

**Testimony from Lorraine Cohen PhD to Board of Trustees Hearing organized by the  
Professional Staff Congress, 6/26/20**

My name is Lorraine Cohen, CUNY has been my professional and political home for a large part of my life. I taught for five years early in my career at a CUNY Community college, I received my doctorate in Sociology from the Graduate Center, and since 1993 I have been a professor of sociology in the Social Science Department of LaGuardia Community College. During that time I have also been academic chair, Chapter Chair of the LaGuardia Chapter of the PSC. For the past 5 years I have been PSC Vice President of Community Colleges. Though out these many years I have witnessed the ruling elites attempt to destroy CUNY through slashing budgets, creating proposals to end remediation, and continuously raising tuition.

in a time when the millions in this country, many for the first time, are acknowledging the existence of a history of systemic racism in American society it is unthinkable that the Governor, and the Mayor are signaling that they are going to resolve their budget problems by making draconian cuts to CUNY's budget, requiring laying off potentially thousands of part time and contingent workers. Systemic racism does not only mean that policing in this society needs fundamental redefinition and reorganization. Systemic racism also means that those in power, and those of us who have white privilege, recognize that that basic cultural and material needs of people of color have been ignored, neglected, and denied. CUNY is not only an economic engine as Cuomo acknowledges, but it is also an engine of hope for thousands of low income and working class students of color. For thousands of students CUNY represents the only opportunity to develop their individual intellectual and creative potential as human beings, and to obtain the preparation they need to enter a highly competitive job market.

What will happen to CUNY's students when thousands of adjuncts are laid off? How many CUNY students will survive in very large classes, where instructors won't have the time to give them the individual attention and encouragement that they will need? What will happen to our students when there are, fewer counselors, fewer course offerings, fewer librarians, and tutors? Would Cuomo be willing to send his children or grandchildren to a college that has been ravaged by the budget cuts that he is imposing on CUNY?

There are alternatives to budget cuts, and layoffs. This set of assumptions that governs Cuomo's thinking falls within a conservative ideological framework that above all is committed to maintaining lower taxes on the very wealthy. Though there is little evidence, Cuomo worries that the very rich will leave, and that the state will suffer unless it is "business friendly." These same ideas were applied when the Governor and the Mayor offered huge tax breaks to Amazon. Community groups, unions, and the City Council had other ideas, and Amazon decided to run. We must organize to defeat this plan of cuts and layoffs. I urge all of you to go to the website of the Fiscal Policy institute and read about the alternatives to the austerity politics of

the ruling elites in this city and state. Tax the rich, not the poor, bring back free tuition, no layoffs, no reduction in funding, and no compromising our health!!

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