By BARBARA BOWEN
PSC President

On May 24 we were one thousand strong. Think about what that means: the biggest PSC rally in memory, a thousand members with single messages. United, we demanded a contract that meets our needs for salaries, restoration of Welfare Fund benefits and improvements in equity and working conditions. As you can see from the photos here, the experience of rallying together with allied unions produced a sense of exhilaration as well as power.

Photo accounts of political demonstrations regularly report that the atmosphere was “carnival-like,” as if that were a bad thing, as if the joy that goes along with the best of these events undermines their seriousness. The joy is part of the seriousness, it seems to me, and that was clearly in evidence on May 24. Not just the blues band or the larger-than-life puppets, but the chanting and the power of its workers spoke for itself. I was struck in particular of its workers’ sense of exhilaration as well as experience of rallying together.

The political effect of our mobilization was apparent immediately. The rally was a clear turn, the whole world.

One thousand strong

The success of our own mobilization, especially against the background of a wave of labor action in the city, was also shifting the political landscape. Our rally was the precursor of a wave of labor action that rolled across the city in June. The political effect of our mobilization was apparent immediately; in fact, even before the rally began. On the morning of May 24, Chancellor Goldstein issued an email message to the entire University, declaring that there would be an “emergency agenda” in this round of bargaining, and asserting that he has been “a staunch advocate” of “competitive salaries” and increased funding for research. Pushed by the rally, Goldstein also announced that the central administration was “pursuing State and City support for the recognition of compensations for faculty that takes into account the high cost of living in New York City.” Although the message took issue with our analysis of management’s failure to provide adequate funding for the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund, it demonstrated that the PSC’s demand for Welfare Fund benefit restorations had been understood. The Chancellor is now on record against an austerity agenda, especially against the backdrop of a wave of labor action.

Meanwhile, the labor landscape in the city was also shifting. Our rally was the precursor of a wave of labor action that rolled across the city in June. Municipal workers in almost every sector expressed their outrage that a city with a $1.3 billion budget surplus would try to shortchange city workers. Daycare workers and home health care aides, two of the most underpaid groups in the city, staged dramatic strikes over the long weekend.

Spirited PSC rally on May 24

For the first time in memory, major city unions—teachers, firefighters, and police—held a mass rally for fair contracts. And on June 19 thousands of workers marched across Brooklyn Bridge to City Hall demanding increased funding for health care. PSC contingents participated in all of these actions.

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