In its fight for a fair contract, PSC is ratcheting up the pressure with a series of escalating tactics. In the scene above, members engaged in a planned civil disobedience action on November 4, blocking the entrance to CUNY headquarters in Midtown, risking arrest. Fifty-three members were charged with disorderly conduct. Plans for the action resulted in contract offer from CUNY management – one described as ‘unacceptable’ by PSC President Barbara Bowen. On November 19, members packed The Great Hall at the Cooper Union to begin preparations for a strike authorization vote.

PAGES 3 & 6

CHURCH & STATE
Friedrichs plaintiffs
Pressing the anti-union Supreme Court case is a little-known group that seeks to bring religion into public schools, making missionaries of teachers.

PAGE 9

DETERMINATION
Ready for action
At a union-wide meeting, 900 PSC members gathered to prepare for a strike authorization vote – the next big step in the union’s campaign for a fair contract.

PAGE 3

POWER & ART
Irony meets idealism
PSC member and MacArthur Fellow Ben Lerner talks to Clarion about the relationship between poetry and politics, and the beauty of imperfect collectivity.

PAGE 12
IN BRIEF

FIELD@pscmail.org.

emailing Marcia Newfield at mnewfield@psce.org.

level.

that activists can take to build collective power at the grassroots level.

College, addresses organizing efforts! We stand with @PSC_CUNY.

must invest in our public institutions and those who support them affect our communities, our economy and our democracy. An environment that tolerates and encourages the employment of under-valued, underpaid workers only compounds opportunities for the exploitation of other workers.

A system that does not reward workers on the basis of merit, educational attainment or talent is damaging to all.

Dignity at stake

● The PSC’s Midtown demonstration demanding a contract brought our message where it belongs — into the heart of this great city. Let us embrace and cheer the 53 fellow union members, including our own Assistant Professor Felipe Pimentel, who endured arrest on our behalf and in defense of our union.

The PSC belongs to its members. We built it and nurtured it. The contempt for the PSC shown by the CUNY Board of Trustees parallels its contempt for faculty governance, which was clearly shown by the board’s ignoring the 92 percent “No” vote against Pathways.

I suggest that we begin collecting pledges from other faculty and staff willing to be arrested for this just cause. What’s at stake is our dignity as workers in a democratic society and the right of our students to a quality higher education.

Gerald Meyer
Professor of History, Emeritus Hostos Community College

Solidarity with students and adjuncts

● A joint effort among CUNY students, faculty and staff is necessary to reverse recent attacks on public higher education. We encourage the PSC to adopt the following as central demands in its contract campaign.

By doing so, the union will show that its commitment to the most exploited members of CUNY, students and adjuncts goes beyond lip service to become genuine solidarity.

● An immediate tuition freeze and rollback of the tuition hikes from 2011 to 2016. If the PSC claims to struggle for racial and economic justice for the working class, then it should refuse to let CUNY fund faculty raises with student tuition increases.

● True movement toward pay equity for adjunct faculty, i.e., $7,000 per course.

Within the last few years, the Modern Language Association (MLA), Coalition of Continent Academic Labor (COCAL) and CUNY Doctoral Students’ Council (DSC) have advocated a $7,000 starting salary for 3-credit courses. By re-fusing pay disparity between CUNY adjuncts and other faculty, the PSC can end the reliance on adjuncts as cheap exploitable labor, the practice of which harms our whole union.

● Adjunct job security. Create real and comprehensive job protection for all through a seniority system by date of hire that doesn’t introduce additional evaluations into the process.

● Workload flexibility. Lift the cap on the number of courses that adjuncts can teach at any single CUNY campus.

The addition of these demands will strengthen the PSC’s ability to negotiate, fight and win. Right now most students and adjuncts don’t see any reason to take action — let alone strike — in support of a contract that doesn’t yet express all our interests. This situation will change when we stand united.

Conor Tomás Reed
Graduate Writing Fellow Kingsborough Community College

PSC President Barbara Bowen responds:

Thank you for your letter, Conor. I know it comes out of a long history of student organizing. The PSC leadership agrees completely that the only force strong enough to reverse the national attacks on public higher education is a coalition of faculty, staff, students — and the communities of which they are a part. We are actively building such a coalition for CUNY right now, working to deepen our bonds with student activists and organizations, showing how students have a stake in the PSC contract fight. That work could be among the most important we do.

On the issue probably most important to students — tuition increases — the PSC opposes the current proposal for another increase and has consistently opposed shifting the cost of a CUNY education onto the backs of our students. The shift of cost is a failed strategy.

The union is also working with activist organizations that advocate for the communities in which our students live. Many are eager to coalesce around a defense of quality education at CUNY.

Finally, on your suggestions for demands: there has been much discussion of the union’s demands in our policy-making body, the Delegate Assembly. The DA voted not to include the demand you propose for “workload flexibility” because that demand is in the interest of management. Management always wants to multiply the number of courses taught for substandard pay; the union works to increase the pay and create meaningful job security. We have already accomplished a landmark benefit in this round of bargaining: fully funded health insurance for eligible adjuncts.

Dignity at stake

● CUNY’s reliance on adjunct workforce easily replaced by newly minted graduate assistants. A system that exploits them represents a loss of civilization. This system employs the majority of the CUNY workforce; 75 percent of classes in the CUNY system are taught by adjuncts. Even more, the support staff secretaries who fill out mountains of new hire paperwork, employees in the duplicating center, department chairs who organize college-wide schedules, tenured faculty (who observe adjuncts) have not had an increase in pay for almost six years. That lack of fairness to the whole CUNY system and compromises its effectiveness as a vehicle for social betterment.

It has been documented by many news outlets that creations and intellectuals are leaving New York City because of the high cost of living. What was once a public service became a private business, and executives were threatened, the response was a fear of driving away the best, the most talented. The shame I feel as an under-paid adjunct is palpable and often compounded by those who believe I should simply “be happy” to work for less as the system so vastly values, underpaid workers only compounds opportunities for the exploitation of other workers.

An environment that tolerates and encourages the employment of under-valued, underpaid workers only compounds opportunities for the exploitation of other workers.

A system that does not reward workers on the basis of merit, educational attainment or talent is damaging to all.

Elisabeth von Uhl
Adjunct Lecturer Bronx Community College

Journal explores adjunct labor organizing

The most recent issue of the academic labor organizing quarterly WorkingUSA (published by Wiley-Blackwell), examines contingent academic work with articles exploring organizing, tactics and collective bargaining.

This issue, “Contingent Academic Labor: The Way Forward,” is edited by PSC bargaining team member Marcia Newfield; Polina Shomial Ahmad, Professor of Anthropology, emeritus CUNY Graduate Center; Gerald Sider, Professor of Anthropology, emeritus CUNY Graduate Center and the CUNY Graduate Center.

Tuition is our business

● Having been to all of the last several demonstrations for a good contract, I am increasingly upset by one aspect of these demonstrations: Since several of our last contract improvements were partially financed by students’ tuition increases, we must make clear to our contractual demands that there be no student tuition increases for the duration of the contract.

Considering how lonely and effectively the students support us — particularly wonderful are the students from Hostos — we can no less for them. Management will tell us this is none of our business; we should tell them and our CUNY stewards that we just made it our business.

Gerald Sider
Professor of Anthropology, emeritus The College of Staten Island and the CUNY Graduate Center

Exploitation at CUNY hurts all

BMCC students Khadijah Warner (right) and Sekou Sacko are among the more than 40,000 CUNY and SUNY students who signed postcards urging Governor Andrew Cuomo to sign the “maintenance of effort” bill. On November 26, a coalition of groups, including the Professional Staff Congress, CUNY University Student Senate and the New York Public Interest Research Group delivered the postcards to the governor’s office at the state capitol in Albany.

40,000 postcards to Gov. Cuomo

Gary Striefel
At a union-wide meeting at the Cooper Union’s Great Hall on November 19, PSC President Barbara Bowen called on Governor Andrew Cuomo to fund the PSC contract, and laid into a five-year “loitering” that union’s fight for a fair contract. In October, the union’s Executive Council announced that the union would hold a vote among members for authorization to call a strike, if necessary, and the membership meeting kicked off the organizing process for the vote. The PSC’s contract with CUNY expired in 2010. Although public employees are barred from striking in New York under the Taylor Law, it is legal to conduct a strike authorization vote.

“We are holding Governor Cuomo accountable for his refusal to put money in this contract,” Bowen told the lively crowd of 900 members who packed the hall. “Governor Cuomo, you cannot present yourself as a progressive if you are not progressive on CUNY. You cannot be a progressive and pursue austerity economics on the higher education system of this city and state. We will not let you do that.”

CUNY Chancellor James B. Milliken – until now the focus of PSC pressure – has failed to secure adequate funding from the state legislature. As Bowen went to press, the governor had yet to take action on a bill that would cover the costs of deciding on whether to sign the bill, (As Clariion went to press, the government had yet to take action on a bill passed by the state legislature this summer that would cover the costs of negotiating a fair contract going forward. The deadline for his decision on whether to sign the bill, known as a “maintenance of effort” measure, was December 11.)

PUBLIC DISINVESTMENT

“We fight to press the larger issue of disinvestment in this university, and austerity,” First Vice President Mike Fabricant told the crowd. “We fight on the question of wages, and that has consequences for the quality of education for our students. We fight for fair work for part-time faculty and staff and full-time faculty so they can survive and stay at this university. And in the midst of all this, tuition is raised to fill in the hole left by disinvestment.”

On November 4, as hundreds of PSC members rallied on the West side outside CUNY headquarters on 42nd Street and some prepared to take part in a planned civil disobedience action, management announced that in a single contract, salary increases that totaled a mere 6 percent over six years between 2010 and October 2016, and while failing to offer retroactive raises for four of the six. Within days of receiving the offer, the union countered with a proposal for a package of salary increases that would total 14 percent. Negotiations are still ongoing.

FIVE-POINT PLAN

The plan Bowen put forward at the union-wide meeting includes the following steps:

1. Taking the demand for funding a fair contract directly to the governor.
2. Enlarging the fight by building and strengthening alliances with students, community groups and other unions.
3. Amplifying the union’s message through increasingly aggressive efforts in both traditional and social media.
4. Making a counteroffer to CUNY’s 6-point offer, which is below the rate of inflation for the period covered.
5. Organizing to win a strike authorization vote.

Buoyed by the successful rally and sit-in – which garnered coverage by television newscasts and The New York Times, and resulted in the arrest of 53 PSC members – the boisterous crowd in The Great Hall applauded frequently throughout speeches by PSC officers and representatives of the union’s various constituencies, and an officer of CUNY’s Student Senate. Members hoisted familiar signs (we’re the war on CUNY) and several blew vuvuzela horns.

UNION SOLIDARITY

Videos bearing greetings from leaders of unions that either won or were engaged in similar battles were greeted with enthusiasm, especially the appearance on the screen of Kar en Lewis, president of the Chicago Teachers Union, which waged a successul contract battle that included a strike against the city’s school system. Introducing the video messages, Secretary Nivedita Majumdar noted that Lewis is presently battling brain cancer, but nonetheless recorded a message to PSC: (“Tell the truth!” Lewis said in her message. “Just let us teach.”) The video messages can be seen at tinyurl.com/PSCAllies.

“Our colleagues, like us, are fighting not just for salary raises, but for a quality education accessible to all students,” Majumdar said. “For management, the phrase ‘student success’ is usually nothing more than a rhetorical ploy to further their agenda of neoliberal education reforms.”

Also expressing solidarity with the PSC via video were Phyllis Campano, president of the Seattle Education Association, Tim Killikelly, president of AFT Long Island, which represents faculty at the City College of San Francisco and Jennifer Eagan, president of the California Faculty Association. The CFA, Eagan said, won its strike authorization vote by 94 percent. Each leader spoke of their unions’ individual battles for fair contracts and respect for their students as part of a national fight, a point also made by Brooklyn College Chapter Chair James Davis in his speech from the podium.

A NATIONAL FIGHT

While budget cuts and attacks on collective bargaining are fought and felt locally, Davis explained, they are “fueled by national movements... that seek to delegitimize higher education as a public good, and rebrand it as a private investment.”

“We have an opportunity to change that narrative, to reframe higher education not only as a public good, but a good for the particular public that we serve – working-class students, students of color, immigrants and their children.”

Dexter Roberts, vice chair of the University’s Student Senate, declared student solidarity with the PSC in the union’s contract fight. “If there is no you, and there is no me, there is no CUNY,” he said. Roberts also reminded the crowd of the Student Senate’s resolution passed in September that called on CUNY to “prioritize the needs of the adjunct professors.”

Those who attended the mass meeting were treated to a clip from an upcoming documentary by Rehad Desai about a successful struggle at South African universities in which students and faculty came together to stop the outsourcing of campus labor.

UNITING CONSTITUENCIES

Michael Batson, an adjunct lecturer in history at the College of Staten Island and Kingsborough Community College, spoke of his union’s struggle with management, the phrase ‘student success’ is usually nothing more than a rhetorical ploy to further their agenda of neoliberal education reforms.

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NEWS

When the subject is the University

Lessons in struggle for justice

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

In Kathleen Offenholley’s mathemat- ics class at the Borough of Manhat- tan Community College (BMCC), students are getting a lesson in regression lines and equilibrium using a case study to check the rate of decrease in state aid per full-time student compared with the increase in community college tuition over the years. “You can see that the two lines have met and that students are now paying more themselves than state aid is paying,” she explains, showing the trends on a graph.

Since the 1996-91 school year, tu- tion and fees have more than dou- bled as a proportion of community college revenues, while state aid to CUNY community colleges fell from 36 to 25 percent.

CUNY IN THE CLASSROOM

“It kind of pissed me off a while,” BMCC student Alex Atkinson, who works full-time in a restaurant and pays her own tuition, told Clarion. “They’re raising tuition and they’re not offering help.”

Offenholley’s CUNY-focused les- son plan is part of “Teach CUNY,” a PSC initiative to make the Univer- sity itself a subject of investigation with students. Teach CUNY was introduced in 2001, during another big budget cut, and was re- launched this fall as part of escalat- ing contract and budget campaigns.

Faculty across the University held teach-ins and developed curricula around the topic appropriate to their courses.

Kathleen Offenholley demonstrates a math concept with a graph showing the rate of CUNY’s tuition increases.

In political science classes, stu- dents learned about the legislative process by which the maintenance- of-effort bill (which was awaiting ac- tion by the governor as Clarion went to press) was passed by the State As- sembly and Senate, and learned the language of legislation. Elsewhere, a group of first-year students were given a lesson on the history of CUNY by their counselor. Students in one English class wrote about the roles of faculty and students in seeking justice within the college community.

Teaching a sociology class at Bar- ruch, Luke Elliott-Negri engaged students in a discussion of current political conversations about mak- ing higher education tuition-free. “When you link it to the fact that for generations working class immi- grants in the city could get a bach- elor’s degree free [at CUNY] and now they and their parents are pay- ing for it, I think that makes it much more real,” said Elliott-Negri, who is a graduate employee and chairs the PSC Graduate Center chapter.

CUNY and students resist tuition hikes

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Another round of tuition hikes could take place next year now that the Board of Trustees has approved the 2016-2017 budget. The Tuition Advisory Panel (TAP) has not yet completed its work, however, and its recommendations are not due until May.

PSC and students resist tuition hikes

CUNY budget request at issue

At Bronx Community College, Victoria Rodriguez, acting coordi- nator of general counseling in the Division of Student Affairs, taught a freshman seminar on open admissions at CUNY, a policy now restricted to the City College system, which once applied to senior colleges, as well.

“I’m a SEEK graduate my- self,” Rodriguez explained, refer- ring to the Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge opportu- nity program that allows low-in- come students to the senior colleges who may not have received the stand- ard level of academic preparation for college work.

A FADING OPPORTUNITY

Rodriguez teaches students how the fight for open admissions was won during the Civil Rights move- ment in 1970, only to be lost at the senior colleges in 1999, during the administration of Mayor Rudolph Gi- uliani. “I’ve been connecting recent struggles around tuition hikes and contract negotiations” to the loss of the university-wide open admissions policy, said Rodriguez, who gradu- ated from City College in 1981.

“They have serious reactions. One recently told me that he felt like crying.” Rodriguez said, “I guess it was going through the history, the struggle and having the realization that the opportunity is fading.”

Chet Jordan teaches a research- based English composition course at Guttman Community College and has students writing on the theme “The art of protest movements.”

“We’re not just talking about primary source materials, like [PSC Presi- dent] Barbara Bowen’s letter on the strike authorization vote and the PSC-CUNY contract,” Jordan said. His students, he said, saw the con- nection between the workshop prob- lems, which they and the administra- tion struggle to “maintain a relationship with CUNY management and the quality of their education.”

“I get it,” he said. “My pay doesn’t really impact them that much, but the workload [does],” he said, be- cause they consequently receive less personalized attention, Jordan said.

Back at the BMCC math class, Offenholley uses graphs to give her students a bonus lesson on the economies of inflation and the term “real dollars.”

The reality is CUNY’s tuition and how the cost of community col- lege now compares to the costs decades ago once consumer price index is taken into account. “A lot of the stu- dents are going to be business ma- jors, so they are interested in what real dollars are, and what inflation means,” Offenholley told Clarion.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Offenholley also shared with students her plans to participate in the University’s civil disobedience action, which was mentioned in a previous article (pages 6-7, “Militant action highlights contract fight.”)

“They asked me to tell them, ‘Your tuition is going up. Why are you going to keep the lights on,’” says Offenholley. “‘The state is supposed to be paying you so that I can have a decent salary and so that you guys can have an increased quality of edu- cation. That’s not what’s happening.’”

Missing from CUNY’s budget request, however, is an explicit line-item amount to fund a new PSC- CUNY contract; instead the projected costs for collective bargaining were labeled “TBD” (to be determined).

“CUNY chose to request an ex- tension of the tuition hike instead of requesting greater state funding, for which the university is consenting to inadequate public funding,” said Joseph Awadige, chair of CUNY’s Student Senate and a voting member of the board. “I know that I speak for the vast majority of students when I say that we are frustrated and disap- pointed at the budget request.”

The University Students Senate has voted twice this year to reject the plan “because CUNY is asking for funding which has effectively regularized tuition increases via SUNY 2020.”

STUDENT RESISTANCE

Awadige, along with trustee Charles Shorter, voted against the budget request.

CUNY’s budget request will now be submitted to the executive offi- cers of the state and city govern- ments. Recent Governor Andrew Cuomo legislation for Governor Cuomo will release his executive budget; the state’s fiscal budget – including its appropriation for CUNY – is expected to be final- ized by April.
Focusing on climate change

Call for robust social movement

By ADELE M. STAN

As leaders from around the world prepare to converge in Paris for the climate talks known as COP21, the PSC Retirees Chapter called its own climate-change summit of sorts at a lunchtime meeting at the Union Hall on November 1 that featured three experts to address the climate crisis.

Reginald Blake, director of the City Tech Center for Remote Sensing and Earth System Sciences of the CUNY CREST Institute, kicked things off with a series of sobering slides that showed the projected waves of accelerating temperatures engulfing broad swaths of the nation, and forecast maps showing parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn under water as rising global temperatures cause the sea levels to rise.

MORE WEATHER CATASTROPHES

According to a New York State report on climate change, “By 2100, scientists project sea levels up 8 to 20 feet higher than today along New York’s coastlines and estuaries, though a rise as high as 75 inches could occur.”

A PHASED INCREASE

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Across the nation on November 10, workers at the lowest end of the pay scale launched a series of rallies that organizers of the Fight for $15 movement hoped to turn into a nationwide day of action. But union organizers say their efforts to pressure lawmakers to approve a rise in the federal minimum wage to $15 per hour have thus far yielded little success.

At the Capitol, a meeting of the House Democratic Caucus, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi announced that the federal minimum wage “will be raised” in the coming year, but היא promised a more comprehensive increase in the national minimum wage to $15 per hour. The lawmakers, however, skated around the issue of considering legislation that would raise the minimum wage.

The union-backed campaign unites workers across industries and the nation, and forecast maps showed the projected waves of accelerating temperatures. In a storm like Sandy could occur 10 times in 100 years.

A statement from New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento, released the same day as the governor’s announcement, lauded Cuomo’s move, saying, “We thank the governor for his leadership and for making social and economic justice for all workers a top priority.”

But left out of the governor’s equation are many workers at CUNY, and makes around $12.50 an hour. She is one of the many who are not covered under the governor’s $15-per-hour plan.

“I am very underpaid for what I do,” Perez told Clarion. She says that a program assistant is generally expected to do clerical tasks, but she picks up additional responsibilities, such as managing the data.

“I want a raise now... for all of us, not just the department...” Miles said.

Everybody in the CUNY family needs a raise.

A contingent of DC 37 members turn out for a PSC rally outside of Chancellor Molken’s apartment building. Thousands of DC 37 CUNY workers make less than $15 an hour.

Low-wage workers speak out

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Across the nation on November 10, workers at the lowest end of the pay scale launched a series of rallies that organizers of the Fight for $15 movement hoped to turn into a nationwide day of action. But union organizers say their efforts to pressure lawmakers to approve a rise in the federal minimum wage to $15 per hour have thus far yielded little success.

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Everybody in the CUNY family needs a raise.

A contingent of DC 37 members turn out for a PSC rally outside of Chancellor Molken’s apartment building. Thousands of DC 37 CUNY workers make less than $15 an hour.
As night fell, hundreds of PSC members rallied and marched, calling for real movement in contract talks.

**Students Turn Out**

On hand, as well, were a number of CUNY students ready to fight another proposed round of tuition increases as the state threatens to decline funds for mandatory cost increases in the operation of the university. (See “PSC and students resist tuition hikes,” page 4)

“I came down here with a bunch of students,” said Jonathan Buchsbaum, professor of media studies at Queens College, where he chairs the PSC chapter. “Everyone is concerned about the institution; they feel it’s being disserved by politicians who don’t believe in supporting public institutions with public money.” Around his right arm, Buchsbaum wore a red ribbon.

“I’m ready to sit down in front of this building until I have to move,” said Ken Estey, associate professor of political science at Brooklyn College. In the present dynamic with CUNY management, he added, “It’s only with blocking the way that you open up the possibilities.”

George Emilio Sanchez, chair of the PSC chapter at the College of Staten Island (CSI), sported an orange marshal’s vest as he walked the barricades set up by police to contain the crowd. He was there to help maintain an orderly process as people took part in the civil disobedience action, he explained, and to help keep the rally going strong as people were arrested. “I do see the membership galvanizing,” said Sanchez, a professor of performing and creative arts who chairs his department at CSI. “I see them coming together, I see more actions taking place. And that’s really important because I think that’s what’s gonna tip it.” An acceptable offer, he said, will “come from our demanding it.”

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**Contract Offer Full of Zeros**

As the bargaining session wrapped up inside the building, First Vice President Mike Fabricant, wearing a red armband, rallied demonstrators outside.

“Contract offer full of zeros!” chanted, speaking through a public address system. “Education is a right!”

**Gesture of Contempt**

Inside the CUNY headquarters, the bargaining team and PSC observers – who together numbered around 35 – emerged from the elevator led by Bowen, and marched through the lobby chanting, “What do we want? Contract! When do we want it? Now!” All wore the black T-shirts that have come to symbolize the PSC’s contract campaign, inscribed in block letters with the words “FIVE YEARS WITHOUT A UNION CONTRACT Hurts CUNY Students.”

As Bowen exited the building to take the microphone, she and many others who attended the session took their places along the barricade where those willing to risk arrest had lined up. “We’re lined up to be civilly disobedient,” said Robert Farrell, an associate professor in the Library Department at Lehman College, with a hint of irony.

“It has taken the threat of a sit-in and arrests to get them to put one penny on the table,” Bowen told the crowd. CUNY management’s paltry offer, she said, represents “a gesture of contempt to our students and to us,” because the failure of management to offer a raise structure that keeps up with the rate of inflation means that CUNY will not be able to support its current workforce decently, and that it will fail to attract the faculty and staff its students deserve.

The children of working-class New Yorkers, Bowen continued, “shouldn’t have a crappy education, shouldn’t have a merely adequate education, shouldn’t have a third-rate education – they should have the best education. And that’s what we are fighting for – the right of our students to have the resources they need to have the education they deserve.”

The crowd in the street responded with cheers.

**Raising Consciousness**

Warren Orange, an academic advisor at the Center for Worker Education at City College, was among those cheering. “CUNY is such an important institution in the city,” he said. “For the majority of people, it’s our opportunity to better our lives. For
Militant action highlights contract fight
across PSC constituencies to block the entrance of the CUNY Central Office on 42nd Street. They were among the 53 protesters arrested November 4, and charged with disorderly conduct.

“They were among the 53 protesters arrested November 4, and charged with disorderly conduct.”

“Solidarity means to me the same thing that Social Security means for the country as a whole, that the folks in the older generation have to support the folks in the younger generation as the younger generation supports us when we get our Social Security payments,” he said.

When the numbers of protesters siting cross-legged, chanting, in front of the building overflowed onto the sidewalk, officers moved in, cuffing several union members and, walking them to the police wagons parked in a line along 42nd Street.

Andrea Vásquez, a higher education officer at the Graduate Center and member of the PSC Executive Council, stood in handcuffs on the sidewalk, watching as her colleague, Chapter Chair Lake Elliot-Negri, a doctoral student in sociology, was led away as several of his students tried to get his attention, yelling, “Professor! Professor!”

“Thank you for coming,” Vásquez told the students as Elliott-Negri was led into the back of a police wagon. “It’s really important that you know our fight is your fight.”

DEMANDING RESPECT

Vásquez, managing director of the Graduate Center’s New Media Lab, is on the PSC bargaining team, and was at the negotiating table when CUNY Vice Chancellor Pamela Silverblatt described management’s offer.

The way Vásquez sees it, management hasn’t been willing to go to the mat for the university. “CUNY [management] needs to go to Albany and demand funding for this university,” Vásquez said, as she waited to be taken by police for booking. “They need to show some respect for their university because see are CUNY, it’s not just the ‘stars’ whom we see on the [CUNY recruitment] posters in the subway. It’s not just the students who earn big awards and get grants. We have half a million students at CUNY. Half a million students deserve a good education, and the thousands of faculty and staff who work at CUNY deserve good salaries and good raises, decent raises.”

MASS ARRESTS

The chants of protesters, punctuated with rhythmic blasts from a lone vuvuzela horn and the pounding of drums, provided the soundtrack to the stream of sit-in participants being loaded into police vans. The chants continued as 51 PSC members were carted away to One Police Plaza for booking.

There, they were placed in holding cells, men separated from women, until they were released at around midnight. They were charged with disorderly conduct.

Read and view media coverage of the PSC’s civil disobedience action and rally at tinyurl.com/PSCmedia.
Constructing a retirement timeline

Planning will smooth the way

If you are approaching retirement with a mix of anticipation and confusion, you are not alone. You may be thinking: What will I do once I retire? Have I saved enough to retire? How does my retiree health insurance work? When should I start taking my Social Security benefits? How will my Social Security benefits be affected by any treatment you seek. (Your NYC health benefits plan will pay for your NYC health plan will pay for.

By Larry Morgan

Changing the administration of the drug benefit for more than 100,000 active members and 2,000 retirees is complicated. It would not have been undertaken by the WF Board without the dedication of specific benefit fund members, as well as state-of-the-art cost control improvements that continue this benefit into the future. The transition will involve no charges to benefit parameters, such as copayment levels. There will be a very small number of changes to your drug cards, including routine changes – when the drug currently being used must be replaced by an equivalently effective medication that costs less. Targeted notifications will be mailed from mid-December and will give people a chance to discuss any changes with their doctors.

Although the new benefit manager is part of CVS, members who get their prescriptions at brick-and-mortar pharmacies will not be limited to CVS and may continue to use their current pharmacies, whether they are small businesses or part of a big chain. However, the relationship with the CVS chain of retail pharmacies is viewed as a positive aspect of the new program. One significant advantage of a CVS pharmacy

You should also develop an understanding of your projected retirement benefits. Full-time instructional staff members who belong to an Optional Retirement Program (ORP) plan (TIAA-CREF, MetLife or Hallday) should have a retirement planning meeting with a representative of the appropriate plan.

The union conducts retirement planning forums twice yearly, and has helpful planning materials on the PSC website at tinyurl.com/pcscbenefits.

You have already determined your retirement date, put together a personal timetable for planning. The union conducts retirement planning forums twice yearly, and has helpful planning materials on the PSC website at tinyurl.com/pcscbenefits.

By JARED HERST

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A protestor carries a cross in front of the US Supreme Court on October 7, 2009 in Washington, DC.

By SARAH POSNER

Religion behind anti-union SCOTUS case

PLAINTIFFS WANT GOD IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Here Clarion presents the third article in our series examining the forces behind and implications of Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association, the free speech case with potential First Amendment implications currently before the Supreme Court of the United States. At issue is the underpinning of public-sector unionism — that public employees who opt out of union membership can still be obligated to pay for their individual share of the services and collective bargaining they receive from the union. This has been considered settled law since the 1973 Supreme Court decision in Abood v. Detroit Board of Education, but the present conservative majority on the Court could decide to overturn Abood, either wholly or in part, depending on its decision in Friedrichs. For public sector unions such as the PSC, the consequences could be profound.

Tucked away in Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association, a lawsuit purportedly about unions and free speech, lies another, real First Amendment concern: the separation of church and state. The lead plaintiff in the case is Rebeccia Friedrichs, a teacher in the Savanna School District; she is joined in the suit by nine additional individuals, and one organization: the Christian Educators Association International (CEAI), which bills itself as an alternative to the “secular” teachers’ unions, and maintains that the Constitution does not bar teachers from imparting “the controversy,” “a lie.” Laursen declined to be interviewed for this article.

ANTI-LABOR CHRISTIAN GROUPS

Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association

Founded in 1953 in California as the Fellowship of Christian Educators, CEAI now describes itself as an alternative to the National Education Association (NEA), which it claims promotes secular, liberal political positions that conflict with Christian values. The association currently has chapters in 20 states; its website says its mission is “to encourage, equip, and empower educators according to biblical principles.” The history of evangelical involvement in anti-union activity dates back at least to the 1930s, said Baruch College history professor Clarence Taylor, in an interview with Clarion. At the time, many conservative evangelicals viewed unions as part of a supposed communist threat, and business-led allies, such as James Fife and Abraham Vereide, organized events to evangelize against the New Deal. (Vereide convened prayer breakfasts for business elites and Fifefield founded the Spiritual Mobilization movement.) The fear of unions intensified in evangelical circles during the Cold War and amid the backlash against movements for racial equality and women’s rights. In 1979, the Moral Majority was founded, and played a significant role in electing Ronald Reagan to the presidency.

“When looking at that long history, clearly by the 1970s, the Christian right decided to get involved in politics,” said Taylor. “They particularly targeted unions because they saw them as strong opposition to the agenda,” which includes officially sanctioned prayer in public schools.

Ken Estey, associate professor of political science at Brooklyn College, cautions that not all evangelicals hew to an anti-union line. “The teachers’ unions, said Estey, “doesn’t capture the complexity in American evangelicalism, especially on the social justice side.”

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING TARGETED

The legal claims in Friedrichs rest on the assertion that paying agency fees (also described by unions as “fair share” fees) to the California Teachers Association violates the plaintiffs’ free speech rights because of their disagreements with CTA’s political positions. But agency-fee payers – teachers who have opted out of union membership, and are consequently mandated only to pay for their share of services the union provides on their behalf, such as collective bargaining – are not required to pay for the union’s political activities.

CEAI, however, argues in Friedrichs that it and its members – 600, it says, in California, including six of the individual plaintiffs in Friedrichs – are “fundamentally opposed to many of the positions taken by teachers’ unions, both within the collective bargaining process and outside of that process,” and frames the collective bargaining process as an expression of politics in and of itself, and therefore a violation of the freedom of association guaranteed under the First Amendment.

In a section of its website devoted to warning prospective members of the National Education Association’s “liberal political stance,” CEAI notes, “You may also be surprised at what you find as you compare your Christian beliefs with the agendas of the NEA and realize your membership dollars make [sic] the NEA’s agenda possible.”

Furthermore, CEAI maintains, California’s agency shop laws have the “effect of creating a drain on CEAI’s resources.” According to Laursen’s affidavit filed in the case, “the scheme operated by the teachers’ union causes CEAI to spend money countering its members on how they can opt out of union fees based on religious objections, rather than spending money on other services for its members.

Those services include providing backing to CEAI’s member teachers when their school districts censure them for crossing that church-state separation line.

The CEAI, Laursen has said, is “here to encourage, equip, and empower Christian educators in our public schools... to become transformational agents.” The organization will, according to its website, offer members “prayer support,” “guidance on establishing prayer groups in your building,” and connections with “ministries that equip you to be an effective witness for Jesus our Lord in your school.”

CASE OF THE CREATIONIST SCIENCE TEACHER

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But while CEAI has pressed this agenda to its members, its efforts to test them in the legal system have largely met with failure. CEAI’s forays into the legal system, apart from the Friedrichs case, have involved what it has framed as the defense of teachers expressing their faith in the classroom. Their attempts have been routinely rejected by the courts as violations of the Establishment Clause.

In 2010, Laursen served as an expert witness in hearings reviewing the termination of John Freshwater, a middle school science teacher in Mount Vernon, Ohio, who was fired in 2008 for refusing to follow school district directives to remove displays of religious texts and the Ten Commandments from his classroom. The CEAI’s involvement in Freshwater’s troubles began in 2007 when a student sued the school district, alleging that the veteran teacher had burned a cross into the student’s skin with a Tesla coil. The school district settled the case with the student out of court.

In CEAI’s Teachers of Vision Magazine, Laursen recounted his testimony at Freshwater’s administrative proceedings challenging the teacher’s dismissal. “I invested over two hours clarifying the religious freedom teachers have in our public schools that were relevant in Mr. Freshwater’s case,” Laursen wrote. “All the pieces of the testimony lined up with the key issues of the case and the peace of the Lord could be felt during the process.”

‘A HERO OF THE FAITH’

When Freshwater filed a separate federal case against the school district, claiming that its action was a violation of his constitutional right to his free exercise of religion, Laursen said in a statement that he was “happy to encourage, equip, and empower Christian educators in our public schools... to become transformational agents.” The organization will, according to its website, offer members “prayer support,” “guidance on establishing prayer groups in your building,” and connections with “ministries that equip you to be an effective witness for Jesus our Lord in your school.”

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First Amendment issues at stake Continued on page 10
York lecturer wins poetry prize

Tomás Modesto Galán, an adjunct lecturer at York College, was awarded the Poet of the Year prize by the Americas Poetry Festival of New York, sponsored by CUNY’s Division of Interdisciplinary Studies, in October. Below is a poem from his 2008 book, Subway: Vida subterránea y otras confesiones, accompanied by an English translation by poet Dan Vera.

Persisting on March 8th

by Tomás Modesto Galán

Translation by Dan Vera

Subway living serves at the pleasure of conjugation, the uncease of chassing verbs, separating adjectives, desholling names, a last see more than likely the insense of this point, or the unfathomability that makes me close my eyes and embrace books, our umbrellas open the gates of this purgatory to find some relief, the vain gesture of the body hidden in the windows, posed for a picture, an uncertain moment, skeletons bathed by designers or by morning’s musicians.

At this point the dream takes us to an unknowable corner.

Insistiendo en el ocho de Marzo

by Tomás Modesto Galán

La vida subterránea sirve al placer de una conjugación, al malestar de cazar verbos, segregar adjetivos, deshollinar rieles, desatara más que la insensatez de esta pregunta, o la incomprehensión que me hace cerrar los ojos y abrazar libros, paraguas nuestros desconectar las puertas del purgatorio para descubrir un aliento, el gesto vanidoso del cuerpo escondido en las ventanas, dispuesto para un cuadro, una fase equivocada, esqueletos bañados por La vida subterránea sirve al placer de una conjugación, al malestar de cazar verbos, segregar

Tomás Modesto Galán is a Dominican writer and cultural activist who has lived in New York since 1986. His most recent book is Los cuentos de Mount Hope (Editora Universitaria, 2010). Dan Vera is a US poet based in Washington, DC. His most recent book is Speaking Wiri Wiri (Red Hen Press, 2013).

Religion behind SCOTUS case

Continued from page 9 all the way to the Ohio Supreme Court, which upheld Governor Mike DeWine’s favor in 2013. Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor wrote in the majority opinion that Freshwater “not only ignored the school district’s directive, he defined it.” He did not have a Free Exercise right to display those items in his classroom, she added, “because they were not a part of his exercise of his religion. Freshwater’s willful disobedience of the district’s order demonstrates blatant insubordination.” The US Supreme Court de nied review of the case in 2014.

CEA also sought to intervene in a case in the Santa Rosa School District in Florida, where, in 2009, the school district had settled a lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union, charging numerous violations of the Establishment Clause. The school district’s conduct was “over the top,” said Daniel Mach, director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief, citing, for example, the high school teacher handbook, which required school personnel to “embrace every opportunity to inculcate, by precept and example, the practice of every Christian virtue.” Mach said that teachers and coaches regularly led students in prayer, and some teachers “were effectively teaching Sunday school lessons in public school classes” and “proselytizing students, sometimes with a bullhorn.”

KIM DAVIS’S ATTORNEYS

The school district admitted liability and agreed to a comprehensive settlement, after which the CEA represented by Lawyers’ Committee – the same religious-right law firm that represented Kentucky clerk Kim Davis in her case to deny marriage licenses to same-sex couples – sought to intervene in an effort to vacate the consent decree. “They invented these fanciful readings of the consent decree,” said Mach, including concerns that it would prevent teachers from saying, “God bless you” if someone sneezed, or in the case of one EEA member, from praying quietly in the stands if her grandson, who attended school in the district, was injured in a wrestling match.

The court ruled their fears “objectively unreasonable,” and denied CEAI’s motion to intervene. The CEAI later brought its own lawsuit, which resulted, in 2011, in only minor clarifications of the consent decree, such as spelling out that saying “God bless you” does not violate the Establishment Clause.

Although it is not apparent from reading CEAI’s Supreme Court brief, the civil rights plaintiffs are successful, the ripple effect of their efforts could do more than undermine unions.

It could open another chapter in the war over religion in public schools, emboldening groups such as SACHA to urge public school teachers to endorse and promote religion with their students once their best-organized teachers’ unions – are weakened.

Samsung Puener is a senior correspondent for ReligionDispatches and an investigative journalist whose work has appeared in The Washington Post, The Daily Beast, The American Prospect, The Nation and many other publications.

PROFESSIONAL STAFF COUNCIL/CUNY

Notice of Nominations and Elections – Spring 2016

Chapter Officers, Delegates and Alternates to the PSC Delegate Assembly and PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council

Term of Office: 1 Year

ELECTION SCHEDULE

1. Deadline for filing the Candidate Declaration form will be January 6, 2016.

2. Pre-printed Nominating Petitions will be available upon request from the PSC office on February 1, 2016.

3. Properly completed nominating petitions must be received at the PSC office, 61 Broadway - Ste. 1500, New York, NY 10006, by 5:00 pm, March 3, 2016.

4. Ballots will be mailed to members’ home addresses on April 1, 2016.

5. Ballots in uncontested elections must be received at the PSC office by 4:00 pm on April 18, 2016. Ballots in contested elections must be returned to the office of the designated/audited counting organization by 5:00 pm on April 28, 2016. Ballots will be counted at 10:00 am on April 29, 2016.

OFFICERS TO BE ELECTED

In each of the Chapters listed below, votes will elect the Chapter Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer/Legal Affairs Officer, and Delegates to the Delegate Assembly (in addition to the Chapter Chairperson, who shall automatically be the initial delegate to the Delegate Assembly) and Alternates to the Delegate Assembly according to the following listing:

Chapter Officers Members Alternates Delegate

Bronx EOC 15 1
Brooklyn EOC 36 1
College of St. John the Divine 36 5
Hunter Campus Scholars 97 1
Manhattan CC 220 3
Kingsborough 728 5
Lehman College 542 4
Lehman CC 188 6
Lehman EOC 44 1
Legends CC 131 1
n September 11, 2001, I lost my 23-year-old son, Moham-
mad Salman Hamdani, at the Twin Towers. A graduate of
Queens College, he was also
a first responder and an NYPD cadet who
rushed down to rescue his fellow Ameri-
cans – and gave the ultimate sacrifice.
He didn’t discriminate. He followed his
heart, his humanity and his training to
do his best to save those whose lives were
in danger.
By contrast, across America today, we
are witnessing the spectacle of politicians
crossed in their destruction of Nazi,
Beirut and Russia for selfish political gains.
Capitalizing on fear and the considerable
anger about the Muslim faith among
many of our citizens, they are in a rush to
the bottom, driving a stampede of prejudi-
cial proposals.

PROVOKING ISLAMOPHOBIA

Quite the opposite of supporting their fel-
low Americans in a moment of crisis as my
son did, many apparently see political gain
to be had in selectively denying American
Muslims their rights. If that weren’t ugly
enough, many are equally ready to turn
their backs on the finest American tradition
of welcoming refugees fleeing violence, per-
secution and war.
Perhaps the worst of all is Donald
Trump’s call to block all Muslims from
entering the US, along with his suggestion
that it might be necessary to shut down
mosques and force all who share my faith
to carry a special ID card and be registered
in a government database. This is not some
fringe candidate; it is the Republican Party’s
undisputed front-runner.

When others pushed back against these
proposals for their obvious parallels to
prewar Nazi Germany, Trump did not
back down. Instead, he further claimed
that “thousands” of New Jersey Muslims
cheered as the Twin Towers fell. He used
this blatant lie to suggest the NYPD renew
its spying program on local New York and
New Jersey Muslims.
Let’s be clear here: by making such hor-
rendous suggestions, Trump is generating
feeling and renewed hatred and violence
against Muslims.

GOING AGAINST THE CONSTITUTION

Sadly, he is not alone. Presidential aspir-
ant Ben Carson has often echoed Trump,
while Senator Marco Rubio has suggested
that all Muslim gatherings are suspect and
should be monitored. Senator Ted Cruz and
Governor Jeb Bush, meanwhile, have sug-
gested that Christian refugees should be
given priority in entering the United States.

The president of the United States, like
every member of Congress and every member
of the armed forces, takes an oath to defend
and uphold the Constitution. Freedom of reli-
gion, freedom of speech, the right of assembly
and the right to be free from unlawful search
are at the heart of our national identity.

To see politicians demonstrate contempt
for our Constitution and advocate for poli-
cies with ugly precedents should outrage
every citizen, but perhaps most of all it
should outrage every American with ugly
precedents should outrage
every citizen, but perhaps most of all it
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the Constitution – as I did, when I be-
came a citizen – and any American with
a genuine respect for our most important
values as a nation.

Perhaps more importantly, it should make
clear that these politicians are unqualified
to be president. Presidents take an oath to
maintain the Constitution and uphold the
fundamental rights and freedoms of all
Americans.

All citizens should be outraged.
Ben Lerner on CUNY and ‘the power of naming’

MacArthur Fellow on art & power

By Nivedita Majumdar
PSC Secretary

EDITOR’S NOTE: The novels and poems of Ben Lerner, professor of English at Brooklyn College and active member of his PSC chapter, have earned the praise of critics and spurred conversations about the intersection of art and politics. When released in September of last year, his novel 10:04 (Faber and Faber), which addresses both the Occupy movement and the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, was described by The New York Times as “frequently brilliant.” His first novel, Leaving the Atocha Station (Coffee House, 2011), won The Believer Book Award and was named one of the best books of the year by The New Yorker and The Guardian, among many others. He is presently at work on a monograph titled The Flayed Poetry, which will be published this June by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. In October, Lerner was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship.

Clarians asked PSC Secretary Nivedita Majumdar, associate professor of English at John Jay College, to interview Lerner about how his view of poetry and fiction comports with the struggle for justice and fairness at CUNY in a climate of public disinvestment. Here we present their exchange, which was conducted via email.

Nivedita Majumdar: You have related your poetic practice to Allen Grossman’s view that poetry is defined by a “bitter logic” because of a necessary disconnect between the “transcendent impulse” that motivates the poet and the material limitedness of the actual poem. Poetry in this sense is characterized by a failure or a betrayal. Do you see a similar process at work with the political impulse – the lofty ideals that often motivates radical politics and the meagerness of outcomes, if not even goals? Then again, much like the poet, does the political agent have any choice other than that of pressing on? Can you speak to this parallel, if you see it as one, especially in the context of an all-pervasive neoliberal logic?

Ben Lerner: I think the parallel your question suggests is real: that there always is, or at least always has been, a distance between a revolutionary or poetic impulse and what is actually achieved. But you write and press on politically anyway, both because you have no choice and because the story isn’t as tragic as it sounds; the fact that a poetry or politics has to remain preoccupied with private lives and aligning with only a kind of lifestyle politics. And yet, you also document the Occupy movement, which unsettled not just institutional structures but key moments in the lives of your characters. How do you understand the coexistence of these seemingly contradictory impulses in contemporary youth? Could you maybe talk, in particular, about how you see CUNY students negotiating the pulls of the personal and the political?

BL: Both of my novels – like many novels – are concerned with what would count as authentic experience (aesthetic, romantic, social) in conditions of spectacle. The novel as a form is great at portraying the threat of solipsism as well as glimmers of real social possibility. I should say that both of my novels have narrators of significant privilege (in terms, for starters, of race and class), who are trying to figure out what it would mean to be an artist or father or friend or political agent from those positions without lapsing into ironic detachment. That’s not everybody’s problem, obviously. But generally, I think atomization and interconnection are very close to one another in a globalized economy of bundled debt, “social media,” etc.

I suppose I see CUNY students trying to figure out how bad forms of collectivity (being denied X) can be transformed into a good form of collectivity (joining together to fight for X and then make claims beyond it). One of the weird things art can do is make us feel the potential for good collectivity in even its most perverted forms.

Language and Politics

NM: As you know, we’re now at a critical juncture in our contract campaign. Like public institutions across the country, we’re under attack by forces that want to deny the right to quality education to working-class communities. A key aspect of the attempt to eviscerate the worth of public education was also reflected for us in the Pathways Initiative. It basically sent the message to our students that they are not worthy of a well-rounded arts education, that a vocational education is good enough for them. As a highly accomplished writer, your work with CUNY students challenges that message. Could you speak to the significance of teaching poetry and creative writing to working-class, largely minority students?

BL: I should say first that my teaching at Brooklyn College is primarily but not exclusively – in a graduate writing program that is not largely composed of minority students (making our program more diverse is and should be a critical priority). But I also teach and advise undergraduates whenever I have the chance. In my experience, CUNY undergraduates are polyglot, brilliant, tough, generous, open-minded and remarkably resilient. If you have students working so much to support their education and their family that it is unclear to me how they do all, exactly, of course, some of them ultimately can’t. There’s just a limit to how many minimum-wage jobs you can work while also trying to do your reading.

Talking about language and literature with such students is my privilege and I feel like much of my teaching is about bringing up what they already know so deeply: that language and power are inseparable, that structure (political or poetic) is inseparable from how we experience sense, that the social world is built, to a large degree, from words. I also think that part of my job is to remind them what is, by rights, already theirs: the city and city colleges. A poetry and a creative writing class is in part about the power of naming. The divestiture from all things public, the privatization of everything, is violence, theft, and should be named thusly.