

Amid 'climate of fear,' PSC rallies in support of fired adjunct faculty

BY MAX WHITE
For The Chief

A cowbell, a saxophone, drums and chants of solidarity rang out in Midtown last Friday as dozens of students and staff of the City University of New York rallied outside CUNY's central office on East 42nd Street in support of four adjunct faculty members who the union claims lost their jobs because of their activism on behalf of Palestinians.

Members of the Professional Staff Congress-CUNY which represents nearly 30,000 faculty and staff at the university, gathered on the same day that the four adjuncts, all union members, participated in an appeal hearing with CUNY's chancellor's office as part of a grievance process.

The rally also followed by a few weeks so-called "investigatory meetings" between college officials and six full-time CUNY instructors related to the educators' pro-Palestinian activism, the union said.

The PSC's president, James Davis, said at the rally that the firings of the four adjuncts were evidence of the college administrators' appeasement of the Trump administration, which has withheld funding from institutions of higher learning that have not acquiesced to its demands.

The four fired adjuncts lost their positions "for their political expression," Davis said.

The union leader said the message that CUNY sent when it fired the adjuncts was "incredibly chilling." Faculty, he said, should not have to fear that they must "relinquish their constitutional rights when they come onto campus."

"We hope that (the rally) sends a strong message to students and families that everyone has a right to speak out, whether it's on this issue or any other political issue that matters to them," Davis said.

Brooklyn College officials told The Chief in a brief statement that



Max White/The Chief

CUNY staff and students held a rally last Friday outside of the university's Midtown offices in support of faculty members fired for what their union, the Professional Staff Congress, said was their pro-Palestinian activism.

the four adjuncts were not reappointed "based on conduct, not political belief."

But the union said that none of the adjuncts was told of any job performance issues and that none was the subject of misconduct allegations. CUNY is not required to provide a reason when it does not reappoint adjunct faculty members.

Davis likened the current climate to the Red Scare of the 1950s and said there is no doubt in his mind that university officials would not have dealt with the adjuncts the way they did if it were not for the

Trump administration's pressure campaign on higher education, especially at institutions where students and teachers protested in support of Palestinians amid the war in Gaza.

Dubbed the "fired four" by the union, the Brooklyn College adjuncts, who taught in various departments, were told in June that they would not be reappointed, even though they had already been assigned courses for the fall semester and despite recommendations from their departments.

The outcome of the grievance

process won't be known for a couple of weeks. If the professors are not reinstated, the union has the option to go to arbitration with a neutral third party, which would make a binding decision.

'Chill in the air'

Friday's rally also came after the college called in six full-time instructors for investigatory meetings related to their pro-Palestinian activism, the union said.

One of the six, Naomi Schiller, an associate professor of anthropology

at Brooklyn College, told The Chief that she was called into a meeting with the institution's provost in early September in connection with her presence at a pro-Palestinian rally at the college on May 8 that erupted into chaos as demonstrators and the police engaged in physical altercations. Schiller maintains that she did nothing wrong at the protest, where she said she stood alongside other faculty calling for the college to de-escalate the situation.

Brooklyn College did not immediately respond to a request from The Chief to confirm the meeting and to comment on the allegations about the campus climate.

Schiller doesn't know why the college singled out her and the five others, but said all of them are active union members and that the meetings pointed to "intense intimidation of union leaders on campus."

"The administration has created a climate of fear at Brooklyn College, where instructors are scared to teach the material about which they have expertise and are worried about being surveilled by our bosses, the Brooklyn College administration," Schiller said. "There's a chill in the air."

Schiller, who is in her 12th year at the college and is currently teaching two undergraduate classes as a tenured professor, is still waiting for the outcome of the university's investigation and does not know its timeline. "I'm worried about my job. I think about it every day and it weighs heavily on me," she said.

A fifth-year student at Brooklyn College, who wished to remain anonymous, said that CUNY needs to understand that students and faculty are the ones who "really run the university."

"I would just encourage anyone involved in this sort of organizing to stay steadfast in their solidarity," the student said. "Just keep going, because what you're doing is important."