



The PSC Executive Council, elected in April. Standing, from left: Steve London, first vice president; Lorraine Cohen, university-wide officer; Kathleen Barker, senior college officer; Donna Gill & Vera Weekes, cross-campus officers; Marilyn Neimark, senior college officer; Nancy Romer, univ.-wide officer; Susan DiRaimo, part-time

personnel officer; Susan O'Malley, community college officer; Barbara Bowen, president; Alex Vitale, sr. college officer; Jim Perlstein & Peter Jonas, retiree executive officers; Jay Appleman, CC officer; Anne Friedman, VP for CCs; Mike Fabricant, treasurer; Steve Trim-boli, cross-campus officer. Seated, from left: Arthurine DeSola, sec-

retary; Iris DeLutro, VP for cross-campus units; Bob Cermele, VP for sr. colleges; Stanley Aronowitz, univ.-wide officer; Lizette Colón, CC officer; John Pittman, univ.-wide officer; David Hatchett & Diane Menna, part-time personnel officers; Jonathan Buchsbaum, univ.-wide officer; Marcia Newfield, VP for part-time personnel.

New Caucus wins PSC elections

By PETER HOGNESS

Bowen re-elected with 55%

On April 25, the incumbent New Caucus was returned to office in the PSC's leadership elections. President Barbara Bowen defeated the CUNY Alliance candidate for president, Rina Yarmish, by a 10-point margin, 55% to 45%.

Bowen polled slightly ahead of the rest of the New Caucus (NC) slate, which drew 54% of the vote in most other contests. NC candidates won by more in some cases and less in others, but they prevailed in every race. All 27 positions on the PSC Executive Council were up for grabs.

SUPPORT VARIED

New Caucus support was somewhat higher among community college faculty: its candidates for the community college posts on the PSC Executive Council (EC) drew 56%. CUNY Alliance (CA) candidates came closest among members of the Higher Education Officer and College Lab Tech chapters: the CA drew 49% of the vote in these cross-campus units, but still fell short. The NC won 64% of the retiree vote.

In all other contests – for first vice president, secretary, treasurer, university-wide officers, plus senior college and part-timer EC posts – NC candidates won with 54%. (Full results at www.psc-cuny.org/PDF/April06results.pdf.)

"The election was about what it takes, in an increasingly reactionary political climate, to win a decent contract and restore public funding for a public university," said President Barbara Bowen. "Members chose leadership because they shared our vision and trusted our analysis. In six years, our leadership has reversed the decline in public funding for CUNY and negotiated contracts that support members' aspirations for teaching and research. Voters understood that we've made these gains because of – not in spite of – militancy and engagement in the political arena."

"It was a difficult campaign," said PSC First Vice President Steve London, re-elected on the New Caucus slate. "People were frustrated with the lack of a contract and the problems facing the Welfare Fund. But in the end, we were able to explain what we were up against and what we've been able to accomplish. Members were not convinced by a CUNY Alliance campaign that was based on a negative, divisive message and offered no real solutions."

The campaign revolved around three main issues: contract negotiations, the Welfare Fund, and the CUNY Alliance's charge that the union leadership had been distracted by "global politics."

The CA argued that "uncivil behavior" in the union's contract campaign had damaged prospects for a good settlement, with the PSC wasting time and energy on "noisy demonstrations." It charged that "the current leadership has spent far more time on the street than at the bargaining table."

"That's simply not true," said Bowen. "We focused a tremendous amount of time and energy on bargaining – you can ask any of the members who attended negotiations as observers." She said that union negotiators had spent approximately 1,200 hours in bargaining sessions and team meetings.

PUBLIC PROTEST

But beyond the numbers, the two sides clearly disagreed on the role of public protest. Asked what pressure tactics the PSC's contract campaign should have used, Yarmish told *Clarion*, "Good solid negotiations with proper priorities."

"In the past, we never heard the phrase, 'contract campaign' – what we heard about was negotiations," Yarmish explained. "So I'd really rather not talk about a contract

campaign." She added, "I think getting a good contract is the job of the PSC leadership, for which they get released time. They should do that job so the rest of us don't have to."

The New Caucus offered a very different view. "Negotiations do not take place in a vacuum," said an NC campaign flyer. "The unions that win the strongest contracts are those that can mobilize members."

Members were understandably upset at the lengthy and difficult contract negotiations, Bowen told *Clarion*. But she said it was "a fantasy" to think that the union would get more if members did not organize. "To negotiate a contract takes more than making nice to management," added retiring Secretary Cecelia McCall.

The Welfare Fund was a hot topic throughout the campaign. Changes in benefits had left members paying more out of pocket, particularly for dental work. The CUNY Alliance charged that the decline was due to incompetence. "The New Caucus can't hide their mismanagement of the Welfare Fund," declared a CA flyer. "In the 6 years of New Caucus control, the Welfare Fund reserves shrank from \$15 million to less than \$2 million." The CA demanded to know, "What have union leaders done about it?"

"If the problems of the Welfare Fund were really an issue of mismanagement, that would be easy to fix," said London. "The real problems have to do with escalating costs, particularly for prescription drugs, and the level of funding." London noted that as of 2002, the Fund had run an operating deficit in 11 of the previous 14 years. "We made some tough but necessary choices to live within our means, and at the same time aggressively went after new money." In addition to \$30 million for the WF reserves, London said, the new con-

tract will mean a 20% increase in CUNY's annual contributions.

On politics, the CUNY Alliance said that "ideologically driven political endorsements" had weakened the PSC, and argued that if the union had endorsed Pataki and Bloomberg it would have won a better contract. "Failure to endorse obvious winning candidates – the mayor and the governor in particular – has needlessly squandered opportunities to build political capital," Yarmish said in an election debate at BMCC.

"That doesn't stand up empirically," said the NC's London, an associate professor of political science. "Unions who endorsed the mayor or governor did not necessarily fare well in these last negotiations." In fact, said London, the PSC "has won real political results. We have a strong relationship with the City Council, which has consistently restored the mayor's cuts to CUNY funding."

POLITICS

More generally, a key CA theme was that the current union leaders "care more about global politics than they do about union business," and it promised to focus exclusively on "bread-and-butter issues" instead.

"We don't live in a bubble," responded McCall. "What's more

'bread-and-butter' than trying to get the billions being spent on Iraq used for education and social needs instead?" She argued that unions have been strongest when they are part of broader movements for social justice.

In a hard-fought and sometimes bitter campaign, CUNY Alliance literature was often punchier. But the CA tripped up on several points of fact. It falsely said that the PSC had not endorsed Democrat Carl McCall for governor; in fact, the Delegate Assembly had voted to back McCall. The CA repeatedly claimed that wage increases in the new PSC contract were less than those won by SUNY's United University Professions – but the UUP said that the raises were the same. The independent civil service newspaper *The Chief* concluded that Yarmish had misstated the terms of the UUP agreement, and said that this false claim hurt the CA in the election.

Overall, the New Caucus slate won the election by about the same margin as when it first took office in 2000.

"I am honored to have the opportunity to continue my service as PSC president, and grateful to the thousands of union members who supported the New Caucus," said Bowen after winning a third term. "The campaign was tough, but it was bracing and useful, and I have learned from the issues members raised. Now that the election is over, the leadership's commitment is to welcome the efforts, ideas and suggestions of every member, building the power we will need for the future."

Challenge rejected

Just before the deadline on May 2, the CUNY Alliance (CA) filed a challenge to the PSC's April election, alleging several violations. After a May 11 hearing, the PSC Election Committee concluded that the challenge had no merit. The May 25 Delegate Assembly voted to accept the Election Committee's report and deny a CA appeal, and certified the election results. The CA says it will appeal to the federal Department of Labor.

The Elections Committee found just one violation of election rules: a

statement in the Retiree Chapter newsletter, mailed on April 13, encouraging votes for two New Caucus candidates. A total of 849 retiree ballots were received before that date, with 62% in favor of the NC, while 207 arrived on April 14 or after, of which the NC won 66%. Since the later ballots did not affect the outcome, the Elections Committee concluded that no new election was necessary. (For details, see www.psc-cuny.org/PDF/PSC06ElectionChallengeDecision.pdf.)

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