NEW ROUND OF CONTRACT TALKS
DELEGATES OK DEMANDS, BARGAINING BEGINS

The union began contract talks with CUNY management on February 7, and an agreement on ground rules was reached at the second session on March 2. The PSC Delegate Assembly met twice in February, to approve contract demands and plan the union’s campaign to achieve them. Through local campus organizing, the union will build the power needed to win, PSC leaders said. Above, members of the PSC and CUNY bargaining teams at the Feb. 7 session.

- **RETIREMENT**
  TIAA-CREF’s new computer system
  Poor communication has plagued TIAA-CREF’s transition to a new computer system, and some accounts have had errors. Check your statement, says the PSC.
  **PAGE 9**

- **CONFERENCE**
  Gay and lesbian student services
  Staff and faculty from across CUNY gathered to discuss the state of services for GLBTQ students. Colleges need to do more, advocates say.
  **PAGE 12**

- **CONVERSION LINES**
  50 adjuncts hired full-time
  With last year’s contract settlement, the PSC secured funding for 100 new full-time lines for long-serving adjuncts. Half have now been hired.
  **PAGE 5**

- **BENEFITS**
  Welfare Fund has new website
  The PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund has launched its new website, at www.psccunywf.org. There you can find claims forms, benefit information and more.
  **PAGE 10**
Inconvenient truths and corrections

Have you written a letter to the “editor” that has been rejected by a newspaper or publication? Do you know how to write a letter in which you believe the editor will publish it? If not, you will never have a chance in the public discourse to present your views. This new independent online publication, Rejected Letters to the Editor, is designed to provide a platform for such letters.

Our website will be found at rejecteditortotheeditor@gmail.com.

Rejection is not just a few people in an office. You say, “Come on, PSC. . . Fight for us.” I take the call to action seriously—but if members think of the union as “them,” as a separate entity that is supposed to carry out the fight for “us,” then the union will be too weak to win.

The power of the union is the membership, in our willingness to fight for ourselves and for each other. So I will join you in saying, “Come on, PSC”—and that means I will be calling on you and every other member to take action in our contract campaign.

Wiesenfeld responds

One would think that the highly educated demographic which comprises the PSC would have the elementary sense to at least attempt to cultivate a concordat with a university trustee recently reconfirmed by the New York State Senate to a 7-year term with only the two Senate holdouts being blindly beholden to the PSC’s whims.

In 1999, I chose not to dignify the calumny of then-State Senator Dan Hevesi and his rabble-rousing sidekick Isaac Abraham, an individual who creates disturbances in his Williamsburg community and operates an illegal business from his public housing apartment. Abraham’s pique was borne out of my failure to recognize him as having any standing in his community to deal with the office of then-Governor Pataki.

Dan Hevesi, a particularly troubled intellectual, who left office under suspicious circumstances, was also animadverted by his father’s ancient enmity towards me, due to my success in exposing his political, intellectual, and religious hypocrisy in Queens.

Of course, I categorically deny these charges—whether leveled by Abraham or repeated by Hevesi or the PSC. I sought them and will continue to seek not to dignify these charges nor the perverted individuals making them. The fact is virtual all the legislators, minority and Caucasian, made clear in the Albany hearings their knowledge of my active concern for all of our campuses.

The current PSC views itself as an institution dedicated to world revolution. They are angered because I believe that academic diversity means that left, right and center get heard. I am, therefore, proud of my stand in this regard.

Jeffrey Wiesenfeld
Trustee, City University of New York

Clarion’s editor responds: This letter concerns an article in the Februrary Clarion (“Pataki picks last two trustees”), which reported as follows: “When Wiesenfeld was first appointed in 1999, Isaac Abraham, a longtime activist in Brooklyn’s Jewish community, charged that Wiesenfeld had referred to African Americans as ‘savages’ and labeled Hassidic Jews ‘thieves.’ Wiesenfeld claimed that Abraham was motivated by a personal feud, but never denied the charges.”

Our reporting was accurate. We are glad to now publish Wiesenfeld’s denial of these charges—his first since the controversy flared nearly eight years ago.

It was the New York Post that first broke the story in June 1999, under the headline “Pataki Puts Under Fire for Bias.” The Post article was the center of attention at Wiesenfeld’s confirmation hearing the following week.

According to an Associated Press report of June 16, 1999, “Wiesenfeld became red-faced as Hevesi read last week’s newspaper story and other accounts dating back to 1995 that accused Wiesenfeld of the name-calling. But Wiesenfeld did not deny the allegations outright. The New York Times—also and Wiesenfeld’s failure to deny them—were also reported in The New York Times, and cited in a report by the New York-based Foundation for Ethic Understanding.

Wiesenfeld’s claim that the PSC is “devoted to world revolution” is either misinformed or intentionally misleading.

Train robbery?

I write in the hope that my experience and the experience of my peers who have been repeatedly or other union members

After building up a $800 balance on my transit benefit, I decided to return to New York on my own instead of suspending it and continuing to pay the administrative fee. I submitted the paper evidence to the college in late November and was aware of a 30-day policy to use up any remaining balance. However, I was never informed when the administrative fee was again and was told that when the 30-day countdown would begin. The administrative fee continued to be deducted from my paycheck—checks including an “advise date” January 18, 2007.

Around January 8, apparently to the end of my unpublished 4 weeks of leave, the UCRA would not allow me to use my funds to purchase MetroCards for future use, but was only allowed to draw on about $350—less than a third of the amount remaining in the account. After dozens of further attempts and several hours with Chase phone support, I was finally told that my account was suspended for withdrawing too much in a 3-day period. I was at the end of my 30 days, the funds would be sent back to the employer.

I immediately called City Tech human resources, explained what had happened and was told someone would call me back. After several weeks with no response, I called again and was told that nothing could be done, that I had lost the funds forever.

Ena Halleck
City Tech
DA approves contract demands

By PETER HOGNESS

Bargaining for a new PSC-CUNY contract got underway in February. The PSC Delegate Assembly approved a list of bargaining demands, and PSC negotiators met with CUNY management on February 7 and March 2.

“Defining the union’s bargaining agenda is important,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen, “but when we hand the demands across the table, that’s just the beginning. Now we must focus on how to put power behind those demands, enough power to win.”

The February 7 session marked the beginning of talks in this round of bargaining. “Both sides came well prepared, and it was a productive discussion,” said PSC negotiating team member Bob Cermele. “After some give and take, we moved toward agreement on ground rules for the negotiations going forward.” At the next session, the two sides finalized an agreement on procedural issues.

JOINT EFFORT

The union has called on CUNY management to make a joint effort to settle the next contract before the current agreement expires. For its part, the PSC came to the table with a focused list of 31 demands (see page 4) – about half as many as in the last contract talks. “This list represents some hard choices,” said Bowen.

“CUNY has told us that they also want to settle before this contract expires,” said PSC Secretary Arthurene DeSola. “But the level is in the details.” Management has not yet presented its demands, but at the first session CUNY negotiators said that they, too, have an agenda – including greater “flexibility” in job titles. “What that often means,” DeSola observed, “is that they want employees to do more of the work.” While the Union negotiators expect that hard bargaining lies ahead.

At the February session, on March 2, the PSC presented its demands. Union negotiators argued that adhering to a new, lower-level contract “patterns” from the city and state could never make up the 30-year deficit in salaries dating from the NYC fiscal crisis. CUNY needs to take a broader approach, they said, since a major university must compete nationally for its faculty and staff.

COMMUNITY

The union’s demands had been approved by its Delegate Assembly at a special meeting on February 15. They call for significant improvements in salary and workload, stability in health care, and protection against inequities, and clear paths for advance.

(See “The union’s bargaining agenda,” page 4.) “Our demands seek to reclaim a system that is committed to the education of our students,” Bowen told delegates. “We should be supported in that commitment, not undermined, by our working conditions.”

In February, the PSC carried out a detailed survey of members’ views on contract demands. “This was the most extensive scientific survey of member opinion ever done in this union,” First VP Steve London reported. “We want to support departments’ ability to set class size, since this is a matter of academic judgment,” responded Bowen. But workload at CUNY is a key union concern, she said: “There’s nowhere at CUNY where this problem isn’t felt.”

Adjoint activists mobilized a strong turnout at the Delegate Assembly to support job security and improvements in pay and benefits for part-timers. Dozens of members attended as observers, and adjunct delegates held up signs with slogans such as Equity for Part-Timers: “It’s great to see the signs,” commented Bowen. “I’m glad to see people organizing for their views within their own DA.”

“I teach 25 hours a week and I’m called ‘part-time,’” said Cyndi Casey, an instructor in the College Language Immersion Program (CLIP) at LaGuardia. “Does that mean that people who work 25 hours a week are not important?”

Both kinds of problems are urgent, commented Bowen. “We have to address both the erosion of the entire salary scale and the relative depression of salaries for different groups within it,” she said.

A week later, on February 22, the Delegate Assembly discussed the shape of the union’s contract campaign. The Executive Council proposed organizing structures at the campus level and within the EC as the backbone of the effort, with regular communication between them. “The goal is to combine strategic decisions on union-wide policies with members’ imagination and creativity at the local level,” said Treasurer Mike Fabricant. The work on campus would be done by members “most organizing, in my experience, is local.”

Member opinion surveyed by phone

First two sessions with CUNY management held

Delegates voting at the Special DA on February 15. At center is Ingrid Hughes.

Bowen said that the PSC will fight to fix CUNY’s “broken job system,” which is heavily reliant on the exploitation of adjuncts. “CUNY is addicted to that job system,” she said, “but the system undermines every job in the bargaining unit. It is patent- ing unjust to part-timers – and when the employer can hire people at a frac- tion of the cost of a full-timer, with limited rights and worse benefits, that drags down conditions for all.”

In discussion, Delegate Peter Jonas spoke in support of the demand to change the contract’s broad management rights clause. “I’m a retiree, but I want to talk about how important this is – it means for intellectual property, what it means for privacy rights, what it means for academic freedom,” Jonas said. “It impacts everyone all the time, and it has to be changed. If not, the univer- sity will continue to sneak around their bargaining obligations.”

WORKLOAD

Delegates agreed that the issue of CUNY’s heavy workload was critical, and Kyle Cordeleone of City Tech asked why the union was not also demanding specific limits on class size. “We want to support departments’ ability to set class size, since this is a matter of academic judgment,” responded Bowen. But workload at CUNY is a key union concern, she said: “There’s nowhere at CUNY where this problem isn’t felt.”

Adjoint activists mobilized a strong turnout at the Delegate Assembly to support job security and improvements in pay and benefits for part-timers. Dozens of members attended as observers, and adjunct delegates held up signs with slogans such as Equity for Part-Timers: “It’s great to see the signs,” commented Bowen. “I’m glad to see people organizing for their views within their own DA.”

“I teach 25 hours a week and I’m called ‘part-time,’” said Cyndi Casey, an instructor in the College Language Immersion Program (CLIP) at LaGuardia. “Does that sound right to you?” Delegates an- swered with a chorus of “No!”

“T’im very glad to see health insur- ance for graduate employees on the agenda,” said Carl Lindskog, an ad- junct and a doctoral student in his- toric preservation. “I see so many grad students walking around without coverage, hoping they don’t get sick.”

On wages, PSC Treasurer Mike Fabricant noted that more than 55% of both faculty and staff are “ma- roomed” at the top salary step within their title. “It’s not just the top of the top title, but the top step of every ti- tle,” he said. “It’s a very widespread problem.” In addition to across-the- board increases, he said, the union is therefore demanding additional money for the same top step.

Vasilios Petratos, chapter chair at College of Staten Island, supported the demand for better pay for part- timers. “For a 3- or 4-credit course, an adjunct earns one-fifth or one- sixth of what I earn,” Petratos said. “There’s no formula that can justify that inequity.”

BOTH PROBLEMS

Both kinds of problems are urgent, commented Bowen. “We have to address both the erosion of the entire salary scale and the relative depression of salaries for different groups within it,” she said.

A week later, on February 22, the Delegate Assembly discussed the shape of the union’s contract campaign. The Executive Council pro- posed organizing structures at the campus level and within the EC as the backbone of the effort, with regul- lar communication between them. “The goal is to combine strategic deci- sions on union-wide policies with members’ imagination and creativity at the local level,” said Treasurer Mike Fabricant. The work on campus would be done by members “most organizing, in my experience, is local.”
The union’s bargaining agenda

The PSC’s demands for this round of contract bargaining were approved by the union’s Delegate Assembly on February 15. (See page 3 for details.)

**SALARY**

1. Salary Increases: Salaries must be comprehensively lifted – for all titles and all ranks – so the University regains its salary competitiveness with other major universities regionally and nationwide. Inequities of salary must also be addressed so that there is movement toward pay equity for employees in part-time positions and other titles.

   All members of the bargaining unit, including contingent and part-time faculty employed at the Educational Opportunity Centers and in Continuing Education series titles, shall receive a substantial per annum across-the-board salary increase. (Article 24)

2. Enhancement of Top Steps: Substantial funds shall be added to the base salary on the top step of each salary schedule for every title and every rank, both full-time and part-time. (Article 24)

3. Movement in Steps: The five-year step and the seven-year step shall be converted to one-year steps. Teaching and non-teaching adjuncts shall receive a movement in schedule after one year. (Article 24)

4. Adjunct Professional Hour: The provision for a professional hour negotiated in the last collective bargaining agreement shall be amended so that eligibility may be reached by service University-wide. (Article 15)

5. Law School Salary Schedule: A complete schedule of salary steps for all CUNY Law School full-time and part-time faculty shall be introduced. (Article 24)

6. Upgrade Lecturer Position: Lecturers in the Doctoral Schedule and EOC Lecturers shall be placed on the Assistant Professor salary schedule at the appropriate step. (Article 24)

7. Upgrade CLIP and Similar Positions: Employers in the Continuing Education Teacher title who teach non-credit-bearing remedial or ESL instructional programs shall be placed at the appropriate salary step in the Lecturer or Assistant Professor title. (Supplemental Agreement on Continuing Education)

**HEALTH BENEFITS**

8. Welfare Fund: There shall be a substantial increase in contributions to the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund for all active and retired members of the bargaining unit, including employees at the Educational Opportunity Centers. Part-time instructional staff members shall be included in the New York City Health Benefits Program. (Article 26)

9. Graduate Employee Health Insuranc e: The parties shall support and gain the necessary legislative and executive action to provide health insurance to graduate employees and their dependents. (Article 26)

**WORKLOAD**

10. Course Load: Teaching loads for full-time faculty throughout the University shall be substantially reduced. (Article 15 and Appendix A)

11. Reassigned Time: All tenured Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Professors shall receive a substantial and specific number of days of reassigned time on a per academic year (or per three-year period) in order to engage in scholarly and/or creative activities related to their academic disciplines. (Article 15)

12. Educational Technology: Workload for courses employing new media, known variously as educational technology and distance learning, shall be governed by the workload provisions of this Agreement. The increased workload – for all members of the bargaining unit – arising from instruction in these media shall be supported by the University and fully compensated. Such support and compensation shall include but not be limited to: extra workload credit for both faculty and staff, reduced class size, and agreements on staffing levels for professional staff. Instructors shall retain control of the mode of instruction employed in their courses. (Articles 15 and Appendix A)

13. Class Size: Class size has a direct impact on the workload of all faculty and of some staff, particularly CLTs. The University has an obligation to compensate faculty if their classes exceed specified departmental class sizes. In the event that class size exceeds departmental class limits, the instructor shall receive one additional contact hour credit toward the instructor’s teaching workload for each five students above the departmental limit. (Article 15 and Appendix A)

14. Multiple Position Policy: The Multiple Position Policy of the University shall be amended. (Articles 14 and 15)

15. Library Faculty: All Library Faculty, regardless of when hired, shall be placed on the full-time teaching faculty calendar. (Article 14)

**PROMOTIONS & JOB SECURITY**

16. Adjunct Seniority: A seniority/hiring preference system for part-time instructional staff, in both classroom and non-classroom titles, shall be established and enforced. A seniority/hiring preference system for Continuing Education Teachers who are eligible for benefits shall be established and enforced. (Articles 9 and 10, Supplemental Agreement on Continuing Education)

17. Higher Education Officer Series Re-classification: The Higher Education Officer series shall include increased opportunities for advancement through reclassification to a higher position, for example through peer review, preparation of a portfolio, and meeting performance criteria. The reclassification process shall be amended to provide due process. After five years of service in the Assistant to HEO title, employees shall be matured automatically to the title Higher Education Assistant. (Article 15)

18. Reasons for Non-Reappointment of Higher Education Officer Series Employees: During the first four years of employment, HEO series employees shall be entitled to reasons for non-reappointment. (Article 13)

19. College Laboratory Technicians: A new title in the College Laboratory Technician series shall be created, with a salary schedule identical to the Chief CLT schedule, to reflect the increased technological responsibilities and capacities of certain employees in the College Laboratory Technician series. Article 22.2.a shall be amended to allow promotion to this title for individuals who meet appropriate guidelines. (Articles 34 and 22)

**WORKING CONDITIONS/QUALITY OF LIFE**

20. Health and Safety: Article 39.1 shall be amended to improve the stated standard for violations – to include conditions that interfere with teaching and learning or with the ability of employees to perform their assigned duties. Article 39.1 shall also be amended to allow health and safety grievances to be taken to Step 3 of the process provided in Article 20.4. Article 39.2 shall be amended to establish a campus health and safety committee at each college, in addition to the central health and safety committee. (Article 38)

21. Parental and Family Medical Leave: Family Medical Leave shall not run concurrently with sick leave; in addition, the University shall establish full-paid semester-long leave for the introduction of a new child into the household, or for the medical care of an immediate family member. (Article 16)

22. Access to Childcare: The parties shall agree to jointly seek legislation to enhance current access to on-campus childcare to provide on-campus childcare to dependents of members of the bargaining unit. (Article 30)

23. Banked Sick Days: Under certain conditions, employees shall have the opportunity to transfer sick days to meet special needs of others in the bargaining unit or to convert sick days to support wellness and preventive health measures for themselves. (Article 16)

24. Tuition Waivers: CUNY tuition shall be waived for immediate family members and domestic part-time members of the bargaining unit, and for CUNY graduate students who are employed by the University. The provision for tuition waivers for part-time instructional staff shall be amended so that certain current restrictions are lifted and access to tuition waiver permission for part-time instructional staff is increased. The provision for tuition waivers for full-time instructional staff shall be amended to include summer sessions. (Article 29)

25. Adjunct Professional Development Fund: The Adjunct Professional Development Fund shall be made permanent by recurring funds. (Appendix C)

26. Release Access to Electronic Resources: Retired members of the instructional staff shall have access to CUNY electronic mail addresses and to electronic databases available to active employees. (Article 27)

**SPECIAL CONSTITUENCIES**

27. Educational Opportunity Centers: Salary parity with comparable positions in the other units of the City University shall be maintained. The Supplemental Agreement on Educational Opportunity Centers shall be amended to improve certain working conditions. (Supplemental Agreement on Educational Opportunity Centers)

28. Hunter Campus Schools: Improvements shall be made in certain unique salary rates and benefits for employees teaching at Hunter College, contingent position at the Hunter Campus Schools. (Article 24 and others)

**CUNY/PSC RELATIONS**

29. Management Rights Clause: Article 2 shall be amended to provide for management’s duty to negotiate with the PSC and to provide for enforcement of this duty under Article 20. (Article 2)

30. Overuse and Abuse of Temporary, Contingent and Part-Time Titles: Temporary, contingent and part-time titles, including but not limited to non-teaching adjunct titles, teaching adjunct titles, and part-time College Laboratory Technician titles, shall not be abused. (Article 24, Article 15 and elsewhere)

31. Increased Reassigned Time for Union Work: The amount of reassigned time allocated to the Professional Staff Congress for implementation of the Agreement shall be increased to 250 hours per semester. (Article 20)

The Professional Staff Congress res- serves the right to amend or supple- ment these demands during the course of collective bargaining.
This winter, City University hired faculty for its first 50 conversion lines – new full-time faculty positions for which the hiring pool is made up of long-serving CUNY adjuncts. These new lines were created in conjunction with last year’s contract settlement, with another 50 to be hired for the Fall 2007 semester.

“This really is precedent-setting – not only for CUNY, but nationally,” said PSC Treasurer Mike Fabricant. “These first conversion lines are a beachhead, from which we can build future campaigns for an increasing number of conversion lines, offering part-time faculty the overdue opportunity of transitioning to full-time status within the university.” The union is seeking support in the state legislature for the creation of additional conversion lines.

100 LINES

Chancellor Matthew Goldstein agreed to create the 100 lines in a letter sent to the union on May 10, 2006. On November 21, Vice Chancellor Brenda Malone announced the allocation of the first 50 lines among CUNY’s colleges: 12 schools received three lines each, York and John Jay received four each, while Brooklyn, BCC and Kingsborough each received two. “The lines were allocated in inverse order to the percentage of classes taught by full-time faculty in Fall 2005,” explained Malone.

On each campus, the decision on which departments would get a line was made by the college president. Across the university, 11 English departments received a conversion line, followed by four for math departments and three each for eco- nomics and history. Positions were to be filled in time for the Spring 2007 semester, which meant that the hiring process had to follow a very tight timeline. CUNY’s late decision meant that most departments were not informed until early December, and eligible adjuncts often had only a week to apply. Competition for the positions was intense.

“I coincided with the end of the semester, so it was a very busy time,” said Wayne Moreland, who was hired on a conversion line in Queens College’s English department. “Ours came up in the middle of December, and the deadline was December 20th.”

For Moreland, the process had a happy conclusion. “I’m grateful I had this opportunity,” he said. An adjunct at Queens for 19 years, he has been a mainstay of the department. “I’ve done creative writing, fiction workshops, American literature surveys, poetry workshops, African American literature. In that 19 years, I think I’ve taught almost everything in the department except medieval literature.” Within this range, African American literature is Moreland’s specialty, and Chair Nancy Comley told Clarion that the department particularly needs it.

The most obvious difference in being full-time is “more security and more money,” Moreland said. “Beyond that,” he added, “the job itself is more focused. And you have a greater sense of ownership and responsibility within the department.” Moreland, who has a mas- ters’ degree, has been asked by the department to work as a mentor with its part-time faculty.

It is quick to say that he was one of many experienced applicants who also deserve full-time positions. In his department, more than 20 were eligible and 11 applied. “You knew that there were a lot of other people who also wanted the same position and also were well qualified,” he said. “To be honest, there is a kind of awkwardness around it — even though other adjacent have been universally supportive.”

Those twin gaps — between the number of conversion lines and the number of those qualified, as well as between work conditions for full-time and part-time faculty — were acutely felt by both applicants and those making the hiring decisions. “What I said was, ‘I’m going to make one ad- junct very happy — and break a lot more adjuncts’ hearts,’” said Brian Keener, chair of the English depart- ment at City Tech. “It was not an easy decision, because a department like ours has so many good people.”

In Keener’s department, 36 people were eligible, 14 applied, and eight were interviewed.

QUALIFICATIONS

Part-time faculty were eligible to apply for a conversion line if they had held adjunct positions in that department in eight of the last 10 semesters (excluding Summer ses- sions); had taught at least six classroom contact hours in seven of those 10; and taught at least six classroom contact hours in the Fall semester. The definition of the applicant pool, depart- ments were to fill the positions with the same procedures as for any full- time faculty.

Problems arose along the way, of- ten because management failed to ac- curately determine who was eligible, and notify them in a timely fashion.

Hiring for the next 50 lines could go more smooth- ly, if more time is available for the search process. Ac- cording to the memo that announced the allocation of the remaining 50 lines, these will be distributed early in the Spring for the Fall 2007 semester.

Most CUNY colleges received three lines

Wayne Moreland teaches English at Queens College.
Half of my colleagues are looking elsewhere

Jonathan Buchsbaum
Professor, Queens College

My department has hired about six or seven highly qualified professors in recent years. I believe we have perhaps the best media studies department in the greater New York City area, with excellent teachers dedicated to the students, extremely productive research output, high enrollments in classes, and on the cutting edge of new technology.

Yet half of these excellent colleagues are seeking positions at other schools. You need to know why that is happening, for all of these teachers wanted to come to CUNY, wanted to be in New York, love our students, and have friendly and supportive collegial relations.

OUTRAGED AND FRUS TRATED

One young associate professor, who came to Queens College from an executive position at NBC, was recently promoted with an excellent raise of $71.8 million. Breaking with the pattern set by George Pataki, the Spitzer budget does not seek major cuts to TAP or other programs, and asks for no increase in tuition. Unlike Pataki’s budgets, the governor’s plan would also fund CUNY’s mandatory cost increases – expenses that stem from rising fuel costs, increased enrollment, and collective bargaining agreements.

But Spitzer’s budget does not significantly address the erosion of CUNY’s full-time faculty and staff and the long-standing underfunding of the university. For example, $4 million is earmarked for new faculty hiring – an amount that would only add a few dozen lines.

“This is essentially a budget that leaves CUNY treading water,” said PSC Vice President Steve London. “The PSC is asking the state legislature to step up to the plate and provide a real advance in funding for CUNY.”

In response to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit, the governor has proposed dramatic increases in funding for K-12 education in the five boroughs to begin to right historic inequities in New York’s funding of education. This investment is based on the idea that New York City students need a high-quality education in order to be economically successful – and the PSC argues that the governor’s budget fails to take into account CUNY’s role in this process, leaving it badly underfunded and understaffed.

UNDERFUNDED, UNDERSTAFFED

“College has never been more necessary than it is today,” PSC President Barbara Bowen told a February 8 hearing in Albany. “CUNY is the only college within economic reach for the majority of the students who will be served by the enhancement in the public schools.”

Bowen noted that nearly 60% of CUNY students are from families whose total annual income is under $30,000, while 72% are people of color. “It is no accident that this is the population whose educational opportunity has been jeopardized by years of disinvestment in CUNY,” she concluded. (See page 11.)

New faculty lines are at the center of the PSC’s budget agenda. Between 1975 and 2006, the number of full-time faculty lines dropped from 11,268 to 6,334, even though student enrollment is now at an all-time high. Despite significant hiring in recent years, there was a net increase of only 69 new lines in the last year because of high levels of attrition, including retirement. In fact, the number of part-time faculty has increased at twice the rate of full-time faculty over the last 6 years. The result is that more than 50% of courses at CUNY are still taught by part-time faculty, despite the university’s pledge in 2000 to bring the share of instruction by full-time faculty up to 70%.

FULL-TIME LINES

As a result, the PSC is calling for $27.5 million to fund 500 faculty lines and 50 professional staff lines in the next year. This would be in addition to the more modest hiring proposed by Spitzer and by CUNY’s administration, which CUNY says would add up to 200 new lines. New hiring should include increased funding to increase racial and ethnic diversity, the union says, and it is requesting an additional $5 million to support recruitment efforts. To tap the talent that
 Tested increase for CUNY

already exists among CUNY’s adj-
uncuts, the union proposes that a sig-
ificant number of the new full-time
lines be earmarked as “conversion
lines,” hired from among long-serv-
part-time faculty.

Other PSC proposals in-
clude increasing operating
support for the community
colleges by an additional
$150 per full-time equivalent
student, providing health
insurance for CUNY gradu-
ate students, and a student
mentoring initiative. In all,
the union is calling for a total of
$76 million beyond the governor’s pro-
posed budget of $1.42 billion for
CUNY – $55.9 million for its own pro-
posals plus CUNY’s request for an
additional $24.3 million, which the
PSC supports. The PSC also sup-
ports CUNY’s capital budget pro-
posal, which includes substantial
resources for new construction.

COMMISSION PROPOSED

Gov. Spitzer has also proposed the formation of a commission on
public higher education. “The gover-
nor says he wants to see how we can
move as he put it, from a good to a
better university at a disadvantage when
competing with other schools for top
graduate students. I have met
with prospective students in the
past two years and they always
ask me about financial assistance
for graduate students at CUNY. I wish I
could tell them that CUNY values
us enough to fully fund our study, but
I cannot and I single this out because
it is keeping some of the best students
from joining our otherwise out-
standing institution.

Testimony in Albany

60 adjuncts, 1 office

Marcia Newfield
Adjunct Lecturer, BMCC

The chronic underfunding of
CUNY hampers our students
in countless ways. Stu-
dents often work full-time and
do not attend school full-time. When I
see my students, they are tired and
often discouraged and/or resistant to
getting the skills they need. How
much better it would be if I were
available to meet with them in my
office on days when we do not
have class to give them extra
help. But yearly, the many obsta-
cles to that: as an adjunct faculty
member, I only have one office
hour a week for 28 students, and I
share my office and computer
with 60 other adjuncts. This
decided to raise the rent on my
apartment by $700, something
I could absolutely not afford.

MAKE ENDS MEET

I struggle to make ends meet,
which I only manage to do
by teaching two summer school
classes and acting as a summer
dpartment chair for five weeks,
which significantly cuts into the
number of courses I have to teach
ing the time I need to spend on my own re-
search, a necessity for tenure and
promotion. I urge you to invest in the future
of CUNY by investing in its junior
faculty, by providing the budget
necessary to allow for higher
salaries, reduced workload,
personal leave and childcare,
and creative and innovative approach-
es to address the lack of affordable
middle-income housing in New
York City.

Grad students can’t
afford health coverage

Carl Lindskoog
Graduate Student,
Doctoral Program in History

I chose to come to CUNY be-
cause the history department
and faculty featured some of the
leading scholars in my field and be-
cause the program is ranked among
the top 20 in the nation. I
also looked forward to studying at a pub-
lic university in the city of New York,
an experience that I
imagined would in-
troduce me to the di-
versity and ex-
citement of the city itself.

Because CUNY does not pro-
vide health insurance to graduate
students, I have had to choose be-
tween going without or paying for
it myself out of my meager wages
as an adjunct. Added to this is the
cost of tuition. Almost all top-
notch graduate schools provide
tuition remission for their
students, but at CUNY many
graduate students
are not so fortunate.

Having to pay
tuition and health
insurance on top of
expensive city
life forces them
to teach more
hours or to go
into deeper debt.

60 adjuncts

PSC tells
state lawmakers

Fund CUNY
fairly, PSC tells
state lawmakers

Tuition has nearly doubled
since 1990, and now accounts
for 38% of CUNY’s revenues
compared to only
20% in 1990. Yet the “CUNY Com-
pact” would regularly increase the
burden on students, relying heav-
ily on yearly tuition hikes to fund
improvements at CUNY. The union ar-
gues that the goal of preparing
students for economic success will
be undermined if tuition is constant-
ly increased.

NO HIKE

Last year the legislature rejected
the chancellor’s plan and ruled out
a tuition hike at the request of the
PSC and student groups. This
year, the governor’s budget pro-
poses no tuition increase.

COMMISSION PROPOSED

Gov. Spitzer has also
proposed the formation of a
commission on
public higher
education. “The gover-
nor says he wants to see how we can
move as he put it, from a good to a
better university at a
disadvantage when
competing with other schools for top
graduate students. I have met
with prospective students in the
past two years and they always
ask me about financial assistance
for graduate students at CUNY. I wish I
could tell them that CUNY values
us enough to fully fund our study, but
I cannot and I single this out because
it is keeping some of the best students
from joining our otherwise out-
standing institution.

Testimony in Albany

60 adjuncts, 1 office

Marcia Newfield
Adjunct Lecturer, BMCC

T he chronic underfunding of
CUNY hampers our students
in countless ways. Stu-
dents often work full-time and
do not attend school full-time. When I
see my students, they are tired and
often discouraged and/or resistant to
getting the skills they need. How
much better it would be if I were
available to meet with them in my
office on days when we do not
have class to give them extra
help. But yearly, the many obsta-
cles to that: as an adjunct faculty
member, I only have one office
hour a week for 28 students, and I
share my office and computer
with 60 other adjuncts. This
making privacy and focus difficult
makes privacy and focus difficult
for several weeks and may
cause the history department
and faculty featured some of the
leading scholars in my field and be-
cause the program is ranked among
the top 20 in the nation. I
also looked forward to studying at a pub-
lic university in the city of New York,
an experience that I
imagined would in-
troduce me to the di-
versity and ex-
citement of the city itself.

Although I do not
regret the two-and-
a-half years I have
spent at CUNY, there are certain
things that have
made my experience difficult.
Starting in my second year, I be-
gan teaching as an adjunct at
Queens College, as this was the on-
ly form of financial assistance
available. Unlike graduate stu-
dents at many other institutions,
who work as teaching assistants,
students at the CUNY Graduate
Center do not assist in a course but
have to teach our own courses – a
more exciting, but much more ar-
duous assignment. This is my sec-
ond year of teaching two courses
per semester. The amount of time I
spend preparing for class, teach-
ing, and grading limits the time I
can put toward my own studies,
and will certainly lengthen the
time it takes me to get my degree.
Around the chapters
Organizing launched in 3 boros

By DANA RA JENDRA

BROOKLYN: ONE ON ONE ORGANIZING BLITZ

In an “organizing blitz,” a dozen members of the Brooklyn College PSC chapter contacted junior faculty members on February 8 & “We tried to reach every untutored, full-time faculty member on that single day,” said Alex Vitale, acting chair. “We split up into teams of two, knocked on office doors, and left calling cards for people we missed. For many people we spoke with, it was their first face-to-face contact with the union,” he told Clarion. “Because of the blitz, we found faculty members who had been active in unions before they got to Brooklyn. We hope to tap their expertise.”

“People had fun, and those we spoke with really appreciated getting a visit from other junior faculty in the union,” said Carolina Bank Muñoz of the chapter’s organizing committee. “We learned about [their views on] contract priorities, as well as what people are willing to do to win those demands in the next contract,” she said.

The chapter is also setting up a legislative committee that plans to meet with [area] lawmakers in their Brooklyn office homes. The chapter is also creating a new legislative committee that plans to meet with city and state lawmakers in their Brooklyn offices, Vitale said. “We are doing outreach to full- and part-time faculty and HEOSs. Our first focus will be meeting with legislators about the CUNY budget.”

LAGUARDIA: STEWARDS’ COUNCIL LAUNCHED

At LaGuardia Community College, faculty and staff have formed a Stewards’ Council with representatives from the college’s different departments. “Shop stewards” are a common part of many unions, local activists who work to organize and provide information to co-workers. At LaGuardia, the Stewards’ Council serves as an informal support system for developing union leader-ship, networks and knowledge, said Karen Miller, assistant professor in social science. Miller, who is spearheading the effort, says it helps members stay informed across cam- pus. “HEOs, in particular, have been consistently participating,” she told Clarion. “We’re tackling workload – and while that is a problem for all of us, it’s a huge problem for them.”

Renee Daniels, an assistant to HEOSs who works in the admissions office, has been participating since the start. “I would like to help the union capture the most meaningful HEOS concerns,” Daniels told Clarion, adding that the nature of her job duties motivated her to join the council. “As a college re- cruiter, I work on- and off-campus during the year and need to be in- formed and clear about my rights as an employee and a union member. I need to know how my union can as- sist me and help create a voice for HEOSs within the union.”

LaGuardia PSC Chapter Chair Lor- raine Cohen called the project “one of the chapter’s most important initia- tives ever.” She added, “I believe that the Stewards’ Council has the power to strengthen every campaign in which the chapter is engaged.”

HOSTOS: UNION VS. RATS

Last semester, a student worker in Hostos’s behavioral and social sciences department reached for a book in a department supply room – and a rat landed on her arm. It scratched her; she helped it scurry back. “I didn’t study so hard and earn a PhD to deal with a rat in my office!” she told Clarion.

“No one, student or faculty, should worry about rats in their classrooms,” she said. “It’s a privilege to work in a healthy workplace,” said Hostos PSC Chapter Chair Norma Peña de Llorenz. “These problems are an af- fliction on our students – their work and study here, and management must take them seriously.”

Irish unions raided

In Baghdad, US and Iraqi armed forces seized the main offices of the General Federation of Iraqi Workers on February 23, turning the office upside down. They also detained a security guard and confiscated com- puters and other equipment. The soldiers returned two days later, damaging the headquarters again.

On the same day, armed forces also raided the offices of the Iraqi journalists’ union and shot at the building.

Both unions and many others are calling for the return of the seized property and compensation. To add your voice, go to www.labourstart.org and search for “Iraqi unions.”

US unions at the UN

Last month, the United Auto Workers and the AFL-CIO petitioned the UN to restore graduate assistants’ human right to form a union. The two labor organizations filed a complaint against the UN government with the UN agency devoted to workers’ rights, charg- ing the Bush administration with violating internationally recog- nized standards.

Also at the UN last month was PSC President Barbara Bowen, who spoke on a panel about grow- ing threats to workers’ pensions. Her remarks drew on PSC retirees’ activism to protect their Welfare Fund coverage, as well as efforts of other local union members fighting for stronger pensions.

The latter include NYC transit workers and New Jersey public sector employee officers. Other panelists included Mark Levinson of the Eco- nomic Policy Institute and Robin Blackburn of Essex University.

Champion of women’s and union rights dies

Judith Vladeck, a labor lawyer famous for winning a landmark law- suit against CUNY for discriminating against women faculty, died on January 8 at the age of 81. A memo- rial service at Hunter College, from which she graduated in 1945, drew people from across the university.

Vladeck was known for her wit, her passion for justice and commitment to underdog plaintiffs. When a reporter asked whether she had ever repre- sented an employer, she re- responded: “No, I’m a justice wanderer.”

“Never.” She was a partner in the firm of Vladeck, Waldman, Elias & Engelhard in Man- hattan, and was also a founding soci- alist law firm in America.

The CUNY lawsuit, in which Lilia Melani of Brooklyn College was the lead plaintiff, charged CUNY with systematic discrimination against women faculty in pay, promotions and hiring. CUNY fought the suit for 10 years until 1983, when a judge ruled that there was strong evi- dence of discrimination in wages. The university paid a $7.5 million settlement, but Vladeck told The New York Times, “If we were to calculate the real back pay in this case, they’d have to take Brook- lyn College and City Col- lege and auction them off to pay for the damages.”

“It was a tremendous legal victory, a landmark piece of litigation,” said Irwin Bleistein, outside coun- sel to the PSC. “Melani established the principle of gender equity in pay.” He noted, however, that CUNY’s practice still falls short. As of Fall 2005, women accounted for 45% of CUNY’s faculty, but only 35% of full professors and just 25% of distin- guished professors.

FORCE OF NATURE

Bleistein worked both with Vladeck and her husband, Steve Vladeck, for decades. “She was a force of nature,” he recalled. “She was a pioneer, intrepid, a real dread- locked feminist.” The couple told Clarion that the Vladecks helped negotiate the formation of the PSC, and that their firm provided outside representa- tion to the union in the discrimination suit against CUNY, he said, the union provided substantial support to the litigation.

“As an alumna of CUNY, Judy Vladeck knew what was truly posi- ble from the opportunity offered by the university,” said Irwin Pol- ishok, former president of the PSC. “This passion informed her defense of CUNY, of women, of students, of social justice.”

Melani of Brooklyn College was the case’s lawyer. “No one, student or faculty, should worry about rats in their classrooms,” she said. “It’s a privilege to work in a healthy workplace,” said Hostos PSC Chapter Chair Norma Peña de Llorenz. “These problems are an af- fliction on our students – their work and study here, and management must take them seriously.”

Judith Vladeck. Looking at and ana- lyzing inequality of not only gender, but also race and everything that needs to be done in an ongoing way. And that’s also her legacy.”

Joyce Barrett, a former PSC vice president for senior college, was a plaintiff in the Melani lawsuit and worked with Vladeck on an earlier gender discrimination suit against Western Electric. Barrett said it had been a privilege to learn from Vladeck, whom she called "a stub- born, tough fighter of employ- ment discrimination."

MAGNETIC

Vladeck’s strong personality helped make her a good litigator – and also a “marvelous public speak- er,” said her husband, Steve Vladeck.

“Whenever Judy came and spoke to us during the lawsuit, it was a packed audience. Even last year, she spoke at our women’s studies conference and she came with her homecare attendant. She held those women in the palm of her hand, even though she was ill. She was magnetic – she really was.”

—DR
Retirement Money

Rough transition at TIAA-CREF

By Peter Ruggles

Transition to a new computer system at TIAA-CREF has led to confusion and concern among CUNY employees. "It is a hard time," said Phyllis Perlstein, the president of the PSC.

"This requires" that TIAA-CREF split the member's existing pension account into two or more separate accounts. The letter was received by some on the active payroll and some retirees.

What the letter did not explain — at least to most members' satisfaction — was why. It stated that TIAA-CREF had to split all accounts "that contain contributions originating from separate sources" — such as contributions "from more than one employer or from more than one plan under the same employer."

But to many who received the letter, this made no sense. Many had accounts only through TIAA-CREF while working for CUNY, and not under any other employer. And while at CUNY, they had always been able to access their accounts in the same way, even if they had been in another pension plan. "I've always been in TIAA-CREF and my paycheck has always been from CUNY," said Phyllis Gray, who works at City Tech in student affairs. "I've always been in TIAA-CREF while working for CUNY, and not under any other employer."

The letter announcing the split in accounts told members who receive pension checks that "you may begin receiving multiple payments that, added together, equal your original disbursement. It is possible that these payments may arrive on different days."

Will these members get advance notice of the new payment schedule?

"I have my mortgage maintenance and credit cards on automatic payment!" retiree John Gillespie told Clarion. The timing of these bank transfers, he explained, was based on the dates when he got his systematic withdrawals from TIAA-CREF. After experiencing a problem with his account, Gillespie complained to TIAA-CREF that he felt obliged to cancel all his automatic billing arrangements, "given the unreliability of payments."

Gillespie was one of those who received a pension payment during the switch to the new computer system. "I discovered by accident," he said, "that I received about 30% of my retirement for the February 2 payment." While the shortfall was corrected the day after he complained, he received no specific explanation — despite repeated requests. Another retiree, who asked not to be named, told Clarion that he also received only about a third of his regular amount, in two payments in February. "On February 12 I received a letter about the successful implementation of the software upgrade," he added. "Some success!"

TIAA-CREF's Peterson said the company regrets the incorrect payments and that "a very small number of CUNY members" among those receiving systematic withdrawals were affected. "In every one of these cases," he said, "members will be made whole.

What happened, Markowski explained, was that members should have gotten a second payment from their newly split account, at that "the money remained in that account." This happened when the split was carried out on the same day that a check should have been issued. He said that he added that TIAA-CREF is reviewing all 1,000 CUNY members who receive systematic payments to identify any errors. With that review about 80% complete, she said, it appeared that only a few dozen CUNY members had this problem — and the majority of retirees, who have annuitized, were unaffected.

"Overall, the CUNY conversion process went as well as we expected. The issues were few," Peterson told Clarion. "Of course, we know this is little consolation to anyone who has experienced a problem."

At least one larger-scale problem occurred during the transition: "It was down over a million dollars for people before late February's drop in the stock market, which in any case could not have accounted for nearly that much. As of March, the discrepancy had still not been resolved."

This retiree, the former director of computer services at a CUNY college, was quite calm for someone who, on paper, was down a million dollars. "Look, I want to be fair to them," he said. "I don't believe that the money is gone." Though he expects the numbers to get straightened out, he was severely critical of the new computer system.

"Those of us who were in information systems can't believe that they put modifications in without adequately testing them or without noticing," he said.

He also said that while such problems have been worse with the transition to the new system, they have been growing for some time. "Most of it seems to have occurred in the last three or four years," he said, "since TIAA-CREF went beyond academia and started marketing throughout the country."

Howard Reznikoff, of the Retirees' Chapter TIAA-CREF Issues Committee, agreed. "We've been accumulating problems," he said. "Now they have gotten worse."

Focus

At the Retirees Chapter meeting, Hank Stroobants, a recent retiree from BMCC, told Markowski, "I think you have lost focus with these new products and services. This group is not so concerned about that — I think you have lost focus on serving our traditional members."

"But I hope you would take a message back to your superiors, that TIAA-CREF is running a tremendous risk. There are alternatives, and there is nothing to stop the PSC and UUP from reconsidering the relationship with TIAA-CREF."

"We fully recognize that," Markowski responded, "and also that you as individuals have alternatives. There is a serious concern for us."

She added that top TIAA-CREF management "is very aware of these issues," and focused on resolving them. The problems, she added, were not mainly with the new computer system itself, but with transmitting the data from the old format.

Weiss told the meeting that the PSC has pressed TIAA-CREF to improve its phone support, and that the number of calls to the call center has increased by over 600% since the new system was implemented. Members should check their statements carefully, she advised. "If you have a problem, call TIAA-CREF through our call center or their website.

"If it does not get resolved, contact the PSC."

TIAA-CREF's New York office can be reached at (800) 842-2011.
New WF site

The Welfare Fund has launched a new website, www.pscunions.org. Printable forms, a schedule of dental fees, and links to helpful resources for part-timers and full-timers are all available at the new website. “We view this as a work in progress,” said WF Executive Director Larry Morgan. “The website was never intended to be an all-inclusive site, but rather an evolving tool to assist you in your workplace and personal life.” Morgan encourages WF members to share information about good dentists. “It’s a real opportunity for us to step up the level of communication, both within the fund and the membership,” Morgan said.

KENTUCKY RIVER

Workers lose union rights

By DAVID LYLES and PETER HOGNESS

Fourth Democrats in control of Con-

sidered unions are seeking to reverse

six years worth of anti-labor policy deci-

sions by the Bush administration – and a key target is the Kentucky River decision by the National La-

bor Relations Board (NLRB).

Last fall the Republican-controlled NLRB ruled that nurses with regular assigning tasks are supervisors and stripped them of their federally protected right to form a union. The implications of the decision go far beyond nurses and could ultimately deny union rights to millions of professionals.

The ruling came in a dispute at Oakwood Healthcare, in one of three cases collectively known as Kentucky River. When nurses at Oakwood organized with the United Auto Workers (UAW), hospital executives argued that two-thirds of them were supervisors and therefore had no collective bargaining rights.

HIRE, FIRE, DISCIPLINE

Previously the NLRB applied the title ‘supervisor’ only to individuals with the power to hire, fire, pro-
mote and discipline other employ-
es. But in a September 28 ruling, the board’s majority decided that a nurse need only direct other nurses, and may spend as little as 10% to 15% of his or her time doing so, to be classified as a supervisor.

The distinction is crucial because supervisors are not covered by the National Labor Relations Act. They can still try to form a union – but employers can legally fire them for doing so, and face no legal penalties if they refuse to nego-
tiate. (This has been the situa-
tion of graduate employees at NYU since 2004, when the NLRB reversed itself and stripped them of their federal union rights.)

A dissent by the NLRB’s two Democrats, Wilma Liebman and Dennis Walsh, warned that the Kentucky River decision “threaten-
to create a new class of work-
ers under federal labor law – workers who have neither the genu-
ine prerogatives of management, nor the statutory rights of ordi-
nary employees.” They noted that most professionals could fall into this category because they often direct another’s work – for exam-
ple, teachers may direct the work of a teacher’s aide.

Liebman and Walsh wrote that by 2012 around 34 million workers, or 23% of the private-sector work-
force, could be categorized as su-
ervisors and denied union rights. (The NLRB has jurisdiction only over private employers, so its deci-
sions do not apply to employees of CUNY or other public universities.)

Nurses and labor leaders around the country greeted the decision with anger and vowed to continue organizing. “We’re the voice of pa-
tient care and the union gave us that voice,” Anne Goldman, chair of NYU’s Health Care Profes-
sionals Council, told New York Teacher. “When you’re under the cloak of your employers, how are you going to say patient care is de-
teriorating?” she asked. “How dare [the NLRB] try to silence us?”

“This continues a trend of anti-
union actions by the NLRB,” said Denis Hughes, president of the New York State AFL-CIO. “This agency, which was created in 1935 to protect the rights of workers, now appears to determine those rights away. Today it’s charge nurses. To-
more it could be police officers or computer analysts.”

PREDICTED?

More than 60 other cases ad-
dressing the definition of supervi-
sor are now before the NLRB. While the Kentucky River decision sets a dangerous precedent, unions will fight case-by-case to minimize the number of workers who are stripped of their rights.

“Kentucky River violates the spirit of the [National Labor Rela-
tions Act],” said Kate Bronfenbren-
er of Cornell’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations. “But it’s going to take a different board to make that determination.”

Unions hope that a change in the White House in 2008 will produce a more labor-oriented labor board – but they say action is needed now. A broad court challenge to the NL-
RB ruling is expected, and the case might well end up in the Supreme Court. But AFL-CIO President John Sweeney vowed to press congres-
sional Democrats to reverse Ken-

dy River as part of a broad package of labor law reforms.

By a vote of 241 to 185 the House recently passed the Employee Free Choice Act, which would allow workers to join a union if a majority of employees sign author-
izing cards. The measure is the pres-
ence an Senate action. A bill that would restore airport security works. It would create a union was passed by the House and Senate. Both measures face likely presi-
dential vetoes.

QUESTION OF POWER

But unions don’t want Congress to stop there and are seeking action to reverse Kentucky River as well. “Some members of our new Cong-

ress may caution that we are demanding too much, too soon,” said Sweeney. Whatever the outcome in Con-
gress, Bronfenbrenner notes that workers can and do organize even when faced with a union-busting risker, she says, but possible.

“Teachers are organizing in Texas, where public employees have no collective bargaining rights,” said Bronfenbrenner. “Atlanta’s city workers are organized, and farm workers have organized for years. It comes down to a question of power.”

LABOR IN BRIEF

Taxi union activist returns diamonds

Chowdhury Osman, a member and organizer of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA), made headlines in February when he returned a bag full of diamonds – to a passenger who’d given him a 30-cent tip.

Osman discovered the bag on February 5, some time after dropping off the passenger, who had paid him a $10.70 fare. Osman brought the unopen bag to the taxi union’s executive director, Choudhury Ayub. When Ayub asked Osman to open it, he refused.

The taxi driver was later fired, and Ayub directed Osman to keep the diamonds. The fruit of the drivers’ labor, the diamonds were donated to the taxi union’s scholarship fund.

Immigrant meatpackers fight union-busting

Workers at Smithfield Foods, Inc., the world’s largest pork processor and hog producer, contend that the company is using federal immigration en-
forcement to squelch pro-

unions. They are seeking to re-

verse a two-year-government order on immigration enforcement.

In the fall, the company fired 56 workers from its Tar Heel, NC, plant, where workers have been or-

NLRB targets professionals

While the NLRB targets profes-
sionals, unions will fight case-by-case to minimize the number of workers who are stripped of their rights.
Lift CUNY out of poverty

By BARBARA BOWEN
PSC President

On February 8, I testified before the New York State Legislative Joint Committee on the need for a significant increase in public funds for CUNY. The PSC is the leading voice for the importance of making a major investment in CUNY this year, when New York is poised to make historic additions to K-12 education funding. This column is adapted from my testimony, updated to reflect the most recent budget figures; the full testimony and budget testimony by rank-and-file PSC members is on the union website at www.psc-cuny.org/budgethearing07.html.

We start from a different place this year, not only because we have a different governor, but because you, the legislature, heard our message. In your budget last year, you demonstrated that you understood the importance of public higher education, you registered that public higher education in New York has historically been underfunded, and you were willing to invest political capital in starting to make up that deficit. Rejecting the notion that public higher education can be restored through tuition increases, you refused the requests from Governor Pataki and from CUNY for increased tuition.

This year, when we begin with a higher platform in the Executive Budget, we ask you to build on that platform and make an investment that would make a difference. Because Governor Spitzer’s budget this year does not call for tuition increases, does not significantly reduce TAP and does not underfund mandatory costs, the legislature has the opportunity to do more than bail CUNY out. For the first time in more than a decade, you have an opportunity to make CUNY great.

I am here to ask you to do that.

OUT OF POVERTY

But will it be frank with you. Restoring CUNY, lifting the university out of poverty – because that’s where it is – will take more than minor adjustments. It will take a visionary investment. The PSC supports CUNY’s request for additional funding but differs with Chancellor Goldstein on the nature of the crisis in our institution. It is true that the faculty, staff and students do more and more with less; it is true that we publish books and produce prize-winning students and make major contributions to the state’s economic, intellectual and cultural life. But we do that in spite of the conditions in which we work, not because of them.

Fortunately, we have before us this year a powerful model of what can be done by going beyond business-as-usual. Building on the courageous grassroots effort of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Governor Spitzer has pledged a major new investment in K-12 education. His proposal for a massive infusion of funds recognizes historic inequities and responds to the need for a dramatically different approach. This is the education year for New York State. Make it the investment year for CUNY.

CUNY is the only college within economic reach for the majority of the students who will be served by the enhancement in the public schools. And CUNY has by far the state’s largest enrollment of students of color and students from new immigrant families. 52% of CUNY students are people of color; 59% are from families whose total annual income – in New York City – is under $30,000. It is no accident that this is the population whose educational opportunity has been jeopardized by years of disinvestment in CUNY.

If New York is to attain the real value of its new investment in education, an investment in CUNY must be part of the plan. To not invest in CUNY at this critical juncture is to put at risk both our children’s future and the state’s historic investment in education.

The good news is that a relatively modest investment in CUNY would be transformative. While the funds needed to enhance opportunities in the public schools are in the billions of dollars, an additional investment of $76 million beyond the governor’s proposed budget would remake the City University of New York. Because of CUNY’s historic importance to the project of public education, the renewal of CUNY would also be a landmark educational achievement nationwide. It is within your power to create a university worthy of the twenty-first century’s “children of the whole people.”

The PSC requests that you invest in six major priorities for CUNY:

#1: Funds for Programmatic Improvements: The governor’s budget does not authorize a tuition increase, but leaves a $24.3 million gap in critical operating funds CUNY expects to achieve from increased tuition. That gap should be filled by public funds – not by our students.

#2: Aid to Community Colleges: The governor’s proposed increase of $100 per full-time equivalent student will not bring the state near its statutory requirement for community college funding. The PSC calls for an additional $315 per student, for a total of $9.4 million.

#3: Full-time Faculty: Our sharpest need is for full-time faculty. In 1975, when CUNY enrollment was close to its current level, CUNY employed 11,268 full-time faculty.

Even with recent hiring initiatives, the total is still only 6,354 – a loss of about 5,000 positions. We request funding this year for an immediate increase of 500 full-time faculty lines, at a cost of $25 million. Our initiative includes proposals for increasing racial and ethnic diversity among the faculty and for converting a number of part-time positions to full-time.

#4: Additional Full-time Professional Staff: We propose that CUNY be funded to hire 50 additional professional staff, at a cost of $2.5 million, in positions that directly serve students – both to respond to the increased enrollment and to provide a richer base of support for our students.

#5: Student Mentoring Funds: We propose the creation of a new fund to support intense, hands-on mentoring of CUNY students, with an investment this year of $5 million. One of the secrets of small private colleges and large elite universities is that they work to ensure that their students do not fail. CUNY students are entitled to no less.

#6: Support for Graduate Students: At almost every other graduate institution, certainly at institutions whose programs rank as high as CUNY’s, doctoral students receive full tuition fellowships, plus stipends and health insurance. A small investment, of $5 million annually, would stabilize graduate student support and allow the university to offer these students educational opportunity.

A VISION OF RENEWAL

On behalf of the faculty, staff and students of the City University – and on behalf of the people of New York State – the PSC requests additional funding in these six areas, for a total of $76 million in increased funds. That may sound ambitious – and it is. But small plans will not lift CUNY out of decades of enforced poverty. Governor Spitzer said in his State of the State address that “we must begin an effort to make our higher education system the best in America.” After 20 years of disinvestment, it is a delusion to imagine that that can be done without significant funding.

There is a wonderful poem by the British poet Stevie Smith, in which a dead man lies on the beach and moans:

I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.

For the past 20 years, CUNY has been not waving, but drowning. The Executive Budget allows us, for the first time in many years, to tread water. What we’re asking is to swim.

Take action

Ask your state elected representatives to support CUNY by visiting the PSC website, www.psc-cuny.org. Sign onto a letter urging your state lawmakers to add $76 million to Gov. Spitzer’s proposed CUNY allocation and continue last year’s commitment from the legislature to address the years of underfunding. This increase will fully fund CUNY’s budget request and allocate almost $52 million for the six PSC priorities listed above.
NEWS

‘Gay Today at CUNY’

By MICHELE FORSTEN
City Tech

"If students don't feel safe on campus being who they are, their academic achievement will suffer," says Terri Clark, director of the Student Wellness Center at City Tech. "When students feel included, they can focus on learning. They'll be more likely to stay enrolled and go on to graduate."

That shared concern brought faculty, staff, students and administrators from across CUNY to the recent colloquium, "Gay Today at CUNY: The State of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (GLBTQ) Student Services on Our Campuses."

Held at City Tech on December 5, the event drew 50 people from 15 CUNY campuses and the central office.

We need to provide appropriate services to GLBTQ students to help ensure their academic success and personal well-being, as we aim to do for all of our students," said Dr. Marcela Armoza, vice president of enrollment and student affairs at City Tech. "While CUNY campuses individually have been addressing gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender student concerns for some time, much remains to be done." Her remarks drew murmurs of agreement.

UNSAFE

Looking at the national picture, GLBTQ students do not feel safe. According to a National Gay and Lesbian Task Force study of several US college campuses, one in five GLBTQ respondents had feared for their physical safety because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, 43% considered their campus homophobic, 41% stated their college/university was not addressing issues related to their sexual orientation and gender identity, and 53% concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid intimidation.

"The colloquium was an eye-opener in that it showed us that there is a population of students – those who are GLBTQ – whose needs we are not addressing," said Marie Carrese-Araoz, associate professor of counseling at York. "We have no services specifically for GLBTQ students on our campus."

BACKLASH

Patel Miller, a higher education associate who is director of Kingsborough’s Center for Women and Non-Traditional Students, said the extent of the problem became clear to her when she heard about the homophobic backlash that greeted a showing of the film Brokeback Mountain in an English class. (Based on Annie Proulx’s short story in the New Yorker, the film depicts a love relationship between two cowboys.) "I think there is a tendency for homophobic slurs not to be taken as seriously as racial or ethnic slurs," Miller said.

City Tech’s Clark said that this type of behavior highlights the need for colleges to provide personal and institutional support to their GLBTQ students and to educate heterosexual students, faculty and staff about GLBTQ issues.

"We know that homophobia and heterosexism greatly contribute to GLBTQ youth’s high rates of attempted and completed suicide, homelessness, violence victimization, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and HIV-associated risky behaviors," said Clark.

Colloquium participants discussed the challenges involved in building GLBTQ student support programs at CUNY. Where programs exist they vary widely, ranging from straight/gay alliances at CCNY and College of Staten Island, to a gay and lesbian club at Hunter, to a part-time GLBTQ coordinator at Lehman, to a weekly support group at City Tech. While CUNY’s Graduate Center is home to the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, the first GLBTQ services assessed

university-based research center in the US on GLBTQ issues, the center’s focus is on research, public programs and conferences – not campus-based student services.

City Tech had already established itself as a pioneer of sorts in GLBTQ student services by being the first CUNY campus to offer the Safe Zone program, which offers a voluntary opportunity for faculty, staff and administrators to become allies for GLBTQ students. Volunteers participate in a three-hour training conducted by Clark and Daniel Fic-tum, director of student life, which introduces them to the issues that GLBTQ individuals face and explores how they can be supportive allies. The City Tech Safe Zone program was replicated at Kingsborough and for a time at John Jay.

UNCOMFORTABLE

"Most of our GLBTQ students are not comfortable disclosing their orientation or gender identity and so are not ‘out’ to their peers," said the director of City Tech’s counseling center, Cynthia Bink. "That’s why it’s so important for us to create a positive atmosphere backed up by strong support services and visible role models of faculty and staff who are GLBT," added Bink, a higher education associate. With this in mind, last June a GLBT Pride group photo was taken of "out" City Tech faculty, staff and students, and displayed on easels at the entrances of three campus buildings.

"It was a breath of fresh air to see that at least on the City Tech campus, there are staff and faculty who are not afraid to speak openly about their sexual orientation," said York’s Carrese-Araoz. "This supports GLBTQ students and says ‘it’s okay to be who you are.’ This is so important for young people."

Bink, Clark, Fic-tum and others at City Tech went on to organize "Gay Today at CUNY," and they credit VP Armoza with giving this and other diversity efforts strong institutional backing. "Individuals can express their support but this can go only so far," Bink told Clarion. "Institutions should provide leadership, resources and commitment to GLBTQ student issues." Without this backing, she said, the colloquium would not have been possible.

Working in small groups, colloquium participants brainstormed possible services and programs to satisfy the unmet needs of this student population, which includes a wide range of sub-groups, such as those who are gender-questioning, immigrants, HIV-positive or at-risk, and people of color.

SAFE ZONE

Suggestions included establishing a CUNY-wide GLBTQ resource center, implementing faculty develop-ment around GLBTQ issues, increasing GLBTQ student support programs at CUNY, coordinating a CUNY Pride retreat, including GLBTQ students in the college’s annual Groundhog Day celebration, and making it easier to become an ally.

"It’s important to have organizational commitment from the highest levels of leadership," Adam Rockman, a higher educa-tion assistant in student affairs at Queens College, voiced a sentiment shared by many others. "It was a good first step," said Rockman. "We have a long way to go, but this was certainly an encouraging beginning."

Additional reporting by Carol Feinman.

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Make Congress act

As the union enters into a new round of contract negotiations, members are sure to hear about "scarce resources" in the city and state. Few policy decisions have as much impact on those resources as the escalating war in Iraq.

To date, the war has cost $405 billion – NYC’s share is $13.5 billion. The labor movement is acting to demand an end to the war and its waste of both lives and money. Hundreds of thousands of working people are participating in a petition drive directed at Congress; add your signature by going to the US Labor Against the War website, www.uslaboragainstwar.org.