



Erik McGregor

MOVEMENT FOR A FAIR CONTRACT

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

PSC members engage in civil disobedience outside a CUNY Board of Trustees hearing, demanding the administration settle a new contract with the union. **PAGE 3**

VICTORY **CUNY reverses** **bylaw changes**

The union fought the CUNY administration's egregious bylaw changes, and management has rolled back many of its worst proposals. **PAGE 2**

LEADERSHIP **New ED at the** **union**

An experienced trade unionist from the Service Employees International Union has hit the ground running as the new PSC executive director. **PAGE 5**

CAMPUS FREEDOM **Protecting** **rights at BMCC**

The administration at the Borough of Manhattan Community College tried to curtail speech in the classroom. The union fought back. **PAGE 5**



COMMEMORATION **Honoring** **Barbara Bowen**

The union held a ceremony to name its year-old Manhattan union hall after Barbara Bowen, who led the union as PSC president for two decades. **PAGE 10**

VICTORY

Union pressure wins on bylaws

By **JAMES DAVIS**
PSC President

I am pleased to report that the CUNY administration is addressing many of the objections that we as a union, scores of PSC members and governance leaders have raised over the past several months to proposed changes to the university's bylaws and Manual of General Policy. The August 30, 2024, version of the administration's proposed changes is substantially different from the version that was initially scheduled for the Board of Trustees' approval last semester. The broad groundswell of opposition from individual members, the union and governance bodies compelled the administration to change course.

I am also pleased to report that the administration agreed to meet with the PSC about our remaining concerns in relation to our collective bargaining agreement and the principles of shared governance.

This meeting should have preceded any proposed changes to the bylaws. Instead, it took multiple forms of insistence in labor-management meetings and contract negotiations, vivid PSC member testimony at public hearings of the Board of Trustees, a formal grievance and an improper practice charge with the New York State Public Employment Relations Board to bring us to this point. The law is clear that the administration must negotiate with the union over any bylaw changes that affect our terms and conditions of employment, as I recently reminded members of the CUNY Board of Trustees.

CLARIFYING

The stated intention of the bylaw changes has been to clarify the roles of the college provost and academic dean in relation to the roles of the college president and oth-

ers, including the department chair and personnel and budget committee. Had they been implemented as drafted, however, the proposed changes would have fundamentally altered these roles and the relative authority of the positions. Having reviewed the revised August 30 version, the PSC expressed concerns to the CUNY administration primarily in two areas: scheduling and the procedures for promotion and tenure. On scheduling, we insisted that any authority that academic deans and college provosts possess over the schedule of classes must respect the academic judgment of the department chair and personnel and budget committee. On the procedures for promotion and tenure, we maintained that the contract and related arbitration history establish the roles of college administrators, and that must be reflected in any changes to the University's governing documents.

We hope that PSC members will continue to express your views about the proposed bylaw changes. The administration will make additional modifications and submit the resulting draft for consideration by the Board of Trustees at its October meeting. Bylaw changes require two meetings of the Board, so the soonest the changes could be approved is December 16, 2024.

CRITICAL ISSUE

With all of the pressing issues on our minds – from devastating wars and high-stakes elections to our PSC contract negotiations closer to home – the University's governing documents may not seem like a pressing matter. But, in fact, the struggle that PSC members have waged, including many in elected governance roles, has been absolutely critical to maintaining the academic character of the University. Please stay vigilant and informed, and please continue to use your experience and raise your voice in this, our shared workplace.

Defending the rights of CUNY faculty

GC member completes NYSUT leadership program

By **CLARION STAFF**

Veronica "Vero" Ordaz is the center administrator at the Stone Center on Socio-Economic Inequality located at the Graduate Center. She recently took part in Pathways to Leadership, a BIPOC program with the PSC's state affiliate, New York State United Teachers.

"NYSUT Pathways to Leadership is a project to support NYSUT BIPOC members who strive to own their power and strengthen their skills to take on leadership roles within their union, workplace or community," NYSUT said on its website. "Throughout the year, participants will learn new skills, create community and experience mentorship to achieve their personal leadership goals."

DETAILS

It went on, "The project takes participants through a series of meetings, reflections, readings and discussions over the course of the year. We will adapt the content of the program based on the interests and needs this cohort identifies in our first meeting, so the work is tailored to individual participants. The program will culminate with the creation of a leadership project and mentorship opportunities for those who are interested."

Clarion editor Ari Paul spoke to Ordaz about the experience.

What prompted you to join NYSUT's Pathways to Leadership?

I learned about the program application as I was thinking about my place in union work. I am the daughter of working-class Central American immigrants, and I did not have a traditional, straightforward path in education nor in labor. I welcomed an opportunity to

Putting values into action

spend time learning, reflecting and building a community with BIPOC educators and leaders from across the state.

What were some of the most important things you learned from this program?

This program is a powerful testament to the idea that if you value something, you have to resource it. We are witnessing massive backlash, especially in education, to decades of racial and social justice work. After the devastating impacts of Covid magnified inequalities in society, followed by the largest U.S. protests in support of Black Lives, we had a moment of hope. Unfortunately, that groundswell also triggered a rejection of racial progress. NYSUT's Pathways to Leadership program helps counter that retrenchment. If we really want to create a more equal society, we must allocate resources to support the work necessary to make it happen.

What experiences or lessons do you hope to bring to your campus?

We need to continue to bring more people into the work, so that our future reflects the diversity of our members and our students. There

are many ways in which to lead and many different roles necessary to accomplish goals.

Why do you think programs like this are important for BIPOC union members?

Programs like this are one way to put our stated union values into practice and challenge ingrained in-

equities. They create space for BIPOC members to process our experiences, develop systems of support and strategies for accountability in our union work, our schools, community and across all the spaces we inhabit.



Veronica 'Vero' Ordaz says the union's future should reflect 'the diversity of our members and students.'

Clarion NOVEMBER 2024

Newspaper of the Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York. Vol. 54, No. 5. PSC/CUNY is affiliated with the American Association of University Professors, National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers (Local 2334), AFL-CIO, the New York City Central Labor Council and New York State United Teachers. Published by PSC/CUNY, 25 Broadway, 15th Floor, New York, NY 10004. Telephone: (212) 354-1252. Website: www.psc-CUNY.org. Email: apaul@psccmail.org. All opinions expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the PSC.

PSC OFFICERS: James Davis, President; Jennifer Gaboury, First Vice President; Andrea Vásquez, Secretary; Felicia Wharton, Treasurer; Luke Elliott-Negri, Rulisa Galloway-Perry, Justyna Jagielnicka, David Gerwin, Heather James, University-Wide Officers; Penny Lewis, Vice President Senior Colleges; Michael Batson, Susan Kang, Stuart Davis, Senior College Officers; Kathleen Offenholley, Vice President Community Colleges; Sharon Persinger, Youngmin Seo, Emily Schnee, Community College Officers; Larry Bosket, Vice President Cross Campus Units; Zee Dempster, Lucy McIntyre, Zeno Wood, Cross Campus Officers; Marva Lilly, Nancy Romer, Retiree Officers; Lynne Turner, Vice President Part-Time Personnel; Remysell Salas, Claudia Shacter-Dechabert, Pamela Stemberg, Part-Time Officers; Peter I. Hoberman, Vice President Emeritus, Cross Campus Units.

STAFF: Malini Cadambi-Daniel, Executive Director; Anais Surkin, Associate Executive Director; Denise Poché-Jetter, Director, Human Resources and Operations; Dan Hunt, Director, Financial Services; Faye Moore, Director, Contract Administration; Nick Devyatkin, Director, Legal Affairs; Rico Doan, Director, Organizing; Francis Clark, Director, Communications; Bettina Damiani, Director, Policy and Research; Denyse Procope-Gregoire, Coordinator, Membership Records.

Editor: Ari Paul / Designer: Margarita Aguilar / Copy Editors: Teri Duerr, Matthew Schlecht
© 2024 Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

Members arrested in contract protest

By CLARION STAFF

More than two dozen PSC members were arrested on October 21 in an act of civil disobedience outside a CUNY Board of Trustees hearing to protest the CUNY administration's resistance to settling a new PSC-CUNY contract.

The action began inside the BOT hearing taking place at John Jay College and was the result of growing frustration among CUNY faculty and staff that the University administration has been dragging its feet in negotiations. The action took place on the 606th day the union had been without a contract, PSC First Vice President Jen Gaboury said.

"CUNY offered unacceptable raises seven months ago, a year after their top executives received 27% and 30% bumps in pay," said PSC President James Davis, who led a member walkout of the hearing and was arrested at the civil disobedience action. "They haven't shown faculty, staff and students the respect of a fair economic offer and haven't put another dollar on the bargaining table since March. We're demanding real raises, job security and urgency. There can be no business as usual at CUNY until we get a fair offer."

PACK THE HALL

Nearly 250 PSC members and student supporters packed the John Jay auditorium for the hearing. After about 30 minutes of testimony (including fiery statements about mold in campus libraries), much of it from PSC faculty and staff, Davis interrupted the hearing and led a walkout, as the room and hallways filled with chants demanding a contract.

PSC members marched to the college's 10th Avenue entrance for a raucous rally on the streets. After several minutes, PSC members – including Davis, Secretary Andrea Vásquez and former President Barbara Bowen – blocked the entrance, insisting on blocking the pathway until the administration agreed to a contract that met faculty, staff and student needs. One by one, NYPD officers arrested PSC members, with dozens of students and passersby witnessing the demonstration.

"Standing up for ourselves by demanding a fair contract is also standing up for our students and generations of CUNY students to come," said Youngmin Seo, a teaching adjunct at LaGuardia Community College who was among the arrestees. "Our teaching and working conditions are our students' learning conditions. We can't focus fully on teaching and mentorship if we're constantly stressed about how to afford to live."

The PSC has been without a contract since February of 2023. CUNY was slow to begin bargaining – the administration finally agreed to sit down with the union after months of protests.

The bargaining process, which has included dozens of bargaining sessions attended by rank-and-file PSC observers, has been sluggish, to be

Rage at CUNY's resistance to a fair pact



PSC President James Davis leads a walkout at the October 21 Board of Trustees hearing.

sure, in large part due to management's hostility toward the union's initial economic offer. In that time, the union has held several demonstrations demanding a new contract. With a new contract still unsettled, the union has escalated with this civil disobedience event, and members are preparing for further escalations.

The union's bargaining committee has been engaged in many negotiation sessions with management since the start of the Fall semester. While some progress has been made at the table, CUNY still resists on many key items. "We are at a really critical juncture of the contract campaign," Davis told members during a mass meeting in September. "Every bit of progress we have made to date has been because of the active engagement of PSC members."

PROGRESS MADE

Davis explained that management has made progress toward agreements with the union on several key issues including retroactive raises, extension of the remote work agreement, expansion of paid parental leave, adjunct equity for jumbo courses and increased contributions to the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund. Management has also shown a willingness to negotiate on college laboratory technician promotions, supplemental reassigned time, job security for CLIP and CUNY Start workers, multiyear appointments for adjunct instructors, lecturer promotions and including SEEK and College Discovery employees in the bargaining unit, Davis said.

But the administration has resisted finding agreements with the PSC when it comes to the union's educational technology demands and common good demands, Davis said. The main sticking point, of course, is that the administration has also not offered a real economic counteroffer, Davis explained – the union is fighting for real raises to adequately

reflect the work PSC members do every day. "They've resisted our environmental proposals and proposals around class size," he said.

TIMELINE

- November 1, 2022: Last contractual raise for PSC members.
- November 2022: [Top CUNY administrators receive 27% and 30% raises \(\\$90,000\)](#).
- February 28, 2023: PSC-CUNY contract expired.
- June 27, 2023: Bargaining begins after management's four-month delay.
- March 2024: CUNY management made their one and only economic offer.
- There have been 34 bargaining sessions since negotiations began.
- CUNY's offer of 3% in 2023, 3% in 2024, 3.125% in 2025 and 3.125% in 2026 fails to keep pace with the rate of inflation and the [rise in housing costs in NYC](#). It is below the [national average rate of increase for college faculty](#).
- Salaries for CUNY professors lag thousands of dollars behind those of professors at comparable insti-

tutions including Pace University, Fordham, University of Connecticut, Rutgers University, and Stony Brook University.

● Most CUNY adjuncts earn \$5,500 per course. In comparison, NYU and Columbia/Barnard adjuncts make \$10,000 or more per course, and



Members blocking the John Jay College entrance.



Arrested members were held for several hours.

Contract Pickets @CUNY Central (205 E. 42nd St)

Oct 30: Wed. end of workday - Manhattan campuses

Nov 7: Thurs. end of workday - Brooklyn campuses

Nov 12: Tues. end of workday - Queens campuses

Nov 14: Thurs. end of workday - Bronx and Staten Island campuses

Date for HEOs and CLTs: TBD

New School, Rutgers and Fordham adjuncts all make between \$8,000 and \$10,000 per course through recently settled contracts.

● PSC has proposed raises totaling 18% over 4 years, while CUNY's offer adds up to only 12.25% over 4.5 years. The union also wants pay parity and job security for adjunct faculty, better benefits, remote and flexible work options for staff, and strong workplace safety and health provisions, among other key items.

● CUNY management is focused on reducing operating costs at the expense of workers and students, and maximizing managerial authority and "flexibility."

Erik McGregor

Erik McGregor

Erik McGregor

'Decarb CUNY' events around the city

By ARI PAUL

New York State can move toward a green energy future with the help of CUNY faculty, staff and students. That was the theme of nearly a dozen "Decarbonize CUNY" events hosted at different campuses this past September.

Activists from the union's environmental justice committee joined with activists from other community groups to push for a green CUNY – and to replace polluting power generators with green energy.

CLIMATE LAW

The story starts in 2023, when the state enacted the Build Public Renewables Act – the "biggest climate law in the nation," said Sam Balzac of the Democratic Socialists of America and the group Public Power at one of many Decarbonize CUNY events around the city this fall. It mandates the state to move toward 70 percent renewable energy use by 2030, reduce utility bills and create new green jobs.

As *The Guardian* explained last year, "The Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA) will ensure that all state-owned properties that ordinarily receive power from the New York Power Authority (NYPA) are run on renewable energy by 2030. It will also require municipally owned properties – including many hospitals and schools, as well as public housing and public transit – to switch to renewable energy by 2035."

But the state, under Governor Kathy Hochul, has fallen behind on these goals. It will take sustained public pressure on the governor in order to meet these climate goals, activists said.

The movement the PSC is helping to build at these Decarbonize CUNY events is one that will put the state's power generation not only under public control, but also back on the path to a green future.

STATEWIDE ACTION

The campaign to move away from fossil fuels and toward renewable energy is statewide. And in our city, each campus is acutely impacted by fossil fuels in unique ways. One example of this is LaGuardia Community College (LGCC) in Long Island City, Queens.

At the Decarbonize CUNY event at LGCC and the Graduate Center, Ashley Dawson, a distinguished professor of English at the College of Staten Island and the Graduate Center, showed a short film he directed about the impact on the neighborhood of the nearby Ravenswood peaking power plant, or "peaker." Plants like Ravenswood are only in use for about 100 hours each year, but they are highly polluting, and often located near schools, parks and housing. "Think about the breath you're taking right now," he said.

To be more specific, a 2022 report by the Clean Energy Group said,

Union leads on climate action



Nancy Romer of the union's executive council.

"Peakers are some of the dirtiest, least efficient and most expensive energy sources, and most of them are located in low-income communities, environmental justice communities and communities of color. Long-term exposure to peaker emissions, such as sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and fine particulate matter (PM 2.5), can cause asthma, Alzheimer's, heart disease, chronic kidney disease, diminished fertility, miscarriages and other adverse health conditions."

Organizing for climate justice

That is frightening stuff, and it is impacting Queens residents and workers right now, including LGCC faculty, staff and students, Dawson said.

Julie Won, a City Council member whose western Queens district includes LGCC, referred to the section of the borough by the East River as "Asthma Alley," and said that this movement was about fixing that. "I don't want to see my children grow up with asthma," she said.

CUNY CAN LEAD

During another presentation about energy-saving heating methods, Dawson also said that CUNY could be a leader in how public institutions rethink their infrastructure to be greener. "We are organizing to retrofit CUNY buildings," he said. "We could be a laboratory to make these buildings as efficient as possible."

Won also reiterated that colleges like LGCC could play a huge role in training students for careers in greener energy, ensuring that the green energy economy is also a job

creator. "We are talking with [LGCC] President [Kenneth] Adams about job training," she said.

CONTRACT TIES

Justin Yulo, the NYPIRG project coordinator for City College, said, "From these Decarbonize CUNY town halls, CUNY faculty, staff and students should absolutely organize and educate their campuses on these improvements to facilities and administration. All while also advocating outside of campus to their elected officials to push for

climate legislation that will improve our environment, make our buildings energy efficient and save costs. These dual actions of a united CUNY can lead to decarbonizing our schools and taking action for our planet."

Nancy Romer, who represents retirees on the PSC executive council and is one of the key organizers of the Decarb events, noted that the PSC's involvement in this campaign is directly related to the contract fight with CUNY, as the union is pushing for CUNY to agree to reduce



Ashley Dawson

its carbon footprint and eliminate single-use plastics.

"As part of the PSC's 'Support for the Common Good' in our bargaining, we are demanding that CUNY management be transparent in their plans to achieve net-zero carbon emissions and to report their progress in achieving those goals during campus- and CUNY-wide labor-management meetings," she said. "We are also connecting our health and safety demands to our environmental demands – again, to be completely transparent in regular reporting of the air quality, water safety and availability, and facilities maintenance on each campus. Further, in view of the availability of alternatives to pollution-causing, fossil-fuel-based plastics, we are demanding that CUNY provide food service and vending machine offerings that are free of single-use plastics in keeping with New York State law."

NEED ACTION

Romer continued, "We cannot stand by allowing our University, our workplace, to harm us, our students and our neighboring communities, as well as the planet writ large. Our many campus-based Decarbonize CUNY town hall events are underscoring the importance of environmental justice and health and safety – for all of us to be front and center in our efforts as union members. We are educating ourselves and our students so that we can protect ourselves and advocate for the most resilient and healthiest CUNY possible, and do our share to slow down the potentially ravaging effects of runaway climate change."



The Ravenswood "peaker" plant in Queens.

Bringing union experience to the PSC

By CLARION STAFF

Malini Cadambi-Daniel, a veteran union organizer with decades of experience with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), came aboard as the PSC's new executive director in August. After a long national search, the union's leadership was confident that her experience, leadership and commitment to trade unionism would be an enormous asset to the PSC.

She recently spoke to *Clarion* editor Ari Paul.

You have a lot of experience in the labor movement. What motivated you to join the struggle for workers' rights?

When my family first came to the U.S. in 1969, my parents took whatever jobs they could find, as immigrants do. Because of who they were and their accents, good jobs were inconsistent and hard to come by despite the fact that my father had been a lawyer in India. In the 1980s, we moved from Chicago to Los Angeles and they both found public sector jobs from which they retired. These jobs were good union jobs with health care and pensions – they made all the difference for our family.

I lived in Oakland, Calif., and taught public school briefly. I was a member of the Oakland Education Association and we went on strike in 1996 for a month with the number one issue being class sizes. It was a

New executive director joins



Malini Cadambi-Daniel marches with PSC members outside CUNY headquarters.

hard month, and I witnessed awful moments of scabbing and infighting and amazing moments of solidarity and conviction. At some point, I de-

cid classroom teaching was not my calling, but union work was.

These two disparate events crystallized for me how much work

impacts our lives: When we aren't valued at work, when we have no control at work, when we cannot sustain ourselves because of work, it impacts everything in our lives. Fighting for economic justice is critical to having a just world.

You worked primarily at the SEIU, nationally and locally. What were some inspiring things you saw and did there?

So many inspiring things. I received a call from Hannah, a faculty member at a New York City university who got my contact from their cousin, who taught at a Boston university where we helped win the union. Hannah was whispering when she spoke with me, clearly upset and very nervous about even beginning the union conversation, but she had had enough from her university's administration. The campaign was long and brutal but Hannah met every challenge. I watched this faculty member grow exponentially through the campaign, a phenomenal leader who was shouting with joy at winning the union election. It is always amazing to see that growth during a campaign. Learning to organize is something you can never unlearn, no matter the outcome of the election or what the boss does.

At 1199, there are so many BIPOC and immigrant women who do some of the hardest, lowest paid work like homecare and Licensed Practical Nurse work. The union winning

\$1, \$2, \$3 more an hour for them is the difference between making rent and being on the street. The training funds moved members from LPN to RN – these members were once the lowest paid in their hospitals but were running departments because of the programs.

Unions are transformative.

What attracts you to working with CUNY's faculty and staff?

My partner is CUNY faculty, so it's very personal to me. I have watched the PSC from a close distance and love that it is a fighting union! I love that the PSC represents the people who help make CUNY a jewel of higher education, not just in NYC but nationally.

What is a goal you have for yourself and for the PSC?

Sustainability! I want the PSC to be at its strongest in member engagement, in its finances and in its contract, because the fights don't get any easier. Our members work hard, care about the campus community and live in one of the most expensive cities in the world. For CUNY to remain the fabulous institution it is for its students, the tens of thousands of faculty, staff, graduate and service workers need great contracts. I also believe in making my work and activism personally sustainable. We are in it for the long haul, folks. Take care of your health and take care of each other.

CAMPUS FREEDOM

PSC defends NYPIRG and student

By KATHLEEN OFFENHOLLEY

At the end of August, I received my usual email from one of our Borough of Manhattan Community College New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) activists to arrange a time to talk to my class about registering to vote. I immediately said yes and set up a time. NYPIRG is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and public education organization. In addition to registering people to vote, it runs public education campaigns about consumer and environmental issues (the group also has a long history of advocating for CUNY). To my great concern, the email that followed from the BMCC team asked me whether I had any idea why some faculty were saying that NYPIRG was banned from being in BMCC classrooms.

TYPICAL BMCC

After some digging, I found that, in typical BMCC fashion, the provost had informed the department chairs of this new directive, and the chairs were expected to communicate it – right as the semester started – to the faculty in their departments. I let the chair of the PSC's Academic Freedom Committee know, and two committees of the campus senate took up the issue in their first meetings. I also informed PSC First Vice President Jen Gaboury and



Kathleen Offenholley of Borough of Manhattan Community College.

Nicholas A. Devyatkin, the union's director of legal affairs.

The Academic Freedom Committee came up with a strongly worded resolution on academic freedom, and at the same time, the PSC drafted a letter as well, signed by President James Davis, which read in part, "Academic freedom is essential to the intellectual integrity and rigor of an academic in-

stitution. As Arbitrator Robert L. Stutz held in a previous case, 'It is difficult to conceive of a more fundamental condition of employment at any academic institution than academic freedom and the responsibilities attached to its exercise.'

"In accordance with BMCC's own Governance Plan and the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) definition

of academic freedom, faculty are entitled 'to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject' and this right includes inviting guest speakers. Your denial of faculty members' invitations to NYPIRG representatives in class sessions is excessively intimidating and threatening in tone and substance. The intent of the denial appears to prevent any invited guest speakers on campus based on subject matter that you deem 'political' or whose affiliation is part of an 'external group,' which is an entirely subjective determination, a content-based restriction on speech and blatant violation of academic freedom."

WINNING

The letter was sent just before the College Council and Academic Senate were set to meet. During the College Council, which at BMCC is held the hour before the Senate meeting, Hollis Glazer, the chair of BMCC's Academic Freedom Committee, raised her hand to share the resolution that she would be bringing, and I raised my hand to read the letter from President Davis. We were both told by the BMCC president that we were out of order because we were interrupting the College Council meeting. Just then, both our phones lit up with the message that BMCC's acting assistant vice president for legal affairs and labor relations had rescinded her letter backing the ban.

We had won!

This is what it looks like when we all work together – faculty governance and the union, in support of our academic freedom and our students' rights.

Winning political freedom at BMCC

Kathleen Offenholley is the chair of the PSC's BMCC chapter.

CONTRACT

The struggle ahead of us

By JAMES DAVIS
PSC President

This article goes to press at a tense time in the PSC-CUNY contract negotiations. It is a moment when many union members are exasperated by management's stalling and are planning the next phase of the contract struggle. Bolstered by the support of PSC members, the union's bargaining team is seizing this moment to press for a strong settlement this semester.

CUNY management presented their initial economic offer more than a year after the last contract expired in February 2023 and, as of this writing, has not put another dollar on the table since then. There are several open and contested issues to resolve in order to reach a settlement, but the economic framework is critical.

FRAMEWORK

That framework affects not only across-the-board raises, but also any retroactive salary payment, ratification bonus, additions to the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund, and resources available for equity raises to the lowest-paid job titles and for the top step of the salary schedules of full-time faculty and staff. The parties have held 34 bargaining sessions, including 14 sessions since the Spring 2024 semester ended, working through the summer. But management's intransigence on the economic offer continues to hold us back from reaching a fair agreement.

The bargaining team decided not to accept management's initial offer of a 4.5-year contract with across-the-board raises of 3%

in each of the first two years and 3.125% in the third and fourth years. That decision gave us leverage to press on other fronts, and we have made significant progress on key issues that our members told us are important, including professional advancement opportunities, job security, adjunct equity, educational technology provisions, remote work and flexible scheduling. But the path to a strong settlement still rests on the value of our economic framework.

WHY WE FIGHT

That is why hundreds of PSC members demonstrated at John Jay College on October 21, to tell the CUNY Trustees and administrators inside that they are tired of waiting for a fair agreement. That is why we disrupted their hearing and why 30 of these members, representing 13 different CUNY colleges and many job titles, blockaded the door of the building in which the Trustees were meeting. We demanded, at the risk of our arrest, that management make us a new, stronger economic offer. Because management still refused to do so – nearly 20 months into these negotiations – we spent that Monday evening in jail. But the support for the PSC's position is much deeper than those who risked arrest, deeper even than those assembled on October 21. It extends to the PSC members who have participated by the hundreds in observing our bargaining sessions or who taught a class so that their colleague could participate in a union action. It extends to our allies in the labor movement and in the legislature. And it extends to our students, alumni and members of communities we serve as CUNY educators.



PSC President James Davis getting arrested at John Jay College.

What comes next? If CUNY management puts a new economic proposal on the table, the PSC bargaining team will assess whether it recognizes the work of our members and determine our next steps. If they persist in withholding a new economic proposal, the PSC will further es-

calate our campaign. That discussion is already taking place among the union's chapter chairs and delegates. Despite management's apparent expectation that a prolonged negotiation would wear the PSC out, it has only strengthened our resolve for the struggle ahead.

Winning a good PSC contract

PSC retirees keep pressure on Adams

By ARI PAUL

As Mayor Eric Adams was still feeling the shock of a federal indictment and wave of resignations in his inner circle, New York City municipal retirees took advantage of the moment and demanded that he drop his court appeals defending the privatization of retiree health benefits.

Several courts have now ruled against a plan by the city and Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) to move city retirees away from a traditional Medicare plan and into a privately administered Medicare Advantage plan that could force retirees into higher costs and reduced care. The PSC is a member of the MLC, and had voted with a small minority of affiliated unions against the proposed Medicare Advantage contract, administered by Aetna. PSC leadership had argued that the details of the plan were far too opaque to win approval and

Stopping the privatized plan

Movement to stop Medicare Advantage

there were other ways for the city to contain health-care spending.

"No matter how many times retirees win in court, this mayor consistently appeals every court case that he's lost," said Marianne Pizzitola, president of the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees, during a rally with retirees in City Hall Park on September 30.

Clarion reported in August that an appeals court had upheld a lower court decision blocking the implementation of the plan, a huge victory for the PSC and city retirees. At the same time, the United Federation of Teachers, one of the most important unions affiliated with the MLC, withdrew its support for the privately administered plan.

Now the case is expected to go before the state's highest court, the Court of Appeals. There is still

a chance that the high court could rule in favor of the Adams administration. That is why union activists are demanding that City Hall accept that the plan is widely unpopular, and that it drop its legal pursuit of the plan's implementation.

PROTECT RETIREES

In addition to urging the mayor to drop the legal challenge, Pizzitola told *The Chief* that Adams should take other steps to protect retirees. "Adams should also publicly state his support for a City Council resolution that would guarantee the retirees' current benefits, as well as for state legislation, [introduced in January](#), that would prohibit public-sector employers from 'diminishing health insurance benefits provided to retirees and their dependents,'" the paper said. "The state bill would also preserve the public entities' contributions toward the benefits."

Activists were doubtful that the mayor's legal troubles would encourage him to pick his battles and drop the pursuit of a privately managed

plan, which would save the city money on the back of city retirees. They did, however, say it was important to rally for the issue. As Stu Eber, president of the Council of Municipal Retiree Organizations, said, rallies like this "keep up the fighting spirit."



Retirees marching near City Hall.

PSC welcomes new union members

By ARI PAUL

More than two dozen people who have gained CUNY employment in the last year gathered at the union's lower Manhattan headquarters on September 25 for a new member orientation, displaying growing energy in the PSC.

President James Davis told the members, who came from all around the city and represented both faculty and staff, that the PSC is a member-driven union, rather than a service-oriented one. By that he meant that while the union provides various services with its "extraordinary staff," the "power of the union is in our membership," he said.

"That's what distinguishes the PSC."

MEMBER TO PRESIDENT

Davis used his own story as an example. He explained that he arrived as a faculty member at Brooklyn College as a teacher, quickly becoming an active union member. But seeing the PSC organizing and making gains inspired him.

"I saw a union that knew how to build power and to win," he said, noting that this led him to become involved in the chapter, later becoming chapter chair, then a PSC executive council member and eventually the president. "That's transformational."

Davis advised these new union members that they should find power in becoming active in the union and on their campus. "Find a way to remain active in the union, because that is what allows us to

CUNY workers becoming activists



New members play a game of PSC Bingo.

be the powerful union that we have become," Davis said.

PSC officials and members explained to the group how the PSC

offers a "union advantage" over non-union workplaces. Union members, they said, enjoyed higher wages, better benefits and the ability to speak

up about problems on the job without fear of retaliation.

For example, union activists were pivotal in the first months

of the COVID pandemic in fighting against campus administrations that either took little action to protect workers or wrongfully called nonessential workers onto campus.

UNION POLITICS

The event was part of PSC's Union Week.

Julian Stark, an associate professor of biological science and geology at Queensborough Community College, and PSC First Vice President Jen Gaboury spoke about the need to support the union's political activity by contributing to VOTE-COPE, the union's political action committee. Union dues cannot be used for political activity, they explained, and thus it was important for as many members as possible to volunteer to contribute to VOTE-COPE, in order to build the union's power in city and state politics.

Major Tier 6 pension win

By CLARION STAFF

Last spring, the Fix Tier Six campaign supported by PSC members through our statewide affiliate, NYSUT, convinced the governor and state legislature to change the way the final average salary (FAS) is calculated for state pensions. This applies to full-time and adjunct employees enrolled in the TRS defined benefit

pension plan who were hired on or after April 1, 2012 (Tier VI). Instead of using the average of the highest five consecutive years to determine the FAS, the highest three consecutive years are used.

A major pension victory

This victory is the biggest win for pension reform in 20 years and provides a substantial benefit to our Tier VI members in TRS.

The new calculation means Tier VI members retiring after April 20, 2024, will receive a bigger pension check, every month, for life. Individual situations will vary, but this works out to around \$100,000 more in lifetime retirement earnings. It also gives Tier VI members parity with Tier IV members.

FIX DISPARITIES

The Fix Tier Six campaign aims to change the disparity between Tier VI and Tier IV members by improving Tier VI benefits. It is led by NYSUT and supported by the PSC and more than 1,200 local unions. In 2022, the

campaign led to pension vesting dropping from 10 to five years, bringing thousands more into the pension system.

"It is fantastic that their campaign was able to reduce the calculation for the FAS from the highest five consecutive years to three," said Diana Menna, the vice chair of the PSC retirees' chapter. "I'm not sure exactly how they arrived at the estimate of around \$100,000 more in lifetime retirement earning, but it certainly will be beneficial. Also, being vested after five years instead of 10 is helpful to many, particularly those who leave employment early."

CONTRIBUTE to COPE!

The union's political organizing has successfully defeated proposed tuition hikes and crippling budget cuts. It has saved vital programs throughout CUNY. And the union's political work has won funding for CUNY at the state and city levels. Members can strengthen the union's political program by contributing to COPE.

MAKE YOUR CONTRIBUTION TODAY!

Sign up online at: <https://psc-cuny.org/issues/issues-cope/>.

POINT, COUNTERPOINT

Yes to the academic boycott

By ANTHONY ALESSANDRINI

As an advocate for academic freedom, I've often had to explain my support for the [Palestinian Campaign for an Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel](#) (PACBI), issued in 2004 by Palestinian civil society organizations, including the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees.

One of the most common misunderstandings of the boycott call is that it targets individual Israeli academics. It doesn't: It calls for an *institutional, not an individual, boycott*. The call is for a boycott of Israeli academic and cultural *institutions*. This is why many defenders of academic freedom support PACBI. As Joan Scott, one of the foremost [authorities](#) on academic freedom, [expresses it](#): "It is because we believe so strongly in principles of academic freedom that a strategic boycott of the state that so abuses it makes sense right now."

The reasons for the boycott have become clearer every year for the past 20 years, but especially over the past year. In addition to the unspeakable human cost of Israel's genocidal attack on Gaza, Israel has been carrying out a policy of [scholasticide](#), the systematic obliteration of education through the arrest or killing of educators and the destruction of educational infrastructure. [Since October 2024](#), every university in Gaza has been destroyed, along with 87% of all schools. Israel has killed [at least 11,000 students](#) and 529 educators in Gaza and the West Bank in the past year.

SCHOOLS IN GAZA

Over half a million students in Gaza are being deprived of their right to education. Poets, scientists, scholars, psychologists, admissions officers, lab technicians, academic support staff – the same people who make up the PSC membership – have been [systematically murdered](#). As the Middle Eastern Studies Association put it in [a statement](#) condemning this cultural genocide, "The very notion of a Palestinian people is itself under attack through Israel's policy of destroying Gaza's archaeological, religious and cultural heritage."

This campaign of scholasticide is not new, nor is it confined to Gaza. The repression of Palestinian education has been [ongoing for decades](#). Curricular materials are subjected to Israeli censors, and Palestinian students, faculty and academic institutions have been [under continual attack](#). Universities have faced arbitrary closures, raids and checkpoints at the hands of the occupation. From 1988 to 1992, all universities were closed by the Israeli military, and since the 2000s, Palestinian academic institutions have been frequent [military targets](#). [Between 2000 and 2008](#), eight universities and over 300 schools were shelled, shot at or raided by the Israeli Army in the West Bank; military and settler attacks, and arbitrary arrests at West Bank schools and universities, [have dramatically increased this year](#).

Israeli policies have also cut off Palestinian teachers and students from academic institutions outside Palestine for more than 50 years. [Travel restrictions](#) have prevented them from attending academic conferences or accepting visiting positions, and the Israeli military has the final say over which



A rally for divestment at John Jay College in 2021.

internationals can be admitted to teach or study at Palestinian universities.

In short, Palestinian academic freedom today is nonexistent. Put differently: While the call to boycott Israeli academic institutions *does not target individual Israeli academics*, Israeli apartheid policies *have always targeted individual Palestinian academics*.

Scholar Maya Wind [describes](#) how even before 1948, today's Israeli universities directly contributed to the violent dispossession of Palestinian communities, manufacturing weapons and developing expertise used to drive Palestinians from their lands. After 1967, Israeli universities created "facts on the ground" by contributing to the growth of settlements and, in Wind's words, "served as pillars of regional demographic engineering and Palestinian dispossession."

Today, [these universities closely collaborate](#) with Israeli weapons manufacturers to develop technology for the Israeli military and security state. To give only a few examples: Bar Ilan University [works closely](#) with Israel's security services, condemned by the [United Nations Committee against Torture](#) for their use of illegal interrogation tactics; Ben Gurion University hosts the Homeland Security Institute, whose [partnerships](#) include Israeli weapons companies and the Israeli Ministry of Defense; Technion has [numerous](#) joint academic programs with the [Israeli military](#), and developed technology for the Caterpillar D9 armored bulldozer used to demolish Palestinian homes ([one](#) killed Rachel Corrie in Gaza in 2003); Tel Aviv University runs [joint centers](#) with the Israeli military and arms industry; the University of Haifa hosts the Israeli [Military Academic Complex](#) that trains senior military staff; and [Ariel University](#) is located in an illegal settlement in the occupied West Bank.

SINGLED OUT?

Still some ask: Why single out Israel? PACBI is a specific call for a specific action in support of our Palestinian colleagues, and it calls for us, as academic workers, to respond with solidarity. When the United Farm Workers called for a boycott of grapes in 1965, it

would not have been an act of solidarity to have immediately responded, "What about apples?" Similarly, to point to other cases simply as a way to argue against PACBI is to refuse to hear the call for solidarity from our Palestinian colleagues.

AAUP STATEMENT

The American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) recent ["Statement on Academic Boycotts,"](#) while it does not focus on PACBI per se, provides a strong rationale for the idea of a boycott in defense of academic freedom.

Stating clearly that boycotts "can be considered legitimate tactical responses to conditions that are fundamentally incompatible with the mission of higher education," the AAUP confirms there are instances in which upholding academic freedom may mean *withholding* our intellectual labor.

Guided by the same principles, some of the largest, most influential and most established academic and professional organizations have [endorsed](#) the [boycott](#), including the American Anthropological Association, the American Studies Association, the Middle East Studies Association, the American Comparative Literature Association and the National Women's Studies Association, among many others.

The list continues to grow. Over the past few months, in response to the Israeli genocide in Gaza, over a dozen colleges and universities throughout North America have begun the process of [disclosing connections and divesting](#) from Israeli apartheid.

There are [clear guidelines for the boycott](#), as well as a [specific statement](#) explaining PACBI as a boycott of *institutions, not individuals*. The basics of the call are simple:

1. Refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with Israeli institutions.

2. Advocate a comprehensive boycott of Israeli institutions at the national and international levels, including suspension of all forms of funding and subsidies to these institutions.

3. Promote divestment and disinvestment from Israel by international academic institutions.

4. Work toward the condemnation of Israeli policies by pressing for resolutions to be adopted by academic, professional and cultural associations and organizations.

5. Support Palestinian academic and cultural institutions directly without requiring them to partner with Israeli counterparts as an explicit or implicit condition for such support.

THE PSC VIEW

What would this look like specifically for PSC members? One immediate effect of endorsing PACBI would be to declare that PSC members do not support CUNY management's ongoing efforts to uphold and normalize Israel's apartheid policies. In May of 2022, Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez led a delegation of CUNY administrators on a ["bridge-building" junket to Israel](#), but did not meet with a single member of any Palestinian university. A statement from Palestinian academic workers and unions [condemned](#) "CUNY management's whitewashing of Israel's regime of military occupation, settler colonialism and apartheid,

and its relentless attack on Palestinian higher education."

An endorsement of the academic boycott does *not* apply to individual Israeli scholars engaged in ordinary forms of academic exchange, including conference presentations, public lectures at campuses or collaboration on research and publication (except collaborating on grants or anything that would materially benefit Israeli *institutions*). It is a pledge to not engage with institutions that support and enable apartheid, occupation and the ongoing genocide, but it would not *compel* PSC members to do so. Like a picket line, it is a

call for solidarity.

It is also a pledge to create forms of cooperation and collaboration with Palestinian academic institutions. Endorsing the boycott means pledging to act in solidarity with our Palestinian colleagues. [The Black feminist tradition](#) has long espoused the notion that no one is free until everyone is free. The same goes for academic freedom: [Until everyone has it, no one has it](#). Endorsing an academic boycott is one small way that PSC members, together with other U.S.-based academic workers, can contribute to a movement for true academic freedom, in Palestine and everywhere.

Anthony Alessandrini is a professor of English at Kingsborough Community College and the chair of the union's Academic Freedom Committee.

Academia can take action

POINT, COUNTERPOINT

Opposing an academic boycott

By IRWIN YELLOWITZ

Should there be an academic boycott of Israel? No.

Such a boycott is wrong both in principle and for reasons specific to the Israeli situation.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has been an affiliate of the PSC since 1981. For over a century, it has defended academic freedom and free speech in an academic setting. The AAUP had opposed academic boycotts, but recently revised that policy to allow such boycotts – but with very significant restrictions. The boycott “should target only institutions of higher education that themselves violate academic freedom or the fundamental rights upon which academic freedom depends.”

The AAUP does not support academic boycotts of countries or of individual faculty engaged in academic activities.

UNWISE

I believe this revised statement is unwise despite its careful wording. The AAUP has existed because of its defense of academic freedom and free speech on campus, and an academic boycott ends discussion. The AAUP should seek to encourage the ex-

change of opinions on any subject, not close that interaction. This certainly applies to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We need free speech, not boycotts.

Even under the new AAUP statement, an academic boycott of Israel is illegitimate. The AAUP statement allows academic boycotts of institutions – not countries, and certainly not faculty – and only if those institutions have violated “academic freedom or the fundamental rights upon which academic freedom depends.” There is no Israeli university that meets that criterion. Thus, calls for an academic boycott of Israel go beyond AAUP standards, be they new or old. They become a tactic within the larger campaign for BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions), which has operated on U.S. campuses for over a decade with limited success. An academic boycott of Israel has no greater claim to success than the BDS movement in general.

If we turn from general principles to the specifics of the Israeli situation, we find once again that an academic boycott is a mistaken policy.

The AAUP statement indicates that an academic boycott should not affect faculty who

are engaged in academic activities. However, were there to be an academic boycott of an Israeli university, it would soon impact faculty. Thus, we have a distinction without a difference.

WRONG TARGET

The AAUP does try to make its revised statement on academic boycotts a limited one. Some supporters of an academic boycott of Israel make no such effort. Any call for an academic boycott that targets the country at large, its universities as a group or the faculty within those institutions not only violates the AAUP statement, but good sense.

Faculty in Israel are like faculty in the United States. They have a variety of views on every subject, and they are not shy about expressing these views. That is the basic right of free speech in a democracy, and it should be encouraged. If any members of the academic community in the U.S. oppose Israeli government policy, they can speak out, make their arguments, work to change minds and opinions – but not close the discussion by a boycott. Free speech you do not like should be met by free speech you do like.

In addition, an academic boycott of Israel aims at the wrong target. Assuming the boycotters oppose specific policies of the Israeli government, they will find that many Israeli faculty agree with them. Thus, the boycott negatively impacts those with whom the boycotters may agree, while having little effect on those with whom they disagree.

Opponents of current Israeli policies have many means to oppose those actions. Supporters of the current Israeli government’s policies should defend those activities. Both opponents and supporters should make their case, so long as there is no violence against persons or property. In addition, neither party should demonize the other. This debate will reach beyond those most committed, to the much larger public, who are not so involved.

An academic boycott disturbs this interplay of argument by labeling some views as illicit. It would reshape the open debate that should go on about Israeli policy. It is destructive of free speech, and unfairly targets Israeli faculty for views many of them oppose. It is the wrong policy, and should be opposed.

Irwin Yellowitz is a professor emeritus of history at City College. He is also the New York chair of the academic freedom committee at the American Association of University Professors.

Don't close the discussion

CONTRACT

The power of member observers

By ANDREA VÁSQUEZ

PSC Secretary

In the latest round of contract negotiations, the PSC bargaining team chose to invite all members to observe all bargaining sessions. With the goal of winning the strongest possible contract, we believed that when members showed up, it would – in addition to other tactics we employ – show CUNY that we are a unified and determined body. The PSC has had member presenters and observers in past rounds of bargaining. But more recently, across the country, we’ve seen increased openness with good results. In addition to being a sign of strength when members sit face-to-face with CUNY management, we felt that it would be meaningful and supportive to the bargaining team itself to have members in the room as much as possible. Finally, we wanted PSC members to see and hear firsthand what CUNY management had to say about our bargaining agenda, our union and our members – their employees.

MEMBER POWER

With many new administrators at the helm of CUNY and its bargaining team, it was especially important to introduce them to the PSC’s bargaining agenda, demand by demand. What better way to do that than to ask members themselves to speak to our vision for a better workplace and a better CUNY? So members from all titles presented our agenda during the initial sessions; member observers attended all of those early sessions and have kept showing up each and every time since then. Other unions have reported to us about the difficulty of



PSC members gather before a bargaining session.

sustaining observer participation over time, but that has not been our experience. Over the course of 32 bargaining sessions as of this writing, around 450 PSC members have attended a contract negotiation session as observers, some attending numerous times.

Only dues-paying members are invited, and each was first required to attend one of the 29 observer orientations the union has offered since June of 2023. Members arrive half an hour before the three-to-four-hour session and stay at least half an hour after to debrief with the bargaining team. Each observer gives their valuable time and spends most of a day with us at the bargaining table. For professional staff, it’s an even

greater commitment, since we need to use a personal day to be there.

More than anything else, we all would have wanted to have a strong ratified contract by now. Instead, we are escalating the campaign, and we need all members on board and contributing in some way to the struggle. To all of you who attended a bargaining session: Thank you, on behalf of the bargaining team. You have moved us, advised us, engaged us and influenced us. From you, we have heard insights, thanks, responses, applause and concerns. How could we stay so calm? How could CUNY not understand why adjuncts deserve job security? How outrageous that they expect us

not to talk about racial justice. How can they say we shouldn’t talk about inflation when we see some of *their* big raises exceed inflation? When will we see something about remote work in the contract? Where are our equity raises that bring up the lowest paid? How can CUNY say our faculty are paid competitive salaries when we cannot hire people because they get better offers elsewhere? In our debrief sessions, we have had such rich conversations that one first-time observer recently said, “This feels like a real community here today. It feels like a great union meeting.”

MORE TO DISCUSS

There is so much more for us to discuss about bargaining in our chapter meetings and other union meetings, but the main thing we all know is that we’re not yet satisfied, and we’re not yet finished. It is always important to engage more and more members during a contract campaign, and attending bargaining sessions has proven to be an effective way of doing that. We have had non-members *join* the union so they could see how we bargain a contract. And we have seen many new faces at rallies, on picket lines and at union meetings as a result of members’ experiences at bargaining sessions.

When we first invited members into bargaining, I didn’t imagine how rewarding it would be for me, for the team, for members. After CUNY negotiators leave the room, we turn around and see you, and you have our backs. Sometimes stunned, sometimes frustrated, sometimes furious, we look at each other, and then break into dialogue. And now, 18 months after our contract expired and with too little movement from CUNY, it’s time for greater action, greater determination and greater numbers. At every upcoming bargaining session, we need you to show up and shout out for the contract we deserve. Now is the time to escalate, strengthened by the experience of our many member observers throughout this campaign.

A strong bargaining tactic

SPEECH

The union can create paradise

By BARBARA BOWEN

Editor's note: The following is Barbara Bowen's speech during a celebration of renaming the PSC union hall after her.

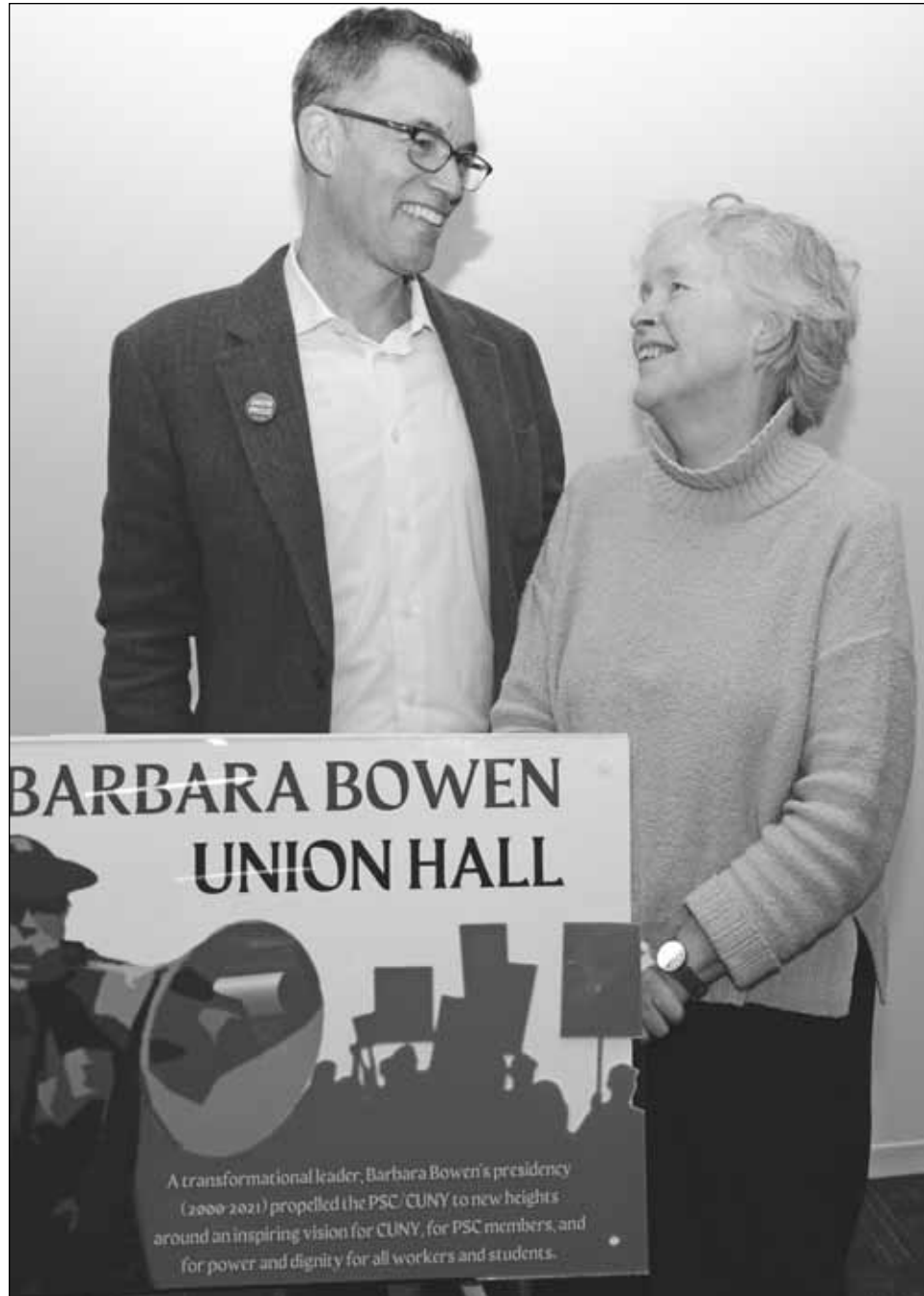
I was hesitant about accepting this honor because there are so many other people in our union who should also be named. One of the things you are privileged to see as union president is how much work other people in the union are doing. I literally did nothing alone. More important, nothing I did as PSC president would have had any meaning or any power if it had been just me. The union's power is the membership – when we are organized.

I'm enormously grateful and I'm moved by this gathering of a beloved community – I think we can use that beautiful name for the bonds we created through our shared vision and shared work. But an individual name tells only part of the story. When the PSC offices were at 61 Broadway, we had the chance to honor two of our past principal officers, Cecelia McCall and John Hyland, by giving their names to conference rooms that saw hard use. But the other past officers, especially the longest-serving, Steve London and Mike Fabricant, and many unsung PSC activists, deserve a room of their own. Let that be this room. Let's make it a room that honors the power I had the privilege of representing, the power we developed together. I hope I can accept this honor not only in my name, but in the name of everyone without whom the work would have been impossible.

COLLECTIVE ACTION

All the PSC accomplishments you've heard about tonight were the product of hundreds and sometimes thousands of people. Some took years to achieve. And some, like adjunct health insurance, were possible only because the whole PSC membership supported putting their own gains at risk in order to make a gain for others. What's extraordinary is that PSC activists have sustained a commitment to change – in our work lives, in CUNY, in our city and beyond – for more than 30 years, starting with the founding of the New Caucus. That commitment continues, in the fight of the current PSC leadership for a contract that makes advances in job security and equity, and their work on deepening the union's community alliances and leverage in Albany. Very few unions have been able to sustain a progressive agenda, or a political analysis rooted in the Left, for so long – especially in a political climate as hostile to the Left as the current one. The question I bring to tonight's wonderful event is, What has sustained so many of us doing so much against such odds for so long?

The answer can't be unanimity on politics. Five minutes in any meeting in this room would tell you that. Then what explains the kind of solidarity that leads some members to knock on a hundred office doors to gain support for a contract demand that will largely benefit others? What explains the sustained work of chapter chairs and grievance officers, delegates and advocates that lies behind every single gain we have made and every one we tried for and haven't yet reached? Why have some of the activists in this room invested mind and heart in the PSC's work for three decades or more?



Barbara Bowen (right) and PSC President James Davis.

My first answer comes from the night the New Caucus won the union-wide election in 2000, when some of us were baby unionists. I realized at that moment that I was in the presence of many people who had spent their lives in radical political movements: movements against war, against racism, against misogyny and homophobia, against capitalism. The shaping presence of Left politics among faculty and staff is one of CUNY's most closely guarded secrets: There's no room in CUNY's boosterish official image for the truth that the University would not have survived without the intellectual energy and self-sacrifice of staff and faculty on the Left. You only have to watch the film *The Five Demands*, about the student takeover of City College in 1969, to see that some of the most courageous CUNY workers and students in that fight are the same people who formed our caucus 30 years later.

ALTERNATIVE VISION

We have sustained a history of fighting for change as we fight for wages and hours – or of understanding the fight for wages and hours as part of a bigger fight for change –

because both unions and public universities hold out the hope of an alternative way of organizing the world. At their best, they give us a glimpse that another world is possible – unions as organizations of workers' struggles for justice and beauty, as the site of relationships between people that cannot be replicated anywhere else. The convergence of the hope embodied in universities and unions explains at least part of why so many of us in this room are old friends and old comrades. It's the exhilaration of being able to work for another world that keeps us in this fight.

WHY WE FIGHT

We've found CUNY as a place where that fight can be waged. That's why we stay. That, and the irreplaceable bonds you form with other people when you dare to expose your heart and your dreams in a political fight. Our name for CUNY as "the people's university" captures some of those dreams, but CUNY is *not* the people's university. Like every university under capitalism, it ultimately serves capitalism's aims by reproducing the labor force and naturalizing the dominant ideology. One thing that becomes

inescapable when you are PSC president is that the obstacles we and our students confront daily – from inadequate salaries to leaky ceilings – are not unavoidable. They sabotage – and are meant to sabotage – our students' chance of a serious education and a good life. CUNY is impoverished because those in power *want* it to be impoverished. But that doesn't mean that our radical hope is a mistake. On the contrary, we can maintain hope and acknowledge the role of the University under capitalism at the same time. We live in that contradiction the feminist theorist bell hooks expresses when she writes that "the academy is not paradise, but learning is a place where paradise can be created."

It seems important to say in this newly named room that we should not underestimate the importance of the dream of a people's university. For many of us, that dream fuels our work at CUNY and in the PSC. Yes, the University and the cruel economic system of which it is a part work against us and our students every day. But we should not apologize for or relinquish the radical hope and alternative vision of CUNY that undergirds the PSC's best work. Living in the contradictions is better than succumbing to cynicism or retreating to the myth of a private life. One thing I love about having a union hall as the room named for me is that it's a space for public life.

A PLACE FOR WORKERS

My wish for this union hall is that it will be a place where challenging and radical ideas about learning, power and workers can be tested and flourish. The work has already begun; we can see it in the hundreds of hours already spent here by the union's bargaining team and allies to carve out a contract, in the many meetings, large and small, hot and cool, held here every week.

This is a terrifying moment in both American and global politics. We urgently need unions not only to demand workers' rights but to offer an alternative to the ideology and the savagery of racial capitalism. Donald Trump's fascist agenda would never have been able to attain the glamour it has for millions of workers if unions had offered a more compelling vision of mutuality and freedom. Nor would we be stuck in the dead end of capitalist non-solutions to the climate crisis or the wars in Ukraine and Gaza if anti-capitalism had gained strength. There is no time to waste. My wish for this union hall is that we bring to it our deep solidarity and the confidence in radical possibility that keeps us fighting in the PSC. Let it be an inspiring place for those hammering out a contract agreement, a comfortable place for those who will spend the last nights of the contract negotiations sleeping on its floor, a supportive place for those practicing for direct action and risking arrest, a welcoming place for those summoning the courage to stand up and speak for the first time, a warm place for those who gather to celebrate victories and regroup after losses, a capacious place for all the work that can be done only by people together.

We know that unions are not paradise, but perhaps this union hall is a place where paradise can be created.

Barbara Bowen is the former president of the PSC and a professor of English at Queens College.

Renaming the PSC's union hall

LIFE INSURANCE: *Crucial for protecting your loved ones*



Life insurance is a topic many people find confusing, complicated, and uncomfortable to think about. It is undoubtedly one of the most vital types of insurance products you can purchase, though. Whether you're looking into your first policy or to upgrade existing coverage, it's important to determine how much life insurance you need and which type is right for you.

One key fact about life insurance you may not be aware of is premiums are likely to be less expensive if you purchase it earlier in life. For those of you who currently have policies, what you purchased 10 years ago, five years ago, or even last year may not be enough to replace your income and all you provide for your family. And if you are part of the 30% of Americans who don't have any life insurance at all,* you could be putting your family at great financial risk.

There are a variety of options to consider when it comes to life insurance, including:

- 1. Term Life** – this product pays a benefit in the event of the death of the insured during a specific timeframe but offers no cash value.
- 2. Level Term Life** – this insurance is similar to term life but is normally for a set period of time such as 10, 15, or 20 years; it also offers no cash value.
- 3. Universal Life** – this option offers a way to protect your family while building tax-deferred cash value; policyholders can usually access a portion of the balance without impacting the guaranteed death benefit.

* Source: USA Today - <https://www.usatoday.com/money/blueprint/life-insurance/life-insurance-statistics>

NYSUT Member Benefits endorses a number of competitive life insurance programs (those listed to the left and others) available to NYSUT members and their spouse/certified domestic partner. Many of these plans offer reduced rates not available to the general public along with additional convenience and savings opportunities through payroll or pension deduction.

Learn more about Member Benefits-endorsed life insurance programs by scanning the QR code, visiting memberbenefits.nysut.org, or calling 800-626-8101.



**MEMBER
BENEFITS**
nysut
Working to Benefit You
September/October 2024



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

Professional Staff Congress/CUNY
25 Broadway, 15th Floor
New York, New York 10004
Return Service Requested

NonProfit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
New York, N.Y.
Permit No. 8049

PSC grants available

This academic year, the union's HEO-CLT Professional Development Fund will award approximately \$800,000 in small grants to approximately 500 applicants from campuses University-wide in the higher education officer and college laboratory technician series, as well as CLIP and CUNY Start instructors, non-teaching adjuncts and EOC lecturers.

The fund was won as part of the 2000–2002 PSC/CUNY collective bargaining agreement, marking the first time CUNY HEOs and CLTs were granted support for academic and professional pursuits, and it remains a proud part of the union's services. Interested in applying? Learn more at <https://psc-cuny.org/benefits/heo-clt-professional-development-fund/>.

WANT A STRONG CONTRACT?
WANT TO ATTEND A BARGAINING SESSION?
WANT TO VOTE ON A STRONG CONTRACT?
JOIN THE UNION! TO SIGN UP, GO TO
[PSC-CUNY.ORG/JOIN-PSC/](https://psc-cuny.org/join-psc/)



Dave Sanders