

Clarion

NEWSPAPER OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS / CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



DECEMBER 2017



RESISTANCE Fight the grad tax

The GOP tax plan hurts PSC members at the Graduate Center.

PAGE 5



Dave Sanders

PSC to CUNY

WE DEMAND FAIR PAY

Hundreds of PSC members, joined by students and other advocates, marched from the Graduate Center to the CUNY Board of Trustees hearing at Baruch College on December 4, demanding that management sit down and bargain a new contract that restores competitive pay for all positions and raises adjunct pay to \$7,000 per course.

PAGES 6-7

CONTRACT

RF workers ratify contract

Members at the CUNY Research Foundation's central office overwhelmingly approved a new contract with pay and leave gains.

PAGE 3

POLITICS

Defeating the 'con-con'

A constitutional convention in New York could have threatened unions. Old-fashioned organizing by PSC members helped defeat it.

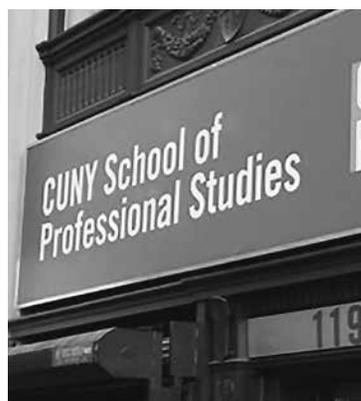
PAGE 4

GOVERNANCE

A dangerous SPS plan

The union has criticized a School of Professional Studies governance plan that would cut out faculty input. It could be a model for other schools.

PAGE 9



CITY

De Blasio's second act

Mayor Bill de Blasio was reelected handily. The union looks forward to challenges and opportunities in the next four years.

PAGE 11



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 61 BROADWAY, 15TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10006. EMAIL: APAUL@PSCMAIL.ORG.

Academic integrity at QCC

● The department chairs of Queensborough Community College would like to affirm their respect for the integrity and excellence of our peer faculty at the college. Recent publications have called into question the scholarly integrity of the work of the Queensborough faculty. As governance leaders who collaborate with fellow faculty and the administration in the guidance, reappointment and promotion of faculty, we can say with certainty that at Queensborough our dedicated faculty members conduct their scholarship, research and creative work with an integrity and seriousness that deserves appreciation and celebration. Continued references to opportunistic publishers may easily confuse those unfamiliar with the excellence of our peers, leading to the impression that this is a common issue at the college. This is not the case. Faculty applications for reappointment, tenure and promotion are vetted to five levels of scrutiny: annual reviews, departmental personnel budget committees (P&Bs), college P&B, the administration and the academic review committee. Faculty are offered guidance by peer mentors, chairs, faculty on departmental P&Bs and the administration to assist them in maintaining a record of excellence. To besmirch the reputation of this faculty, as a whole, is to do a disservice to CUNY and the college. It devalues the excellent education provided to our students and the quality of their degrees.

It's unfortunate that one of the publications referred to in this statement is *Clarion*. An article in the September issue ("On the lookout for 'predatory journals'") made some broad and accusatory generalizations about PSC faculty members at QCC based on unattributed allegations. Regrettably, those who may have had a different and more nuanced view of the nature and scope of this problem were not consulted.

Recently, we had the opportunity as chairs to meet with PSC President Barbara Bowen, who voiced her preference for the term "university community colleges" for the CUNY community colleges, in reference to the unique and substantial contributions our faculty make to their fields and the life of the university through their scholarship, creative work and other professional activities. We concur with this assessment and hope that this message is more consistently conveyed by our union.

Joseph Culkin
Queensborough Community College

Editor's Note: This letter is co-signed by the college's committee of department chairs. The author of the Clarion article spoke to the QCC chapter chair and other faculty on background.

Get aggressive

● Early next year, the Supreme Court will hear the infamous *Janus*

v. AFSCME case. At stake is the continued existence of organized labor in the United States. Overall, union density has fallen from almost 38 percent in the early 1970s to less than 11 percent in 2016 – with private-sector union density at 6.4 percent. The decline of union density is primarily the result of nearly 40 years of an unrestrained employers' offensive – forcing established unions to surrender hard-fought gains and blocking the organizing of new workplaces. Unfortunately, the official labor movement has been complicit in this decline: it has hoped concessionary bargaining and labor-management cooperation would save unionized jobs, and relied on the National Labor Relations Board for organizing new workers.

Today the public sector is the last bastion of the American labor movement, with a union density of 34.4 percent. The *Janus* decision, which will likely rule unconstitutional the payment of mandatory "agency fees" for all represented workers, is an existential threat to public-sector unionism. The ability of the public-sector unions to survive this blow will require a sharp break with our "business as usual" of relying on Democratic Party politicians and lobbying.

The campaign by the PSC and other public-sector unions to get members to recommit to union membership regardless of *Janus* is a good first step. However, the member-to-member organizing we do needs to help make the PSC and other public-sector unions a *living reality* in the workplace. Our conversations with other members have to include ideas for more members to become active in their chapters and the local. We need to be even more aggressive in *organizing* around workplace issues – both through the grievance procedure and building membership campaigns. The successful campaign for increased reassignment time/reduced teaching load at John Jay College, which is today being pursued at Borough of Manhattan Community College, is a good model of how to make the PSC a living reality on the campuses. We also need a contract campaign that builds upon the graduate-student-initiated picket at Governor Andrew Cuomo's office on September 26 and the PSC-organized demonstration at the Board of Trustees meeting on December 4.

If the public-sector unions do not want to suffer the same fate as the private-sector unions, we will need

to revive membership activism and militancy.

Charles Post
BMCC and Graduate Center

Defending academic freedom

● Thanks for the excellent story on the attack, once again, by the David Horowitz Freedom Center on our faculty members and students ("Extremist targets two members at Brooklyn," November issue of *Clarion*). The most recent incident, labeling two faculty members at Brooklyn College as "terrorist supporters," is part of a nationwide campaign targeting both faculty and students who may support the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanction) movement.

Together with the "Canary Mission," whose targets are mainly, but not exclusively students, it accuses those featured who criticize the policies of the Israeli government regarding settlements in the occupied West Bank and the treatment of Arab-Israeli citizens with anti-Semitism and support for terrorism. By potentially damaging the prospects of undergraduates for graduate school admission or of current or prospective faculty members for jobs, these attacks are meant to silence such speech and association, core American values enshrined in the Bill of Rights.

According to the *Forward*, a Jewish newspaper, those two groups may very well enjoy support from the casino magnate Sheldon Adelson,

who convened a group of donors in 2015 to raise \$50 million to fund organizations like the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), which attacks those it describes as "pro-Palestinian" activists who promote hatred and anti-Semitism. The ZOA was a key supporter of Governor Andrew Cuomo's Executive Order 157, penalizing businesses and individuals supporting the BDS movement, and it succeeded in pressuring CUNY to investigate Students for Justice in Palestine and in holding up funding of CUNY in the State Senate in 2016.

The attack on students and faculty at CUNY isn't over. Recently some faculty members have been notified [by "outlawbds.com"] that their names have been added to a BDS blacklist and turned over to their college administration for further action. See this email for an example (name redacted):

"[To faculty member:] Be aware that you have been identified as a BDS promoter. According to new legislation in New York State, individuals and organizations that engage in or promote BDS activities with US allies will no longer receive public funding or support. Moreover, the state and its agencies will no longer engage in business or hire these organizations and individuals as they have been deemed problematic and anti-American. You have been marked. You have been identified. You have a limited window of opportunity to cease and desist or face the consequences of your actions in

legal proceedings. In case you have ceased your past wrongdoing, please contact us at admin@outlawbds.com for your profile to be removed from the Blacklist."

How many of our colleagues and students may choose to remain silent for fear of repercussions and their future prospects? And how can we organize to avert these threats and protect the most valuable principles for a university, and for a democratic society?

Steve Leberstein
City College, Retired

SJP not innocent

● I was extremely disappointed in the *Clarion* article discussing the attack on Professor Samir Chopra ("Extremist targets two members at Brooklyn," November issue of *Clarion*). I am not sure why it had to include a full-throated defense of Students for Justice in Palestine. While the article was narrowly correct that there was no proof that a SJP leader screamed at the Faculty Council chair "Zionist pig," it was only the second word that was at issue. Everyone agreed that the term began with "Zionist" and since this simply reflected that the chair wore a kippah, it is hard to argue against calling it an anti-Semitic outburst. As I pointed out in the Brooklyn College student newspaper, SJP has a history of borderline anti-Semitic behaviors. Indeed, after particularly noxious actions, the Chancellor of the University of Illinois Robert J. Jones denounced "anti-Semitic attacks hidden under the guise of anti-Zionist rhetoric."

I was even more disappointed when the local PSC chapter failed to come to my aid after I was slanderously attacked in the newspaper by the BC SJP president. As to my specific criticisms of SJP behavior, the group's leader claimed that I engaged in "chants of Islamophobia and discrimination." While condemning the poster [that attacked an SJP member], I balked at calling the David Horowitz Center an anti-Muslim hate group because that designation is given out too broadly by the Southern Poverty Law Center. I urged the ending of the "hate group" labeling as it only serves to stifle campus discussions. In her response, the SJP president characterized my position as "pledging your support to a white supremacist group."

Under "top 10 things I hate," the SJP president listed on a Facebook post, "white people" and "Jews." Her mentioning of "Jews," not "Zionists," once more brings to the fore the anti-Semitic leanings of SJP.

Maybe the PSC should reevaluate
Continued on page 10

Members signing up members



York College PSC Chapter Chair Scott Sheidlower calls members urging them to sign new membership cards.

Clarion DECEMBER 2017

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RF workers settle contract with salary and benefit gains

By ARI PAUL

The nearly 100 PSC members at the CUNY Research Foundation's (RF) central office are able to celebrate a solid new contract as the end of the year approaches. The bargaining unit ratified a five-year contract on November 10, a month and a half before its expiration date, with 2 percent minimum annual wage increases, as well as gains in other areas.

The 14-member bargaining team, elected by the members, began negotiating the new contract in May, after several months of surveying the unit about contract priorities. Members' priorities included, in addition to fair wage increases, controlling their share of health insurance premiums, correcting inequities for employees hired in the last four years, and maximizing dependent-care leave.

SUPPORTING DEMANDS

The contract with the RF, a private entity under the law, was set to expire at the end of the year. Because the RF is a private nonprofit employer, the workers are covered by the National Labor Relations Act rather than the state's Taylor Law, and workers have the legal right to strike or engage in other job actions. This round of bargaining, however, was a departure from previous contract struggles that met heavy management resistance and sometimes involved job actions, including a one-day strike five years ago.

Bargaining team member Keith Bonner compared negotiations in

Surveying members, delivering on demands



Research Foundation central office workers ratified a new agreement by an overwhelming margin.

this round with the more contentious round of negotiations to achieve the last contract, where "management came at us like a pit bull."

"The workers were in an uproar and morale was really low," he said of the talks five years ago. "This time around, the negotiations were very respectful. The team spent a lot of time putting together data, getting the pulse of the membership to see what they wanted and that's what we were able to deliver this time."

RF workers are responsible for processing millions of dollars in grant funding won by CUNY faculty and staff.

Charles Chaung, a senior business systems analyst at the RF's central office, stressed that the bargaining unit's surveying of the membership's priorities and costing out the unit's contract proposal at the outset of negotiations was key to creating the positive negotiating environment that led to this contract.

'There were no givebacks, no nothing.'

"We did a lot of calculations and we were pretty open," he said. "We gave management an estimated budget and what our proposals would cost, so we could see what policies they were against and see if their opposition was actually about the cost."

Bonner suggested that the overarching themes of this new contract were equity and ensuring that workers got what they deserved. "It was about making sure people had a comfortable living,"

he said. "We don't want to be millionaires. We just want to live."

In addition to the 2 percent per year minimum annual wage increases, a major economic gain was enhanced longevity increases for employees with less than 10 years of service, an improvement the unit has sought repeatedly in recent contracts.

The new contract also ends a two-tiered annual leave accrual system where newer employees carried over fewer leave days than veteran employees. "There should never be anything that's two-tiered," said Barbara Rose, a worker with 19 years at RF.

EXPANDED BENEFITS

All employees in the bargaining unit will benefit from expanded leave for the care of sick dependents. In the previous contract, workers could use five accrued sick leave days a year to take care of immediate family members who are ill. In a new side letter to the contract, workers can use up to 20 of their accrued sick days per year for that purpose.

Another important gain is that there are no increases to the share of employees' health insurance premiums for the next five years. In prior contracts, the employee share had increased steadily, so that not only were premiums going up, but also their share was increasing. Arsenia Reilly-Collins, the PSC organizing coordinator who worked with the bargaining team, noted that a major contract priority for the members was controlling health-care costs. In a new benefit, workers will be entitled to a \$250 annual reimbursement for non-cosmetic dental expenses not covered by insurance.

Dawn Sievers, who has worked at the RF for 32 years and participated in several rounds of bargaining, hit a less subtle note during the ratification. "This is the best contract I've seen," she said. "There were no givebacks, no nothing."

PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY NOTICE OF NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS – SPRING 2018

PSC GENERAL OFFICERS

Term of Office: 3 Years

President, First Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, 5 University-wide Officers.

Vice President, Senior Colleges, and 3 Senior College Officers.

Vice President, Community Colleges, and 3 Community College Officers.

Vice President, Cross-Campus Chapters, and 3 Cross-Campus Officers.

Vice President, Part-Time Instructional Staff, and 3 Part-Time Instructional Staff Officers.

Two Retiree Executive Council Officers.

NYSUT AND AFT CONVENTION DELEGATES

Term of Office: 3 years

100 Convention Delegate Positions

AAUP ANNUAL MEETING DELEGATES

(Only PSC members designated as members of the AAUP are eligible to run and vote)

Term of Office: 3 years

15 Annual Meeting Delegate Positions

ELECTION SCHEDULE:

1. Deadline for submitting a Declaration of Candidacy will be January 8, 2018. For convenience, pre-printed forms are available at the PSC Office and the PSC website.
2. Pre-printed nominating petitions will be sent to slate representatives and will be available from the PSC Office and from chapter chairpersons beginning February 5, 2018.
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 5, 2018.

4. Ballots will be mailed to members' home addresses on April 2, 2018.

5. Ballots in any uncontested AAUP election must be received at the PSC office by 5:00 pm on April 27, 2018.

6. **Ballots for PSC General Election and contested AAUP election must be received at American Arbitration Assoc. by 5:00 pm on April 27, 2018.**

7. Ballots will be counted at 10:00 am on April 30, 2018.

ELIGIBILITY TO SERVE:

To hold a position as a general officer (serving on the Executive Council), one must have been a member in good standing of the PSC for at least one (1) year prior to the close of nominations, March 5, 2018. Among the general officer positions, retiree members may only serve as Retiree Executive Council Officers.

ELIGIBILITY TO VOTE:

To be eligible to vote in this election one must have been a member in good standing for at least four (4) months prior to the mailing of the ballots, April 2, 2018.

NOMINATIONS PROCEDURE:

1. A Declaration of Candidacy must be received at the PSC Central Office by no later than January 8, 2018.
2. Nominations shall be by written petition signed by no less than fifty (50) members of the appropriate constituency in good standing. For the AAUP Delegate positions the written petition must be signed by no fewer than twenty-five (25) of the identified members

in good standing of the PSC Chapter of the AAUP.

3. Slate nominations shall be permitted.

SLATE REGULATIONS:

A slate of candidates will be recognized if it consists of candidates for twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the officers to be elected, and if it submits, prior to the close of nominations: (1) a listing of caucus officers, all of whom must be members in good standing, including the person designated to authorize nominees for that caucus' slate; and (2) a nominating petition including the printed name, signature, department and college of each petitioner, and the signature for each candidate running on the slate. The candidate's signature on the slate petition shall constitute that candidate's acceptance of the slate designation.

ELECTION RULES:

A copy of the Rules Governing All General and Chapter Elections is available for inspection by all eligible voters from Barbara Gabriel, Coordinator of Administrative Services, at the PSC office. It is also available online at the PSC website. Relevant sections are summarized below:

1. All voting must be on an official ballot. Write-in votes are permitted. The intent of the voter must be clear, whether the name of the candidate is written, printed or typed. In order for a write-in vote to be considered valid, the candidate must meet the same eligibility requirements as a regular candidate. A write-in candidate must receive at least 10 or 10 percent (10%) of the total votes cast in the election, whichever is less, to be elected. Write-in candidates who are elected must submit written acceptance of office to the Elections Committee within ten (10) days of the notification of election results.
2. Each candidate, or a representative designated in writing, is en-

titled to observe the counting of the ballots.

3. The **March 2018 issue of Clarion** will carry biographies and/or statements by the candidates for general officers. Each candidate for general officer will be allotted 200 words. Slates of candidates for general officer may pool their allotment of words in whatever fashion they choose. The deadline for typed copy is 5:00 pm, **March 1, 2018**. For information on existing *Clarion* photos, contact the editor. Candidates for delegates to the NYSUT, AFT and AAUP conventions will be listed, but they will not receive further space.

Candidates for general officers may purchase not more than one-half page of advertising space in the March issue of *Clarion*. Slates may purchase not more than one page of advertising space in the March issue of *Clarion*. The deadline for camera-ready mechanicals or an equivalent digital file is 5:00 pm, **March 1, 2018**. (Note: It would be helpful to *Clarion* if candidates can give newspaper staff advance notice of their intention to submit statements or advertisements, by **February 14, 2018**, or as soon as possible thereafter.) Space limitations preclude an offer of space to candidates for delegates to the NYSUT, AFT and AAUP conventions.

All candidates may mail literature at their own expense through Century Direct, 30-30 47th Avenue, #300, Long Island City, NY 11101-3415, the PSC mailing house. The PSC computer service will provide Century Direct with home-addressed electronic downloads of the membership, at cost. The computer service must have three days of advance notice to provide these downloads.

AAUP Candidates running for office can purchase the complete list for \$5.00. The list will be mailed to the candidates' home address. The list will not be faxed.

'Con-con' defeat shows unions' power

By ARI PAUL

For Carol DeMeo, an adjunct assistant professor of psychology at the College of Staten Island, the November 7 ballot referendum on whether or not to hold a constitutional convention was a local, neighborhood issue. One of her neighbors is a unionized nurse. Another is a fire department lieutenant. In short, the working class had to be united for a no vote in the referendum, she said, since a convention meant that constitutional protections for labor and public services in the state of New York could be opened up and altered by political forces targeting the power of organized labor.

"It was like a Pandora's box, it was a real scary thing," she said. "I didn't trust that anything good would come out of it. It would be harmful to unions and individuals who worked for the state."

THOUSANDS OF CALLS

DeMeo was one of nearly 50 PSC members and retirees who phone-banked in the run-up to the referendum, making thousands of calls to members to urge a no vote. The stakes were high: a constitutional convention was likely to invite corporate special interests to flood money into the delegate election process, putting public-sector pensions and collective bargaining rights at risk.

DeMeo alone made 722 calls and canvassed 103 members. When asked why she put in the time to make so many calls, she pointed out that in an otherwise low-stakes election year, not many people were educated on the vote on the constitutional convention. "As late as Monday night [before Election Day], I spoke to people who didn't even know about it. That was really surprising," she said. "The other thing they didn't know is that they had to turn the ballot over to vote on the referendum. They wouldn't see it and they would just walk off."

PSC's phone banking was part of a unified labor effort to turn the vote out against the constitutional convention, which included a \$3 million labor fund for television ads and anti-convention signs. And the result was significant. While a Siena College poll before Election Day said 59 percent of voters would vote against a convention, the actual result was 83 percent to 17 percent defeating the referendum (the referendum is held every 20 years). Not one of the state's 62 counties returned a yes vote.

LABOR UNITED

"Early polls had shown close to 70 percent support for a constitutional convention while the vast majority of editorial pages, so-called good government groups and others laid the groundwork for an incredibly steep hill to climb. The result of the election is very clear; working men and women understood what was at stake," said New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento in a statement after the election. "This

PSC members turned out votes



Justyna Jagielnicka, a counselor at Borough of Manhattan Community College, made 1,056 phone calls to PSC members, urging them to vote no on "con-con."

is a defining moment for the labor movement as it demonstrates what can be accomplished when we all work together, from the public sector, private sector and building trades unions to the Central Labor Councils and Area Labor Federations."

The PSC's state parent union, the New York State United Teachers, also spent both money and member power fighting the campaign. NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said

in a statement that the material support was what was necessary to get the no vote out to the public. "NYSUT members made more than 500,000 calls from phone banks, knocked on tens of thousands of doors and distributed literature to their friends, families and colleagues," he said. "Everywhere you turned, you saw a lawn sign, a car magnet or a button urging a no vote—a sign that NYSUT, and labor,

remains a strong force in New York State fighting to protect workers from wealthy special interests."

The united labor push against the constitutional convention was almost palpable, said John Jay College PSC Chapter Chair Dan Pinello, who made 378 phone calls and reached 44 people. "I live in Nassau County and driving around I have seen for months a ton of bumper stickers that said 'no on the constitutional convention,' he said. "All the local teachers' unions were on a rampage against it. There were lawn signs. Unions across the state were very, very well organized."

Borough of Manhattan Community College PSC Chapter Chair Geoffrey Kurtz, who made 147 calls and reached 23 members, struck a similar note. "Unions in New York and a few other states still have the power to reach and persuade large numbers of voters. That's what the huge margin in the "con-con" vote showed, and that's exactly why anti-union organizations are trying to use the Supreme Court to weaken us," he said, invoking the case *Janus v. AFSCME*, which is all but assured to strike the rights of public-sector unions to collect agency-shop fees by next summer. "New York unions still have the cohesion and membership base to be able to reach lots of people, and the moral stature to be persuasive when they point out a threat to the public good."

The PSC's phone bankers made 5,125 calls and had conversations with 692 members. Among them,

598, or 86.4 percent, vowed to vote no. In a world of Twitter, mass texting and online petitions, the art of phone banking can seem like an archaic and time-consuming process,

Union organizing across the state ensured defeat.

but Anselma Rodriguez, who made 193 calls and canvassed 23 members, believes it's still necessary for political organizing. "The only way is the human element," said Rodriguez, who is the associate director of the Graduate Center for Worker Education at Brooklyn College. "That is the touch you can see, you can be informed. It really brings the issue to life when a person speaks to you and knows about it."

MEMBER OUTREACH

Standing out among the members who phone-banked was Justyna Jagielnicka, a mental-health counselor in the Student Life/College Discovery Program at Borough of Manhattan Community College, who made 1,056 phone calls and reached 129 members.

"I just felt like I had to do it, like it was my responsibility, a civic duty," she told *Clarion*. "I just made time to do this. I made sure that I allocated two or three hours a night, a few times a week. This question comes up every 20 years, so I felt like this was a deadline to reach everyone, and if I spent this time before the 7th, I'd be able to reach a wide audience."

She continued, "It was inspiring to call members and have conversations and hear some of their concerns, and to explain the process to them."

Milliken leaves behind complex legacy

By ARI PAUL

James B. Milliken's four years as CUNY chancellor will be remembered for tense relations between the university and the union, as his administration continued what the PSC called an "austerity" regime for one of the nation's most prominent public institutions of higher education. While his tenure includes other areas of progress, he leaves without making a profound mark on the direction of CUNY.

Milliken, 60, announced in November that he will be stepping down at the end of the academic year. The former University of Nebraska president has indicated he may stay at CUNY as a law professor.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

For his part, Milliken said that CUNY accomplished many of his goals under his administration. "Our community colleges are on track to double their graduation rates, making them national leaders. We have launched a new school of medicine, almost certainly the most diverse in the country, and a successful independent school of public health,"

Chancellor steps down in 2018



James Milliken was chancellor when the PSC took a historic strike vote in 2016.

he said in a statement. "We put in place exciting new initiatives to diversify the arts institutions in New York, provide groundbreaking comprehensive support for foster youth, increase women and minorities in tech, and much more."

As several media outlets noted, Milliken's administration benefited from increased city funding for CUNY, which allowed greater investment in community colleges.

Milliken became chancellor when the PSC contract was al-

ready four years overdue. After a year of failing to secure the funds necessary to make an economic offer to the union, the PSC stepped up its campaign and mounted enough pressure to force an offer in 2015. Union leaders were critical again when Milliken offered only muted public opposition to the \$485-million reduction in state funding for CUNY proposed by Governor Andrew Cuomo in 2016. Only after a nearly unanimous strike authorization vote taken later that year did CUNY finally come to the table with acceptable raises and back pay, allowing the contract to be settled.

EXORBITANT SALARY

While many adjuncts cobble together a living with poverty wages, Milliken, whose salary clocks in at \$670,000 annually (\$180,000 more than the previous chancellor), has received a nearly \$18,000-per-month housing allowance from CUNY for his luxurious Upper East Side rental apartment. For PSC members and CUNY advocates, these numbers represented a tale

Continued on page 8

GOP tax bill would hurt grad students

By ARI PAUL

Public outcry against the Republican Party's sweeping tax bill, which passed both houses of Congress, focused on what many called a wealth transfer of billions of dollars from middle-class households to the wealthiest 1 percent, as tax write-offs like the mortgage interest tax deduction would – if reconciled by both houses and signed into law – be scrapped in exchange for a dramatically lower corporate tax rate.

For PSC members, notable among the proposed changes are that interest on student loan debt payments would no longer be tax deductible, and graduate school tuition waivers would be considered taxable income, adding to the tax burden of students already struggling to make ends meet. Troubling higher-education advocates, the proposal would quadruple the tax burden for graduate students and discourage anyone without significant outside income from engaging in graduate study, threatening the viability of graduate research in the United States in the long run.

“PhD students at most American universities already have to juggle too many jobs and responsibilities to try and finish their degrees in a timely manner, and the GOP will add to that burden,” Graduate Center Assistant Director of Admissions Gerry Martini told *Clarion*. “Taxing tuition waivers will reinforce the notion that elite higher education is mostly for the wealthy, since, at the stroke of a pen, students will require many thousands more dollars to attend school.”

ATTACKING COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

He continued, “Rather than impose new burdens on an overstretched and cash-strapped group, we should be looking at ways to ease them – most especially by investing in public higher education, where so many of these students teach, both in graduate school and once they graduate. Years of debt should not be your reward for the pursuit of knowledge and teaching.”

For Martini, these two provisions constituted the first steps in the Trump administration's larger attack on the affordability of higher education. “I think we should also fear what precedent this sets down the line for undergraduates,” he said. “After all, if a tuition waiver is ‘income’ then taxing undergraduate scholarships is the next logical step here.”

Rosa Squillacote, a PSC delegate from the Graduate Center, told *Clarion*, “The GOP's attempt to make student loans and tuition waivers count as taxable income is an attack on graduate students as workers and their efforts to organize, as well as an attack on universities as sites of democracy. This attack makes sense: strong labor rights and a robust and accessible education are some of the greatest threats to the Trump regime.

Targets tuition waivers



Ellen Moynihan

Graduate Center-based members like Jessica Mahlbacher blasted the tax bill, saying it would put an enormous financial burden on graduate students like herself.

Making tuition waivers taxable income pushes graduate students further into economic precarity, making it even harder for these already overworked employees to feed themselves and develop their academic work while protecting their labor rights.”

Squillacote noted that this attack only furthered the need for free tuition at places like CUNY to serve working-class communities. “Where academic unions and the Left should take notice, however, is that this attack would be less effective if universities abolished or significantly reduced their tuition,” she said. “We should take this as a sign that tuition waiver programs – like [Governor Andrew] Cuomo's weak Excelsior Scholarship – are totally insufficient in our current political climate. We need to push harder for radical transformation of educational institutions, with demands for free and fully funded universities and living wages for adjunct labor.”

As Jessica Mahlbacher, a Graduate Center PhD student in political science and an adjunct lecturer at Baruch and Hunter Colleges, put it, the proposal would affect GC students. “They're getting penalized and it'll make it harder for them to finish their degrees,” she said. “And taxing student loans would be really terrible because PhD students are more likely to be taking out larger loans.”

As a result of the increased tax burden, she said that such students “may have to take on more graduate assistant hours, there's always odd jobs you can do, but the more jobs you take on, the longer it takes you to finish your PhD or publish the articles you need to be competitive on the job market.”

INCREASING ADJUNCT PAY

Mahlbacher believed that the PSC was going in the right direction by demanding \$7,000 per course per se-

mester for adjuncts, some of whom are PhD students, to mitigate the damage. “Ultimately, what the union can do is fight for higher adjunct pay per class, make sure that students in their sixth and seventh year have access to insurance and tuition remission, those are good starting steps,” she said.

Another GC delegate, Tahir Butt, noted, “Our cash-starved institution can't afford to pay us a fair wage, so we try to not starve by taking additional work, only to now be starved by a new tax plan.”

POTENTIAL SETBACKS

The proposals, if enacted, come at a perilous time for graduate worker labor activists, at both private and public universities. In the private sector, unions fear the Trump administration's National Labor Relations Board could overturn an Obama-era decision to classify graduate instructors and assistants as workers entitled to collective bargaining rights. In the public sector, unions, including the PSC, expect a decision at the Supreme Court next year in *Janus v. AFSCME* that would bar the collection of agency-shop fees, thereby squeezing unions financially and undermining their organizing strength.

The Atlantic reported that the plan could constrain public universities in other ways: “By pressuring states to spend more on health care while hampering their ability to raise taxes (never an easy thing to begin with), GOP tax and budget policies could deprive public colleges of state funding, which would force American students to pay more. This would almost certainly lead to a rise in student debt. So it would make sense to make that debt easier to pay off. The House bill does the opposite. It would eliminate a provision that allows low- and middle-income student debtors to deduct up to \$2,500 in student-loan interest each year.”

Various higher-education groups have blasted the tax proposals, calling them a threat to the future of university education. The Ameri-

can Council on Education President Ted Mitchell said in a letter to the House of Representatives' Ways and Means Committee, “This legislation, taken in its entirety, would discourage participation in post-secondary education, make college more expensive for those who do enroll, and undermine the financial stability of public and private, two-year and four-year colleges and universities. According to the Committee on Ways and Means summary, the bill's provisions would increase the cost to students attending college by more than \$65 billion between 2018 and 2027. This is not in America's national interest.”

He continued, “Roughly 145,000 graduate students received a tuition reduction in 2011-2012. Repeal of this provision would result in thousands of graduate students being subjected to a major tax increase. The provision is also critical to the research endeavors at major universities, particularly in the crucial science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields.”

'GIVEAWAY TO THE WEALTHY'

As this newspaper went to press, progressive groups and unions were lobbying senators and targeting centrist Republicans in an effort to stall the reconciliation process to bring the two bills together. The House of Representatives' bill and the Senate's bill still have differences.

Overall, labor leaders have blasted the GOP tax proposals as giveaways to the wealthy. American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten in a statement called the overall tax bill a “gut punch to the middle class that would crush the American dream of having a family and owning a home,” and said that it's “not just that their tax bill is a massive giveaway to the wealthy and big corporations who don't need it, but also that they're doing it at the expense of the middle class, homeowners, and local community services like public schools, police departments and fire departments.”



Ellen Moynihan

Graduate students from public and private universities across New York City rallied against the tax bill in Lower Manhattan, calling it an attack on higher education.

ON THE MARCH

Union tells CUNY board: it's co

By ARI PAUL

On December 4, as hundreds of PSC members chanted with illuminated signs at the Graduate Center, demanding a new contract for CUNY faculty and staff, several PSC members walked into the hearing room at Baruch College to give CUNY's Board of Trustees a message that it was time for a new contract with the PSC.

That message wasn't well received, it turned out. PSC First Vice President Mike Fabricant reported back to members gathered at Baruch College later that night, "We had 15 to 20 trustees who all looked down, looked away and they called an executive session to run away into a fortress of executive privilege. We wouldn't let them, because we said, 'What time is it?'"

To which the crowd responded, "Contract time!"

"It is their responsibility to deliver a contract that improves our working conditions and lifts the quality of education and learning conditions of our students," Fabricant said of the trustees.

CONTRACT EXPIRED

The gathering at Baruch College was the culmination of a march by hundreds of faculty, staff, students and other labor supporters. The march started with a rally at the Graduate Center and ended at Baruch, in order to let CUNY know that the union was united and ready to fight for a new collective bargaining agreement.

The timing of the rally was no accident. The PSC contract with CUNY expired on November 30, and while the Triborough Amendment to the state's labor code mandates that the contract's provisions still govern faculty and staff until the next contract is settled, the message on the streets was that the campaign for a new contract had already begun.

NEW DEMANDS

PSC delegates approved the new contract demands in mid-October. In terms of salary demands, the union is calling for 5 percent annual raises, an ambitious but necessary demand in a climate where the state has settled contracts with 2 percent annual raises with other public-sector unions. The PSC is demanding a step toward pay equity for adjunct faculty by calling for \$7,000 per course per semester and is calling for the salary schedules for college laboratory technicians and the lecturer series to increase in addition to the across-the-board raises. The union also insists on more support for department chairs through either one of the following or a combination: an "additional salary or summer stipend, additional reassigned time, additional access to support personnel," according to the stated demands.

"These demands will benefit not only faculty and staff, part-timers and full-timers, but these demands benefit CUNY students; these demands benefit the university," said Andrea Vásquez, chair of the union's higher education officer chapter. "We often see signs on the subway for CUNY celebrating the most successful students and the most distinguished and wonderful faculty members, which is great, but we know that it takes every one of us, it takes every faculty member and every staff member, part-timers and full-timers, to make this university what it is. And we all deserve the recognition and the compensation that these demands represent."

The demand of "\$7K" per course was a hallmark of the rally, which union officials noted was important not just for the part-time faculty but for all union members. "The gross underpayment of adjuncts undermines our entire profession," said PSC President Barbara Bowen of current adjunct salaries. "As long as CUNY can get away with paying anyone \$3,200 per course they believe they can do the same to any worker at the university. They set a new low." She added that low adjunct pay "is a slap in the face to every student."

Calling \$7,000 per class per semester an ideal "baseline minimum wage" for adjuncts, Baruch College PSC Chapter Vice Chair Carly Smith said, "We say 'no' to the exploitation of part-time faculty at CUNY. We know it is unjust to stand by when our adjuncts – our brothers, sisters and siblings – teach the majority of classes [and] are making the average wage of fast-food workers. It is unsustainable for all of us when CUNY is funded by slashing full-time faculty positions in favor of paying the majority of adjuncts poverty wages. We know that an attack on faculty is an attack on the very core of public education."

ACT LOCALLY

At the Baruch College rally, PSC Vice President for Part-Time Personnel Susan DiRaimo told the crowd that at present nearly 12,000 adjuncts teach a majority of classes at CUNY. "I was not a part-timer. I was a full-timer at part-time pay," she said. "We only make \$27,000 [with an eight-course load] a year, we're making poverty wages, it's time to change that and give us a living wage."

She added, "Some adjuncts are even on food stamps. That is not fair."

Before the rally, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology Frances Fox Piven told reporters that the PSC contract struggle was one of the many local fights she believes are part of a response to the corporate assault on working and

poor people by the Republican-controlled federal government. "We're going to draw strength especially from our universities, and our public universities," she said.

The message of the union to the CUNY administration was manifold:

- The PSC will not wait several years for the administration to make an economic proposal as it did last time.

- Failure to meet the PSC's demands would be an assault not just on CUNY's faculty and staff, but an insult to CUNY students, the majority of whom are working class and people of color.

- The PSC will not settle for austerity wages. Students suffer from underfunding, and the university can only serve its students well if it invests in its faculty and staff.

- The PSC will push for economic gains for members in the most precarious and lowest-paid positions, among them adjuncts, college laboratory technicians and lecturers.

- The PSC made many gains in the last contract, and it will push to build on those gains, including the groundbreaking multiyear appointments for adjuncts.

LARGER CAMPAIGN

PSC members were joined and supported by more than 20 other unions, including the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, fast-food organizers from the Service Employees International Union, District Council 37, Actors' Equity Association and the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. The rally also received support from the CUNY Rising Alliance and from the Alliance for Quality Education, the Working Families Party and New

Pushing for more equity for adjunct faculty



Photos: Dave Sanders

PSC members marched and chanted through the streets on the east side of Manhattan,

York City Communities for Change.

The Manhattan march and demonstration was a follow-up to the union sending CUNY Board of Trustees Chairman William Thompson an official request to begin bargaining on November 20, about a month after the union's delegates ratified the union's official list of contract demands (the full list of demands was featured in the November 2017 issue of *Clarion* and is available on the

PSC's website). "While the CUNY board and administration may accept that austerity funding is good enough for our students, the members of the PSC do not," Bowen said in her official request. "The contract proposals we have developed originate in an understanding that our working conditions are our student's learning conditions."

She stressed that the PSC contract demands are "about enhanc-



Baruch College PSC Chapter Vice Chair Carly Smith denounced inadequate adjunct pay outside the Graduate Center.

Contract time



and were joined by other labor activists.

ing the quality of education for our students,” and that without making CUNY salaries and working conditions competitive with peer institutions, “CUNY suffers, and our students suffer.”

The action also came after a series of demonstrations demanding a fair contract around the university. At Lehman College in October, adjunct activists demonstrated in the main common area not only to highlight the demand for \$7,000 per class per course for adjunct instructors but to link the demand with ongoing calls to make CUNY tuition-free.

“We can do it, the money is there,” Diane Auslander, an adjunct historian at Lehman, told *Clarion*. “There are ways CUNY can do both, there just needs to be the political will. That’s the hard part.”

Auslander said adjuncts around the university are bringing up the issue of inequity between adjuncts and full-time instructors in the classrooms, as many students are not aware of the financial hardships contingent faculty at CUNY often face. “It’s been in the news, we’re raising awareness all over the country,” Auslander said. “The PSC has to do what it has been doing: protest and put our issue in the face of the Board of Trustees.”

A CORE ISSUE

The struggle for adjunct equity has long been a central campaign for the PSC. In March, dozens of ad-

adjunct faculty members testified at a CUNY Board of Trustees hearing, describing the poverty they and their colleagues experience as a result of low pay at CUNY, and the negative impact that has on students’ learning conditions. In the last contract, the PSC won a groundbreaking pilot program establishing multiyear appointments for adjunct instructors, adding a layer of job security the union looks to build upon with this current contract campaign.

CAMPUS ACTIONS

Union members also staged contract campaign rallies at Hunter College, Bronx Community College and College of Staten Island on November 30, the day the previous contract expired. At the BCC protest, Joan Beckerman, an adjunct lecturer in sociology, said that even in a time of major cutbacks at the federal level it’s still possible for a union like the PSC to demand raises. “I don’t think it’s so audacious,” she said. “There’s money for war, to protect the president and for nuclear weapons.”

While CUNY Board of Trustees Chair William Thompson has yet to respond to Bowen’s letter, CUNY spokesperson Frank Sobrino said in an email after the December 4 rally, “The union will have an opportunity to make the case for higher pay during the next round of collective bargaining. We do not plan on negotiating in the press.”

Why we stay, what we need: low pay hurts all of CUNY

By **BARBARA BOWEN**
PSC President

Barbara Bowen delivered a message to members and management at the rally. In the piece that follows, she gives an edited version of her remarks.

How many of you have considered leaving CUNY for a job that pays better? And how many have considered leaving for a job that has a manageable workload?

But how many of you have stayed because you believe in the project of expanding access to the powers and pleasures of learning? Or stayed because you have seen the explosive intellectual power of our students when they are given a chance at a serious education? CUNY students are not just any students – and that’s why they are under constant economic attack.

Coming as they do largely from communities of color, from working-class, poor and immigrant communities, they bring subjugated knowledge that has the potential to transform what can be researched thought and known.

BIGGER MISSION

The project of CUNY is bigger than the PR version of the university that appears in subway ads. It has a deeper collective meaning than moving individual graduates into stable incomes, essential as that work is. And it’s because we understand and even love that project that we stay.

Now tell me: how many of you are sick and tired of having your dedication to that project exploited by a university that doesn’t pay competitive salaries?

This contract is about forcing CUNY to restore competitive salaries at all levels. And we are not prepared to wait six years to get there!

If CUNY salaries had merely kept up with inflation, our salaries would be level with those at Columbia and Rutgers. Instead, full-time faculty salaries are tens of thousands of dollars lower and our workloads are significantly higher. Professional staff salaries would also be far higher than they are now, and adjuncts would, indeed, be paid nearly \$7,000 a course. Since the current leadership took office in 2000, our salaries have generally kept up with inflation, but they haven’t regained the ground lost in previous decades.

And the salaries of the lowest-paid full-time employees, especially laboratory technicians and lecturers, have lagged far behind. That’s why we’re demanding a 5 percent increase in each year of the contract. No one goes into academia to get rich, but we are entitled to fair pay. And the university of New York’s working people is entitled to be able

to pay its faculty and staff at a rate that makes our positions nationally competitive.

This rich city and this rich state, where public services help to enable the immense wealth accrued by finance, real estate and other sectors, has the resources to fund CUNY well. The CUNY trustees, who are political appointees by the governor and the mayor, should be able to leverage their power to make that funding happen.

NO AUSTERITY

That’s why we are here – to demand that they get busy. If the trustees seek to do more than manage the decline in public funding for the university with whose future they are entrusted, they have to take a stand and demand CUNY’s fair share of public resources. CUNY is not funded at anything close to the level appropriate to its importance to the city and state. While the trustees may be content with more and more austerity for the college education of working people, people of color, immigrants and women, the members of the PSC are not. We call on the trustees join us in demanding an alternative to austerity for CUNY – and that’s what our contract demands are about.

The solution cannot be at the expense of our students. It is unconscionable that CUNY students, some of the most economically disadvantaged college students in the country, should be expected to pay more in tuition because the State has not funded contractual raises that it approved.

At this critical moment in this economic history of the US, we call on New York City and New York State to reject austerity for CUNY.

The reason CUNY is underfunded is a lack of political will. It is not an accident or an oversight. Instead, it is the result of an active agenda – which we see now in the Republicans’ tax scam – to transfer wealth from the poor to the rich and to deny a top-rate college education to the people we teach.

The PSC has changed political will before, and we can do it again. We created the political will to add funds to CUNY to cover adjunct health insurance and graduate employee health insurance, to provide full-paid parental leave and 80%-paid sabbaticals. We can create political will again, but it will take a fight.

ALL CONNECTED

Perhaps the biggest contract fight we have ever undertaken in the one we embrace now – for \$7,000 per course as the minimum adjunct pay. But no fight is more important.

The demand for \$7K is a demand about full-time salaries at CUNY.

It is also a demand about academic freedom and intellectual integrity, about ethical and professional standards in a public university. It is ultimately a demand about racial justice in New York City because it is about investment in the students we teach.

Working side by side with colleagues who are grossly underpaid diminishes all of us. But it also directly and materially affects all of our salaries. As long as CUNY can get away with paying anyone less than \$3,500 to teach a course, CUNY can pay all of us less than our labor is worth. By demanding a living wage of \$7,000 a course, we are asserting that the labor of teaching or working in a university – no matter who does it – is itself worth fair pay. Just as the \$15-an-hour campaign asserted that the work itself was worth higher pay, regardless of whether it was a person’s main source of income or a part-time job, we are asserting with our demand for \$7K that the work itself must be valued. CUNY has no incentive to raise salaries across the board to competitive levels as long as they continue to be allowed to underpay more than half of their teaching workforce.

END THE MYTH

And the idea that adjunct-teaching is always a side job, a little add-on to full-time pay elsewhere is a convenient myth. Of the 12,000 teaching adjuncts at CUNY, several thousand – all with advanced degrees – live on their adjunct income. That means an income of less than \$27,000 a year. CUNY adjuncts stay for the same reason all of us stay – they believe in the work.

The shameful underpayment of adjuncts hurts all of us in another way. It establishes a floor for what constitutes acceptable pay. By demanding an increase in adjunct pay we are insisting that the floor be raised. One of the primary reasons for workers to come together in unions has always been to prevent employers from paying lower and lower wages at each place of work. The \$7K demand is a demand that not only CUNY but our whole industry not be allowed to continue to undercut those who work in it.

And perhaps most important, the \$7K demand is about the lives of thousands of people who have dedicated their professional lives to and invested their hopes in CUNY.

I believe that we can beat austerity, we can win fair pay, we can beat the fascistic Trump agenda of destroying unions so that the only remaining way for working people to have power against the rich finance class is destroyed. Tonight is just the start. We are in for the fight of our lives.

After 27 years at PSC, Bergen retires

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Debra Bergen, PSC's director of contract enforcement and a university grievance counselor, is retiring, after nearly four decades in the labor movement. At PSC, she has literally changed lives; more PSC members than she can count have relied on her and the department she leads when faced with denial of tenure, denial of reappointment or other devastating employment situations. While the PSC does not win every case, Bergen's leadership has been central to the union's strong record of defending members' most basic rights and saving their jobs. Even members who have never faced serious difficulties on the job benefit from the work of Bergen and the contract enforcement counselors and staff: the union's ability to challenge violations of the contract and bylaws acts as a brake on potential violations throughout the university. Strong, member-based contract enforcement of the kind Bergen has developed protects every member.

Bergen built her career in the labor movement as an organizer for home care and hospital workers at Local 1199, Hospital and Health Care Employees Union and as an organizer and contract administrator for physicians in public and nonprofit hospitals at Doctors Council. In 1991, she brought her skills to PSC's contract administration department. Along the way, she earned several certificates in labor studies and a joint Cornell/Baruch Master's degree in industrial and labor relations. Bergen taught contract administration and collective bargaining for nearly 20 years in worker education programs at Cornell's ILR School in NYC and headed the adjunct faculty union there. Over several decades, Bergen helped to organize and expand the women workers' summer school with other labor educators from the United Association for Labor Education.

EMPOWERS MEMBERS

President Barbara Bowen said, "Debra understands, in a moving and visceral way, that union contracts are about the power workers have when we stand together. And she knows that we need that power just as much to enforce a contract as to win it. Often the real struggle over contract provisions comes long after they are negotiated, as management, through outright challenge or laziness or neglect, can attempt to undermine what we have gained. That's when Debra steps in, and has stepped in literally thousands of times. Her aim, always, is to empower members to lead the fight themselves. One of the most significant parts of Debra's legacy is the generations of PSC members she has trained and mentored to use our collective power to defend individual workers."

In 1977, when she graduated from SUNY New Paltz with a degree in psychology, working for unions was not in her plans. She learned the power of organizing at her first clerical job, once she joined the

A union contract specialist



Dave Sanders

Debra Bergen is known as a tough contract enforcer.

rank-and-file organizing committee at Syracuse University.

"I originally joined because of my objective working conditions. Pay was terrible. I thought it was a way to have my voice heard," Bergen told *Clarion*. "Later on, I saw it as something that I was meant to do." When she moved to NYC, she became active in the National Association of Working Women's (later District 925 of SEIU) effort to organize clerical workers.

FAMILY INSPIRATION

Through an oral history project at a labor education course, she learned about the radical past of her grandmother, Anna Stern, who was an active member of the International Ladies' Garment Workers'

Union, a suffragette and a socialist candidate for alderperson in the Bronx in 1917. Bergen was inspired by her grandmother's involvement and saw her own work as a continuation of a family tradition.

"I felt that that kind of progressive politics wasn't new to my family. I was very inspired by her. My career is something that she would be proud of," Bergen said.

When she joined the PSC in 1991, Bergen became the union's second director of contract administration and the department's only professional staff person. Through the years, as the union has grown, she has led the expansion and transformation of the department to become a vital part of the backbone of the union. Today, the department has two staff grievance

counselors and an administrative assistant who, along with trained union members who serve as part-time grievance counselors working at the union office and as campus-based grievance counselors, work with members so they understand how the contract protects them and file grievances when necessary.

Bergen and the contract enforcement staff offer ongoing contract education workshops to broaden knowledge about the contract among members, and they monitor contract violations and whether new contractual provisions are being implemented correctly. Bergen is proud that her department's role is a "combination of contract education and contract organizing."

"Management is always developing strategies to work around the contract," Bergen said. "Unless members know what their rights are and we use contractual procedures to enforce them, the contract isn't worth the paper it's written on."

CONTRACT VIOLATIONS

Her department has closely monitored implementation of new contract provisions including untenured faculty reassigned time, implementation of the adjunct professional hour, HEO assignment differentials and the adjunct three-year appointments. Every year, the department monitors whether instructional staff members receive reappointment notices when they should and timely annual evaluations. They also ensure that faculty governance rights and due process are protected. When contractual provisions are violated, the department files grievances.

Bergen is adamant that the effectiveness of her department depends on members knowing the contract and alerting the union when violations occur. Howard Prince, a former professor and dean at Borough of Manhattan Community College who is now a PSC part-time grievance

counselor, said Bergen excels at building leadership in the union and teaching members the provisions of the contract and where likely violations can occur.

"She's marvelous at staying on top of it all: tracking all the cases, staying in touch with everybody's situation, knowing what levels cases are at," Prince told *Clarion*. He's worked with Bergen for nearly two decades. "She's created a model for anyone who will take this job on how to do it and what needs to be done to stay on top [of an issue]."

To train members who want to serve as grievance counselors, Prince said, Bergen uses a mentorship model, pairing a new grievance counselor with an experienced one. She walks members through the entire grievance process and prepares them for situations they are

'I'm not leaving labor behind.'

likely to encounter. She also uses grievances innovatively, often recommending that a grievance become the basis for organizing on campus, not simply one individual's issue.

Bergen hopes that contract education continues to be an important aspect of the department.

For right now, she's looking forward to a break. "My position is a very full one. It takes up a lot of my time – emotionally, physically, mentally. I'm looking forward to relaxing in all those areas," Bergen said. However, she will miss the camaraderie of working with other like-minded people at the PSC office.

After retirement, Bergen has a plan to take off with her husband and camp wherever the spirit moves them. She is also looking forward to spending more time with her husband and sisters. She also plans to teach adult literacy and further her involvement with the Workmen's Circle, an organization committed to the celebration of Yiddish culture and the advancement of social and economic justice. Once she has time to decompress, she plans to teach in labor education programs and be involved in the labor movement in a broader way.

"I'm not leaving labor behind," Bergen told *Clarion*. "I'm just doing it differently."

Milliken's tumultuous legacy

Continued from page 4

of two CUNYs that saw an increasing number of managers paid high salaries while faculty and staff salaries stagnated and student tuition at senior colleges increased.

Milliken's eventual departure comes at an uncertain time for the university. As this newspaper went to press, it was still unclear whether the governor would sign legislation passed this year that would release state funds for physical maintenance of campuses and set aside money for collective bargaining, easing the strain on the CUNY budget.

STATE IG REPORT

CUNY and its advocates are also awaiting a final state inspector general's report on alleged finan-

cial improprieties at the university. Initial findings have already led to the resignation of one college president, Lisa Coico of City College, and a realignment of top CUNY administrative staff.

Milliken also leaves just as the PSC has set forth its contract demands and formally requested bargaining sessions to begin. The contract expired on November 30, and talks leading to the next collective bargaining agreement may well extend after Milliken steps down.

Above all, the union believes the next chancellor should be someone willing to lobby the governor for more state funding for public higher education and to work with the union in increasing investment in the university's workforce without increasing tuition.



Amanda Magalhães

Masha Komolova, an assistant professor of psychology at BMCC, posed with a cardboard cutout of Chancellor Milliken during a PSC protest outside his luxury apartment.

Despite the conflict generated by the long contract battle, union

leaders acknowledged that the eventual settlement, approved by Milliken and the CUNY Board, included important provisions for which the union had fought for years: on the teaching load, HEO advancement and multiyear appointments for adjuncts.

STRONG POINTS

Milliken also received commendation for his efforts to support undocumented students, who have long been strongly supported by the PSC.

Above all, the union believes the next chancellor should be someone who will refuse to accept austerity funding for CUNY. Both Milliken and his predecessor, union leaders have said, simply managed scarcity, failing to offer an effective challenge to the notion that state investment in CUNY should decline every year while education suffers and students, staff and faculty pay the price.

SPS governance plan cuts faculty input

By CLARION STAFF

CUNY's School of Professional Studies was established in 2003 with the explicit mission of meeting the educational needs of working adults, organizations and employers in New York City. SPS offers a range of undergraduate and MA degrees, most of which are fully online, with a faculty that is 94 percent adjunct instructors. SPS has been a leader within CUNY in developing and implementing online degrees, and it trains CUNY faculty in online instruction.

Several weeks ago, a proposed governance plan for the CUNY School of Professional Studies was issued by the dean of SPS. The proposed new plan for SPS is a highly flawed document that undermines shared governance and academic freedom. Union members at SPS and leaders of the PSC Graduate Center chapter quickly began mobilizing to educate their colleagues about its flaws and to oppose the dangerous aspects of the proposed plan. Leaders of CUNY's University Faculty Senate have also expressed concerns about the proposal.

"The PSC-CUNY contract envisions academic freedom and shared governance to be at the heart of CUNY. When structures of shared governance work well, students do well," observed PSC Executive Council member Steve London. President Barbara Bowen said, "Instead of promoting shared governance between faculty and the SPS administration the proposed SPS governance plan seriously undermines shared governance by encoding strong administrative control over most academic decision-making."

Thirteen full-time, cotsortial and visiting faculty from the Murphy Institute (currently a part of SPS), SPS issued a critical statement offering "our deep concerns regarding the proposed governance plans. We do not see in the proposed structures meaningful shared governance. Our concerns flow from two central structural elements, one of the school itself, the other from the plans as drafted. The first is the school's excessive reliance on contingent faculty positions; the second is the extraordinary powers granted the position of the Dean in the proposed governance plan.

NIX PEER REVIEW

London noted, "The plan lacks the institutional arrangements to allow for meaningful faculty consultation. The proposal does not envision a school with tenured and tenure-track faculty to contribute to curriculum, admissions criteria, programmatic development, evaluations and other areas of academic policy. Rather, the proposal defines "faculty" to include administrative employees without underlying faculty appointments to perform tra-

The union says this could be a bad model



The School of Professional Studies is putting forth a model of governance that the union fears would cut out faculty input.

ditional faculty roles."

Of particular concern to the PSC, the proposal effectively eliminates peer evaluation for reappointment, tenure and promotion while simultaneously removing any real appeal procedure for those denied. It creates a governing body which denies participation to most part-time faculty and simultaneously creates a "faculty" voice which is controlled by the dean, and establishes an ongoing amendment process that is wholly controlled by the dean.

The current governance plan already undermines shared governance by restricting voting rights and prohibiting participation by the vast majority of teaching faculty who are adjuncts, by misleadingly counting administrative appointees as faculty and by eliminating faculty participation at the program level. The existing governance plan does provide for program-level curriculum and personnel committees; however these are only open to full-time and cotsortial faculty.

A number of programs at SPS have neither, and most others have very few. The program-level committees' inability to function has become so acute that the PSC has a pending arbitration challenging the fact that these committees do not function and are being bypassed by SPS management. In response, SPS has not opened up the

program committees to part-time faculty – 94 percent of the faculty – who do most of the teaching at SPS, but rather has eliminated all program-level faculty input over curriculum, personnel and budget.

The only governing body established by the proposed governance plan is the council of the CUNY School of Professional Studies. The proposed plan eliminates all program-level governance over curriculum, personnel and budget. However, an SPS-wide council, no matter how capable and distinguished, can never hope to possess the detailed and specific knowledge needed to address program-level issues. The proposed governance plan grants the dean complete power over academic directors such that their independence may be compromised and gives the dean the power to appoint academic directors with no requirement for the dean to even consult with program faculty or with any faculty at all.

INDEPENDENCE?

Furthermore, by removing the existing term of appointment of academic directors and all checks on the dean's authority to appoint them, the proposed governance plan creates a school where the independence of the academic directors will be compromised. The plan also contains no requirement that an academic director have a faculty appointment, so it is clearly anticipated that academic directors with

no faculty appointment will become the norm at SPS.

The elimination of a meaningful faculty voice is made clear by the composition of the SPS governing council. While the proposed governance plan appears at first blush to give the faculty a bare majority (51 percent) of votes on the governing council, that slim majority is misleading because the definition of "faculty" includes academic directors who are defined as "administrators" and who in any event are appointed directly by the dean and are not required to hold an academic title.

While the academic directors should have a voice in the governance of SPS, their inclusion as part of the faculty is improper. Also included in the definition of faculty are "academic community leaders," a term not defined in the governance plan and whose qualifications and appointment process are similarly not explained. It appears that these individuals would be that be hired directly by the dean on a year-to-year basis. Therefore, the proposed governance plan pays lip service to faculty decision-making and involvement, but is constructed so that faculty are irrelevant on any matter of contention. SPS offers most of its curriculum online and relies on a contingent teaching force of adjunct instructors – 94 percent of the faculty. In addition

to being paid inadequate hourly wages and being largely denied any form of job security, they are also not permitted to engage in oversight and governance of the curriculum they teach and rarely have full-time faculty colleagues to do so, a further disenfranchisement. Under the proposal, only adjuncts with three-year appointments can serve on the SPS governing council, of whom there are about five, but they are not permitted to vote.

NO SAFEGUARDS

The proposed governance plan would replace the current multi-level peer review process for academic personnel decisions with a one-step decision by the administration. The new school personnel committee will be top heavy with administrators. It is to be composed of "the dean of the school as the non-voting chair, the associate dean of academic affairs (who serves as voting chair in the dean of the school's absence), the associate dean of administration and finance (non-voting), all academic deans, the academic directors of all academic program areas and the academic director of general education or designee."

The process for faculty personnel decisions as described in the document is that the academic director, appointed solely by the dean, will prepare a report on the faculty member. The academic director's report shall not be the result of any peer review or discussion at the program level. The report will be reviewed by the

The union is protesting what it calls a weak review process.

school personnel committee. That committee will then make a recommendation to the dean, who is the also the chair of the school personnel committee.

The dean will then make a recommendation to CUNY's board of trustees. In short, the administration will be solely responsible for the review of candidates for reappointment, tenure and promotion. While SPS' current governance plan has a multi-step process of peer review, the proposed plan lacks adequate safeguards for procedural rights for faculty, and, furthermore, there is no real appeal procedure of negative decisions.

And there is no discussion of how part-timers will be appointed or reviewed.

As *Clarion* went to press, PSC President Barbara Bowen was preparing a letter to SPS Dean John Mogelscue, raising these and other issues. One faculty member noted, "Undermining academic freedom deprives faculty, students and the public of real debate. Top-down administrative governance squeezes out professionalism and independence. Contingency increases insecurity. The proposed SPS governance plan would take CUNY in a more authoritarian direction."

CLIMATE CHANGE

Using pensions to fight fossil fuels

By NANCY ROMER

American workers often feel overwhelmed by the power of capitalism in general and financial corporations in particular. We may feel we have few economic resources with which to exert our opinions and defend our needs in a system based on money – capital. We may want to challenge a fossil fuel economy that threatens the future for our grandchildren, but how?

Most American workers *do* own capital in the form of their own homes and, especially, in their pension funds. What if union members were to look closely at our pension funds and see how we could use them to create the kind of world we want: investments in renewable energy, public education, public transportation, affordable housing?

SIGNIFICANT INVESTOR

Pension funds are the single largest institutional investor, followed by banks, investment firms and insurance companies. Approximately \$40 trillion were invested by pension funds in financial markets in 2015, giving workers much more financial punch than we realize or use.

Pensions represent deferred compensation to workers and are negotiated through contracts on behalf of union members, providing income during retirement years. Workers can exert financial power by protecting their pension fund investments and by investing that capital to create the world they want to see, the world they want to leave to their children and future generations. Too often the second part of this formula – having an impact on the world they want to see – is totally ignored. The value of fossil fuel stocks is declining as the world realizes the harm these pollutants inflict and as renewables advance. In short, fossil fuel stocks are a bad investment on every level.

A growing number of American workers are questioning the wisdom of keeping their



PSC members joined other activists in a climate-justice rally in Brooklyn in October.

hard-earned deferred income in fossil fuels. Some unions are joining other financial entities (e.g., universities, faith organizations, foundations) which have divested their funds from fossil fuel holdings. Pension funds committed to divestment comprise 12 percent of all divestment commitments; \$5.2 trillion in assets are presently pledged to divest from fossil fuels. That's a huge start in starving the fossil fuel industry of valued capital and making them a pariah economic sector.

CURTAIL CLIMATE CHANGE

After President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the Paris climate accord, the three hurricanes in the Caribbean and Gulf Coast and the wildfires in Northern California, union members have a new

desire to do what workers can to slow the process of climate change and move toward a renewable energy economy, one based on equity, not just profit.

In New York City, the organizing work of 350.org, Divest New York and New York Communities for Change, and several unions – including ours – has borne fruit. Divesting city and state public pension funds from fossil fuels was one of the short list of demands of the “Sandy 5” march, commemorating the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Sandy. It was supported by 150 organizations including over a dozen unions. Public Advocate Letitia James followed up with a hearing on climate change and divestment held at Borough of Manhattan Community College.

Each New York City public-sector union

pension fund functions a bit differently. PSC members have pension funds in either TIAA, a defined contribution plan where investments are privately determined, or Teachers Retirement System (TRS), a fixed-benefit NYC pension fund, where trustees make investment decisions. Along with the city comptroller, only the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) is represented on the TRS board, not the PSC. City public-worker funds, including TRS, are tightly regulated to protect the funds. The city's pension funds have already divested from coal, private prisons and guns but those holdings were quite small, especially in comparison with the almost \$4 billion holdings of fossil fuel stocks. Fossil fuel divestment will have to be rolled out over a few years to insure fund stability. After receiving studies tracking the carbon footprint of stock holdings and the feasibility of divestment, climate-change activists expect the pension fund trustees to vote on divestment soon.

EXPANDING INFLUENCE

The Divest New York coalition, now joined by rank-and-filers and leaders in the PSC, District Council 37, UFT and Transport Workers Union Local 100, has expanded our reach through a petition drive, extensive lobbying and leafleting, demonstrations outside of pension board meetings and presentations at union meetings. But the most profound shift in worker response to climate change has been the evidence before us that climate change is happening. Workers cannot deny this and workers should not deny our power as workers to use what workers can – our minds, our muscle, our influence and our capital in the form of our pensions – to lead the way to a just and sustainable future for Planet Earth.

Nancy Romer is professor emerita of psychology at Brooklyn College and a former member of the PSC executive council. She is a member of the PSC environmental justice committee.

A way for us to vote with our dollars

Letters

Continued from page 2

ate its refusal to support my modest request: withholding approving SJP's ability to become a recognized student group for a period of time. If not, I can only conclude that the PSC will stand against right-wing but not left-wing anti-Semitism.

Robert Cherry
Brooklyn College

James Davis, Brooklyn College PSC chapter chair, responds: The BC chapter of the PSC supports its members' right to academic freedom. When those rights are seriously threatened, as when a member is subjected to an orchestrated campaign of harassment and intimidation, we will respond assertively. "Minimally," Professor Cherry wrote, "I believe the PSC should support a decision that SJP would not be allowed to register as a student group for 12 months." The chapter leadership declined to support that demand.

Overlooking BMCC

● On September 11, 2001, the World Trade Center was destroyed. Due to the Borough of Manhattan Community College's close proximity to Ground Zero, the campus was severely impacted. Though there were two schools in the area, the media focused primarily on Stuyvesant High School.

In the struggle to bring media attention to the plight of BMCC, I recalled contacting my good friend, the late award-winning journalist Gil Noble of ABC-TV and host of the TV show *Like It Is*. I explained that the college was experiencing a “media blackout” regarding the plight of BMCC and its students. He indicated that if I could assist in getting camera equipment and crew he would come to the college and do a story. With the help of our media center, we were able to accommodate him with the required equipment.

Years after the World Trade Center attacks, tragic and senseless murders and injuries to numerous innocent people occurred right outside BMCC on October 31, 2017. It was a déjà vu experience. Again, the media focus was on Stuyvesant High School. There was little

or no coverage about the plight of the BMCC community. Some of BMCC's students, faculty and staff witnessed the horrible events of that day, such as bodies covered in white sheets lying in full view of multiple classrooms and offices. The college community experienced anxiety, fear and anguish. In addition, the media reported that the unhinged individual responsible for the mayhem and murder of innocent persons shouted “Allahu akbar,” which heightened the level of anxiety and concern for the physical and emotional safety of BMCC students in general and the BMCC Muslim student population in particular.

Though we recognize the elite status of Stuyvesant High School students and commend their academic achievements, BMCC's predominantly African-American and Latino student body has some extraordinary accomplishments as well. BMCC and CUNY must continue to fight against the proclivity of the media and society in general to marginalize BMCC because of the race and class of its student body.

James Blake
BMCC

Attack on governance

● Though some full-time faculty may not think the demand for \$7,000 per class per semester for adjuncts is particularly relevant to them, the fact is, the decades-long drive to replace full-time tenure-track faculty with cheaper, more flexible and super-exploited adjuncts is not only unfair, it has fundamentally undermined self-governance and severely weakened the influence of all faculty across the university.

While the full-time faculty are paid and even encouraged to participate in the democratic life and decision-making processes of the university, our adjunct brothers and sisters are not. While full-time faculty have the time and institutional support to participate in department meetings, faculty senates and, most importantly, our union, adjunct faculty are often commuting between several campuses trying to piece together a living, and have few opportunities to attend or serve on such bodies. While full-time faculty have the job security and collegial support networks to protect them when they choose to stand up to the ad-

ministration, adjunct faculty, who can still be hired and fired at will, have little protection from retaliation for their political activity on campus.

If, however, our union is willing to fight and win the demand for a \$7,000 minimum per-course rate for all adjunct faculty, we will have taken away one of the administration's best weapons: its ability to divide the faculty and balance its budget on their backs. The demand for “\$7K” would not only give adjuncts the time and incentive to participate more in the life of their colleges and their union, it would make it much easier for the union to negotiate more tenure-track lines as well as the creation of secure, full-time lines for former adjuncts, which would further strengthen our union and our collective ability to shape the future of our university. If ever there was a time to stand by the idea that an injury to one is an injury to all, and to prioritize adjunct equity, it is now. This is our chance. We may not get another.

James Dennis Hoff
BMCC

ELECTION

For labor and de Blasio: great expectations?

By ALEXANDER REICHL

The 2017 mayoral election in New York was both more and less significant than organized labor might have imagined. More, because it demonstrated staying power for a progressive agenda in New York City after four decades in which urban neoliberalism held sway under the long shadow of the 1970s fiscal crisis. If all goes well the election could even signal a return to the pragmatic liberalism of the 20th century, when city elites accepted the idea that a share of the city's vast wealth should support public services – from mass transit and public hospitals to public housing and free higher education – for poor and working-class New Yorkers. After all, the hard-fought \$300 million that Mayor Bill de Blasio, endorsed by many unions including the PSC, secured for universal pre-kindergarten in his first term represented a mere percent of the annual Wall Street bonuses paid out in 2014.

EXPAND PROGRESSIVE AGENDA

But de Blasio 2.0 may not be everything his supporters hoped for, as he lost a number of battles in his first term when it came to pragmatic dealmaking, particularly as that game is so skillfully played by Governor Andrew Cuomo. With Cuomo eyeing a 2020 presidential bid, the mayor's agenda will be even more vulnerable to the governor's political calculations. This fraught political landscape has been complicated further by the overwhelming subway crisis that has consumed media attention, commanded an infusion of public dollars and exacerbated



The PSC was among many unions that endorsed Mayor Bill de Blasio.

bated tensions between the mayor and the governor.

In his reelection campaign, the mayor opted for a cautious approach that highlighted his first-term accomplishments, most notably establishing the universal pre-kindergarten program, dismantling heavy-handed policing in communities of color (while maintaining historically low levels of crime) and resisting the Trump administration's anti-immigrant policies. His accomplishments are real and significant, even if some – like building and preserving tens of thousands

of units of affordable housing and combating homelessness – pale against the magnitude of the problems that the city faces. Simply maintaining this agenda for another four years will have a positive impact on people's lives. And the mayor has proposed extending universal pre-kindergarten to all three-year-olds in the city. This “3-K for All” initiative would, like pre-kindergarten, be especially valuable not only due to the benefits of early childhood education, but the program provides thousands of jobs and does double duty as free child care for tens of thousands of

The mayor has a chance to aim high

children – a substantial subsidy for many in and outside the municipal workforce.

The mayor should aim higher. He played safe during the campaign, and now it is time to build on his agenda in order to reinvigorate the progressive movement in New York City. There are more potential victories for progressives in New York, even in the context of a term-limited mayor and an ambitious governor.

HIGHER ED FUNDING

One ripe area of particular relevance to the PSC is higher education. Programs that expand access to higher education enjoy broad public support because they are both beneficial to lower-income residents and politically salient to the middle class; indeed, Governor Cuomo has already shown that he grasps the political math with his tuition-free degree program, the Excelsior Scholarship, for New York residents earning less than \$150,000 annually attending CUNY and SUNY colleges. It's not hard to imagine that the governor could be convinced of the payoff from investing in CUNY and SUNY institutions directly, much as California Governor Jerry Brown scored points in his successful fight for a major reinvestment in that state's underfunded education systems. By pushing this issue onto the agenda and sweetening the deal with some city money, Mayor de Blasio could share in this victory. In order to succeed on this and other progressive goals the mayor will need to call up, not call out, the governor to negotiate win-win policies.

Alexander Reichl is a professor of political science at Queens College.

ECONOMY

The four-year city fiscal outlook

By JAMES A. PARROTT

The next four years are likely to be a bigger test of Mayor Bill de Blasio's leadership than his first four years. While he has accomplished a lot since taking office in 2014 – from instituting universal pre-kindergarten to settling the municipal labor contracts to breathing new life into the effort to stem homelessness – the city faces similarly daunting challenges in several areas and the economic context might not be as favorable.

There is little question that New York City's economy has performed better in the current decade than it has at any time since the mid-1980s. Sustained job growth since the Great Recession has lifted the city's total employment level to 600,000 above previous highs, and unemployment has declined to levels not seen in nearly 50 years.

The strong local economy has translated into robust tax collections, rising by over 4.5 percent annually under de Blasio. That's an increment of \$2.2 billion in budget capacity each year. That kind of revenue growth helped make possible the labor settlements, as well as increased funding for homeless, youth and senior services, more police officers on the beat, expanded affordable housing investments, and setting aside substantial budget reserves in the event of an economic slowdown or cataclysmic federal budget cuts.

Mayors don't have a lot of control over the ups and downs of the economy, but they can try to influence how broadly the fruits of growth are shared, and not just through tax policy. Mayors Giuliani and Bloomberg also governed at times when the broader economy boomed, but they never sought to channel gains to the less well-heeled.

Mayor de Blasio has forcefully advocated raising minimum wages, including by significantly raising the wages of low-wage non-profit workers employed under city-funded human services contracts. New York City inflation-adjusted median wages rose by 8.4 percent and real median family income by 9.5 percent from 2013 to 2016, the best gains since the 1980s. And for the first time in many years, wage gains have occurred across the board among New York City workers.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

De Blasio also sought, together with the City Council, to provide more benefits and protections for vulnerable workers, including paid sick days, fair scheduling practices in retail and fast food, and safeguards against wage theft.

Great challenges certainly remain, among them striking a better balance between building more affordable housing and addressing well-founded community concerns about

gentrification. Establishing universal pre-kindergarten was a watershed achievement, but unfinished business remains in achieving compensation parity for universal pre-kindergarten teachers in community-based organizations, and in improving the availability and quality of child care for infants and toddlers.

Governor Andrew Cuomo undeniably is a mercurial partner, but to advance the interests of New Yorkers when it comes to mass transit or CUNY, Mayor de Blasio has no choice but to work harder at coming to terms with the state's chief executive. Too much is at stake to shy away from complete engagement.

Separate from the existential threat to the city's public hospital system posed by Washington, the mayor needs to work on better diagnosing the problems faced by New York City Health and Hospitals (NYCHH). City Hall needs to factor in changes made by the private hospitals that have allowed them to prosper while shifting more responsibilities to the public system, and come to grips with the fact that just because NYCHH absorbs more costs doesn't mean it has higher costs. The city should explore whether the major private hospital networks should provide something like Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) payments to the city to help shoulder some of the cost of the safety-net health care services provided by NYCHH.

City faces challenge from Washington

If Albany would cooperate – and right now it's hard to be optimistic about that – the mayor should focus on making the city's property tax structure less regressive in his second term. Through a combination of eliminating the assessment caps, gradually moving toward more uniform effective property tax rates on all rental and owner-occupied housing units and a circuit breaker tied to the income tax to limit property tax burdens for low- and moderate-income households, the city could make the residential property tax system a lot more equitable and less regressive. The governor and the legislature should commit to deferring to the city on NYC property tax reform, and stay completely out of the fray.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION THREATS

The biggest challenges facing the city emanate from Washington. The heightened uncertainty related to the Trump-Republican tax- and budget-cut proposals necessitates continued cautious city budgeting. Washington's desperate actions to please wealthy donors could jeopardize a range of health care, housing, education, nutrition and other programs critical to the well-being of New York City's children and low-income communities and to the city's broader quality of life.

The mayor must grapple with threats from the Trump administration but also regulatory action.

Mayor de Blasio may now be term-limited, but the challenges he must confront in his second act are seemingly unbounded.

James A. Parrott is the director of economic and fiscal policy at the Center for New York City Affairs at The New School.



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

Sign up a colleague

Have you already signed a new blue PSC membership card? If so, take a few minutes to get a colleague to sign one, too. You can show your colleagues the online card or get one from your chapter chair. The card can be found at psc-cuny.org/UnionYes.

The new card, which asks for two signatures (one to affirm commitment to paying dues and one for membership) is part of the union's long-term effort to prepare for a Supreme Court ruling on union membership in 2018. Getting a colleague – or even a few – to sign will help strengthen the union.

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SOLIDARITY

Organizing CUNY's food service workers

By CLARION STAFF

Last month's CUNY Board of Trustees hearing included disturbing testimony from a group of CUNY workers who don't often appear at that setting. For months, the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) has been organizing food service workers at CUNY where they are employed by various private-sector vendors – many have experienced systematically low wages and subpar working conditions. At the November hearing, food service workers and student organizers testified about their experiences.

While some CUNY campus food service facilities are unionized (UNITE HERE Local 100), some are not, and these sites are where RWDSU is focusing its energy. Because the vendors are outside contractors (such as Chartwells or Centerplate), they are not governed by the state's Taylor Law and CUNY is not technically the employer. The message was clear: these working conditions should not be tolerated anywhere, and certainly not at CUNY. RWDSU has reached out to CUNY faculty and staff, urging them to support the workers' campaign. PSC officers marched with RWDSU activists and the workers during November's Board hearing, where PSC officers also testified.

Speaking in support of the food service activists at the board hearing, Immanuel Ness, a Brooklyn College professor of political science, said, "A core part of CUNY's mission is to educate and lift up low- to middle-income New Yorkers, especially immigrants and people of color, and provide a pathway to the middle class. CUNY's food service system traps these same people in a cycle of poverty, many of whom are current or former students. CUNY should not be a place where hundreds of workers are paid minimum wage at nonunion jobs."

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

I had previously worked for a cafeteria at St. John's University, where we were offered affordable benefits and more rights on the job.



Workers and students testified to the CUNY Board of Trustees about poor working conditions and low pay at CUNY cafeterias.

At St. John's we had a union, and we don't have one at Queens College. I think that's part of the reason why the job at Queens College is worse, even though they're both contracted with Chartwells. It's unfortunate that a private university offers more for their workers than they do at CUNY schools. I was making \$16 an hour at St. John's and I make minimum wage in Queens. I expect better from CUNY and the public university system, and I think it's a shame that we're treated the way that we are.

Edwin Marsach
Chartwells Worker, Queens College

SOMETHING MUST CHANGE

I quit working at Queens College because the pay was too low and there was little room for advancement. The irony of my situation is that I graduated from Queens College with a degree in food service man-

agement, so I expected CUNY to provide good jobs in their cafés and cafeterias. I used to take the health insurance provided by the vendor, but with the wages we get, it was just not affordable for me. CUNY should make sure that the vendors that operate on their campuses provide living wages and opportunities for the people who work in them. Coming from a food service management education at the school itself, to see that the university doesn't have great management of their own cafeteria is concerning. I would like to see workers treated better and with more respect and some sort of ability to make a career out of food service at CUNY; whether the wages are better or room for advancement is a possibility, something needs to change.

Melissa Brown
Former Chartwells Worker,
Queens College

Private-sector squalor at CUNY

DISRESPECTING WORKERS

I am upset that CUNY allows vendors to disrespect dining hall workers and violate our rights. I recently cut my finger on the job and was forced to go to the hospital to get treated. I missed two days of work that Centerplate did not pay me for, and I also have to pay the medical bill. I can't afford the health benefits that Centerplate offers us, and because I recently moved from Kansas City to New York, I have not had time to enroll in the Affordable Care Act. So, my finger-injury hospital bill is not covered by any insurance and is very expensive. I'm considered a part-time worker at CUNY even though I average 36-40 hours per week, which is not fair. Another frustrating thing is that we're not provided with uniforms at City College, which ended up costing me around \$200, something I can't afford. CUNY needs to make sure that vendors treat us fairly, offer affordable health benefits and give us a living wage.

Doreen Thoms
Centerplate Worker, City College

LIVING WAGE NOW!

I'm a student fellow with the Retail Action Project. This semester, as part of a project centered on food justice at CUNY, I helped to survey food service workers about their lives and working conditions. We surveyed almost 70 workers on 14 different campuses and are working on putting together the results into a report.

Personally, I surveyed 16 workers on four different campuses. If they had time, the workers were often happy to sit down with me for 15 or 20 minutes on their break. However, at certain campuses, I was told over and over by workers that they were not allowed to answer any questions, or take a survey, or sign any petitions, even if they were on their break, or it was after their shift ended. Instead I was told that I had to speak to the manager on duty for permission. I was never able to get permission from any manager.

So my question is: What are the food service vendors afraid of? I have some guesses, but I can tell you that on every campus where we did get completed surveys, we found that workers did not make a living wage, did not have job security and only four out of 66 workers had health insurance from the job. As a CUNY student who intends to enter into a grad program here, I am so grateful for everything that CUNY has done for me. I love my fellow students and my professors have been very inspiring, but to the issue of workers who serve us all food on campus, CUNY can do better.

Pedro Freire
Student, Brooklyn College

Dave Sanders