on the grounds that it would divide the union and weaken it for years to come, Toussaint pledged not to sell out the “unborn” – the union’s future members.

In bargaining with other municipal unions, Mayor Bloomberg’s administration has pushed hard for two-tier wage agreements, and won significant cuts in starting pay from the largest unions of police, firefighters and non-uniformed employees. Local 100 not only rejected a two-tier approach to pensions, it won an MTA commitment to refund extra pension payments that about half of the local’s members made between 1994 and 2000.

Although Local 100’s executive board endorsed the deal by a vote of 37 to 4, the rank and file bailed at the proposal’s one big concession: paying a health insurance premium of 1.5% of their wages. “Members recognize the package just didn’t deliver what they were expecting,” said Local 100 Vice President Aimsley Stewart, one of the four “no” votes on the executive board. “We went out on strike to protect the pension of the unborn, so to speak, only to come back with everyone – born and unborn – having to pay a 1.5% premium.” Stewart and other critics argued that the strike was called off too soon.

Opponents of the settlement pointed out that it allowed the MTA to raise premium charges if “the rate of increase in the cost of health benefits exceeds general wage increases.” No municipal union member is now required to pay health care premiums, but since the strike Mayor Bloomberg has declared that he will push to change that.

Local 100 President Roger Toussaint said that the union was willing to consider the premium only as part of a deal for lifetime health coverage, important to a workforce that suffers from occupational illnesses such as steel dust in the lungs and bad knees from ‘busses’ air brakes.

While about half of Local 100’s members concluded that the agreement offered too little, conservative newspapers from the NY Post to the Wall Street Journal charged that the MTA had rewarded an illegal strike and given away the store. The main object of their outrage was the pension refund, particularly upsetting to those who want to see public worker pensions slashed (see p. 11.).

In response, Governor and presidential candidate George Pataki urged the MTA to reverse itself on the grounds that it allowed the MTA to merge one part of the deal, and he urged the MTA to reverse itself and reject it. Toussaint charged that

*Pataki’s backtracking had raised doubts among union members and contributed to the “no” vote.*

Bloomberg denounced the strikers as “thugs” and “softies,” and the class and race overtones of this harsh language from the billionaire mayor provoked some public backlash. Most Local 100 members are black or Latino; the union says that 60% pay more than half their salary for rent. While the transit shutdown was a frustrating experience for every bus or subway rider, many reporters and commentators expressed surprise at the number of people who voiced support for the union.

## STRIKE FUND

The week before the strike, Central Labor Council head Brian McLaughlin called for a solidarity fund of $1.5 million. An amount that could be raised by a $1 donation from every union worker in NYC. City labor leaders stood beside Toussaint just before the walkout started, at a nighttime rally and a press conference.

Once the strike was actually underway, however, there was little sign of a concerted labor mobilization. *The New York Times* reported that on the second day, Toussaint told other union leaders, “I don’t need anyone standing on the sidelines holding my coats – I need someone to take off their coats.”

If a citywide strike fund had already been in place, Local 100 could have decided to stay out longer, said Manny Ness of Brooklyn College, editor of *Working USA.* “To have a strong labor movement in NYC, we need a strike fund that goes beyond our immediate unions,” said Ness. On January 25, MTA officials filed for impasse at the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB), the first step in attempting to impose a deal through binding arbitration. TWU secretary-treasurer Ed Witt told reporters the union would fight binding arbitration “with all our power” because it would prevent members from voting on any resulting contract – one point on which Local 100’s leaders and their members agreed.

Opponents of the defeated deal called for dialogue within the union, and Local 100 announced plans to poll members on what course they would support.

In the short run, another walkout appeared unlikely, particularly given the divisions within the union. But in late January the MTA staked out a new hard line, demanding big give-backs on both pensions and health care. A front-page article in the *Times* warned this might backfire, if union members conclude that they must choose between unacceptable demands and another strike.

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**College faculty salaries in NYC**

*By Andrew Beveridge

Queens College*

Although few people see New York City as a college town, the truth is that the city has the most institutions of higher learning in the entire nation, the most students – and the most teachers as well. At least 25,000 instructors teach at New York City’s colleges, now they are far less. CUNY full professors make, on average, $80,000, while those at non-sectorary graduate colleges in NYC average about $124,000.

## STRUGGLING

In 1989, those teaching at religiously affiliated private colleges were earning about $4,000 less than CUNY graduates; now they earn about $10,000 more. Given these data, it is not surprising that City University faculty are severely discontented with their pay.

Academics in New York City, especially part-time academics, are struggling. New York City’s large public university in no way is keeping up with the other four-year colleges in the city. Graduate students are on strike at NYU; there are grumblings at Columbia; many CUNY graduate students commute by subway from campus to campus.

Yet New York City is still a place where many academics would be pleased to work – if they could find a job, and afford to live here.

A longer version of this article, which originally appeared in *Gotham Gazette,* can be found at the website of *Gotham Gazette* (article link) with tables and additional statistics, a note on sources, and a breakdown on each CUNY college.
**Our money at work**

During the past year I have participated in meetings of the AFT Organizing Committee for the PSC. It has been an important learning experience in terms of understanding organized labor among educators, from kindergarten through graduate school. One important aspect is related to PSC dues to our national affiliate, the AFT.

Sometimes members wonder what we receive for our almost two million dollars in dues. Without giving a complete rundown of every way the PSC benefits, there is one element which I have come to appreciate in a new way through conversations at these meetings—the support we give to our colleagues in parts of the country where educators’ unions are vulnerable, especially in the South and Southwest.

A former AFT Vice President from Texas spoke with great appreciation of the financial support from the national union, and the visits by UPT members during the summer to “talk union” with Texas teachers. In the Midwest an AFT Vice President from Ohio was very pleased with the PSC’s efforts to recruit members to help in their graduate student employee organizing drive at Ohio State.

In a number of cases, the PSC is working with Chapters to increase union membership and to organize and mobilize. There are 23 so-called “right-to-work” states where union rights are restricted; many do not allow collective bargaining for public employees. In many states, income of teachers, professors, and related staff are lower than in New York. To a considerable degree, the PSC is helping to keep alive teacher and academic unionism on a national scale.

While geographically distant, these unions are important to the PSC because important policy and funding decisions are made nationally. In addition, if educators’ unions across the country are eliminated or weakened, we may be left in a “land of privilege” in the eyes of other workers and vulnerable to attacks on our salary schedules, pensions, and other benefits.

Supporting teachers’ unions across the country is not an act of charity. By supporting other public education unions, we support ourselves.

— JH

### The PSC budget

The PSC budget organizes the financial resources of the union. The main goal of the budget is to manage the PSC’s finances in a way that maximizes the union’s effectiveness in serving our members, and in building and channeling the power of the membership.

Each year, the union’s budget is presented in Clari- on; the current budget is for the fiscal year of September 1, 2005, through August 31, 2006. As shown in the accompanying table, the union’s income comes mainly from members’ dues and non-members “fair share” fees. Other important sources are support from our national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers, or AFT, and our state affiliate (NY State United Teachers, or NYS- UT); returns on investment of reserve funds; and fees for services rendered to the Welfare Fund and the Credit Union.

**EXPENDITURES**

On the expenditure side, the PSC pays significant dues to NYSUT, the state federation of educators’ unions, which also includes school-related personnel and some units of nurses. NYSUT has over 550,000 members in institutions from K-12 and higher education. As professional workers in public institutions, we are deeply affected by New York State in terms of funding and working conditions. NYSUT works with the PSC in promoting our interests at the state level, particularly in relation to the State budget, legislation and elections.

We are also affected by federal policies in terms of funding and legislation. The premise of being in a statewide or national federation is that we have more political clout. We work on national issues with and through our national affiliate, the AFT, to whom we pay significant dues and from whom we receive reimbursement for certain activities, such as organizing.

**AFFILIATES**

The PSC also participates in the American Association of University Professors, the State Federation of the AFL-CIO, the New York City Central Labor Council and the Municipal Labor Committee. These organizations work with the PSC on issues such as academic freedom and tenure. The State and City funding for higher education. While the strength of the PSC is rooted first of all in the actions of its own membership and leadership, we are politically stronger because of our links with these affiliates and the services and support they bring.

The second biggest category of expenditure is personnel. This is the cost of the people who do a significant part of the union’s work.

Paid in money or reassigned time, their activity is entirely focused on organizing and mobilizing. Therefore, the union actually spends more resources on mobilizing and outreach than $816,000.

The fifth major area is contract enforcement, which includes grievances, arbitration, and legal work. Similarly to mobilizing and out- reach, the expenditures for union staff who work on contract enforce- ment are accounted for under personnel. In that way the union expends more resources on that important priority.

**MOVING**

This fiscal year the PSC budget has two special, one-shot elements:

- on the income side, additional dues/fees from an expected contract settlement with retroactive money, and, on the expenditure side, costs related to the PSC’s office move to lower Manhattan later this year. A large portion of the construction costs will be borne by the landlord, but the PSC has expenditures for architectural, legal, and construction oversight.

For more details on the PSC budget, visit the union website at www.psc-cuny.org/documents.htm.
The Hunter College Senate’s Select Committee on Academic Freedom reported in December that it was concerned about “perceivers of a climate of fear” in public discussion of college issues. The committee presented its report (available at www.hunter.cuny.edu/senate) to the college’s Senate on December 14, where it drew both criticism and praise.

In an announcement issued in March 2005, the committee invited members of the college community who had “substantial examples of what has been called a...“culture of fear”’ to meet with the committee and share their concerns. In the four and a half months that followed, it received private testimony from 27 people—including 21 tenured professors, or 5% of the tenured faculty. Twelve untenured professors contacted committee members, but chose not to testify because they said they feared retaliation, even though the committee had pledged to keep all discussions confidential.

INTERFERENCE?

In its report, the committee said it had received no accounts of interference with classroom teaching. But it cited a number of reports of administrative interference on issues of curriculum and research, as well as in decisions on hiring, promotion and tenure. Administration disrespect for shared governance was the focus of several complaints. Finally, it said, “the most consistent – and disturbing – finding, heard from numerous testifiers discussing different issues, was a perception that dissent could lead to retaliation.”

Acting Provost Vita Rabinowitz strongly disputed the report, charging that the committee “did not begin this inquiry with an open mind.” She challenged the committee’s procedure as bad social science, arguing that “the vagueness of the alleged offenses” and the number of people involved meant it was impossible to draw any conclusions. “We can no more conclude that there is a climate of fear than we could conclude that 95% of the tenured faculty are delighted with their current work environment.”

CRITICISM

Similar criticisms were heard from some faculty members. Jason Young, head of Hunter’s Faculty Delegate Assembly, told the Senate meeting, Ada Tronto, distinguished professor of film and media studies, described the report as an important first step. He said in January that the significance of the testimony that the committee received is not only in the number of complaints, but in the widespread anxiety about remaining anonymous. “It’s one thing if one or two people have a certain kind of perception,” he told Clarion. Instead, said Ewen, “we had a significant number of people come forward...A lot of them were senior people, and everyone was nervous about retaliation. And that’s a problem.”

In presenting the report to the Senate, Ewen emphasized that “vague generalizations were neither solicited nor considered.” The committee only accepted testimony from “people with firsthand experience and/or observations of what they believed to be a violation...of academic freedom,” he said. As for being one-sided, he noted to Clarion that the committee invited administration representatives to meet with the committee but that they had not done so. Frank Kirkland, chair of the philosophy department, told Clarion that while the specific allegations in the report must be approached with caution, the concerns that it raised deserved attention. “Since the committee had no investigative power,” he said, “there could be things in it that are inflat-ed. Who knows?” But this does not mean that it can be ignored, he said. “It’s important that it identified a certain kind of sentiment,” Kirkland explained. “Whether this sentiment is more widely shared should be ascertained.”

Disagreements about “climate of fear”

In December, the committee received “vague generalizations” as evidence of a “climate of fear.” But the report itself acknowledges that it is limited: “As the committee did not have investigative powers, and as all who testified were guar-an teed confidentiality, it was un- able to verify all accounts or hear different perspectives on the re- ported incidents...[O]thers may have different perspectives.” The report’s authors described themselves as being in something of a bind: the guarantee of confidentiality “prevents the Committee on Academic Freedom from re- porting the specific details that most concerned it.”

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DEBATE

A major point of contention, in the Senate discussion and after, has been over the definition of academic freedom. Rabinowitz charged that the committee had used an “overbroad definition of academic freedom,” and that the report “of ten appears to conflate academic freedom with shared governance.” She told the Senate, “I urge you to resist the temptation to frame diffi-culties with shared governance on our campus as infringements of academic freedom.”

Asked about the relationship between the two, Rabinowitz told Clarion that “at its best, shared gov- ernance is a foundation for academic freedom.” Senator President Joan Tronto answered the same question with a different emphasis. “Among the things that professors need to be able to discuss freely and openly are the conditions of their academ- ic institution,” she said. From this vantage point, she said, the is-sue of fear of administrative retali- ation in disputes or debates over course content was not a direct issue of academic freedom.

SHARED Governance

While it has not been addressed as directly in discussion of the committee’s report, the nature of shared governance has been at issue as well. At the December Senate meet- ing, Rabinowitz cited a national trend of increasing conflicts be-tween the AAUP and administrative about decision-making, and called Hunter’s climate one of “transition” rather than one of “infringe- ment.” She said that traditional shared governance may be in need of redefinition, asking, “What does effective shared gover-nance look like in a world of perfor-mance objectives, results-oriented management, civic participa-tion, declining state aid, and brutal market forces?”

Tronto told Clarion that such fac- tors lead her to conclude that “we need more shared governance, not less.”

The report’s recommendations, emphasizing the need for open dis- cussion, were due to be considered by the Senate in February. Interest- ingly, one of them — a call for the Hunter community to cooperate with a current AAUP inquiry on the state of academic freedom at CUNY, including Hunter — received some support from faculty with very dif- ferent views.

AAUP SURVEY

“My understanding is that the AAUP is going to administer a sur- vey instrument, developed by AAUP, to all faculty and profession- al staff, both current and former, for the purpose of gathering data on administration respect for faculty rights,” said Ewen. “I think people have a right to have this instrument, and they need to speak out in other contexts.”

Young said that the AAUP survey could offer a way to address some of what he thought were the biggest limitations of the report. “What we have now is a core group of vocal people who are concerned,” he said. “Is this really a college-wide issue, or is it localized?” The survey would provide some light on this, Young said.

Kirkland also cited the AAUP sur- vey as a valuable next step. “The support from the administration for our campus as infringements of academic freedom.”

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Identity theft at TRS

By CLARION STAFF

In January, PSC leaders were furi- ous to learn that some members in the New York City Teachers Retirement System (TRS) may have been victims of identity theft. As de- scribed in news reports, some City employees, both active and retired, who are members of the TRS had money illegally taken from their pri- vate bank accounts. Identity thieves reportedly used a temporary em- ployee working in the TRS office to gain private information on mem- bers and beneficiaries.

TRS says that Social Security numbers, bank account informa- tion for members and their benefici- ciaries may have been compro- mised and that it has notified those it believes have been affected. While information on more than 5,000 accounts was accessed, only a small percentage are accounts of PSC members. In a few cases, per- sonal bank accounts were accessed by thieves and funds withdrawn. Several people have been arrested and a search is on for others.

Unfortunately, TRS cannot tell the union conclusively who was af- fected by this theft of information, because the investigation is ongo- ing. So even though the odds are small that you were affected, it is important to take precautions.

PRECAUTIONS

There are several steps that the PSC advises you to take:

1. Examine bank account state- ments over the past two years for any accounts for which TRS has been given the account numbers. It is important that you check for any unauthorized withdrawals. If you have beneficiaries with account numbers in TRS’s system, then you should also be advised to check their accounts.

2. If you feel your account may have been compromised, close your account and open a new bank ac- count with a new bank. If your pen- sion check is deposited via Electron- ic Fund Transfer (EFT) and you don’t want an interruption in ser- vices, TRS asks you to let them know by the 20th of the month when you change your account, and they will send you a paper check. The TRS Call Center is accepting EFT cancellation requests over the phone if the member uses his or her PIN. Members who wish to submit writ- ten cancellations should use TRS Form BK19 – available at the TRS website (go to www.trs.nyc.ny.us and click on “Forms,” then on “Post-Retirement”). TRS is expediting the processing of these forms.

3. Make sure you fill out the prop- er paperwork with TRS to notify them of your account change. Please let the PSC know if you have closed your account. We do not want account informa- tion, just your name. We will then follow up with TRS to make sure they have updated your information. Please call or email Clarissa Gilbert Weiss at 212-354-1252 or cwieiss@pscmail.org.

4. Contact a commercial credit protection service. NYSUT has made arrangements with Equifax to provide PSC members with three months free service and a deeply discounted annual charge for this service.

5. This is a good time for you to re- quest a free credit report. For infor- mation on that and more on protect- ing your identity, go to this govern- ment website: www.consumer.gov/ idtheft

Also, if you received a letter on this topic from TRS, please contact Clarissa Gilbert Weiss at 212-354-1252 or cwieiss@pscmail.org. The PSC has been in contact with TRS and will continue to monitor this situation.

FALSE ALARM AT TIAA-CREF

Recently, the state comptroller sent some members of the CUNY in- structional staff who are members of TIAA-CREF a letter stating that a file sent from the comptroller’s office was missing. That file has been found and it was intact – it had sim- ply been delivered to the wrong ad- dress. The comptroller’s office has since sent a fol- low-up letter explaining that no personal informa- tion was compromised. The PSC is in touch with both TIAA-CREF and the state comptroller’s office and will continue to monitor this situation.

While it was a relief to be told that this had been a false alarm, the incident is still a good reminder of the dangers of identity theft, and the PSC strongly urges people to monitor their personal accounts. This is also a good time to request a free credit report from www.con- sumer.gov/idtheft.

More information on how to pro- tect yourself against identity theft can be found in an article on page 9 of the December 2003 Clarion, avail- able on the web at www.psc-cuny. org/communications.htm.
Nineteen sixty-four was a year in which black men made headlines. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. won the Nobel Peace Prize. Inspiring. A jury let the killers of civil-rights activist Medgar Evers walk free. A blow. A man named Cassius Clay won the world heavyweight championship, within two weeks he was a member of the Nation of Islam named Muhammad Ali. Defiant. Civil-rights worker James Chaney was murdered in Mississippi, along with his white comrades Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman. Another blow. Across the globe, South African freedom fighter Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life in prison. Each of these men in the news fought, was imprisoned or died for the basic right to live with human dignity.

DIGNITY

Amidst all the upheavals of that year, it is a wonder that a small, independent film managed to do in its quiet and elegant way the same thing those making headlines were attempting – champion the black man’s dignity. Nothing But a Man had a simple but revolutionary storyline: Duff (Ivan Dixon), a black man who travels the South working on the railroad, falls in love with and marries Josie, a teacher and preacher’s daughter (Abbey Lincoln).

When he tries to settle into a “normal” life in small-town Alabama, Duff finds that his demand for basic respect from whites is seen as radical, troublemaking and unacceptable. He loses one job, then another. He refuses to pick cotton for $2.50 a day. His wife becomes pregnant. He needs work. Pressure mounts, and his anger grows, defiant.

That phenomenon of black men watching their women being given more opportunity, sometimes appear emotionless. (And you wonder why Abbey Lincoln was made to wear that awful wig throughout, given how unnatural it looked?) If only all those fine actors had been allowed to relax into the roles a bit, inhabit them more, as Ivan Dixon so clearly did.

Still, those are small criticisms of the filmmakers’ larger success of portraying black dignity on the big screen. Having watched the film again recently, I wonder how it was that the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement, which together spawned a black arts movement in literature, music, and fine art, didn’t do likewise.

Sure, there was the militancy and sexual bravado of the blaxploitation films, and the 60’s and 70’s saw a spate of engaging films about black life in and out of the ghetto. Even now, we can look to several black actors – Denzel Washington, Samuel L. Jackson, Tony Todd, Pharrell Wright, Terrance Howard and Jamie Foxx must come to mind – who have embodied roles that bring humanity to the portrayals of extraordinary African American men, or ordinary African American men in extraordinary circumstances.

But few have followed the precedent set by Nothing But a Man, that is, few contemporary films set out to convey the complex humanity of everyday black men in every-day situations. (Charles Burnett’s films Killer of Sheep and To Sleep With Anger and Billy Woodberry’s Bless Their Little Hearts are three exceptions, but those films were made 15 to nearly 30 years ago).

Things are better for the black man in 2006 than they were in 1964. Or so it would seem. But it raises the question. Why is it that Nothing But a Man is as revolutionary today as it was then?

Bridgett M. Davis is a professor of journalism and creative writing at Baruch College. Her feature film, Naked Acts, was released in 1998, and is now available on DVD and video. Her novel, Shifting Through Neutral, was released in paperback in 2005.

FILM REVIEW

NOTHING BUT A MAN

Simple and still revolutionary

By BRIDGETT M. DAVIS

Nothing But a Man screens as part of the PSC’s film series on Friday, February 10 (page 9 for details). The film is also available on DVD and video.

Michael Roemer and Robert Young, former Harvard classmates and television documentary filmmakers, made the film with a six-person crew, drawing on their expertise to give the film its authentic, documentary feel. Roemer directed, Young photographed and the two shared screenwriting credits. Both Roemer and Young were white men, and I’ve often wondered how much the black actors and actresses on the set helped to create the nuanced dialogue that was so seldom seen in American popular culture – that of a black man’s internal life.

RESONATING

It is an equally resonating portrayal of black women. No sassing, no hands-on hips, no bitchiness. Rather, the incomparable Abbey Lincoln (who as a jazz singer made her acting debut in this film) shows alongside other key actresses the powerful strain that black women have come under in trying to nurture the wounded souls of their men. Her pain is palpable, but so are her deeper understanding and love for her husband. “It’s not as hard on a girl,” she tells Duff after his fruitless day of searching for work. “They’re not afraid of us.”

That phenomenon of black men watching their women being given more opportunity because they were seen as less threatening, coupled with black men’s frustration over not finding work at all, often led those men to leave their homes in futility. Duff certainly makes that choice. When, one year after the film came out, the Moynihan Report described how systemic racism had led to “the weakened role of the man in the Negro family,” it caused a firestorm of protest. Yet, watching the film makes it clear how devastating it is to a family when a man is not allowed to “be a man.” Indeed, it weakens him.

It’s worth noting too, that the expression of love and playfulness between a black man and black woman in the film was equally revolutionary for its time (and even now), as it shows genuine affection rather than bland sexuality.

Nothing But A Man was a critical success when it was released, debuting at the Venice Film Festival as the only American film in competition, where it won the Prix San Giorgio and the City of Venice prize. It immediately resonated with American critics as a socially conscious outgrowth of the civil rights movement. Its release was relegated to art houses, however. So ahead of its time it had little national exposure beyond the underground success it enjoyed amongst black cineastes with 16-mm projectors. In 1969, nearly 30 years after it first came out, the film had a brief re-release and was added to the National Film Registry.

REVOLUTIONARY

Through the prism of today’s visual aesthetics, Nothing But a Man has a quaint, studied quality. In an effort to avoid sentimentality as well as sensationalism, the director chose an unmanpered, stripped-down style with his actors. Characters sometimes wear emotionless. (And you wonder why Abbey Lincoln was made to wear that awful wig throughout, given how unnatural it looked?) If only all those fine actors had been allowed to relax into the roles a bit, inhabit them more, as Ivan Dixon so clearly did.

Still, those are small criticisms of the filmmakers’ larger success of portraying black dignity on the big screen. Having watched the film again recently, I wonder how it was that the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement, which together spawned a black arts movement in literature, music, and fine art, didn’t do likewise.

See it Feb. 10

Nothing But a Man is as revolutionary today as it was then.
Pensions in the crosshairs

By WILLIAM TARB
Queens College

Each day we read about another major corporation ending or freezing its pension benefits. IBM, Verizon and Motorola are among the many corporations that have made recent headlines. Americans these days have more power as voters than as workers, and it was voter backlash that defeated President Bush’s effort to take away Social Security benefits. However, where unions have been militant, they have won important victories on retirement security. The recent New York City transit strike was caused by the MTA’s attempt to cut pension benefits for new workers, something the union refused to consider and that workers were willing to strike to prevent.

UNDER ATTACK

As these events suggest, developments in the private sector can make things harder for public employees, including members of the PSC. What is important to the politics the PSC engages in and the attitude members take to that work.

In companies like the Standard & Poor’s 500 now have 33% of a trillion dollars in unfunded pension liabilities hidden from stockholders and workers. The main reason for this trend is that many companies failed to make adequate contributions to their pension funds in good times, counting on appreciation of stock holdings and high shareholder returns. Now that the market has run no longer covers their obligations, they are refusing to make up for this irresponsibility.

Workers whose private pensions are unfunded, only 20% of the unfunding is at companies that are considered financially weak. In most cases, the company is profitable but is passing to extract as much profit as possible at the expense of its workers.

STEALING WORKERS’ MONEY

At those companies that are in trouble, there are executives who are turning losses into profits by taking more from their workers. Consider one man, Robert S. Miller, who specializes in “unlocking hidden value” in companies that are losing money. As chief executive of Bethlehem Steel, Miller shut down its pension plan and left $3.7 billion in unfunded obligations to a federal agency. Any pension is lavish compared to none. As a result, the federal Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC) is picking up more cases than it can handle. The Government Accounting Office estimates federal fiscal exposure to private pension liabilities is now almost a trillion dollars. This is true even though the PBGC does not in fact pay each worker what they were promised by their employer. Modest upper limits cost many workers a large chunk of their benefits.

Losing Benefits

A generation ago, about 40% of private-sector employees had a guaranteed pension. Today, the figure is less than 20%. With the trend in the private sector well-established, state and local governments are following suit, cutting back benefits for retirees and denying coverage to new workers. In a recent instance, the governor of Alaska called a special session of the legislature to cut pension and retirement health care benefits for new employees. Governor Markowski was helped by Ruben Barrales, President Bush’s director of intergovernmental affairs, who lobbied Republican legislators to support replacing public pensions with private savings accounts. New medical benefits that workers are already receiving are under attack in a number of cities and states. New York City under Mayor Bloomberg is working on an actuarial study which will undoubtably show an “alarming” increase in the city’s future obligations which we will be told must be brought under control.

For the right wing, the gutting of pensions in the private sector is not a sign that our country is on the wrong track – rather, it is evidence that public worker pensions must be slashed as well. In the subway strike, The Manhattan Institute’s E.J. McMahon complained that even if the MTA won its pension demands, “transit workers would continue to enjoy guaranteed pensions that are lavish by private-sector standards.” Since any pension is “lavish” compared to no pension at all, McMahon is accurate, but that does not justify his proposals for further cuts.

For the right, the shrinking pensions of today – necessary to maintain their benefits, or vice-versa. And workers that they must sacrifice their wages for new employees. Governor Bush’s director of intergovernmental affairs, who lobbied Republican legislators to support replacing public pensions with private savings accounts. New medical benefits that workers are already receiving are under attack in a number of cities and states. New York City under Mayor Bloomberg is working on an actuarial study which will undoubtedly show an “alarming” increase in the city’s future obligations which we will be told must be brought under control.

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UNJUSTIFIED

The underlying argument of the Manhattan Institute and others is that maintaining strong union contracts will bankrupt America, because U.S. competitiveness requires that labor surrender its hard-won gains. But the way for our society to thrive is by expanding social protections and extending them to all Americans. If we want a high-wage, high-benefit economy instead of a Wal-Mart future, it is not enough to defend the shrinking pensions of today – necessary though that is. We must also wage a long-run fight to establish social benefits on a national basis, as other economically advanced countries do, and not tie them to employment.

As long as pensions and health care are tied to employment, employers will tell workers they must sacrifice their wages to maintain their benefits, or vice-versa. And unless we fight for security for everyone, the right will use the employer-based patchwork to divide and conquer. “Since you don’t have old-age security,” they will ask the public, “why should it exist for city workers or industrial unions?”

In today’s neoliberal economic climate, employers see the chance to renge on the promises they made to workers in retirement.

When the market is the arbiter of everything, older workers who cease to be economically active have no value – so why pay them?

RENEGING ON RETIREES

The attack on pensions can, however, be resisted. When California’s Governor Schwarzenegger mounted a campaign to eliminate pensions for public employees and replace them with 401(k)-style plans, nurses, teachers, firefighters and other public workers fought back. One every of Schwarzenegger’s ballot initiatives went down to defeat, and his political popularity is now at an all-time low.

If we defend our current rights, and also think boldly about the fundamental changes that this country needs, we can reverse the current move towards economic Social Darwinism. But we cannot do it alone. When we support transit workers or Delphi employees, we are also fighting for ourselves. Our union and we as individuals must be part of this larger struggle.
THE CONTRACT

Report on negotiations

By BARBARA BOWEN
PSC President

November 14, 2005 – three years after the expiration of the last contract – the Professional Staff Congress and CUNY management reached a tentative agreement on a framework for a settlement. Since then, the City and State have been reviewing the settlement prior to giving it their approval. On January 13, 2006 – two months after the union and management came to an agreement – CUNY Vice Chancellor Brenda Malone wrote in a letter to me: “The City and State expressed concerns about some items and requested additional information about others.” We do not yet have a formal report on those “concerns,” but as members, you have waited long enough, and I want to report to you on the status of negotiations.

The union bargained in good faith. We expected CUNY to do the same. In what follows, I outline how the “conceptual framework” was reached, the major elements it includes, and how the union plans to respond if we find that CUNY has failed to gain City and State approval for the framework we reached.

MEMBER PRESSURE

CUNY management began to negotiate seriously with the PSC only after we exerted constant membership pressure, including a new level of mobilization as we prepared for a possible referendum on a strike. Remember, it took CUNY two years to make any economic offer at all, and that offer was for 1.5% over four years. The intense membership pressure leading up to the September 29, 2005 mass meeting, coupled with a series of contract settlements for other public-employee unions in New York City, pushed CUNY to increase its economic offer in early November. By November 5, the deadline the union had set, the PSC Executive Council determined that we had an acceptable framework for a settlement.

Negotiations accelerated in the next two weeks, and we hammered out details of costs and language. It took us two weeks of intense and often heated bargaining sessions, but by November 14 the PSC and management arrived at a framework whose cost was worked out down to hundredths of a dollar. I want to emphasize, that in the context of a good economic settlement we could consider a provision for four office hours a week. I want to emphasize, however, that none of these elements is final. I share them with you because I feel you are entitled to know what is under discussion in this contract and why it has taken so long.

Of course everything changes if the City and State fail to approve the conceptual framework. We have had several indications that the framework will not be approved. The union negotiating team remains prepared to listen to the presentation by CUNY, the City and the State, but we cannot accept major changes on such issues as office hours and time to tenure if the settlement as whole does not represent a significant advance.

ADVANCE

At the January 26 Delegate Assembly, PSC leaders unanimously passed a resolution calling on members to lead to substantial salary increases and other real advances in working conditions. As part of the conceptual framework, we agreed to support a change in the time to tenure from five years to seven, and to have full-time faculty hold one additional office hour per week – in exchange for salary increases above 12%, a doubling of reassigned time for junior faculty, substantially improved sabbatical pay and other gains.

CONCESSIONS REMOVED

In addition, we got management’s demand to remove department chairs from the union to have a much more extensive discussion with the membership of the issue of time to tenure (though the provision we tentatively agreed to would not affect current junior faculty and would also not affect CLTs). The union leadership has taken the position that the time to tenure is a subject CUNY has negotiated with us, not impose unilaterally, and that an increase in the untenured period has to be accompanied by a significant increase in support for research. We would also like to discuss with you the issue of an additional office hour: the negotiating team believed that in the context of a good economic settlement we could consider a provision for four office hours a week. I want to emphasize, however, that none of these elements is final. I share them with you because I feel you are entitled to know what is under discussion in this contract and why it has taken so long.

Of course everything changes if the City and State fail to approve the conceptual framework. We have had several indications that the framework will not be approved. The union negotiating team remains prepared to listen to the presentation by CUNY, the City and the State, but we cannot accept major changes on such issues as office hours and time to tenure if the settlement as whole does not represent a significant advance.

CHANGE IN CLIMATE

During the summer of 2005, the context for public employee bargaining in New York began to shift. The police union received an arbitration award that offset higher salaries for current workers with deep salary cuts for new employees, and the UFT settled a contract with the City that included higher salaries as well as “productivity increases” and “reforms” sought by the City. In this context, the PSC negotiating team agreed to consider some proposals management introduced late in the bargaining – as long as they would lead to substantial salary increases and other real advances in working conditions. As part of the conceptual framework, we agreed to support a change in the time to tenure from five years to seven, and to have full-time faculty hold one additional office hour per week – in exchange for salary increases above 12%, a doubling of reassigned time for junior faculty, substantially improved sabbatical pay and other gains.

The union identified and organized for three goals in this contract: 1) salary increases of at least 10%; 2) stabilization of the Welfare Fund and a restoration of the dental benefit; and 3) improvements in equity and working conditions. It’s a measure of the hostile political climate we face that those relatively modest goals are absurdly difficult to achieve. We also took a strong stand against a contract based on concessions. The PSC refused to sell out “the unborn,” as future employees are sometimes called, or to sell out those who might be called “the retired,” who depend on the Welfare Fund for prescription drugs. We demanded a principled contract that recognizes the work we do, improves rather than cuts our benefits, and advances our individual and collective professional lives.

In addition, we pressed for direct assistance from the State of New York to preserve supplemental health benefits through the Welfare Fund. The State provides more than 80% of the government funding for CUNY, and has intervened in the past with other union welfare funds to ensure that benefits are preserved. The PSC leadership also saw that the City covers health insurance for part-time instructional staff who meet eligibility requirements, just as the City covers health insurance for other part-time employees.

The union bargained in good faith and we expected CUNY to do the same.

http://i-rui.com

This report was written immediately after the PSC Delegate Assembly on February 25, where the main agenda item was a discussion of contract talks. It was first distributed by e-mail; if you would like to receive future e-mail contract updates, please enter your address at www.psc-cuny.org/updates.htm.
SOLIDARITY FOREVER

PSC members take a stand with the TWU on the picket line

On December 15, the PSC Delegate Assembly urged members to join transit workers on the picket line in the event of a bus and subway strike – and about 100 PSC members did so. Here are a few of their stories.

Details of the job

Ashley Dawson
College of Staten Island

I went there with my daughter, who’s nine and a half, and it was interesting to see how the workers on the picket line related to her. This one guy was really big, built like a linebacker. With this big, deep voice he spoke to my daughter in a very gentle tone. He was a mechanic, working with bus batteries, and explained to her in detail what he does. Obviously he was someone who has kids, or is frequently around kids, and he turned it almost into a chemistry lesson. He asked if she knew what an acid is, what carbonic acid, and all the hydrogen constituents that are needed to make a battery work. Besides the danger of being splashed by hydrochloric acid, he talked about the effect on his lungs, working in an environment like that. He explained how the MTA didn’t want to pay for his health insurance, and asked if she thought that was fair. It made a very strong impression on her. I was very impressed that he didn’t treat my daughter like a baby, that he spoke to her directly about his experience – it was a sort of magical exchange between the two of them. My daughter, being a typical nine-year-old, had been feeling uncomfortable when we arrived. She was feeling on the margins of things, and not that interested, so it was wonderful that he spoke directly to her. And it was interesting to hear in such physical detail what’s involved in the work that’s needed for the bus you ride on to keep running. The bus you ride on every day, and you don’t even think about it. The striker seemed very aware of the broader context for what they were doing. Another guy was telling me that in the past, City labor unions bargaining their contracts all together and were stronger. Today, he said, we’re dying a death of 1,000 cuts. The City tries to bargain down one union at a time, and separately we can’t use our collective power. Maybe we can learn something from that history.

Public support

Carolina Bank Muñez
Brooklyn College

I went to a picket line at the train station right off of the Brooklyn Bridge, by City Hall. It was really, really cold! But also very high-energy. The transit workers on the line were having conversation with a lot of folks who were walking by. I thought they all had a really good message. They said, look, this is not just for us. Unions have been getting really had contracts, giving back and giving back. They said, “We can’t just let this keep happening.” They were inspiring. Most people who walked by were supportive. Two yelled something nasty, but everyone else was positive. There were teachers who said, “We’re glad you’re out here, we support you all the way.” A lot of people gave us the thumbs-up. I talked for a while with one striker who lives in Jersey. He told me how he was glad to have a decent job, a union job, how it helped him to have a better life. He was really proud of his kid, who’s applying to college. He was very clear about the two-tier issue, and said he doesn’t want to see the opportunity he’s had eroded for future generations.

In addition to the small local picket lines, I think there should have been a huge mass rally at Penn Station, on first day of strike or soon after. People didn’t realize that there was a lot of support for the strike, because there was no one huge line or protest to make it visible.

Extraordinary graciousness

Mary O’Riordan
City Tech

I spent several hours on the picket line at the Woodlawn terminus of the #4 line in the Bronx. It was very emotional, because they were so glad to see me there. They stopped picketing and introduced me, and I was greeted by much applause. I didn’t think I was doing anything special. I just had a homemade sign that said, “PSC/CUNY supports TWU 100.” In fact, I was a little embarrassed that it didn’t look better – but they told me, “Your sign is perfect.” I was touched not only by their commitment but also by their extra-graciousness. They came up individually to thank me for my support, they all wanted to talk with me, and they repeatedly offered me food and hot coffee. I think they were particularly impressed that CUNY professors would come out to support them – it meant a lot. I was like a star on the picket line! I spoke at length with Matthew, a technician who, in all types of weather, goes down on the elevated tracks to address electrical problems. He and his wife, a Hostos graduate and a nurse at North Central Bronx Hospital, struggle to pay tuition of more than $20,000 a year for their two children. I also spoke with Harrington, a subway conductor, and a former Lehman student, who was one of those who sued the MTA for the right to wear his turban on the job. I talked for long time with Phylis, a subway cleaner and a single mother of six. She was a very serious, hardworking person, very devoted to her family. She was not a militant rabblerouser. After you talk to someone like that, it’s disturbing to hear the mayor characterize them as selfish. Having a job with decent benefits had made a big difference for her children, and that is why she was out on strike.

I don’t know what’s going to happen next, but I think it’s important that we continue to give transit workers our support. Not just to support another union, but also out of self-interest – their success will impact on our own ability to sign a contract and restore our health benefits. I certainly support them in their effort to draw the line, to make a stand for labor.

“A lot of people gave us the thumbs up!”

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Real bargaining now

Check the PSC website, www.psc-cuny.org, for contract updates and contract actions. On January 25, the Delegate Assembly voted to continue the pressure on Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, so check the Act Now portion for a letter telling him, the governor and the mayor, “Settle the contract now: Implement the November 14 conceptual framework agreement.” As the PSC meets with City and State representatives in February, there may be more news and possibly more actions to take. Find out at www.psc-cuny.org.