For thousands of CUNY students, a tuition increase would put college out of reach. But a tuition hike wouldn’t just be bad for students – it would be bad for New York. Clarion takes a look at what caused the State and City budget deficits, and dissects the myth of no money.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT VS. TUITION HIKE

OUT OF REACH?

NEWS FLASH
Member action blocks City cuts

BARGAINING
RF chapter wins!

After two years without a contract, organizing pays off as workers win a 18.76% raise over five years at the Research Foundation.

HEALTH
CUNY hiring faculty to train more nurses

The nursing shortage is bad. The shortage of nursing faculty is worse. So was closing CCNY’s School of Nursing a bad idea? Even a dummy could answer that.

A GUIDE
Your rights under the new contract

First in a series of articles about how to make the new provisions work for you. This issue: the adjunct office hour and the Distinguished Lecturer title.
Workers at the University Applications Processing Center (UAPC), which processes all undergraduate applications to CUNY, have secured a date of December 4 for their vote on union representation.

UAPC employees, who are paid through the CUNY Research Foundation (RFP), had asked management to voluntarily recognize the PSC as their representative in early October, after 80% of them had signed PSC membership cards. While local UAPC management said they were open to the idea, RF Interim Executive Director Richard Rothbard rejected it. Workers then decided to file for an election through the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) on October 21.

The next step was a November 4 meeting at the NLRB for the two sides to work out the details of the election. Two basic issues had to be resolved: who is eligible to be in the union, and where and when the election will take place. Usually hearings are needed to settle those issues, which can go on for months. Often management will try to drag out this process, in order to undermine union support.

“Our goal was to avoid a hearing. We wanted to get a date that day in order to have an election as soon as possible,” said Mary Jane Brown, a 15-year employee in UAPC freshmen applications. And after several hours of negotiations, the UAPC employees succeeded: all outstanding issues were settled and the date was set for December 4.

Management initially presented a list of 30 people they felt should be excluded from the vote, on the basis of being either supervisors or confidential employees. Of those 30, the team was able to win back 8.

MAJORITY NOW

“We felt we had to go for the majority and fight to include the rest of the people later, once we win,” said Bernadine Kamwanya, a PSC member in UAPC’s financial aid department. “It was great to get it done in one day. Everyone was so happy that the election is going to be soon.”

Mary Sutton of UAPC’s clerical section told Clarion, “It was obvious that the RF lawyer didn’t want to deal with us. But it was good that we were there, because we have first-hand knowledge of the UAPC.”

Since then management has been waging an active anti-union campaign. When UAPC staff wore “Union Yes!” T-shirts at work, UAPC management told them they had to take them off or go home. After 20 UAPC workers marched into Director Les Jacobs’ office to object and after the PSC’s attorney intervened, management backed off.

UAPC management also tried to tell staffers that they could not discuss the union while at work. But UAPC workers responded that it is illegal to censor what workers can and cannot talk about, and they have refused to stop talking about the union.

Management has also been holding “captivating audience” meetings, pressuring workers to vote against the union. Neil Robert, a 16-year veteran in the Operations Department, said that the meeting he attended did not change anyone’s mind. “In fact what they’re doing is making us stronger,” Robert said.

The December 4 vote will take place at the UAPC, in Building T2 at Kingsborough Community College and at the CUNY Office of Administration Services, in the Grace Building.

“We are looking forward to a landslide,” says Brown. “The higher the percentage voting yes, the stronger our contract will be. And we deserve it.”

For the latest info, see www.ups-press.org/uapc.html.

Time to reform the electoral system

Ken Sherrill does not adequately consider another option for reform. That is, reforming our winner-take-all election system which ensures that we will be stuck with a two-party system. The two-party system doesn’t work anymore in the US, and the Democrats have been pulling the same old tired shtick for years and years: “Vote for us, because if you don’t, the Republicans—those big bad wolves—will come into power.” It’s depressing to read “Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail 72” and realize that the same trick was being used back then.

Enough is enough. Either the election system is reformed, or the main-line parties reform. Right now, the two US parties are indistinguishable (and I say this seriously), and big-money interests ensure that no coalition of the party’s platforms is really possible. But then perhaps big money’s interests might ensure that no electoral system reform is possible either—a depressing thought.

— Samie Chopra Brooklyn College

Progressive pressure

Ken Sherrill’s argument against progressive third parties (“A Strategic Likely to Fail?” October 2002) is based on the false premise that the benefit of voting for a third party is only hypothetical and can only be realized in the distant future. Even a hard-nosed, rational choice analysis shows, however, that progressives can affect the agenda of both major parties in the short term if they have the option of voting for a third party.

If progressives always vote for the Democrats, the Democrats will safely ignore them and move towards the center. Since Republicans would have an incentive to follow the same strategy, the absence of a progressive third party would mean that political outcomes would be decided by centrist voters. If, on the other hand, a third party choice is available, there is pressure for the Democrats to move to the left (since it will not be possible to take progressive for granted) and for Republicans not to move to the far right (because doing so would make it more likely that the progressives would vote for the Democrats as the lesser of two evils).

In other words, the existence of a progressive third party would force mainstream politicians to pay more attention to progressives, thus shifting the entire political spectrum to the left.

— Costas Panayotakis

CUNY Tech

Ken Sherrill responds: These letters accuse me of being a realist and I plead guilty as charged.

Why adjuncts need a CCE

Some reasons why adjunct faculty must engage in the struggle for a Certificate of Continuous Employment (CCE) for adjuncts:

1) The CCE is pro-student. Students have the right to expect that professors, whom they benefit from studying with, will be around next semester.

2) The CCE will ensure steady, living wage employment for a majority of adjuncts. And because it would help a majority of adjuncts, it can better address the crucial issue of diversity. Adjunct faculty of color will be more included in consideration for the CCE than they would be through seniority alone.

3) Adjuncts are in a sense helping to create a new employment accreditation. The CCE would be based up on the demonstrated competence and dedicated service of each individual adjunct, not a class action. Perhaps a Certificate of Continuous Employment could be issued only after the adjunct’s teaching has been evaluated twice, not once by her/his department, after 10 semesters of teaching. Adjunct Faculty themselves should set a higher standard of excellence to win approval of the CCE.

4) With CCE accreditation, adjuncts could take unpaid professional or family leave and still be able to return to teach. This would provide an important non-cash professional benefit.

The CCE – Don’t leave WORK without it!

— Chithra Karunakanaran

BMCC

Honor Betty Kapetanakis

@ Its October Membership Meeting, the New Caucus recommended and passed a resolution to send a contribution to the North Star Fund in honor of its former executive director, Betty Kapetanakis, who was killed in an accident in July.

As executive director, Betty was instrumental in helping small, local (frequently minority) community initiatives that would not otherwise have been able to obtain financial support from traditional funding sources. One of those groups was the New Caucus of the PSC, a separate entity working within the PSC, and the caucus from whose nominees the present leadership of PSC was elected.

We know that the entire community joins the Board of Directors of the North Star Fund in mourning her untimely loss, and we congratulate them for continuing their commitment to the shared ideals and innovative approaches for which she worked so tirelessly.

— Dave Kotelchuck, Warren Orange, Shirley Rausher, Mirmam Thompson

New Caucus Coordinators
RF contract signed

Wage increase tops 18%

By TOMIO GERON

After two years of activism and bargaining, staff at the CUNY Research Foundation Central Office finally have a deal.

The PSC and Research Foundation (RF) management signed a new labor agreement on November 19. It provides for a pay hike of 18.76%, after 7-year increment has now been added. The amounts used to range from $390 to $2,000, but will now run from $500 (after five years) to $2,500 (after 20 years). Average salary at the RF Central Office will rise from $36,813 to $41,556 over the life of the agreement.

“This is a great time to be here,” said Chapter Chair Tony Dixon. “We’ve built a foundation for this chapter.”

RF management had pushed hard for a number of concessions. Its initial offer included no retroactive salary increases – i.e., 0% for the first two years – and only 2% over the next three years. The RF also wanted to start operating on a 24-hour schedule, with the right to assign employees to work a nighttime or graveyard shift. But strong resistance from the PSC forced management to drop these demands.

“I’m speechless,” said Steve Lawrence, who has worked at the RF for over 10 years. “As far as I’m concerned, we won every single battle. It’s a tribute to the negotiators.”

Member actions often pushed negotiations along. In April, over 100 people rallied in front of the RF offices on West 37th Street to demand a settlement. CUNY faculty signed petitions and sent letters to RF Executive Director Richard Rothbard, stating their support for the RF workers’ demands.

In July, union members at the RF voted “no confidence” in management’s bargaining team, after RF negotiators walked away from the table. Frustrated with the lack of movement in negotiations, the RF Chapter voted on October 4 to authorize a possible strike. After the strike vote, negotiations moved at a faster pace.

The final sticking point of bargaining was pensions. Management wanted to initiate a new third tier of pensions for newly hired employees, which it had already implemented with non-union RF workers on the campuses and for union employees during the negotiations. After the PSC filed a grievance, those RF employees who had been illegal- ly placed in the new Tier III were re- turned to Tier II. The new third tier – which affects only those hired after November 7, 2002 – has a three-year vesting period and will include the same employer contribution as Tier II after the first year of employment.

MAIL BALLOT

As Clarion went to press, a chapter meeting was being scheduled for the first week of December for union members to discuss the agreement. Members will vote on the contract by mail ballot in the next two to three weeks.

“It’s great,” said Chapter Secretary Dion Brown. “But I know there’s going to be more to do to protect our rights. I see this chapter going forward in a positive direction.”

The PSC negotiating team consisted of RF chapter members Tony Dixon, Antoinette Morizio, Dion Brown, Bernadette Drumgoole; PSC staff members D. Nicholas Russo, Mary Ann Carlese, Louis Guida and Debra Bergen, chief negotiator.

Remediation policy up for vote

By TOMIO GERON

The New York State Board of Regents is set to vote in December on whether CUNY can continue to run on remedial classes at its senior colleges.

The policy, implemented in 2000, initiated three new tests to assess students upon admission. Those who fail any of the three are denied entrance to CUNY’s senior colleges; non-credit remedial classes at CUNY are available only at community colleges, and must be completed before any for-credit college work can begin.

Some CUNY faculty and staff have argued that the changes have adversely affected the diversity of CUNY’s student body. The PSC’s Open Access Committee noted that the proportion of first-time Latino students at CUNY has dropped by 3.1%, from Fall 1999 to Fall 2001.

NO HEARING

Three hundred people testifed at public hearings before the remediation ban was first adopted, but this time the State Regents have refused to hold any hearings. In response, CUNY is Our Future and other groups organized a “People’s Hearing” on November 26 at City College.

“If I don’t see why the Regents will not hold a public hearing,” PSC President Barbara Bowen told Clarion, “The decision on remediation rehashed CUNY and was one of the most significant restructuring decisions in public higher education in the decade. Surely it merits public comment before it is renewed.”

Susan O’Malley, chair of the University Faculty Senate, told a November 13 City Council hearing that CUNY’s admissions policy is more punitive than SUNY’s or that of many nearby private four-year schools. She said that a new State Education Department report showing that 4,157 students were kept out of CUNY’s senior colleges by the policy, and only 483 of those enrolled in CUNY community colleges. The rest went to another university (1,604) or did not attend college at all (1,499).

PUNITIVE POLICY

“CUNY is losing a lot of students,” O’Malley said, “and a good number of young people are opting not to continue their education.”

CUNY Vice Chancellor Jay Hershenson questioned these figures, noting that “CUNY enrollment is at record levels.” Hershenson told Clarion that the current policy is not exclusionary, noting that 10 CUNY campuses still offer remediation – six community colleges and four campuses offering both 2-year and 4-year degrees.

The University Faculty Senate passed a resolution on October 22, which, while not calling for the current policy to be overturned, did support significant changes. The UFS asked CUNY to allow students who have failed only one of the three tests to enter CUNY’s four-year colleges, with one year in which to pass the failed test. The PSC backed the proposed reform at its November 21 Delegate Assembly.

An October 24 report to the Regents by presidents of several universities praised the new admissions policies, but also warned that they had not been in effect long enough to evaluate the effects on access.

The presidents worried about changes in CUNY’s SEEK program.

“A concern of the team was the possibility that some students who might previously have been admitted to the SEEK program do not appear to be enrolled in the University now. Participation of both Black and Latino students has declined.”

These concerns must be swept under the rug, said the PSC’s Bowen. “If the enrollment of black and Latino students has declined,” she said, “then the policy as it now exists is not right for CUNY.”
CONSULTING EXPANDS NURSING FACULTY

Seven years after CCNY nursing school was closed

By Peter Hogeess

If a nurse must care for five patients instead of four, their risk of death goes up by 7% over the next 30 days. With the number of patients per nurse rising to eight, odds of death increase by 31%, according to a study of 168 hospitals in Pennsylvania published in the October 23 Journal of the American Medical Association.

These are the human consequences of today’s nursing shortage, and CCNY is expanding its nursing programs in response. Last summer Chancellor Matthew Goldstein announced that CCNY would add 30 full-time nursing faculty during the 2002-2003 academic year, in line with the recommendations of a CCNY nursing task force.

“It’s in the interest of the public welfare,” said task force member Elizabeth Enrico, head of the nursing program at Hostos. “If we don’t have enough nurses, health care is going to suffer.”

Because of a lack of faculty, CCNY has turned away qualified nursing students, the task force reported. The 30 positions will not be easy to fill, as evidenced by the fact that 22 of them are nursing lines that have been vacant for some time. Only eight will be newly created lines.

“There’s a nursing shortage across the country – but there’s an even more acute short-age of nursing faculty,” said Delores Shrimpton, co-chair of CUNY’s Nursing Discipline Council and department chair at Kingsborough since 1995.

Joan Johnston, associate professor of nursing at Lehman, told Clarion that the average age of nurses in New York is about 45. “It’s definitely an aging population,” said Johnston, “but the average age of nursing faculty is even older. In New York it’s over 50.”

In other words, the supply of nurses can’t be turned on and off like a spigot. CCNY’s expansion of its nursing faculty is in part a move to re-cover ground that it lost in 1985, when City College of New York closed its School of Nursing down. John- ston, who taught at City then, had argued that the move was shortsighted.

“At the time nurses were being laid off,” she said “but in just a few years we no longer had a shortage of nurses, but also a shortage of age of programs to train them.”

BAD DECISION

Chancellor Goldstein, who serves on two hospital boards, has expressed regret about the 1985 deci-sion, made by former CUNY President Yolanda Moses under the chancellorship of Ann Reynolds.

“There is a dire nursing shortage,” Goldstein told the University Faculty Senate in April 2001.

“Some decisions were made in the past that closed nursing programs. This was unfortunate.”

The CCNY School of Nursing closed after CUNY’s Trustees declared a state of “financial exi-gency,” and Reynolds pressed schools to shift resources away from programs considered low priority.

But many of the projected savings from closing the school were never realized, said Johnston, who served on the college’s retrenchment committee. “The total number of nursing majors was about 800 at the time, of which 250 were actually in nursing courses and the rest in pre-nursing,” she explained. “I’ve been told the college didn’t actually save

very much, because we lost revenue when we lost these students.”

Today’s nursing shortage has its roots in the very factors that pro-duced an apparent “nursing glut” in the mid-1990s. Hospitals started increasing patient ratios as a result of HMOs,” said Errico, “aiming to get more work done with fewer nurses. That did not prove to be a positive thing.”

The result was a deterioration in the public image of nursing in the Pennsylvania study and a simi-lar 1999-hospital study published in the May 30 New England Journal of Medicine. Now hospitals nation-wide are scrambling to hire more nurses, and states like California are starting to require minimum staffing levels.

Low salaries at CCNY will be the main obstacle to filling the new nursing faculty lines, said Shrimp-ton. “A beginning RN with an AA degree can make about $35,000 in Brooklyn,” she said.

“We’re offering nursing faculty less than $50,000. How are we supposed to attract anyone?”

Fewer than 5% of the RNs in the US have a master’s degree, she said, and only about 3% have a doctorate.

“Someone with a doctorate in nurs-ing can earn over $100,000 in a hos-pital,” commented Johnston.

“The scramble to fill nursing facul-ty positions so soon after the same positions are open is a testament to the importance of nurses in the emergency,” and Reynolds pressed schools to shift resources away from programs considered low priority.

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would be voted on by all PSC members, as had already been the case for the vice president for part-time personnel. The changes were not a perfect solution, noted PSC First Vice President Steve London, but they were the best way to create equity in the union leadership. “Adjuncts either vote as part of the whole union or we marginalize them in a little group off to the side.”

MORE CHANGES

The Constitutional Revision Committee is proposing a set of smaller changes to the Constitution that mainly affect membership categories and eligibility rules for run-ning for union office. These propos-als will likely go before the EC and DA early next year.

PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY

NOTICE OF SPECIAL NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS – 2002/2003

The following special elections will be held:

1. NYCCT - Welfare Fund representatives (to serve until Spring 2003)
2. The Graduate Center – Welfare Fund representatives (to serve until Spring 2003)
3. Registrars - Chapter Executive Committee (due to the small size of this Chapter, at least a Chair & Vice Chair to serve until Spring 2003)
4. Bronx RCO – Chapter Executive Committee (due to the small size of this Chapter, at least a Chair & Vice Chair to serve until Spring 2004)
5. Queens RCO – Chapter Executive Committee (due to the small size of this Chapter, at least a Chair & Vice Chair to serve until Spring 2004)

* At the recommendation of the Elections Committee the Delegate Assembly voted that the Queens RCO election be held at the same time and the Spring 2005 General Elections This will give more employees at the Queen RCO the opportunity to become members of the PSC. In order to vote in this election you must have joined the PSC on or before September 13, 2002. The timetable will be:

- Nominating petitions will be available upon request from Chapter Chairpersons or the PSC office from December 2 to December 30, 2002.
- Nominating petitions must be received at the PSC office, 25 West 43rd Street, 5th floor, New York, NY 10018, by 5:00 PM, December 30, 2002.
- Ballots will be mailed to members on January 15, 2003.
- Ballots must be received at the PSC office by 5:00 PM, January 31, 2003.
- Ballots will be counted at 10:00 AM on February 14, 2003.

A copy of the Rules Governing All General and Chapter Elections is available for all eligible voters from Barbara Galbraith, at the PSC central office.
Organizing for fair tuition

By PENNY LEWIS
CUNY Grad Center

The City Council is considering a bill that would alter former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s highly publicized “workfare” program. If Intro. 93-A becomes law, public assistance recipients could ask permission to count a training or educational program, including attendance at CUNY, as part of their required 30 hours of weekly labor.

“There’s a notion to force people out of college to do a workfare assignment. As a public policy measure, it’s completely irrational,” said Stephen Loffredo, a professor at CUNY School of Law. “Workfare isn’t a way to pass people out of poverty, a college degree is.”

In 1996, 27,000 welfare recipients were enrolled at CUNY. As of last year, that number had fallen to 6,000. “We want our students back,” PSC Secretary and Legislative Director Cecelia McCall told the Council’s General Welfare Committee on October 17. “CUNY’s senior and community colleges are the best welfare-to-work programs.”

EDUCATION NEEDED

The PSC Women’s Committee has been active on the issue, drafting a resolution that called for two- and four-year college programs to count as “work activity” for welfare recipients. “This bill will finally enable people on welfare to receive the education and training that they need,” said Lorraine Cohen of LaGuardia, who helped coordinate the lobbying effort. “This shows the power of the members when we decide to really act together and apply pressure to the City Council.”

On November 24, City Council Speaker Gifford Miller told WCBS radio that the final deal included about $850 million in budget cuts. “But some of the worst cuts – to foster care services, libraries, CUNY and other educational institutions, and seniors – were averted,” Miller said.

Just ten days earlier, Mayor Bloomberg had put forward a mid-year budget modification with cuts including $5.9 million from CUNY’s community colleges, $2.75 million from eliminating the Vantine Scholar- ship program as of Spring semester, and a 10% cut to the Hunter Campus Schools (the K-12 schools affiliated with Hunter College). After pressure from PSC members and CUNY administration influenced the intense negotiations that chapters have signed up 600 student groups statewide to oppose cuts or higher tuition. SLAP organized testimony at the CUNY Board of Trustees’ November 11 public hearing, and is staging a “blitz” of leafleting, meetings and other action the week of December 2. The aim is to warn students about tuition hike proposals and help bring them to Albany to lobby with NYPIRG on December 4.

For information on how to get involved, contact Penny Lewis at the PSC (212-354-1252, x234), Julia Beatty at Jobs With Justice (212-631-0886), Miriam Kramer at NYPIRG (212-349-6660) or visit www.nutritionhike.org.

Council considers bill to link welfare and education

By TOMIO GERON

The City Council is considering a bill that would alter former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s highly publicized “workfare” program. If Intro. 93-A becomes law, public assistance recipients could ask permission to count a training or educational program, including attendance at CUNY, as part of their required 30 hours of weekly labor.

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Deficits, decisions & the public interest

By PETER HOLOGES with CHRISTINE D’OMOND, Queens CWE

Even before an official proposal was on the table, the battle lines were being drawn. Some argued that a tuition hike for CUNY and SUNY is only common sense. There is no money, they said, pointing to daily headlines about budget deficits. And if there is no money, then students must pay more.

But CUNY’s just-announced budget request does not envision raising tuition. The PSC is opposed to a tuition hike, as are many other unions, civic groups and student organizations (see p. 5), and they are raising stubborn questions.

Is it true that “there is no money”? When taxes were cut, where did the money go? If tuition is raised at CUNY, how would this affect students, faculty and staff? How would it affect New York? Clarion takes a look at the roots of the current crisis, and what it means for CUNY.

How we got here

How did we go from nearly $7 billion in State and City surpluses to $16 billion in deficits within two years? It was all too easy. This crisis is the predictable outcome of the economic and fiscal policy choices of the last several years.

New York City’s budget shortfall is expected to be $1 billion in the current fiscal year and over $6 billion next year. Next year’s State deficit could be as large as $10 billion. But tax cuts favoring the wealthy have reduced State and City revenues by about $15 billion a year. It’s not too hard to connect these dots. Recession and the September 11 attack exacerbated an already-existing budget problem.

Governor Pataki avoided talking about the budget crisis during the campaign, and has yet to offer any plan for dealing with it. When he breaks his silence, the governor is universally expected to call for raising CUNY and SUNY tuition. But while Pataki is sure to present the idea as inevitable, PSC members should remember: the battle of the budget has only begun.

New debate over taxes

By GLENN PASANEN

Lehman College

For the first time in more than a decade, New York City has a budget hole to worry about raising taxes. City government has enacted an 18% property tax increase. Discussion is heating up over how to make new taxes progressively so that those who can best afford it would pay more.

Mayor Bloomberg’s proposed 25% property tax hike would have raised as much as $25.5 billion. Commercial property owners pay about 44% of any increase. But for residents the City’s property tax is regressive: an across-the-board rate increase will fall most heavily on renters (who on average earn much less than homeowners) once it is passed on through higher rents. So this is an imperfect revenue strategy, but one that may prove necessary: the property tax is the only tax that can be raised by NYC without an OK from Albany.

Bringing back the commuter tax – worth $450 million a year – has been a priority for NYC’s City Council. Mayor Bloomberg now backs the idea in a different form: instead of a separate tax for commuters, he wants to apply the regular NYC income tax to all who earn wages here. Bloomberg points out that most US cities with an income tax – including Los Angeles, Kansas City, Pittsburgh and Yonkers – require both residents and non-residents to pay. The mayor’s plan would bring in over $2 billion next year.

The top rate

Bloomberg simultaneously proposed reducing the City’s income tax rates, a move that would give the biggest benefit to those with the highest income. Under the mayor’s plan, the top rate would drop from 3.85% to 2.25% by 2007. The 25% reduction proposed for next year would lower revenue collected from city residents by roughly $1 billion.

A more progressive alternative to the mayor’s property-tax plan could include a personal income tax surcharge, or adding a higher tax rate for those earning over $250,000. A 12.5% surcharge was added in 1990 and eliminated in 1998; restoring it would yield almost $3 billion per year. The State’s top income tax rate, now 6.85%, has been reduced by more than half over the last 25 years. These proposed surcharges would only bring New York’s top rate to the same level as North Carolina’s, and State Sens. Arthur Eve and Marcy Lauter have supported the idea.

State Sen. Eric Schneiderman has introduced a bill that would freeze State tax cuts scheduled to take effect in the next three years. This would net over $2 billion, and perhaps double that amount. Reversing Pataki’s reductions in New York’s estate and gift taxes, which mainly benefit the wealthy, would mean about $700 million in new revenue. FPI has also called for restoring NY’s Corporate Minimum Alternative Tax to prior levels, citing the $1 billion revenue it recently closed corporate tax loopholes.

FPI argues for a restoration of the City’s stock transfer tax (repealed in the 1970s) at one-tenth its original rate, which would raise over $800 million a year. Sixty-four percent of NYC residents support the idea, according to a poll conducted for the Working Families Party.

In his Green Party campaign for governor, Stanley Aronowitz of the CUNY Grad Center noted that federal Social Security taxes exempt all from the income tax. He urged New York State to introduce a 2% “Emergency General Welfare Tax” on the rich – those earning over $80,000 a year – to bring in $4 billion or more. Although not, strictly speaking, a tax, Bloomberg has another bold revenue idea on the table – putting tolls on City bridges. Revenue estimates range from $320 million to $800 million, depending on how it is implemented.

Tax cuts: who gained?

Where did the money go?

By HOWARD CHERNICK

Hunter College

The impuissance of the series of tax reductions by New York City and State since 1994 is now becoming painfully clear. High-income New Yorkers gained so much from so many tax cuts that it does not seem unreasonable to ask them to pay more today.

State Slashes

State tax cuts since 1994 are reducing revenues this year by $13.9 billion. When Pataki’s tax cuts are fully implemented, the cumulative total of lost revenue will be over $10 billion – enough to pay for two-and-a-half State budgets. Here are some key examples, and their current cost:

● Cuts in the state personal income tax: $6.4 billion. In the cuts enacted in 1995, the poorest 20% of New Yorkers got almost nothing – $8 per taxpayer. The wealthiest 20% got 65% of the tax reduction. The richest 1% got fully 24% of the total tax reduction, saving an average of $1,028 each.

● Estate and gift tax cuts: $656 million. Mainly helps the wealthy.

● STAR (School Tax Relief): $2.9 billion. The STAR program, by design, excludes renters, offers higher homestead exemption levels in higher property value areas, and is funded by the State. Its net impact is regressive – i.e., it provides more benefits to richer taxpayers. This program is deliberately designed to provide suburban tax relief, at the expense of New York City.

● Increased in the Earned Income Tax Credit: Over $300 million. Increased the State EITC to 25% of the federal credit, benefiting low-income New Yorkers.

● Corporate tax cuts: Since 1995, New York’s corporate income tax revenues have fallen by almost 25%. Since 1997, corporate income tax has fallen by over 50% as a proportion of total taxes. These cuts primarily benefit the owners of capital in New York State.

City cuts

Since 1994, New York City has enacted tax cuts that add up to $2.8 billion a year:

● Expiration of 12 1/2% personal income tax surcharge: $600 million. Because the income tax is graduated, richer people pay a larger proportion of income in taxes. Eliminating the surcharge gave the biggest benefit to high-income residents.

● Commuter tax repeal: $405 million. Benefits were realized entirely by New Yorkers who pay New York City general Social Security taxes exempt all from the income tax. He urged New York State to introduce a 2% “Emergency General Welfare Tax” on the rich – those earning over $80,000 a year – to bring in $4 billion or more. Although not, strictly speaking, a tax, Bloomberg has another bold revenue idea on the table – putting tolls on City bridges. Revenue estimates range from $320 million to $800 million, depending on how it is implemented.

● Commercial rent tax reduction: $558 million. A tax on commercial rent payments, it was eliminated for properties north of 95th Street in Manhattan and in the outer boroughs. Though the commercial rent tax appears to be part of the rental bill, economic analysis suggests much of it is ultimately borne by owners of buildings and land. Owners of business property are relatively high-income, and they are the main beneficiaries of these cuts.

● Sales tax exemptions on clothing and footwear under $110: $26 million. Although very small in relative terms, benefits are greater for low-income consumers.

● Co-op/condo property tax relief: $134 million. Weighted towards higher-income owners.
The future of public higher education

The case against a tuition hike

By JOHN HYLAND
PSC Treasurer

Once again, there is talk of increasing student tuition at CUNY and SUNY. Elected officials and policymakers project budget deficits in the billions. They call this a budgetary “Perfect Storm,” a convergence of economic events and forces so powerful that nothing can stand in its way.

But the underlying problem is not “natural,” like a storm, formed by forces beyond our control. Today’s City and State budget gaps are self-inflicted. Tax cuts since 1994 have reduced revenues by $15 billion per year—about the same amount as next year’s budget deficits. This is a “storm” made by human hands. It is the result of past policy choices, and we have choices to make today about how we will respond.

A LOSING STRATEGY

Some say that in these tough times, CUNY should raise tuition. But the record shows that tuition increases are a losing strategy for CUNY. City University tuition was raised twice in the 1990s—and by the end of the decade, CUNY had $159 million less in total funds. The reason CUNY is starved for resources today is that its State and City funding was cut by 30% in the 1990s.

CUNY’s problem is a revenue hole, not large-scale “waste” or its students. Unless we pose and analyze the problem accurately, we will fail to address it in an effective way.

Proponents of a tuition hike claim that it would not hurt the poor, because the increase would be covered by financial aid for low-income students. But the reality is that a tuition hike will force thousands of poor students to drop out of college. When tuition was instituted in 1976, even with financial aid, CUNY lost over 50,000 students. When tuition was increased by $750 in 1995, CUNY lost 8,000 students.

If we accept a tuition hike, we will find that financial aid is a false and unreliable solution. Financial aid must be reauthorized every year by the same politicians who now are proposing an increase in tuition. New York has already eliminated the Supplemental Tuition Assistance Program (STAP), and has proposed cuts to TAP again and again. The result has been an annual dance in which we fight to restore the cuts to TAP, but even when we win CUNY gains no new resources. Mayor Giuliani did the same dance with cuts to the Villano Scholarship program, which days later Bloomberg sought to eliminate altogether.

In addition, the complexities, bureaucracy, and waiting lines of the financial aid system are obstacles that discourage students from using it, despite the efforts of our colleagues and members who work valiantly under difficult conditions to make financial aid work as effectively as possible.

Public colleges were founded to provide higher education at nominal cost, so that it would be available to all. Free public colleges functioned quite well during two world wars and the Great Depression. After WWII, the GI Bill of Rights demonstrated the effectiveness of broad, democratic, public higher education. In the 1960s, the original Pell Grants were only designed for students in private colleges: lawmakers assumed public college costs would remain so low that no financial aid would be needed.

Today the tuition/financial aid routine is a shell game, shuffling money back and forth, hiding the constant erosion of public life.

ROBIN HOOD IN REVERSE

Studies by the Fiscal Policy Institute and the New York State AFL-CIO show that over the last 20 years, the federal, State and City tax systems have been restructured to the advantage of the extraordinarily wealthy few and to the disadvantage of working people. We are living in a land of Robin Hood-in-reverse.

A tuition increase at CUNY and SUNY would keep us on this same failed path. Increased tuition—like increased subway and bus fares—is a user fee that hits poor and middle-income workers the hardest. The more that public services must rely on user fees to “pay for themselves,” the less they are truly public.

What’s next—staircases at the entrances to public libraries and Central Park? “Tuition” to go swimming at the Rockaways or Coney Island?

TAP money goes to students at both private and public colleges. Ultimately, TAP plus tuition hikes at CUNY and SUNY is a formula for erasing the distinction between public and private higher education in New York State.

Which is fine with CHANGE-NY, the Manhattan Institute and other ideologues on the right—they’re hostile to the idea of public higher education in the first place.

At CUNY and SUNY, a shift has already taken place: the costs of so-called public higher education have been increasingly moved from public support to private individuals. During the 1980s, the proportion of CUNY’s budget that was paid for through tuition almost doubled, from 21% in 1980 to 37% in 2000. As a share of family income, New York’s community colleges are now the most expensive in the US. New York’s public four-year colleges are the nation’s third most costly.

The deep problem not addressed by a tuition increase has a name in the social sciences: stratification, a system of structured inequity and conflict. A tuition hike camouflages the class, race and gender-based struggles over crucial resources—in this case, educational resources.

CRITICAL INVESTMENT

What has also been left out of the tuition increase scenario is the economic value of public higher education. A high percentage of our graduates remain in the NYC area after graduation, increasing economic activity and tax revenues. People who graduated from CUNY between 1970 and 1997 pay an estimated $708 million per year more in taxes in New York City and State than if they had not earned a college degree. Their annual spending is $4.6 billion higher than it would be if they had not gone to college. CUNY’s own spending—through construction, purchasing supplies, employee payroll, and other multipliers—supports 300,000 jobs outside the University.

Overall, CUNY is an extraordinary investment in New York’s future. And as any owner of a home or business knows, when investment stops, decay begins.

In the 1970s, massive service cuts laid the basis for the social decay and economic decline of New York City in the 1980s. We need not repeat these mistakes. As former City budget director Abe Lackman has said, “In times such as this...a better way to set sensible policy for the long run is to ask which services and priorities should be protected or possibly even enhanced.”

That’s why the PSC Executive Council has called for restored funding for CUNY through a fair tax policy, not a tuition increase. A CUNY tuition hike would make New York’s problems harder, not easier, to solve.

The record of the last 10 years shows that tuition increases are not a solution to disinvestment in CUNY—they are part of the problem.

The PSC has the opportunity and the responsibility to say NO! to a tuition increase. It is not inevitable. We have the capacity to resist, educate and organize. Our membership has the resources to engage in a program of campus discussions on the funding of higher education that would include faculty, staff, students and our communities. As we educate ourselves in this area, we also need to form alliances with unions like TWU, which face similar struggles around the transit fare, and DC 37, whose locals have been hit by privatizing and outsourcing.

Such education and organizing has the potential to generate another kind of “Perfect Storm,” a convergence of labor, student and community organizations that says “enough” to the trashings of public life and institutions. CUNY needs us to work for an alternative vision, for policies that will serve “the whole people.”

Data in these articles from Fiscal Policy Institute, NYC Independent Budget Office, NYPIRG, NYS Dept. of Taxation and Finance, CUNY Office of Institutional Research.
BMCC escalators grinding to a halt

PSC organizes against a danger to health and safety

By BILL FRIEDHEIM
BMCC

With annoyance and grudging admission, a CUNY administrator exclaimed, “You guys are relentless.” The “you guys” in this case were the BMCC chapter of the PSC. In response to what Chapter Chair Jane Young has called an “unbearable situation,” the chapter has launched a petition and political campaign to demand action on the crisis of overcrowding at BMCC, the collapse of its elevators and escalators and the resulting dangers to health and safety.

Last year on September 11, BMCC lost a 15-story building next to the World Trade Center with 370,000 square feet of classroom space. With enrollment reaching record levels for CUNY’s community colleges, BMCC plans for all four elevators and 16 out of 20 escalators to be non-functional. Many escalators have sat idle for more than six months, becoming highly visible symbols of what many in the BMCC community see as utter neglect by the University. In November, mechanical working on the escalators told Clarion that CUNY’s past failure to perform routine maintenance would ultimately cost it millions of dollars.

BMCC has no freight elevators. As a result, disabled students must compete with cleaning and media equipment, garbage and food deliveries for space on four tiny elevators, which are often out of order. It doesn’t help that services for students with disabilities are located on the top floor, seven flights up.

One disabled student, who lost both legs a decade ago in a Bosnian land mine explosion, typically spends hours each week negotiating the vertical distance between his classes, often forced to leave the building to get from A to B.

At an October 30 union chapter meeting, one PSC member told of two pregnant students who must walk up six flights of stairs to get to class and arrive “red-faced, sweating and gasping for breath.” Two months into the semester, one of the two went into premature labor.

On September 18, CUNY Vice Chancellor Allan Dobrin and Deputy Chief Operating Officer Ronald Spalter toured the building, and the University has since pledged $500,000 for short-term repairs. For long-term replacement of the “vertical transportation system,” the amount of money available is less than half what would be required. And even that money is by no means secure: an October 24 memo from Scott Anderson, BMCC VP for Administration, noted that “funding is generally becoming precariously thin.” Because enrollment drives funding for CUNY’s community colleges, BMCC is under continuing pressure from 800th Street to increase enrollment. The PSC chapter at BMCC is committed to working to change this situation. The centerpiece is a petition, addressed to Vice Chancellor Dobrin but also aimed at elected officials and the media. It calls for a guaranteed timetable and funding, in place of vague promises. Over 5,000 people have already signed the petition and committed themselves to the campaign—to take escalating political action to make BMCC a healthy and safe environment for learning, teaching and working.

For more information and a copy of the petition, go to www.wf-cuny.org/bmccweb.htm.

Elevated levels of lead were found in BMCC’s ventilation ducts this summer, but now college officials are backing off from an earlier promise to clean up the system. BMCC officials say they turned the cleanup over to CUNY Central and the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY) because of the time the job. DASNY, however, conducted its own tests and insists that lead levels are not high enough to pose a danger, according to BMCC VP for Administration and Finance Scott Anderson. BMCC has asked the University to run a third series of tests before deciding whether to clean only the outer vents or the inside of the whole ventilation system.

The PSC chapter at BMCC is committed to working to change this situation. The centerpiece is a petition, addressed to Vice Chancellor Dobrin but also aimed at elected officials.

New drug plan manager for Welfare Fund

By STEVE LONDON
PSC First Vice President

The PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund Trustees are meeting this month to make decisions on restructuring, with a target of $6 million in savings to ensure that Welfare Fund (WF) benefits remain viable in the future. The Trustees are currently considering increased co-pays and deductibles for prescription medicines; instituting a three-tier formulary (generic, preferred brand-name or non-preferred brand-name drugs); equalizing the prescription drug benefit package between holders of NPA cards and those in HIP, Aetna and CIGNA; and alterations to our dental and life insurance plans.

The good news is that so far the Fund’s Trustees have been able to save approximately $2.5 million without touching benefits. The bulk of these savings will come from the Trustees’ decision, made in late October, to change our pharmaceutical benefits manager (PBM), switching from NPA to Medco Health.

PBMs like NPA and Medco Health are large discount buying companies that administer prescription drug plans. They purchase prescription drugs at a discount from manufacturers and pass those savings along to us. Last June the Trustees sent out a Request for Proposals to a number of large PBMs. This started a bidding war among PBMs for our business. Ultimately, the Trustees chose Medco Health because it will save millions of dollars for the Fund and our members, while enhancing membership service.

The change from NPA to Medco Health requires members receiving drugs through the mail to switch to Medco Health Home Delivery Pharmacy Service. This transition will be relatively painless. If you have prescriptions with NPA’s mail-order pharmacy network, you would have meant losing hundreds of participating pharmacies. On a number of other important criteria, Medco Health scored above NPA.

The Trustees felt the long-term interest of the members would be best served by moving to Medco Health. The WF Trustees have heard many members’ concerns and ideas in the last two months of extensive dialogue in campus meetings and in hearing from people individually. Members have contributed many important comments and useful suggestions. There was also wide agreement on the two main principles for restructuring proposed by the Trustees: 1) maintenance of substantial equality of benefits between actives and retirees; and 2) the impact of the cuts should not fall most heavily on the sickest and most plan-dependent members. Another Trustee proposal, that retirees should have higher out-of-pocket costs, was more controversial.

After this extensive period of consultation with the membership, the Trustees are ready to act. Once they complete their deliberations, members will be immediately notified by mail of plan changes.
What is your favorite labor film?

Clarion’s Roving Reporter asks fans of Labor Goes to the Movies

Jackie Disalvo
Professor of English
Baruch College

Salt of the Earth. I remember the women taking over the picket lines. And I remember victory. There may be some films from other countries that I also think of, but that’s the one that comes to mind.

It had this whole element of “the personal is political,” the women having to fight with the men in their marriages in order to be able to take over the picket line. The depth of its feminist perspective really stands out – and this movie was made in 1954!

Visually, it gave a feel for the whole Southwestern setting. I remember the faces of these Mexican Americans – very determined and strong.

Don’t miss I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang – Friday, 12/13, 6:00 p.m., 99 Hudson Street

Evelyn Maldonado
Senior, liberal arts major
CCNY Center for Worker Education

Dead Presidents. Anthony Curtis, played by Larenz Tate, is a Vietnam vet. There’s a scene where he comes back and his own American people don’t accept him and don’t help him out. They called him a “baby killer” because he was in Vietnam. He tried to get jobs but they weren’t paying him enough, so he did what he had to do. That’s when he felt the need to hustle. In a lot of urban areas, that’s unfortunately what a lot of people think they should do, is hustle like that. I know we did things that were illegitimate, but the movie covers the struggles the characters went through.

Jackie Disalvo
Professor of English
Baruch College

Assisted living, Medicare, SSI
NYSUT Social Services can help

By Tomio Geron

"When the phone rings, we never know what we’ll find," said Laurie Kupperstein of NYSUT Social Services. "But we’ll do whatever it takes." For almost three years, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) has offered counseling on everything from finding assisted living, home care, or support groups to domestic violence assistance to help with public benefits.

"We’ll advocate for people if they’re not getting what they need – such as services at home, or Medicare appeals," said Kupperstein. The service is absolutely free and can be a godsend for any PSC member, perhaps especially for those who have retired. "It’s one of the best things NYSUT has done for retirees," said PSC Retiree Chapter Chair Irwin Yellowitz.

NYSUT is the PSC’s state affiliate, and all PSC members thus belong to NYSUT as well. Kupperstein worked on the staff of retiree services at another NYSUT-affiliated union, the United Federation of Teachers, for seven years before she joined the NYSUT staff.

**Wealth of Information**

Kupperstein recently helped a retiree find assisted living facilities. The retiree, who lives by herself, had just had a heart attack and didn’t know how to find the best housing that would meet her needs. NYSUT provided names, fees and reliable descriptions of the services provided at different facilities in her area.

"We also told her about enriched housing, which most people don’t know about," said Kupperstein. Enriched housing is less expensive than assisted living, Kupperstein explained, with similar services and more independence. With NYSUT’s help, this retiree found a suitable living situation.

Because moving to assisted living can be such a big decision, NYSUT Social Services provides a wealth of information. "If somebody calls us for assisted living information, we ask them what areas he wants to move to," Kupperstein said. "We can find facilities in any area in the country. We also download inspection reports to see whether they’re good or not." NYSUT staff can give more detailed evaluations of those facilities that they’ve been visit.

NYSUT helps members with many other concerns as well. Scott Hicks, NYSUT social services specialist, recently received a desperate call from a member who was traveling to Buffalo once a month to give her father, a retiree with mental illness, money to help pay his rent. With his SSI payments so low, she was afraid he would become homeless. The woman was having trouble paying her own bills while also supporting her father.

Hicks looked into the problem and found that the father’s SSI was reduced because he was working part-time. Hicks recently received a call from the father, who was now working full-time, as well as a call from the daughter. "She was happy to get the SSI money back," said Hicks.

In a few weeks Hicks had cut through the red tape of federal bureaucracy and the problem was corrected. The woman no longer had to worry about whether she could pay her own bills, or whether her father would be evicted. It was a serious problem, but just one of the many that NYSUT handles every day.

NYSUT Social Service staffers do more than provide information or slice through red tape. They also take the time to personally follow up with clients who need assistance. "We can give [clients] a regular call if they’re homebound," noted Kupperstein.

"It’s really not just information," she said. "A lot of our work is about creating a relationship. Someone will come ask us, ‘Can you investi- gate this facility for my brother?’ Six months later, after helping the brother, he’ll call back and say, ‘Now can you help me with me?’ Our members are our members for life.”

NYSUT Social Services may be reached at 1-800-342-9810 ext. 6296, or e-mail socsvcs@nysutmail.org. Kupperstein will speak at the Retirees Chapter meeting in May.
A NEW TITLE, A NEW HOUR

Your rights under the contract’s new provisions

By BARBARA BOWEN
PSC President

The title was added to the CUNY Bylaws by the Board of Trustees on October 21, 2002, and is now available for use. Department chairs who seek to hire in this title should initiate the process with their campus administration.

Although the demand for this position originated with management, the union sees the title as an opportunity to expand and enhance the faculty. We urge departments to think creatively about the possibility of hiring distinguished colleagues, especially people from racialized minority groups. The distinguished lecturer title presents a perfect opportunity to attract faculty from underrepresented groups and create a culture in which a more diverse faculty will thrive.

The union strongly recommends that the Distinguished Lecturer title be used equitably, in all fields and at all colleges, so its full potential for enriching the University is realized. We suggest that hiring committees throughout CUNY – in community colleges as well as senior colleges – work actively to explore its possibilities.

ADJUNCT PROFESSIONAL HOUR

The purpose of this major innovation in the contract is twofold: to enhance the integration of adjuncts into the professional life of the college, and to give students more opportunities for consultation with their instructors, over half of whom, CUNY-wide, are adjuncts. This provision is designed to pay for at least part of the enormous amount of unpaid work CUNY adjuncts do and to allow them to contribute more fully to University life. Its parameters are as follows:

1) The provision took effect on September 1, 2002 and will remain in force, unless changes are negotiated by the parties to the agreement. It is fully funded by the contract settlement. Its parameters are as follows:

2) The hour is described in the agreement between the PSC and CUNY as a “professional” hour, “one (1) additional hour per week in order to engage in professional assignments related to . . . academic responsibilities, such as office hours, professional development, participation in campus activities and training.”

3) Adjunct faculty members with a workload of 6 or more contact hours in a given semester at a single college are required to be paid for one additional hour per week at 100% of their normal teaching rate and for the additional work at the 60% rate. Adjuncts who are not eligible for the professional hour but who do work normally paid at the 60% rate should continue to be paid at the 60% rate if they continue to perform this work.

4) Adjuncts who qualify for the paid professional hour and who do additional work that was previously paid at 60% of their normal teaching rate will be paid for the professional hour at 100% of their normal teaching rate and for the additional work at the 60% rate. Adjuncts who are not eligible for the professional hour but who do work normally paid at the 60% rate should continue to be paid at the 60% rate if they continue to perform this work.

5) Eligible adjuncts are entitled to be paid for one hour per week for every week of the semester. This includes the fifteenth week of the normal semester as well as winter sessions, such as those at LaGuardia and Kingsborough.

6) If an adjunct reaches eligibility for the professional hour at two campuses, then the adjunct must be paid for and perform the professional hour on both campuses.

7) The professional hour does not count toward the maximum adjunct teaching workload as defined in Article 15.2 of the contract. For instance, an adjunct who teaches 9 hours at one college and 6 hours at a second college will be paid for 2 professional hours, one at each college. Even though this adjunct will be paid for a total of 17 hours, he or she will not be considered to have exceeded the contractual maximum of 15 classroom contact hours.

8) Courses, usually in English Composition, that are scheduled for 4 classroom hours but carry 3 credits will be counted for the purposes of establishing eligibility for professional hour pay as 4 hours. Thus an adjunct who teaches a 4-hour course in a semester at a single college will receive a total of 9 hours per pay week: 8 for contact teaching hours and one additional professional hour.

9) Adjuncts who qualify for the paid professional hour and who do additional work that was previously paid at 60% of their normal teaching rate will be paid for the professional hour at 100% of their normal teaching rate and for the additional work at the 60% rate. Adjuncts who are not eligible for the professional hour but who do work normally paid at the 60% rate should continue to be paid at the 60% rate if they continue to perform this work.

10) The professional hour provision, because it is designed to provide compensation for work that is included in the normal full-time faculty position, does not apply to full-time instructional staff to teach a course as a multiple position.

11) The union and University have agreed that because of the immense value of one-on-one consultation for students, the normative use of the hour will be for office hours. However, if both the adjunct and the department chair agree, the hour may be used for other professional activities. A good test for the suitability of such activities is whether they would be appropriate for full-time faculty and whether they further the integration of adjuncts into the intellectual life of the college.

12) The University Bylaws state that the department chair shall “assign courses and arrange programs of instructional staff members of the department” (Section 9.3.a.2). The responsibility for arranging with the adjunct how to use the professional hour belongs to the department chair (or the chair’s designee), rather than to the provost or other college official, just as the responsibility for arranging programs for full-timers belongs to the chair.

13) It is the union’s position that the only acceptable “accountability mechanisms” for compliance with the professional hour requirements are those already in place for full-time faculty members. For example, if full-time faculty are required to post their office hours outside their office doors, then no more or less should be required of part-time faculty.

We must actively assert our new rights.
Honor our values

By MARTA PETROUSEWICZ
Hunter College & Graduate Center

A NEW NEW DEAL
New York’s public interest

By MIKE WALLACE

in a letter to the Italian newspaper Corriere della sera (12 November), CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein has asked the university community to consider honoring Italy’s prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi. The letter states that either a Chancellor’s Medal or an honorary degree is possible. The motivation is Berlusconi’s importance as an international figure and his support of the United States in the fight against terrorism. In addition, the proposal is presented as a welcome recognition of the fact that there are many of Italian heritage at CUNY among both teachers and students. As an Italian academic and a scholar of Italian history, I urge the chancellor to reconsider. There are good reasons why the Italian prime minister should not be so honored not only by CUNY, but indeed by any university anywhere. The Italian academic community seems to take this view; it cannot be without significance that no Italian university has even suggested honoring Berlusconi any kind of recognition.

The main reservations about Berlusconi concern not rumors or opinions but specific criminal charges. He has been the subject of nine major criminal proceedings. Usually he has escaped sentencing because his team of more than 100 lawyers has been able to prolong trials in order to be able to invoke the statute of limitations. Even so, on various charges he has been found guilty and sentenced (with suspended sentences) to a total of six years and five months imprisonment. The principal charges against him are bribery, fraud, tax evasion, and politicians, selling away huge sums of unexplained funds in Switzerland and other tax havens, and systematic double bookkeeping with intent to defraud the tax authorities.

SCANDALOUS
Berlusconi’s response to the various threats to his position has been a scandalous manipulation of the law in order to protect his private interests. When discussing his attitude to terrorism, it should be remembered that in September and October of last year, when the countries of Europe worked out an agreement to facilitate extradition and exchange of information to fight terrorism, Berlusconi refused to sign those particular clauses which, among everything else, would have given Italian magistrates easier access to Swiss documents concerning his own financial dealings. Here private interest clearly preceded public interest. It was hardly the action of a man in the forefront of the battle against terrorism. The other Dantesque self-interest has been equally evident. One of the first measures passed by the new Berlusconi government was the decriminalization of many forms of false accounting and double bookkeeping. Interestingly enough this was made retroactive, in defiance of recognized principles of legislation. Paradoxically, recently enacted laws governing conflict of interest in Italy are to be activated only in the future, allowing Berlusconi to keep his hands on his personal media empire and control the state-run television and radio. This gives him near-total control over television, as several distinguished television journalists have learned at their cost when contracts were not renewed.

Berlusconi’s contempt for freedom of the press is of a piece with his hostility to judicial independence. The prime minister and his supporters have launched a generalized attack on Italian magistrates, who are accused of political bias when they dare to question the tycoon’s business methods. Far from being confined to the political left, outrage at Berlusconi’s conduct runs throughout a broad section of Italian society and above all its intelligentsia, including many respected figures from the center, the right and the apolitical. All are people who care deeply about the independence of the institutions of Italian civil society, who treasure open debate and critical thought.

Berlusconi burst onto the international stage with his crusade against the attacks of 9/11, when he affirmed the “superiority of our civilization” over that of Islam. Besides being false, this was said when all other Western leaders were working to avoid the transformation of this event into a clash of cultures. As with Berlusconi’s rejection of more transparency in banking, it must be asked: does this hurt terrorism, or help to fuel it? The foreign minister of Belgium declared that Berlusconi’s ignorant statement “contradicts European values.” Does it not contradict academic values as well?

ANTI-INTELLECTUAL
Berlusconi’s remarks on Islam are among many that reflect his profoundly anti-intellectual and anti-cultural outlook. No one has been surprised that his government has drastically cut funding for universities in Italy, and for research in particular.

It is inconceivable that an institution like CUNY should want to honor these “values.” To honor the Italian prime minister would be to dishonor the Italian academic community, which is wholeheartedly opposed to Berlusconi’s anti-intellectual stance. It would be a slap in the face to CUNY’s faculty as well: the University Faculty Senate’s leadership has strongly opposed such a move.

As a friend of mine, a prominent Italian intellectual and president of a very prestigious Italian university wrote, “the only thing that universities have to lose is their fame and their dignity; once they have given away these they will never be able to buy them back.” Giving an award to Berlusconi would be a grave mistake, one which would do lasting damage to CUNY’s high international reputation.

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A

New York’s public interest

By MIKE WALLACE

ax cutters love to say that they are simply giving us back our money to spend as we wish. But that is to overlook the fact that many of the things we most wish for can’t be provided through the market. You can’t buy public health, or mass transit, for can’t be provided through the market. Under the New Deal in New York City, 40-50 students were common), the program that we nowadays tend to treat as discrete single-issue entities, and the inventiveness and durability of many of its solutions. Under the New Deal in New York City, WPA workers built public amenities that allowed millions of New Yorkers access to benefits not available to them even in the prosperous twenties. The New Dealers reenact the New Deal, however, are its deep roots in our own city’s history, the range and scope of its ambition, its awareness of the interconnectedness of problems that we nowadays tend to treat as discrete single-issue entities, and the inventiveness and durability of many of its solutions. Under the New Deal in New York City, WPA workers built public amenities that allowed millions of New Yorkers access to benefits not available to them even in the prosperous twenties. The New Dealers refurbished and expanded 287 parks (including
Contingent labor meets

By VINNIE TIRELLI
Brooklyn College

Having been to all five conferences of the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL), I found COCAL V to be the most exciting and promising of them all.

COCAL V, held October 4–6 in Montréal, was the best attended by far. The 225 participants included academic labor activists from as far as Alaska, from all across Canada and the U.S., as well as Mexico. The growth in part-time, adjunct instructional staff at CUNY is part of an expansion of contingent academic labor throughout North America. Looking around the conference hall, it was clear that our local labor organizing is part of an international social movement.

COCAL was the first multi-campus protest march in which we all took part, with local activists giving rousing speeches and with entertainment at each stop. Carrying signs and chanting in French and in English, we went from Concordia University to the Science Center of the University of Quebec at Montréal (UQAM) to CEGEP du Vieux-Montréal (a two-year college), where a rally featured music, bal- lows, and circus performers. The march ended at UQAM’s other campus, where a reception welcomed us to town.

New contacts and friendships laying the basis for a stronger alliance

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Almost every conference I attended was international, with students and teachers from across the continent and beyond. One participant described what we were doing by turning the name of our coalition into a verb: “We must continue COCAL-ing.” Everyone seemed to agree.

Transit worker contract fight

By JOSHUA B. FREEMAN
Queens College

The contract between the New York City Transit Authority and Transport Workers Union Local 100 expires December 15. Though New York’s Taylor Law bans strikes by public employees, Local 100 President Roger Toussaint has refused to rule out the possibility of a walkout.

Several issues stand out among the list of demands put forth by the transit workers and subway workers’ union. Without specifying a figure, Local 100 has asked for a “substantial” wage increase, arguing that its members are paid less than workers who hold equivalent jobs with the Port Authority, Metro North and the Long Island Rail Road.

Health benefits

The union also is seeking full funding for its Health Benefit Trust. Like the PSC’s Welfare Fund, the Health Benefit Trust has developed a growing deficit as a result of rising costs and insufficient employer pay- ments. And for transit workers, this is an even bigger problem: the trust provides all of their health insurance, unlike CUNY employees who get basic health insurance from the City and supplemental benefits from the Welfare Fund.

Among non-monetary demands, modifications in grievance and discipline procedures are at the top of the list. Transit workers are plagued by frequent and harsh disciplinary actions and a grievance procedure that is stacked heavily against them. Other demands include ending the use of workfare participants to perform transit work (transferring those currently at the TA to permanent transit jobs), and better safety measures after two track workers were killed in November.

The upcoming contract is first to be negotiated by Local 100’s new leadership, which ousted the incumbent administration in November 2000. Since then, the union has worked relentlessly to mobilize its membership, building an extensive shop steward system and holding a series of mass rallies. At the most recent, on October 30, police initially tried to block 16,000 TWU members from marching to Gov. Pataki’s office in midtown Manhattan, despite the fact that the union had obtained a permit.

PUBLIC SUPPORT

Local 100 has sought alliances with the public, working with neighborhood organizations to stop the TA from closing token booths and subway stations. More recently, the union has been part of a “Save the Fare” coalition with community and political groups, mass transit advocates, and other unions opposed to a post-election fare hike. Raising subway and bus fares would be “in effect a regressive tax hike on working people,” says Local 100’s Toussaint.

Structurally, transit workers are in a similar position to PSC members: although public employees, they are not directly employed by either the state or the city, but work for an agency dependent on funding from both. Over the years, transit worker contracts generally have not followed the pattern established by other municipal unions. Because of TWU’s history of militancy and the critical nature of transit workers’ jobs, they have often won better contracts than other public employees. TWU settlements have provided a general context and benchmark for subsequent union negotiations.

“As mass transit users, unionists, and public employees, PSC members have a strong interest in providing all the support we can to the transit workers in their current struggle,” said PSC Treasurer John Hyland. PSC members who would like to join in support actions should e-mail Jim Perlestein of the PSC Solidarity Committee at jperlestein@skoll.com, or call Hyland in the PSC office at 212-354-1252.