

March 31, 2005

UNION DEFENSE FUND

The following proposal was passed by the PSC Delegate Assembly on March 31.

The Executive Council proposes that the PSC create a Union Defense Fund, through voluntary contributions, in order to increase the union's capacity to wage a public, militant campaign for a fair contract.

Throughout the semester, union strength has been growing, as members across the University have become active in the fight for a fair contract. We have seen that our pressure works, but we will need to be prepared to press even harder to break through management's austerity framework. Being able to draw on a Union Defense Fund will enable us to intensify our campaign and defend the union as we prepare for more militant actions.

A key element of the Union Defense Fund is that it will be built through voluntary contributions: building the Fund will itself be an act of solidarity, an intensification of our one-on-one organizing. This is a proposal for more than a fund; it's a proposal for a campaign. Its aim is in part to change the conversation in the union, as members are asked, one by one, to recognize the seriousness of our fight and make a commitment of support.

Union defense funds have historically been a fundamental institution of the trade union movement. Voluntary or mandatory, long-term or short-term, collective funds for the defense of the union and its members have been an essential tool of organizing and building union strength. In 1973, as part of the PSC's hard-fought campaign to win a first contract, the union began a Union Defense Fund in order to be prepared in the event of a strike. Although the union membership voted to authorize the leadership to call a strike, the contract was won without striking, and the union continued to make regular contributions to the Defense Fund out of its operating budget. In the 1990s, the union leadership discontinued contributions, and the accrued amount became part of the PSC's reserve.

Now we face a state of emergency in negotiations that is arguably as difficult as the situation faced by the PSC in 1973. In order to build the union's capacity for a new level of action—a level commensurate with the contract crisis we face—the Executive Council calls for the creation of a new Union Defense Fund, this time through voluntary contributions. The proposal is for a Union Defense Fund established according to the following guidelines:

- All contributions would be voluntary; members and fee-payers would be asked, through the *Clarion* and a direct mailing, to elect to deduct a fixed

amount from each paycheck and contribute this amount to the Union Defense Fund account in the PSC/CUNY Credit Union.

- The Union Defense Fund would be a fund segregated from other PSC funds, such as operating expenses and reserves, and would be governed by rules established by the PSC Executive Council in consultation with legal counsel and our local and national affiliates.
- The direct mailing and other forms of outreach for the Defense Fund would offer members suggested levels of contribution; e.g., \$2 from each paycheck, \$5, \$10 or \$25. Contributions could also be made directly, by writing a check to the PSC Union Defense Fund. The different levels of suggested contribution would lead up to the highest, one day's pay (with instructions on how to calculate one day for yourself). The Defense Fund would be used to expand the union's capacity to wage a public, militant campaign for a fair contract. For instance, if the union needs to intensify its television advertising campaign beyond the financial limits of our existing budget for such campaigns, the Executive Council might vote to approve allocating money from the Defense Fund to increased television advertising. If the union were forced to consider a job action, the Executive Council might vote to allocate money from the Defense Fund to cover job action expenses. All allocations would be voted on by the Executive Council and would be reported to the membership.
- In the event the money raised for the Defense Fund this spring is not spent, or the contract is settled without full expenditure of the Fund, member contributions would not be refunded; rather, they would become part of a lasting Defense Fund for the union.
- Members would be encouraged to continue contributing to the Union Defense Fund after the settlement of the contract, as a regular part of their union practice. The Union Defense Fund would build the union's capacity in more than financial ways. One of its major purposes would be to intensify the one-on-one organizing campaign in which we are now engaged.
- If the DA approves the Fund, the union's leadership and organizing staff will set a target date, for instance May 2—the first day back from spring break—and a target number of contributors. Activists will be asked to urge their "My Five" people to participate in the Fund; each chapter will set a target for its number of Fund participants by that date. Contract campaign events in April and May will be oriented toward increasing participation in the Fund.

The Union Defense Fund would be part of the PSC's long-term plan to become an activist union, to build our political capacity and develop strength for campaigns beyond this contract.