500 RALLY, CUNY RESPONDS

As five hundred PSC members protested at the Sept. 26 meeting of the Board of Trustees, Chancellor Goldstein announced that CUNY will seek funding for adjunct health insurance in its upcoming State budget. The announcement marked an important step in the union’s campaign to save adjunct health insurance – but it was just a first step. Now members on the campuses are organizing local actions. “This issue has to be visible everywhere you turn,” one activist said.
NEWS & LETTERS

Clarion | November 2011

CALENDAR

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11 / 6:00 pm: Labor Goes to the Movies presents Toxic Eyes (Kazuko Kinoshita, Japan, 1954), a film that traces the relations between a young teacher and her 12 students (two eyes each) over the course of 20 years, from the beginning of the Great Depression through World War II. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14 / 5:30 pm food, 6:00 pm meeting: First Environmental Health and Safety Watchdog meeting of the semester. 61 Broadway, 15th floor.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2 / 4:00 pm: First Friday monthly meeting for part-time faculty. 61 Broadway, 15th floor. For more information, please e-mail nmesfield@cuny.org.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 5 / 1:00 pm: Retirees Chapter meeting. PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Executive Director Larry Morgan will speak, plus there will be a report back from the Safety Not Working Group. PSC Union Hall, 16th floor, 61 Broadway.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6 / 6:30 pm: CLT Chapter General Membership Meeting. PSC Union Hall, 16th floor, 61 Broadway. For more information, e-mail Albert Sherman at ASherman@citytech.cuny.edu.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9 / 6:00 pm: Labor Goes to the Movies presents Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000 (Alain Tanner, Switzerland, 1976), a film about several post-60s meaning in their lives. PSC Union Hall, 16th floor, 61 Broadway.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13 / 6:00 pm: Meeting of PSC Women’s Committee. At the PSC office, 61 Broadway, 15th floor.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Urgency & calm in the Wall Street protests

By Peter Hogness

When Chancellor Matthew Goldstein spoke at the Board of Trustees meeting on September 26, he said something CUNY had been unwilling to say for 25 years. “I will be incorpo-
rating into the University’s budget request, for the first time, funding to support health benefits for adjuncts,” the chancellor announced.

What made the difference? “It was your coming here today,” PSC President Barbara Bowen told hun-
dreds of demonstrators on the street outside. “It was you and all the people who signed petitions and letters that made them move.”

On to Albany

Goldstein’s remarks suggested that this was now a priority for the administration. He called adjunct health care a very “serious concern,” described it as “something that has not been done to any of our satisfaction” and pledged to raise the issue in Albany the next day. But no details were provided — and while union leaders welcomed the administration’s shift in position, they cautioned that members will have to make their voices heard to ensure that CUNY maintains its new stance.

When the PSC first gained health insurance for adjuncts in 1986, the union negotiated annual payments from CUNY as part of a contract settle-
ment. In what became a sig-
nificant structural problem over time, the amount that the University did not increase with either the number of adjuncts covered or the cost of the benefit. The amount paid remained flat, year after year.

For the 11 years since Bowen be-
came president, the PSC has pressed for a more sustainable approach to adjunct health care. The simplest structural solution, the union has said, would be to transfer eligible CUNY adjuncts to either the New York City or New York State health insurance plan, on the same terms as other comparable part-time work-
ers. Neither plan lines up exactly with CUNY adjuncts’ current coverage, but both would provide stable, per-
manent health insurance.

Both would provide “a struc-
tural solution to a structural problem” — that is, a plan in which funding is linked to the number of participants and the cost of coverage. While CUNY has flatly rejected the union’s demands for such a solution in the past, it has now made a public commitment to an effort to achieve one.

Although the administration has taken a step forward, the issue is far from resolved, and union leaders urged members to keep the heat on the University administration. “As the budget process heats up next year, CUNY must continue to stand behind adjunct health insurance as a priority,” said Bowen. “This fall we need to demonstrate the depth and breadth of support for adjunct health care within the University community, so that there’s no pos-
sibility 86th Street will waver.”

In winter, as Albany engages with next year’s budget, she said the union will have to keep two balls in the air at the same time: maintain pressure on CUNY, while working to pass a CUNY budget that includes funding for adjunct health care.

“We have seen how strong sup-
port for this fundamental issue of justice is. Now we need to make that support as visible as possible on the campuses,” Bowen told the October 27 Delegate Assembly. “Why the campuses? Because that’s where we can apply the most pressure on CUNY, and we need to hold CUNY accountable for resolving the prob-
lem. We are also going to hold the City and State accountable — but it’s CUNY’s obligation, as our employer, to provide this coverage for our ad-
junct members.”

CUNY shifts stance on adjunct health care

By Peter Hogness

On October 21, I joined with more than 2,000 union brothers and sis-
ters in a march organized by the Ve-
rition workers of Communications Workers Local 1101 down to Zuc-
cotti/Liberty Park, and from there to a Verizon store on Wall Street, where we rallied. Unions represent-
ed along with PSC-CUNY were the UAW, the Teamsters, and AFSCME.

Those who’ve been down to Wall Street movement know that one of its greatest breakthroughs is getting working people talking about economics and politics. Wear a provocative t-shirt, or carry a sign with a com-
pelling fact or gripping slogan, and you’ll have dozens of people stop-
ing to ask you questions or to add to what you’ve brought to say. It’s a remarkable development in our culture, and only good things will come from it.

One of the big topics that Friday night at the park was the role of or-
ganized labor in the Occupy Wall Street movement. For example, several of the Verizon workers I was with expressed regret that it took so long for their union local to get involved, by which they meant two or three weeks. And that’s the real essence of this movement: a rare combination of absolute urgency and calm, rational dialogue about what we should do next.

Jonathan Scott 
Bronx Community College

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

When Mayor Bloomberg an-
nounced plans to evict the Occupy Wall Street protesters from Liberty Park on the morning of October 14, the call went out from many unions and community groups to come stand with the occupiers in solidarity against the eviction. My wife and I dutifully showed up at 5:45 am.

As I wandered around looking for other PSCers to hang out with, I chatted with a great many other folks: people from other unions like CWA, TWU, SEIU, various progres-
sives and of course the occupiers. I was astounded at the respect that my little old PSC-CUNY cap drew. “Ooohhh, you’re PSC!” “PSC, you’ve won, you’ve won!”

David Arnow
Brooklyn College

School aides oppose layoffs

School aides in Local 372 of AFSCME District Council 37 joined parents, teachers, students and activists from Occupy Wall Street in October to protest against Mayor Bloomberg’s layoff of 642 support staff in NYC’s public schools.

Forum on CUNY and Race Diversity in a Time of Austerity Policies

Friday, December 9 / 6:00 – 9:00 pm / NYC College of Technology

Featured Speakers:
Carol Wright, PSC Researcher, CUNY and Race Project | Frank Deake, CUNY School of Law

Welcome by President Russell Hotzler

Join us for a discussion of the preliminary findings of a study by the Professional Staff Congress on how race, gender and ethnicity affect hiring, promotion, tenure and reclassification at CUNY. Participate in an evening of reflection and commentary, exploring histories of anti-racism at the University, and strategize about how the union can intervene to build diversity into the institutional culture at CUNY.

Refreshments will be served, starting at 5:30.

New York City College of Technology
Janet Lefler Dining Room, Namm Building (2nd Floor) / 300 Jay Street (at Tillary), Brooklyn

Subways: A, C, F, and Q trains to Jay Street, or 2, 3, 4, and 5 trains to Borough Hall. For more information, contact scheng@pscmail.org.
As hundreds of PSC members protested inside and outside a meeting of the Board of Trustees, CUNY Chancellor Martha C. Pollack announced that the University will seek funding for adjunct health insurance in its upcoming State budget request.

The announcement marked a significant step in the union’s 11-year campaign to get CUNY to provide full permanent funding for adjunct health insurance. The long-running dispute over management’s refusal to fund the cost of this benefit came to a head this fall, when the Trustees of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund concluded that the current funding structure could not sustain adjunct coverage beyond next summer. (See Clarion, Sept. 11.)

**FIRST TIME**

“It’s the first time CUNY has ever moved on adjunct health care,” PSC President Barbara Bowen told the hundreds who rallied outside. But Bowen cautioned that convincing CUNY to include adjunct health insurance in its budget request was only a start: “The next step is to hold them to that priority, to insist that it’s funded by the State. And then the next step, if we succeed with the State, is to negotiate the movement of adjuncts onto permanent health care.” (See also page 2.)

More than 500 people participated in the protest outside the meeting at Baruch. A group of about 20—led by BMCC’s academic dean, Mira Zehavi—sang an English version of a healing chant from the Kabbalah.

By JOHN TARLETON

**Keep up pressure, says PSC**

**What you can do**

Faculty and staff across CUNY are taking action to save adjunct health care.

This issue has to be visible everywhere you turn,” said Ron Haydul, professor of political science at BMCC. “We have to make it inescapable—speak to everyone that this is an urgent issue for the whole University community.”

That kind of visibility is a key starting point, union activists say, and every PSC member can take a few basic steps to make it happen: put up a poster, wear a button, give campaign stickers to your colleagues and ask if they have signed the petition. Materials are available from your union chapter chair; links to a printable poster and the online petition can be found at tinyurl.com/AHH-what-do.

PSC chapters are organizing a range of campus actions, with teach-ins, street theater and other projects in the works.

At Bronx Community College, the union chapter organized a rally for adjunct health care outside Meister Hall on November 3. “You have to take it to where the people are,” said Lenny Dick, an adjunct professor in math and computer science at BCC. “The union has had successful demonstrations, like the recent protest outside the Board of Trustees—now we need to spread that message everywhere in the University.”

Speakers at the rally, both adjuncts and full-timers, emphasized that maintaining adjunct health care was a basic obligation for the University as an employer. “Adjuncts now teach more than half the courses at CUNY,” said Dick. “We are a core part of the faculty.”

**FACULTY SENATES**

At some colleges, governance bodies are taking a stand. A resolution adopted by Baruch’s Faculty Senate declared that a loss of adjunct health insurance would “put these faculty at risk and undermine their work...and neglect of their basic needs that the entire faculty of the College does not countenance.”

The resolution said it is urgent to secure either permanent funding for adjunct health coverage or an equivalent benefit from another source. A resolution to be considered by BMCC’s Academic Senate at its November meeting urges CUNY to get adjuncts covered under City or State health plans. It notes that lack of insurance coverage leads many to delay treatment, with results that can damage their health or the health of others.

**Making the issue visible everywhere you turn**

An adjunct makes her views known during the Sept. 26 board of trustees meeting. Now that CUNY has committed to pursue state funding for adjunct health insurance, the PSC will push to make sure the university keeps its promise.

**INVALUABLE**

Mike Cesarano, an assistant professor of theater at QC, said having health care during his seven years as a CUNY adjunct was invaluable. He said he came to the demonstration because a union’s strength comes from members’ willingness to fight for each other’s needs. “I want the corporations to be there when I need them, so I wanted to do my part,” Cesarano said.

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NYPD spy scandal hits CUNY

By JOHN TARLETON

The New York Police Department has monitored Muslim student groups on six CUNY campuses, part of a broad surveillance effort that was not based on evidence of criminal conduct. The police spying was first detailed in early September by veteran police reporter Leonard Levitt on his blog, NYPD Confidential.

According to documents obtained by Levitt and also by the Associated Press, the NYPD deployed undercover officers at Baruch and Brooklyn Colleges, and used police in its Intelligence Division Cyber Unit to monitor students at Brooklyn and Queens.

In addition, police documents refer to the use of “secondary” undercovers at Hunter, CCNY, Queens and LaGuardia. Police undercovers attended events put on by Muslim student groups; the surveillance continued from at least 2003 to 2006.

PERVASIVE

These reports came in the wake of an AP investigation, published in late August, that described a vast NYPD spying operation reaching into almost every corner of the Muslim community — from mosques to restaurants to hair salons.

The central role of a secret NYPD “Demographics Unit” illustrated the extent to which the surveillance had gone far beyond investigation of particular criminal acts to become a blanket investigation of entire communities.

When the NYPD denied the existence of the Demographics Unit, AP reporters posted documents from the unit online. One included a list of “Ancestries of Interest,” including “American Black Muslim.” A “Moroccan Initiative” conducted surveillance on cafés because they were frequented by people from Morocco.

“This kind of behavior is not acceptable in an academic environment, especially if it’s a fishing expedition and there is no specific, credible threat,” said Angela Burton, an associate professor at the CUNY School of Law.

On September 13, the Brooklyn College Faculty Council unanimously approved a resolution denouncing the NYPD spying on campus. The resolution also called on the NYPD to inform those they had spied upon about the nature of the information gathered.

PROFILING

“Police have the right to investigate crimes but they don’t have the right to investigate people based on their religion or their ethnic identity,” said Moustafa Bayoumi, associate professor of English at Brooklyn College and author of How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America.

During the September 13 meeting, Brooklyn College President Karen Gould spoke in support of the resolution and denied that the college administration had known of the spying.

“We do not in any way condone the alleged intrusion of the NYPD into campus life,” Gould said. “I know, we believe this was a violation of freedom of expression and the constitutional rights of our students, faculty, and staff.”

“The faculty resolution sent a clear message to the administration and the NYPD that this will not be tolerated,” said Acting PSC Chairman Alex Vitale, a sociologist whose scholarship focuses on police conduct and civil liberties. Vitale expressed concern that the NYPD may have violated the Handschu Agreement, a set of court-ordered guidelines regulating police surveillance.

The AP reported that some CUNY personnel may have shared student records in violation of the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Penalties for a school that violates FERPA can potentially include loss of federal funding.

Ramzi Kassem, an associate professor and director of CUNY Law School’s Immigrant and Refugee Rights Clinic, told the AP that undercover officers may also have violated a 1992 agreement between CUNY and the NYPD, which states that apart from emergency situations, police “shall enter upon CUNY campuses, buildings and other property only upon the request or approval of a CUNY official.”

A protester used her copy of Clarion as a picket sign at the October 11 “March on the Millionaires of Park Avenue.” The paper’s back-page article debunked the myth that higher taxes on the rich will make them flee New York.

Clarin sweeps awards

Clarin was named the best local union newspaper in the country by the International Labor Communications Association (ILCA) in its annual labor journalism awards contest. This marks the fourth time in seven years that Clarion has won the top prize for general excellence from ILCA.

ILCA also awarded first-place for Best Feature to Clarion Associate Editor John Tarleton for an article on LaGuardia Community College’s urban studies program. Retired professor William Tabb won Best Analysis for his look at the origins of right-wing attacks on Frances Fox Piven, a CUNY sociologist who angered critics with her support for poor people’s movements.

Clarion also shared a first place with California Teacher for Best Print Publication from the American Federation of Teachers. Judges cited the PSC paper for being “well-written, clean and crisp” and “loaded with great information for members and many thoughtful articles written by members themselves.”

NEW YORK HONORS

Here in New York, Clarion tied for first among area papers and earned a total of eight awards from the New York Labor Communications Council for excellence in areas including reporting, writing, photography and design. First place for Best Reporting went to Tarleton for uncovering dangerous health and safety conditions at a campus building under renovation at City Tech.

PSC First-Vice President Steve London won first place for Best Editorial while he was writing at a State-backed scheme to deregulate higher education in New York, and the recently redesigned PSC website took first place for website General Excellence.
PSC prepares Pathways lawsuit

By PETER HOGNESS

The PSC is preparing a lawsuit against CUNY’s “Pathways” process that is overhauling colleges’ general education and transfer requirements.

“We recognize this step lightly,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen, “but we listened to faculty across the University and concluded that the way this process bypasses faculty governance goes right to the heart of our responsibilities as faculty members. That’s why we have begun to prepare litigation.”

“The PSC does not take a position on which courses should be part of general education or required for a major,” Bowen noted. “But we do take a position on respecting the University’s governance procedures, and a strong position in support of the role of elected faculty bodies.”

The Pathways process involves the biggest change in curriculum at CUNY since the elimination of remedial courses in the senior college, Bowen said. “Yet this important change is being designed by a committee that is hand-picked by the chancellor,” she told Clarion. “This bypasses the role given to the University Senate and CCNY’s Bylaws, and it bypasses the faculty senate on each campus.”

While individual faculty members on this committee may be distinguished and may have the best intentions, Bowen said, “the facts remain they were selected by the Chancellor, the very person to whom they will report. They are not chosen by faculty.”

As the PSC Delegate Assembly pointed out in a resolution it adopted in June, Article 8 of CUNY’s Bylaws identifies the University Faculty Senate’s role in formulating policy on curriculum. The resolution declared that CUNY’s Pathways process “violates both the spirit and letter of Bylaw 8.13 and the principle of shared governance.”

No faculty governance body has supported the Pathways process. Resolutions opposed to the administration’s plan were adopted by faculty bodies at 11 of 12 senior colleges and by the faculty senate at Hunter among the community colleges. Pathways has come under continuing criticism as it moves forward this fall.

Demoralized faculty watch 80th St. take apart curricula.

The Executive Committee of CUNY’s Faculty Council said in September that it “strenuously objects to CUNY Central’s circumventing of the faculty’s historic authority with respect to curricula.”

In an October statement at Hunter, 12 department chairs and program directors declared, “While we recognize the need to address the issue of student transfer policies, this proposal as implemented will reduce the overall quality of a CUNY education and will erode the identity of its individual colleges.”

“It’s really demoralizing for faculty,” said Glenn Petersen, chair of the sociology and anthropology department at Baruch. “We’ve dedicated our careers to creating an education for our students that will serve them well, and 80th St. is unilaterally taking that apart.”

Some of CUNY’s procedures or ways of thinking about academic success may have been due for a shake-up, Petersen said — but “that’s a debate that should be had among faculty,” not imposed by central administration.

On October 31, the Pathways Task Force released a draft of the new general education rules — the criteria for courses that are to be part of a college’s “Common Core.” Comments are due by November 15, a timeframe that many faculty felt was inadequate for the serious discussion that this initiative should be promoting.

A frequent topic of concern in campus discussions on the criteria has been its restrictive effect on language requirements. “In an increasingly globalized world,” said the Hunter chairs’ and directors’ statement, “we do not see how CUNY can justify eliminating foreign language requirements and imposing curriculum changes that undermine the value of pluralism and diversity.”

As the general education changes were debated, the Pathways process moved on to other areas. Manhand Philipp, professor of chemistry at Lehman and a union delegate, told Clarion the centralization of authority through Pathways will ultimately give CUNY administration control over key classes in each department. New committees have been appointed to decide what introductory courses can be required for a given major.

FOCAL COUNCILS

“They are not elected, they are appointed,” emphasized Philipp, a former chair of the UPS. “This takes control of the major itself out of a department’s curricular committee.”

These people will actually decide which courses can be required for your department’s major — and that is a fundamental change in how this University operates.

PATRICK ARMSTRONG/PSC
PEF members discontented

By ARI PAUL

The tweaks to the proposal included reducing its length from five years to four and eventually reimbursing members for all nine of the deal’s 18 months that they would have to take over the next 18 months; in the previous version they were only to be paid back for four. But this improvement was funded by dropping a $1,000 lump sum payment that the first version would have paid to each member. As in the original version, workers would go without “vacation time to offset health insurance costs.”

Layoffs await

The union’s leadership urged ratification of the revised proposal on December 31, and Cuomo insisted that poll results will not change his mind. “The fact that everybody wants it, that doesn’t mean all that much,” he told reporters in mid-October, as he urged PEF members to ratify their latest contract proposal.

An hour before Clarion went to press, the Albany Times-Union reported that the revised agreement had been ratified by 2,718 to 11,645.
Labor & OWS, natural allies

By JOHN TARLETON

When a small band of protesters set up their Occupy Wall Street encampment in Zuccotti Park on September 17, 2011, few people in the labor movement noticed. But that quickly changed as the cry of “We Are the 99%!” captured the public imagination.

“They definitely seem to have figured out a way to touch a nerve that perhaps we have been less successful at doing,” said Bob Master, political director for District 1 of the Communications Workers of America. “They have inspired creativity, their willingness to put their bodies on the line and make personal sacrifices, have been inspirational,” he told City Hall News.

In New York, local unions have responded by providing everything from rain ponchos to meeting spaces and have brought thousands of their members into the streets. It’s a rapidly evolving relationship between two groups with very different organizational cultures, both of them battered by the recession and both frustrated by policies that favor the wealthy over those who are losing their jobs and their homes.

On October 5, a massive labor-community march in support of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement made clear that the hundreds of activists sleeping overnight in the park speak for many thousands more. Upwards of 20,000 protesters filled the streets of Lower Manhattan to the protest’s office at the Gryeer building. There, activists turned the Gryeer building into an encampment in Zuccotti Park (which OWS has rebuffed “Liberty Park,” the site’s original name). About half of those marching were union members, including several hundred from the PSC. Members of the Transit Workers, Service Employ- ees, Communications Workers and the National Nurses’ Union also turned out in force. “We support the Wall Street pro- testers and their goal to reduce in- equality,” declared Transit Workers Union Local 100’s Executive Board in backing the march. “The shared sacrifice preached by government officials looks awfully like a one- way street.”

Solidarity was the theme of the October 5 march, as union mem- bers put their own demands in the context of a wider struggle. Lor- riane Towns, a CUNY Research Foundation employee who works in the provost’s office at the Graduate Center, said that New York’s policies of tax cuts for the wealthy and funding cuts for CUNY and other public services must be reversed. “If we don’t get our act together, [the U.S.] is going to be like a Third World country,” said Towns. “At CUNY, we already face constant shortages.”

“It’s good to see the movement growing,” said Costas Panayotakis, an associate professor of political sci- ence at City Tech. “It’s important to dispel the pessimism that says you can’t challenge the power structure.”

STEPPING UP

Labor’s strong presence on Octo- ber 5 was due in part to the work of activists from more than two dozen unions who formed a Labor Support/Outreach Committee within OWS, going back to their unions to seek political and material support for the emerging movement. Many unions stepped up in response to these appeals, while other labor leaders decided independently to get on board. “It’s become too big to ignore,” a political consultant told New York magazine. In September the PSC became the first union to back OWS, but others soon followed. “We are fighting for our union and our members,” said Stephen Moreau of the Service Employees International Union. “We are fighting for health care reform. The movement is a natural ally.”

Several hundred PSC members joined a massive Oct. 5 march in support of Occupy Wall Street.

Cry of the 99%, inspires action.

On Sunday, October 16, Chris- tian, Jewish and Muslim religious leaders inspired POC working groups to form an associate professor of political sci- ence at the Graduate Center, said that New York’s policies of tax cuts for the wealthy and funding cuts for CUNY and other public services must be reversed. “If we don’t get our act together, [the U.S.] is going to be like a Third World country,” said Towns. “At CUNY, we already face constant shortages.”

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Adjunct pensions – the time is now

Enroll now, ensure your rights

If you are an adjunct who has not yet joined the New York City Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS), please fill out an enrollment form immediately. Eligible adjuncts are entitled to a pension benefit; by enrolling now in TRS you can make full use of a benefit that you have worked to earn but there will be serious financial consequences for adjuncts who delay enrolling in TRS if the New York State legislature agrees to pension changes recently proposed by Governor Andrew Cuomo.

Cuomo wants major changes in pensions for New York’s public employees that would hurt employees’ interests (see Clarion, Summer 2011) and his plan may provoke conservative attention early next year. The PSC and other labor unions will be fighting hard to make sure that this proposal does not become law. It would do almost nothing to address current budget shortfalls, while extending the “millionaires’ tax” – which the governor opposes – would make a real contribution.

But the outcome of this struggle is unknown. What’s certain is that the legions whose TRS applications are processed before any new pension legislation may go into effect would be covered under the current rules.

FUTURE HIRERS
The governor has said his proposal will only affect employees who have not yet been hired. But this is true only for full-time public employees, who are required to join a pension system at the beginning of their employment. For CUNY adjuncts, participation in a pension plan is optional. If the governor’s plan is approved, it will apply to all employees who join a pension system after that legislation takes effect.

This means that adjuncts who delay joining TRS could end up in a new, inferior pension tier no matter how long they have worked at CUNY.

So CUNY adjuncts should protect their interests in two ways: (1) by responding to union alerts to take action against Cuomo’s plan, and (2) if you are not already a TRS member, sign up immediately so you can lock in current pension terms. (Note that your enrollment does not take effect until TRS has completed processing of your application, which can take weeks – so don’t delay)

TIGHT BUDGETS
CUNY adjuncts often live on very small salaries, and some put off joining TRS because of the 3% employee contribution that is initially required (it is optional). But CUNY also makes an employer contribution – money that adjuncts who don’t join TRS will never see. Deciding not to join TRS could mean walking away from thousands of dollars in retirement income that you may badly need later.

At present, CUNY adjuncts who join TRS become members under New York’s Tier 4 pension terms. Vesting – the right to collect a pension on retirement – occurs after an adjunct has the equivalent of five years of full-time service as a pension system member. TRS considers paid adjunct hours equivalent to one full-time year, so adjuncts in Tier 4 need a total of 1,800 hours to qualify for a pension. Since adjuncts do not all have the same workload, it takes them different amounts of time to be vested. Let’s look at one fairly typical example: an adjunct who teaches two 3-hour courses in both fall and spring terms, and is paid for one office hour per week. In Tier 4, this adjunct will be vested in about 8½ years.

But under Cuomo’s proposed new pension tier, vesting would not occur until an employee had the equivalent of 12 years of full-time service. This means the adjunct in the example above would take about 20 years to be vested. Since many adjuncts work fewer than 20 years, and most do not teach more than two courses per term, far fewer adjuncts would qualify for pensions if Cuomo’s proposal becomes law.

The longest-term adjuncts would still qualify for pensions under the governor’s proposal, but they would contribute much more of their own money and could get smaller pensions.

In the current Tier 4, adjuncts contribute 3% of their gross pay to the pension system for 10 years. Once the ten-year threshold is reached, CUNY takes over the adjunct’s contributions. But under Cuomo’s proposed new pension tier, all members of New York public pension plans who join after it takes effect would contribute 6% of their gross pay for their entire careers. For an adjunct who does qualify for a pension, this could mean a fourthfold increase in employee pension contributions.

Despite this spike in employee contributions, the governor’s proposal would reduce the pension payout for employees with at least 20 years of credited service. For example, under the current Tier 4, an employee with 20 years of credited service receives an annual pension equal to 40% of final average salary. Under Cuomo’s proposal, the same employee would receive an annual pension equal to 33.4% of final average salary. In Tier 4, twenty-five years of service equals 50% of final average salary; under Cuomo’s proposal, it would equal 41.75%.

TIER FOUR
Here’s an example of the how this works in practice. Under Tier 4, an employee with 25 years of credited service and a final average salary of $40,000 receives a pension of $20,000 per year. But under Cuomo’s plan, the pension for the same employee would be $16,760. Over 20 years of retirement, this sample retiree would lose $36,800 under the governor’s proposal.

And that’s not all. Many adjuncts join TRS several years after they begin teaching. Many adjuncts in Tier 4 are able to get credit for their prior service by paying 3% of past earnings, plus 5% interest, compounded annually. The governor’s proposal would double this cost to 6% of past earnings, making buying back prior service twice as expensive as it is now.

ELIGIBILITY
Finally, the retirement age would increase under Cuomo’s plan. In Tier 4, employees with 2-29 years of credited service can receive an unreduced pension at age 62 and a reduced pension at age 55, employees with at least 30 years of credited service can receive an unreduced pension at age 55. Under the governor’s proposal, employees could not receive a pension until they reach age 65.

A note on eligibility: adjuncts are not eligible to join TRS if they are currently receiving a pension from any New York City or State pension system, or if they are active members of any other New York City pension system. Active members of NY State pension systems who are not yet collecting benefits, however, are allowed to join NY City’s Teacher’s Retirement System.

Cuomo adjucnts who already belong to the TIAA-CREF pension system as a result of previous CUNY employment may also be ineligible. If you have a TIAA-CREF account from previous CUNY employment, please contact TIAA-CREF at tiaa-cref.info or call (800) 444-7760 to discuss your situation.

Adjuncts who are also full-time teachers and administrators in the New York City public school system already belong to TRS and do not need to fill out a new application, but do need to notify their TRS membership number to the Human Resources office at their CUNY campus.

All other adjuncts are eligible to join TRS. If you do not qualify for Tier 4 and are appointed for at least 45 hours in the semester they enroll, there’s no length of service requirement; adjuncts can join TRS in their first term at CUNY. (Adjuncts who leave CUNY before their pensions are vested can receive a refund of their contributions plus interest, or they can remain members of TRS for up to seven years while their contributions continue to accrue interest.)

To join TRS, adjuncts must file two forms – an enrollment form and a beneficiary form. The enrollment form can be downloaded at tnyurt.com/adjunctTRSenroll. The beneficiary form, which must be notarized, is at tnyurt.com/adjunctTRS-beneficiary. Both forms need to be submitted to the campus Human Resources office, along with proof of birth – either a birth certificate or a passport.

MEMBER PARTICIPATION
Adjuncts can find more information about the advantages of a Tier 4 pension at psc-cuny.org/our-benefits/adjunct-pensions-surprising-return. Anyone with questions after reading this article can contact me at eballen@nycmail.org.

In 2009, the PSC successfully resisted efforts by then-Governor Paterson to impose inferior terms on new pension plan members at CUNY. With your participation, the PSC and other public unions aim to defeat Cuomo’s attack plan. Support those efforts – and if you’re an adjunct not enrolled in TRS, get signed up without delay. Protect yourself both ways.

New PSC election rules

By MARILYN NEIMARK
Chair, PSC Elections Committee

In September, 2011, the Delegate Assembly approved a revision of the PSC’s election rules to improve the transparency and accountability of the nominations process. The new rules ensure that all candidates have given prior consent to their signatures. Petition signatures must all be witnessed, if they are to be counted.

In addition to the above, the revised rules allow petition signers to name the candidates they are supporting. In order to inspect these revisions, we’ve had to move the election calendar forward.

SIGNED DECLARATIONS
Under the new rules, candidates for PSC offices, and NYSUT/AFT and AAPP delegates, will have to submit a signed declaration of candidacy to the PSC central office.
Super Committee wants cuts

More than 200 people attended the October 25 PSC forum, “Defending the Social Safety Net.” The article below is adapted from the keynote by Dean Baker, an economist at the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington. For more on the forum, which included panelists Kim Phillips-Fein of NYU, James Parrott of the Fiscal Policy Institute, and CUNY’s Frances Fox Piven, see tinqira.com/SSForum.

The forum took place as Congress’s so-called “Super Committee” considered trillions of dollars in budget cuts, including cuts in Social Security and other safety net programs. The Super Committee’s report is due on November 27; you can send a letter opposing cuts to the safety net at psc-cuny.org/safety-net-letter.

The PSC’s Social Safety Net Working Group has prepared a brochure about what is at stake in these debates, based on a handbook at psc-cuny.org/safety-netbooklet. If you’d like to find out more about the Working Group, contact John Hyland at Lag-Soc@cdal.

You often hear people in Washington say we need to raise the age for Social Security retirement benefits. We’ve already raised the age for full benefits to 67 although, a lot of people don’t know that – and you have politicians and pundits saying, “Let’s raise it to 70.” Most of them are working around their jobs, and their attitude is, “I love my job, I’m in good shape, I want to work until I’m 70.”

For a lot of people, though, that’s not a reasonable thing to expect. That includes factory workers and construction workers, and also people who are the custodians at CUNY, people who are working in restaurants, or working as a nurse’s assistant or a nurse. Most jobs in this economy, in fact, are not that well paid. So it is fair that someone who dehomes chickens or cleans floors all day should be forced to work much longer because lawyers or Senators have longer lives, and still enjoy their jobs?

We get a lot of misleading talk about budget deficits, how entitlements are supposedly breaking the bank. For the most part this talk is very dishonest, because that is not the real story. People are being particularly dishonest if they paint this as a Social Security problem, or some general problem of out-of-control public spending. The problem isn’t Social Security, it’s “Social Security and Medicare” – the problem is our broken health care system. Fix health care, and you can fix the deficits.

We’ve got more than twice as much per person as in any other wealthy country. Take your pick – Canada, Taiwan, Switzerland, Germany. We’re paying more than twice as much per person. And we don’t have anything much to show for it: we have the shortest life expectancy of the wealthy countries.

So what would our budget deficits look like if we paid the same amount per person for health care as Canada or Britain? The answer is that we wouldn’t have these huge deficits. All the money we’d start having budget surpluses.

Of course, military spending has also been a big contributor to the deficit. The comparison to recent increases in military spending, the amounts at issue for Social Security are not that large.

You hear pundits and politicians yelling that there’s a huge Social Security shortfall – they talk about something like $5 trillion over its 75-year planning horizon. People in Washington like to use trillions of dollars, so let’s know what they mean by trillions. If you know that sounds really scary, even if no one has any clue what it means. I had a conversation with an economist once where I asked, “Why are you expressing this as trillions of dollars when you know no one knows what it means?” Why don’t you express it as a share of GDP [Great Domestic Product], because we can all understand percents. And he said, “If I express it as a share of GDP it doesn’t sound big but we know it is a lot of money.”

Now, if you look at the Social Security shortfall as a share of GDP, the reality is it’s a lot less than 0.10% of a percent of GDP. For comparison, how much did we increase military spending between 2001 and 2010? At the projected shortfall in Social Security totally by raising revenue, it would not have a devas- 
ating impact on the economy. I don’t know how many times I’ve heard people around Washington say, “It’s going to be a long time before jobs come back, we’re just going to have to balance the budget.” I hope they say cut Social Security and call it “tough medicine.” Well, the “we” in this sentence is never the people who will be really unemployed. It’s never the people who will have their income slashed when ben- efits are cut. The people who say this are doing fine. And they’re not so tough. Let’s keep that in mind when the Super Committee comes out with its report.

News & Benefits

Social Security under threat

PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY
NOTICE OF NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS – SPRING 2012

1. Each candidate, or a representative designated in writing, is entitled to observe the counting of the ballots.

2. The issue of Clarion published in March 2012 will allot each candidate 200 words for a biography and/or statement. Statements of candidates for general officer may post their own words in any fashion they choose. The deadline for typed copy is 5:00 pm, March 2, 2012. For information on existing Clarion photos, contact the editor by February 22, 2012. Candidates for delegate to the NYUT, AFT and APPC 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 Clarion. They may purchase not more than one-half page of advertising space in The Clarion. The computer service must have addressed labels, lists or electronic downloads of the membership, or will provide candidates with college-listed, or an equivalent digital file is 5:00 pm, March 2, 2012. (Note: It will be highly unlikely that Clarion’s computer service will be able to give newspaper staff advance notice of their intention to submit statements or advertisements, by February 22, 2012. Any candidate who wishes to advertise their candidacy in the issue of Clarion published in March 2012 may do so. Candidates for delegate to the NYUT, AFT and APPC 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 Clarion. They may purchase not more than one-half page of advertising space in The Clarion. The computer service must have addressed labels, lists or electronic downloads of the membership, or will provide candidates with college-listed addresses, lists or electronic downloads of the membership, or will provide candidates with college-listed, or an equivalent digital file is 5:00 pm, March 2, 2012. (Note: It will be highly unlikely that Clarion’s computer service will be able to give newspaper staff advance notice of their intention to submit statements or advertisements, by February 22, 2012. Any candidate who wishes to advertise their candidacy in the issue of Clarion published in March 2012 may do so.

B. The Super Committee report is due Nov. 23.

C. A copy of the Rules Governing All General and Chapter Elections is available for inspection by all eligible voters from Barbara Gabriel at the PSC Central Office, or at the PSC Chapter beginning January 30th.

D. ELECTION RULES:

1. Nominating petitions will be feasible to be submitted to the PSC Central Office on or after March 1, 2012. Petitions must be received at the Professional Staff Congress, 61 Broadway, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10006 by 5:00 pm, March 15, 2012.

2. A candidate or his/her designee may inspect the petition of candidates for twenty-five percent or more of the officers of the organization.

3. A candidate or his/her designee may inspect the petition of candidates for twenty-five percent or more of the officers of the organization.

4. Ballots will be mailed to members who have not submitted a signed declaration of candidacy no later than January 9, 2012, to Barbara Gabriel at the PSC office, 312-354-1252, for a duplicate ballot or to check your membership status. Any candidate who does not receive a ballot by April 9th should contact the editor by February 22, 2012. Any-
Perspectives on Occupy Wall Street

Reclaiming public space

By BEN SHEPARD
City Tech

O
cupy Wall Street’s successful efforts to occupy public space have enabled it to win a place in the social imagination, and a position in the public discourse too often dominated by media stories about celebrities.

By successfully reclaiming Zuccotti Park, a “privately owned public space” it renamed Liberty Park, OWS is using this space as it was intended under New York City’s zoning laws. As Brooklyn College sociologist Greg Smithsimon, my co-author in a study of conflicts over public space in NYC (tinyurl.com/BeachStreets), points out, Brookfield Office Properties “gave it to the public in exchange for very profitable zoning concessions. [Their] building is more profitable because they gave the people that public space.”

ARBITRARY

But in a common pattern among real estate developers, Brookfield has tried to regain control of this space by imposing arbitrary rules. As William Whyte observed, “Many buildings’ management have been operating with a [narrow] concept of access. They shoo away entertainers and people who distribute leaflets or give speeches.... [But the owner] has not been given license to allow only those public activities he happens to approve of.”

Something old is new again

By PAUL WASHINGTON
Medgar Evers College

O
ccupy Wall Street is the newest thing on the political scene...but not as new as it might seem.

As an activist in and observer of the Free South Africa movement during the 1980s, I can see significant similarities in the strategies and tactics of the young people in the Occupy Wall Street movement. Demonstrations during the period used public space that galvanized support for the cause, moral outrage at global capitalism ran amok — it feels familiar.

Twenty-seven years ago Black South Africans were denied all political and economic rights, and many were killed when they raised their voices in protest against that demonic system. Inspired by their example, we found our own ways to put our bodies on the line for change.

POOR PEOPLE’S CAMPAIGN

These tactics of direct action and mass struggle are tried and tested. They were used in the civil rights movement and others before: the tents of the “Occupy” movement are in the spirit of the tent city created by the Poor People’s Campaign in Washington in 1968, an effort launched by Dr. Martin Luther King before his death.

Now, through the lens of legacy and struggle, we see the children and grandchildren of those who sat in, marched, demonstrated, fasted and got arrested coming forward to demand economic justice for the 99%. There is plenty of creativity in the Occupy Wall Street movement — but there is continuity as well.

Begging with a cadre of mainly young people, this new movement has mushroomed into an international phenomenon that is “comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable.” Between a third and half of Americans, across racial, ethnic, religious, and income lines, are in support of the Wall Street protests, with their right to redress their economic inequality.

MEET JOHN LEWIS

If you don’t appreciate the past, sometimes you stumble as you step into the future. So I was troubled when John Lewis came to speak at Occupy Atlanta and at first was turned away. John Lewis is not just a Congressman — he is a man with a rich history of courage and struggle, who helped lead a movement that changed this country forever and who endures arrests and beatings so that our people could win basic human rights.

But a movement does not have to be perfect to be important. John Lewis was in- vited back to Occupy Atlanta the following day, and hopefully something was learned.

Can the collective leadership of Occupy nationwide be more diverse? Yes. Can the goals and objectives of the movement be clearer? Sure enough, but you can only probably just as we witness these courageous, sharp, intelligent and morally committed youth provide critical insight on some of the most practical problems we face.

Let us all remember Frederick Douglass, who said, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.” Today, in the Occupy Wall Street movement, we see that a lutu conti- nua – the struggle continues.

Reclaiming public space

It is vital that OWS be able to occupy this particular space — within the Financial District, in close proximity to Wall Street. In doing so, the movement is insisting that Wall Street itself is public space — that protesters have as much right to walk past the Stock Exchange as any banker or broker.

In doing so, they have helped us reimagine what the space can be — our own public commons, our own Tahrir Square. Comrades from Cairo wrote an open letter of support to those in the OWS movement, in which they spoke to the importance of transforming space and by extension social relations: “Discover new ways to use public space, discover new ways to hold on to them and never give them up again. Resist fiercely when you are under attack, but otherwise take pleasure in what you are doing, let it be easy, fun even. We are all watching one another now, and you are doing, let it be easy, fun even. We are all watching one another now, and from Cairo we want to say that we are in solidarity with you, and we love you all for what you are doing.”

Social movements must always assert their right to public space. From Liberty Park to People’s Park to the community gardens of the Lower East Side, movements find inspiration in a place to meet, organize, share stories, break isolation, dance, plan, build mutual aid, and create a bit of care and civil society in an otherwise tough, alienating world.

OWS & politics

By STANLEY ARONOWITZ
Graduate Center

A
s in other countries around the world, the Occupy movement in the United States 2011 has been a time of discontent. From the Madison Spring to Occupy Wall Street, enraged union members, students, unemployed workers and others have taken to the streets in protest against the concentration of wealth and political power that has afflicted their country.

The Wall Street occupation has been followed by similar protests in more than 110 communities in the US, often met by arrests and other forms of police violence. But the polls show wide support for the demonstrators’ demand that the huge inequalities of our society be remedied.

So far, as one observer has noted, so far this is a movement of inventive tactics and almost no strategy. As winter approaches, it is not yet clear where it will go.

RESISTING DEMANDS

So far, correctly I believe, the protesters have resisted fashioning a set of specific demands, a path that effectively indicates what a better life for the 99%, whom they wish to reach, would consist in.

For example, the movement says it wants a society of “participatory democracy.” What does this mean for people who support the movement but are tied down by long hours on the job or caring for family members at home? If the Occupy movement wants jobs, what kind does it envision? And since sections of labor have joined and endorsed the protests, what should the relationship be with unions and other progressive organizations?

These are strategic questions, the answers to which might bear on whether the protests eventually transform into a movement with a longer life.

On the other hand, if the protesters disdain popular education, and are reluctant to think beyond resistance and non-electoral politics, it may prove to be a glorious but short lived event in our recent history.

with the occupiers. Unions also delayed the mayor with e-mails and phone calls opposing this use of police.

Unions in turn have been energized by their connection to Occupy Wall Street, which has helped labor protests become both bigger and bolder. OWS’s activism has expressed itself as a broad front against a common enemy, extending support to Verizon workers, Teamsters locked out at Stop & Shop, and more.

In drawing labor into this kind of joint action, OWS is facilitating the development out of separate unions of a real labor movement. The Occupy movement shows how brings together people from more than 30 unions, and one of its main goals has become promotion of mutual support among the unions themselves. If this takes hold, it might begin to reverse labor’s long decline.

The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement is shifting the dominant political narrative, revealing far broader support for its class-conscious politics than for the agenda of the right wing and the Tea Party. This success stems largely from OWS’s focus on the top 1% who, it asserts, control politics and the economy at the expense of the working and middle class.

The movement’s ability to position itself as the voice of the majority has been bolstered by its alliance with the trade union movement. This bond between labor and militant activists who take to the streets, occupy public spaces and are willing to risk arrest for their cause is unprecedented in my lifetime. It contrasts strongly with the split between the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which were culturally and politically conservative, and movement activists were often hostile toward unions or even the working class.

When some of us initiated a Labor Support/Outreach Working Group within OWS, I didn’t expect this overwhelmingly positive response. Certainly we were helped by the example of Wisconsin, where the labor movement occupied the State Capitol to protest Gov. Walker’s attack on public-sector unions. Hundreds of unionists defied Walker’s efforts to kick them out.

Here in New York, we can be proud that when the PSC was the first to back OWS, when union delegates went from their September meeting to Liberty Plaza and Barbara Bow- en spoke. The national AFL-CIO and many other unions have now voiced support for OWS Wall Street. Local unions have been supplying food, meeting space, copying and other resources. The unions have shown real solidarity, supporting a movement that they do not control.

The occupation’s survival owes much to organized labor. When eviction was threatened, a number of unions asked their mem- bers to come stand shoulder-to-shoulder...
Defending public higher ed

By GARY RHODES

Gary Rhodes is a professor at the University of Arizona’s Center for the Study of Higher Education, and has been general secretary of the American Association of University Professors from 2009 through 2011. Rhodes was a speaker at “Defending Public Higher Education,” an October 7 conference at the CUNY Graduate Center co-sponsored by the PSC; the article below is adapted from his presentation. Full text of Rhodes’s talk is available at psc-cuny.org/RhodesDPhE. More information on the conference, including audio of speakers and discussion, is at tinstagram.com/DefPubHE.

There is an opportunity today for New York to define a different policy model for public higher education – to help shape the future not just for CUNY, for New York City and State, but for public higher education nationally. In Ohio and Texas and in state after state, governors, state legislators and boards are putting forward models of public higher education that influence what’s possible and what seems reasonable here in New York. That’s why I think this conference is such a heartening thing. I encourage you to take up that game ourselves, to see your role as a political one – to redefine what is possible, in the way that California did 60 years ago.

These state-level models are worked out within a national discourse that's course shaped by politicians and by foundations, not only Gates but also Lumina. And by other groups, as in the McKinsey report, Winning By Degrees. Published last late year, this report declares that to graduate up to one in five of its students, in the next 10 years, the US higher education institutions would need to improve their degree completion productivity by an average of 23%.

PRODUCITIVITY

Now, instead of stopping at that point and saying, “This is foolish, this is silly, this is unachievable,” I think it sounds like a formidable challenge but our research shows that it is feasible by boosting gradation rates and by improving cost efficiency as has been demonstrated by top quartile US institutions that have increased their productivity 17%–38% over the years. So we face this constant litany about productivity and measurement. We have a confluence of policy makers, policy wonks, reporters, administrators and frankly too often faculty as well, invoking “a new normal” of austerity that identifies the problem as productivity or lack thereof – not as revenues or lack thereof. This perspective claims to focus on human capital, but it demonizes higher education employees as an obstacle. And it’s in this context that these state models emerge.

In the states today, we see three main models for public higher education. I’ll call them assembly lines, flagshops, and compact for privatized education. Let me describe the first: production assembly lines and the return of Frederick Taylor.

Texas is a quintessential example of productivity measured by an average of 23%.

Texas is a quintessential example of productivity measured by an average of 23%.

Gary Rhodes at the Oct. 7 conference.

The first measure promoted by the TTPP is, in a sense, like paying K-12 teachers according to student outcomes, rather than gains in their students’ performance on standardized tests. Only the TTPP model is, if that’s possible, because the outcome metric is simply student credit hours generated, period. You get rewarded by volume of credit hours. Measuring professors’ productivity by student hours is a little bit like measuring physicians’ productivity by the number of patients they see. Students, like patients, are not well served by an assembly line model of professional work that mistakes volume of immediate output for quality of treatment.

Texas-style, a productive arrangement is one in which a single, low-paid faculty member, probably an adjunct, teaches hundreds of students. If it’s thousands of students that’s even better. The students might not learn much, they might not have much opportunity to interact with faculty, they might not graduate, they might not get jobs, but what matters? Because in the eyes of the TTPP and Governor Perry, they will have insured that the professors are being productive.

Now Texas has also moved to calculate the costs and productivity of each individual faculty member in terms of their salaries, and the credit hours – and revenue – that they generate.

There has been some pushback against these proposals. But this assembly-line model and these productivity metrics are none-the-less being picked up nationally, in different variations, picked up by the National Governor’s Association and by the Lumina Foundation, and so on.

As these metrics are being defined nationally, we can see the same rallying around them in a blanket sense and watch them get implemented nonetheless, or we can try to play some sort of game of altering alternatives that will actually benefit our students and our commitment to a public mission for higher education.

For example, we could develop a metric not unlike what David Lavin and colleagues did in evaluating the open-access experiment at CUNY. We could ask, what is the contribution of CUNY to upward mobility and to the public good? That is the American middle class? That would be a socially useful metric that could help shape the national debate. The second-state-level model is focused on flagships, with a “trickle-down” model of higher education. This is the return not of Frederick Taylor, but Ronald Reagan. In Ohio, for example, university presidents and the board of regents have proposed what were at first called “charter universities,” which they have now renamed “enterprise universities.” The starting point for this model is a focus on the elite research universities – everybody wants to be a flagship. The idea is to let flagships fund themselves.

DEREGULATION

This model is similar in important ways to the PHIERA [Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act] proposal recently debated in New York. It calls for a level of deregulation, with university presidents thinking like CEOs of independent firms. The deregulation increases tuition, and public oversight over the construction of facilities is eliminated under the label of “construction reform.” In exchange for this deregulation, schools get less state money.

The incentives in this plan are all wrong for addressing affordability, access and quality. It supports the rich and disinvests in quality education for the rest. In fact, this model opens up public monies to a variety of profits with a price with which Ohio has been all too familiar. Let me move to the third model: a social compact for privatized decline. As with the recent budget deal in New York, this systematically shifts the funding burden from the state to the student. It projects an increase in student tuition well above the higher education price index, while the state’s contribution in real dollars gradually falls.

The claim is that somehow universities can generate their own revenues to replace state revenues – but we have 30 years of evidence that what employers want, both private- and public-sector employers, is people who can communicate, who can write, who can present themselves, who have a broad education. That is what higher education gives and it stops here.

A BROAD EDUCATION

The biggest economic benefit that universities provide is educating the broad population. Survey after survey indicates that what employers want, both private- and public-sector employers, is people who can communicate, who can write, who can present themselves, who have a broad education. That is what higher education gives and it stops here.

Similarly, our greatest contribution, especially in an institution like CUNY, is in providing upward mobility for growing numbers of students who are the growth population across the country, and not just in New York City – low-income, first-generation immigrant, both documented and not, and students of color. If we’re going to succeed as a nation culturally, socially and economically, we need to counter the pattern of the last 30 years, of expanding the gap between the have and the have nots, but between the 98% and the 1%.

POLICY

We’ve been colonized by this culture of constraint and fear. The counter-narrative that we have to organize around is one that speaks to priorities and possibilities. We need to get back to defining what higher education is as a public mission for higher education, that you see yourself on a national stage. You are fundamentally important to the future of public higher education, and we need to hear your voice.

 Editor: Petur Hugness / Associate Editor: John Tarlton / Designer: Margarita Aguilar / Proofreader: Kristi Elderedge
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Save the social safety net

With the country hurting from a deep recession, now is not the time to weaken safety net programs that protect the economically vulnerable – protections such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, employee health insurance, pensions, unemployment benefits and others. But Congress's “Super Committee” is set to begin its recommendations for slashing spending and reducing the budget deficit with a report on Nov. 23. Take action against the committee's short-sighted campaign to impose hardship on those who can least afford it. Send a letter opposing the cuts to psc-cuny.org/SafetyNetLetter.

The contract, the political moment

By BARBARA BOWEN
PSC President

Something unprecedented happened at CUNY this fall. The central administration, under intense pressure from the union, shifted a position it has held since 1986 and accepted that the cost of health insurance for eligible adjuncts instruction should be a normal part of the University’s budget. That was only the first step in the process of achieving permanent health insurance for adjuncts who teach multiple CUNY courses, but it’s the step without which nothing else is possible.

Another seismic shift, less welcome, is the implementation of Chancellor Goldstein’s “Pathways” resolution, which ushers in the most profound change in the University’s curriculum in decades – and totally bypasses the governance role of elected faculty bodies. This management-driven initiative on General Education is a defining moment in both the meaning of a CUNY degree and the concentration of power in the central administration. The union has taken a strong position in response: we are preparing to litigate the violation of the Bylaws.

Resistance

But the biggest shift in terrain came from an unexpected place. Occupy Wall Street brilliantly came from an unexpected place. Occupy Wall Street as its source. Organized at a moment when income inequality in the U.S. is greater than at any time since the eve of the Depression – and in the city and state with the most extreme inequality in the nation – Occupy Wall Street has opened new political space. A successful effort to prevent New York from giving a scheduled tax break to millions now appears possible, as does resistance to the imposition of further austerity on “the 99%.”

It is in this changed – and changing – political landscape that we are negotiating our contract. By way of a quick review: the PSC’s most recent contract expired a year ago, in October 2010. Since then, however, we have been working under the full protection of that contract, because of the terms of timing. The job of the union bargaining team is to be responsive to members’ sense of urgency while also being smart about the political conditions in which we bargain – and how those conditions can be changed.

The PSC is fully prepared to negotiate and campaign for our demands. Our priorities are unchanged: salary increases; a more manageable teaching load; promotional opportunities for higher education officers; and significant progress toward fair salaries, benefits and job security for adjuncts. One priority, adjunct health insurance, was brought to crisis by the 1982 Triborough Amendment to the Taylor Law, which governs public-sector union negotiations in New York State. Even during the Great Recession, we have continued to benefit from the substantial gains of our most recent contract, and those of us eligible for annual salary increases continue to move up in steps each January. (That’s one of many reasons we fought so hard in the last round to maintain the salary steps.)

What does not occur until a new contract is negotiated, of course, is any across-the-board raise or other economic advance. Costs are rising, conditions at CUNY are becoming even more pressured as enrollment rises; there is urgency on our side. But if contract negotiations are about power, they are also about politics. The choices we make in our contract offer. The PSC is in one of the most complex bargainings positions of any union in the state, because our contract must be funded by both the City and the State. Thus it involves approval by the mayor as well as the governor. In addition, because of the expiration date of our last contract, the PSC (like the United Federation of Teachers and a few other unions) should receive an increase that was received by most public-sector unions in New York City for 2010.

But the bargaining team is not just waiting, or asking you to wait. While we continue informal talks with CUNY on contract issues, we are also part of the union’s larger campaign to contest the policies of “disaster capitalism.” The PSC is a leading force in the effort to prevent New York from giving a tax break to millionaires, a change that would transform the budget from deficit to surplus.

The best way to campaign for our contract is to campaign for a change in economic policy. I believe we may have a chance we have not had in a long time to change at least our corner of the political and economic landscape. While we stand ready to force movement at the bargaining table, we will also work toward a movement that would shift the ground on which the table stands.

Power, politics & timing

WHERE WE STAND

OPINION

Clarion | November 2011

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