

Clarion

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



JUNE/JULY 2017



PRESIDENTS Faculty iced out?

The union responds to executive searches that lack transparency.

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Dave Sanders, Ellen Moynihan

FACULTY AND STAFF SAY:

I'M WITH THE UNION

The Supreme Court is considering hearing a case supported by anti-union and right-wing political groups designed to deal a shattering blow to unions like the PSC. That's why the union is embarking on a grassroots, rank-and-file

"recommitment" campaign to keep the union strong and united no matter what happens. Members are energized and talking to each other about why this is such a critical moment for the PSC.

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ADJUNCTS

Multiyear appointments

Adjunct faculty have received multiyear appointments and more job security in a pilot program under the new contract.

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CAMPUS

Surveillance at Brooklyn

Two filmmakers delve into the story of NYPD infiltration of a Muslim group at Brooklyn College and spark a conversation about trust on campus.

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CHAPTERS

New union leaders

Several PSC chapters held elections this spring and the union welcomes new delegates in addition to new chapter chairs at John Jay and City College.

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MEMBERS

High turnout for survey

Nearly 9,000 members responded to the union's on-line survey conducted at the end of May. See inside for the union's survey response rates.

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



Yale graduate student teachers began a hunger strike this spring to pressure the university to recognize their union. The university has hired a high-powered, union-busting law firm aimed at intimidating students.

Supporting Yale strikers

● Conservatives and the so-called liberal media elite have finally found an activity to unite around: shaming Yale graduate student workers who are on hunger strike for union recognition. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *National Review* ran cynical articles arguing hunger strikes should be a tactic reserved for more adversely affected groups. Other critics from the Brookings' Center for Children and Families and *Politico* have (falsely) accused Yale students of using the tactic only symbolically.

The fact that Yale students put their health on the line for union recognition should make us question whether they're as privileged as their critics suggest. As a graduate student worker myself, I share these students' sense of foreboding over a future without unions and where 75 percent of available teaching jobs are only part time. The focus on how genuinely hungry these strikers are as a metric of how legitimate their claims are also ignores the underlying issues motivating the hunger strike. Sure, Yale students are more privileged than most, but like everyone else, they deserve more than just bread and butter. They deserve mental health care, workplaces free of sexual harassment and the right to unionize without the fear of intimidation.

What Yale students are risking their bodies for does not deny the rest of us anything and, in fact, increases the strength of all of us as workers and union members. When privileged people speak, more people listen and, indeed, Yale students have used their privileged positions to call attention to the broader casualization and corporatization of higher education. I hope *Clarion* readers will stand with graduate student workers everywhere.

Anh Tran
Graduate Center

Don't believe the hype

● We should all be worried about what happens when the Supreme Court decides that agency fees violate the free speech rights of colleagues who enjoy union-negotiated wages, benefits and job protections, but prefer not to pay fair share dues.

We don't know much about these consequences yet. What will happen with the New York State Taylor Law or federally regulated "duty of fair representation"? But we do know that dues check-off is probably not at risk. Check-off is a contractual arrangement between the employer and the union and has little to do with the economic negotiations that free riders find so offensive, which makes the recent gambit by the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC) such a transparent (and bogus) maneuver.

On May Day, State Senator Marisol Alcantara introduced bill S-5778, which "Protects the Right to Join a Union and Fights Union-Busting Laws," and was endorsed by the state AFL-CIO and a host of public- and private-sector union leaders. Down in the textual weeds, however, the bill merely amends civil service law to require public employers to offer dues check-off to union members. Whoop-de-do.

Why bother? The answer's in the hype. The IDC enables the Republicans to maintain control of the State Senate. Every IDC member can expect

a primary challenge next year from a genuine Democrat fired up by resistance to the Trump agenda. Alcantara already faces a challenge from Robert Jackson, who almost beat her last time out. Primary elections usually have low turnout, which makes union support (or at least neutrality) critical to defending the IDC and keeping the GOP in control of the State Senate.

The State Senate has never been a friend of CUNY (or of labor). Last year, the IDC supported the governor's proposal to cut \$485 million from CUNY. Without GOP control of the Senate, the governor cannot practice his politics of austerity, which could help him capture the Democratic nomination for president in 2020. Too bad.

Don't fall for the hype. The IDC cannot protect public employee unions in New York State.

A.B. Chitty
Queens College

Clarity on settlement

● Contrary to the statement in *Clarion*, the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) settlement regarding the new contract does not state that the contract terms were "open and transparent" with respect to three-year contracts. In fact, the settlement makes no statement regarding the contract terms, but rather merely affirms that the grievance procedures

apply to the three-year contracts.

The session held at PERB in March 2017 was a mediation conference, with no evidence taken and no findings made. We, the charging parties, withdrew the charge in return for assurances from CUNY and the PSC that full grievance proceedings would be afforded to those adjuncts who did not receive three-year contracts and were terminated. That settlement agreement neither required nor included an admission of fault.

To prevail on a breach of the duty of fair representation (DFR) charge, a charging party must demonstrate, not merely that an agreement is reasonably clear (presumably, a lower standard than "open and transparent"), but also that a union has intentionally lied to its membership. In other words, even if the charging parties had litigated the charge and lost, there might have been no finding that the contract was clear. On the contrary, an administrative or state court judge might have believed that the contract was unclear, confusing and misleading, yet still ruled that the union had not breached the DFR.

Particularly now that – as we had feared – senior adjuncts have been denied three-year contracts and fired, it behooves the PSC to get its facts straight. As a great New Yorker, union supporter and believer in "clarity and transparency," Senator Daniel Moynihan famously admonished his colleagues on the floor of the United States Senate, saying, "You are entitled to your own opinion, but not your own facts."

Alternative facts from the PSC? We certainly hope not.

Rita Tobin
Hunter College and Graduate Center
Jane Clark and Andrew Gottlieb
Borough of Manhattan
Community College

Editor's note: Clarion vigorously supports the importance of accuracy and truth in reporting. The phrase "open and transparent" was not quoted from the PERB settlement, nor was it a phrase used by PERB. The article should have made that distinction clear. As noted in the article, the PERB settlement restates the union's position that the new three-year appointments for adjuncts are grievable under the current PSC contract. See the report on page 3 of this issue about grievances of three-year appointments already filed. The report makes it clear that the vast majority of eligible "senior adjuncts," far from being fired, have received secure three-year appointments.

Clarion Awards

By CLARION STAFF

Clarion recently took first place awards in four categories in the Metro Labor Communications Council's annual awards, receiving top honors for best feature writing for an article about the NYPD surveillance of Muslim students at Brooklyn College and CUNY administration's silence on the issue and best op-ed writing for a column written by PSC President Barbara Bowen on CUNY management's declaration of an impasse on contract negotiations.

Clarion has continued to follow the issue at Brooklyn College, including the article about the documentary *Watched*, "New film uncovers pain of spying at BC," in this issue (see page 4). The film was inspired by an article written by PSC member and Brooklyn College Distinguished Professor Jeanne Theoharis, who urged the CUNY administration to speak out against the surveillance.

This issue of *Clarion* (see page 8) follows up on a union campaign to rid York College of its rat problem: *Clarion* won first place for news writing for an article about this issue.

News Writing, First Place: "Rats invade York College," by Shomial Ahmad, *Clarion*, April 2016.

Op-Ed/Column, First Place: "Show CUNY you're not buying it," by PSC President Barbara Bowen, *Clarion*, February 2016.

Feature, First Place: "Muslims want answers on surveillance," by Shomial Ahmad, *Clarion*, September 2016.

Feature, Second Place: "A CUNY history project makes history," by Shomial Ahmad, *Clarion*, October 2016.

Graphic Design, First Place: September 2016 cover, by Margarita Aguilar, *Clarion*.

General Excellence – Web, Second Place: Professional Staff Congress website, psc-cuny.org

General Excellence – Print, Honorable Mention: *Clarion*

Best Online Writing, Second Place: "Three things that we can do right now," by PSC President Barbara Bowen.

Best Art Work, Second Place: "Rats invade York College illustration, by Jud Guitteau, *Clarion*, April 2016.

Best Art Work, Third Place: CUNY Writers Against Austerity poster, by Thencasti Paulino.

Best Photograph, Third Place: Professor with CUNY student, by Dave Sanders in the article, "The age of disinvestment through the eyes of department chairs," *Clarion*, May 2016.

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Adjuncts get 3-year appointments

By ARI PAUL

More than 1,000 adjunct faculty members have received three-year appointments this May in the biggest step forward for adjunct job security in CUNY history. Adjuncts on three-year appointments are guaranteed assignments and income, and cannot be dismissed without just cause. Each appointment involves a comprehensive review by the adjunct's department.

Cory Evans has been teaching philosophy and communications studies in an adjunct position at Baruch College for nearly seven years, but never with any real job security. As of May 15, he knew that he would have a secure appointment for the next three years.

JOB SECURITY

"It's a great thing," said Evans. "Teaching is wonderful, but one of the things that can weigh on folks is [job] uncertainty, so knowing that you're going to be teaching for three years is a big deal. It makes you more involved with your department and with your students, and I think it helps adjuncts feel like they're part of the academic life of that department."

"I appreciate that the three-year appointments have given us a chance to offer some small measure of stability to both the professors and our writing program, where most will teach," said Lee Papa, the chair of the English department at the College of Staten Island. "We want our adjuncts to feel more a part of the department and I'm glad for anything we can offer to that end."

"The preliminary reports from the colleges indicate that more than 1,000 adjuncts have received a three-year appointment – a start on real job security for adjuncts at last," said PSC President Barbara Bowen. "The union wanted longer appointments and broader eligibility criteria, but the results from this first year of the five-year pilot program indicate the value long-serving adjuncts bring to their departments."

May 15 was the deadline for CUNY colleges to notify adjuncts eligible for three-year appointments, and the vast majority of adjuncts who were eligible for multiyear appointments received them.

MANY QUALIFIED

The introduction of three-year appointments for adjuncts who have taught consistently in a single department is one of the most significant changes negotiated in the contract ratified last year. The provision, among the hardest fought in the contract, is designed to professionalize the treatment of adjuncts and increase continuity among instructors for students.

"It's great for them," Brooklyn College PSC adjunct liaison Yasmin Gruss said of the more than 40 adjuncts at her campus who received multiyear appointments. "It went smoothly in terms of that group; it was a manageable group to

A hard-fought contract gain



Cory Evans is one of the many adjuncts who were approved for three-year appointments, a new contract gain that makes Evans feel more a part of his department and the academic environment at Baruch College.

monitor." At a campus with far more eligible adjuncts, the process was equally smooth. PSC adjunct counselor Marcia Newfield noted, "More than 200 long-serving adjuncts at Borough of Manhattan Community College were eligible for three-year appointments, and it appears there were very few problems."

CLARIFYING CONFUSION

Katie Albany, the City Tech PSC adjunct liaison, said, "People were very happy because, having gone through the procedure, the review process and coming out with a favor-

able outcome, they think now they've been acknowledged. They feel like what they've done so far is the right way to teach. There's a sense of accomplishment with those people."

Pamela Stenberg, the PSC adjunct liaison at City College, noted that many long-serving adjuncts at her campus opted for the one-time, two-year appointments, because the three-year appointment process required a review from department personnel and budget committees. "That was perceived by members as a new level of difficulty," she said.

But most adjuncts who were con-

sidered for a multiyear appointment received one, Stenberg noted. "One of the adjuncts was really happy; she never had that kind of stability," she said. "It's a big deal for people who have had no stability."

Bowen added, "I am especially appreciative of the conceptual and logistical work the new appointments involved for department chairs and personnel committees. They took on a whole new structure and, for the most part, handled it beautifully. The new appointments represent a vote of confidence by one member in another."

The appointment process was not without its problems, however, and the union's contract enforcement department is investigating reports of members being improperly denied appointments or receiving inaccurate appointments or letters of appointment.

"In a department at Medgar Evers College and another at College of Staten Island, adjuncts who were eligible for and should have been considered for three-year appointments were not and received, instead, one-year appointments, which are no longer applicable to such adjuncts under the new contract," said Stan Wine, a PSC adjunct grievance counselor. "We assume these problems are the result of confusion in the departments, but they must be investigated and corrected." He added, "There are some adjuncts in most colleges who have been offered one-year appointments 'with guidance,' which is permitted under the new contract. They will be eligible for reconsideration next year."

At Clarion's press time, the union's contract enforcement depart-

ment was responding aggressively to these and other concerns brought by adjunct members. Union staff and grievance counselors are working one-on-one with members and informing departments and human resource offices of obvious misinterpretations of the contract language for the pilot program. The union's actions on these concerns come on the heels of two other grievances filed earlier this year regarding the eligibility of certain long-serving adjuncts for multiyear appointments.

A STRUCTURAL CHANGE

"One grievance concerns CUNY's assertion that adjuncts who teach only one jumbo course (for six credits) are not eligible for consideration for a multiyear appointment," said Wine. "The other grievance concerns adjuncts who teach in so-called 'programs' – SEEK, College Now, Lehman's Freshman-Year Initiative and many others. CUNY is asserting that these adjuncts do not teach in a department, as required by the contract language, but

Stability for long-serving adjuncts

rather are in a program, even though they are appointed and evaluated by a department."

Bowen said, "This is the first year of an initiative that represents a major structural change at CUNY, so it was not unexpected that there would be some confusion and some errors in execution. But it's critical that we get the first year right. The union will continue to fight to ensure that all eligible adjuncts receive fair consideration. Next year there will be another cohort of eligible adjuncts, and I expect it to go more smoothly. The results so far are major: more than 1,000 people with job security. That is a victory that took the force of the whole union to win and that benefits us all."

Chairs protest online MA

By ARI PAUL

The PSC, the University Faculty Senate (UFS) and history department chairs from four-year colleges that offer masters of arts degrees in American history are protesting a proposed new online graduate program at the School of Professional Studies (SPS) that faculty activists say was put forward without their consultation.

The proposal, developed with the Gilder Lehrman Institute, would serve middle and high school history teachers, most of whom reside outside of New York. The aim of the program, according to the SPS proposal, is to improve "the teaching of American history in the nation's middle and high schools...at a time when the learning and applying the lessons of our nation's history would seem especially vital." The proposal also asserts that classes will be "taught by CUNY SPS faculty, with all the rights and responsibilities of any CUNY faculty presiding over courses."

Concerns over academic quality and rigor

But some faculty advocates see things differently. The UFS voted unanimously on May 16 to call on SPS to halt the proposal until proper faculty consultation occurred. In particular, SPS failed to consult with the department chairs who already oversee American history MA programs, the union said. The proposed program will make use of some CUNY faculty who teach at other colleges and will be engaged with students as SPS adjunct faculty. However, most of the "part-time faculty" listed were not consulted about the proposal's contents – which include detailed course syllabi – or even told their names would

be listed in the proposal as "eager to teach in the program."

"The history department chairs raise serious concerns about the academic quality of the proposed program," PSC President Barbara Bowen said in a letter to Vita Rabinowitz, CUNY's executive vice chancellor. "They also question CUNY's employment of 'dis-

tinguished scholars' outside of its own faculty to provide videotaped lectures."

NO FACULTY INPUT

Bowen continued, "The decision to feature faculty from other universities while failing to consult with the university's own MA history faculty sends a message of profound disrespect."

CUNY's History Chairs Discipline Council said in statement that the "online history education at the graduate level must not compromise academic excellence, or undersell and supplant richer, more rigorous existing programs at CUNY through cost-cutting measures. In this context, we harbor serious concerns about the potential of the SPS proposal for an online MA program in history, as currently conceived, to cheapen the quality of CUNY's graduate degrees in history. Conceived largely without consultation with CUNY's own talented body of historians, the SPS's vision of virtual education is governed by remarkably skimpy structures of

instruction and accountability. The institution offering this graduate degree has no history department or full-time faculty to anchor the program; the scholars advertised to videotape lectures – the primary mode of content transmission – are overwhelmingly from outside CUNY, and in some cases not aware that their names appear in the proposal; and the shifting contract labor force who did not design the content of the prepackaged lectures, but are envisioned to implement the program, can hardly be expected to provide continuity in mentoring, advisement or assessment."

Bowen said, "I am also concerned that the proposed online MA represents direct competition with the existing MA programs at the colleges, particularly because it has been planned as a degree with a lower price. It could put at risk the jobs of faculty, especially part-time faculty, represented by the PSC."

SPS is proposing to charge \$800 per course, more than one-third less than the current *in-state* history MA tuition rate, nearly two-thirds less than the out-of-state tuition.

At press time, the board of trustees' consideration of the proposal had been postponed until the Fall.

New film uncovers pain of spying at BC

By ARI PAUL

In February 2016, Jeanne Theoharis, a distinguished professor of political science at Brooklyn College, wrote about NYPD infiltration of the campus Islamic Society for the Intercept, a news website that covers the intersection of politics, surveillance and national security. Her report was a response to a barrage of reports about the NYPD and undercover operations in the city's Muslim community: there had been an explosive Pulitzer Prize-winning Associated Press investigation of widespread police surveillance of New York City's Muslim community groups and mosques and a Gothamist report about infiltration specifically at Brooklyn College.

The story revolved around a woman who was not an enrolled student at the school, named Malike Ser, or "Mel," who claimed that she was taking time off before graduate school and came to the Islamic Society in order to convert to Islam, which she eventually did. It was revealed later that Ser was an NYPD operative.

Theoharis's article about the effect of the spying, which took place between 2011 and 2015, caught the attention of filmmakers Katie Mitchell and Danielle Varga, who reached out to Theoharis. The result is the new documentary *Watched*, which focuses on two female Muslim Brooklyn College students who were victims of Ser's deception. In the documentary, in which the two students are identified only by their first initials, they describe how the ordeal has affected them, their peers and their campus. The film was screened, free of charge, on campus on May 16, followed by a question-and-answer session with Theoharis, the filmmakers and other panelists.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

Ser arrived on campus in 2011, as the two Brooklyn College students in the film, explain. Ser said she was Turkish, raised without any religious affiliation and seeking to convert to Islam. The campus Muslim Student Association took her in with open arms, and the two interviewees describe her taking the declaration of faith, a sacred ritual in which one officially converts to Islam.

One thing the two women in the film noticed soon after Ser's conversion was that her eagerness to learn more about becoming a Muslim wasn't matched by the usual questioning most converts have. Some Muslim students were taken aback by how Ser, who was not an enrolled student, almost obsessively reached out to other Muslim students and in-

NYPD surveillance at CUNY

quired about their whereabouts. At one point, she asked another student about suicide bombings, a question that led some on campus to become suspicious.

DISTRUST ON CAMPUS

When it was revealed that Ser was an NYPD informant after she stopped being seen at Brooklyn College in 2015, feelings of distrust permeated the campus. Part of the movie's point is to show how the damage has not been fully addressed. The 19-minute film does not tackle the complex legal and constitutional issues surrounding NYPD activity on a CUNY campus;

long-standing precedent is that public safety is handled by CUNY safety officials, and the NYPD does not come onto campuses unless responding to an emergency call.

Instead, the filmmakers made a conscious effort to focus on the psychological impact of the episode on Muslim students. The interviewees report on a variety of emotional reactions, some of which were echoed during the question-and-answer session after the screening. In the film, students recount how they began to self-censor and refrain from expressing their political opinions in class or in other forums on campus. Students began to be paranoid about newcomers, or fear that others believed they were spies. Worse, students then felt a sense of shame for prejudging a newcomer as a possible informant.

The takeaway from the film is that the ordeal had a chilling effect on activity and speech, which is the opposite of what a university setting should be, and why the student and faculty organizers of the screening wanted the movie to not just stand on its own, but to act as a catalyst for further action on campus to resolve what is clearly a lingering issue for Muslim students.

Brooklyn College President Michelle Anderson, who came into her position in 2016, attended the public viewing of the film, but did not stay for the question-and-answer session, which included a frank discussion by students, faculty and staff about the effects of the surveillance.

Naomi Schiller, an assistant professor of anthropology, in an emotional appeal to Muslim students during the discussion period said, "You're not going to get the apology you deserve." Kelly Spivey, a college laboratory technician in the film department at Brooklyn College, told Muslim students during the question-and-answer session that going forward they should "look at

who we are" to see who in the faculty and staff can be counted on as a "support network" for students who might feel uncomfortable on campus.

Anderson had, in a campus-wide email, invited people to see the film and participate in the discussion, a move welcomed by faculty, staff and students. "Students should feel free in their campus affinity groups to explore their evolving spiritual, political and intellectual identities," said Anderson. "Undercover police surveillance based on race, religion, or ethnicity on college campuses undermines this academic freedom. Freedom of conscience is foundational to the Brooklyn College mission, as is our commitment to providing a welcoming educational environment for immigrant communities."

PROGRESS

At the city-level, there has been some progress to keep a check on NYPD surveillance in Muslim communities. In March, the ACLU and other organizations – including CUNY's Creating Law Enforcement Accountability and Responsibility (CLEAR) – announced a settlement



From left: Jeanne Theoharis with filmmakers Katie Mitchell and Danielle Varga.

agreement with the city to provide greater oversight of police department intelligence operations. It was an agreement stemming from the lawsuit *Raza v. City of New York*, which included among its plaintiffs two former CUNY students, one of them a Brooklyn College graduate.

During the discussion period, attendees agreed Anderson had taken a more progressive stance than her predecessor, Karen Gould, on the matter. But students, faculty and staff in attendance insisted that the administration needed to take further

action to help the healing process.

"If that's a first step that's great," Theoharis said of Anderson's letter and her attendance at the screening. "But if it's a last step that's insufficient. I think we've seen a lack of leadership."

She added that it was imperative for the Brooklyn College administration to take charge of the issue, since even though the infiltration is no longer ongoing, the negative effects are still lingering.

"These are deep wounds here," she said.

Strong response for PSC survey

By CLARION STAFF

From manageable workloads to adjunct pay rates, medical leave to tuition waivers, raises to professional development, thousands of union members shared their concerns and priorities in the union's first-ever electronic membership survey. In May, PSC members let union leadership know what issues are most important to them for the next contract and what the union could do better.

PSC President Barbara Bowen said in an email to members, "We want every member to respond and every unique response to be heard."

Joan Rogers-Harrington of NYSUT, who helped administer the poll, said, "In the context of other NYSUT locals, 30 percent is considered as good a response rate you can hope for."

As this issue of *Clarion* was going to press, preliminary results from the survey were coming in. At the beginning of the Fall semester, there will be a more comprehensive analysis of survey results and the issues expressed by CUNY faculty and staff. Listed in the table are the number of responses and response rates from different categories of workers represented by the PSC.

TITLE	RESPONSES	RESPONSE RATES
Graduate Assistant	315.....	23%
Teaching Adjunct	2,495.....	22%
Full-time Faculty Professors, Lecturers, Instructors.....	3,185.....	43%
Higher Education Officer	2,112.....	45%
Full-time College Laboratory Technician	263.....	49%
Adjunct College Laboratory Technician	101.....	17%
Non-Teaching Adjunct.....	207.....	19%
Continuing Education Teacher	113.....	13%
CLIP and CUNY Start Instructor	62.....	44%

DRAWING WINNERS

The union was proud to see such a high turnout, nearly 9,000 members, for the survey in such a busy time.

The following members received \$100 gift certificates in a random drawing of survey participants:

Alessandra Peralta-Avila, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CLT
Debbie Sonu, Hunter College, Associate Professor
Margaret Fiore, John Jay College, Adjunct Lecturer
Victoria O'Shea, Queensborough Community College, HE Assistant
James Angeli, City College of New York, HE Associate

New chapter chairs at John Jay, CCNY

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Daniel Pinello is no stranger to the union. He has been a trustee of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund since 2009, a longtime activist and now the new John Jay College chapter chair. He joins dozens of other new delegates and chapter leaders elected in union elections this spring and who now represent their chapters at the union's delegate assembly. Their leadership comes at an especially crucial time for the union as it faces a potential – and, according to some legal observers, an inevitable – Supreme Court decision designed to cripple public-sector unions. The case that may be heard by the high court is *Janus v. AFSCME*.

Part of the reason that Pinello, a professor of political science who is a scholar of LGBT rights, decided to step up his involvement was the “bombshell of [the presidential] election.” Following recent political events, he got more involved in political organizing in Nassau County, Long Island, where he lives.

“This is one way that I can move from the backbench to a position of greater leadership,” Pinello told *Clarion*. “As a political scientist and someone who has been active in the union, I felt like it was my turn, in a sense, to be more responsible.”

Pinello's plan for his chapter is to increase the union's presence on John Jay's campus starting with a listening tour, where union members can share their concerns and become acquainted with union leadership. He also hopes to establish a campus newsletter, inspired by the *Gadfly*, the newsletter of the Borough of Manhattan Community College PSC chapter.

CHAPTER ORGANIZING

The other new chapter chair elected this spring is Carol Huang, an assistant professor in City College of New York's (CCNY) department of leadership and special education. Huang, who has worked on feminist labor issues in Taiwan and documented the lives of Mexican-American migrant workers in the Midwest, was energized by the organizing around the strike authorization vote last spring. She decided to step up her involvement at this crucial time in the labor movement.

“Going forward, we have to prepare,” said Huang, referring to the court case *Janus v. AFSCME*, which the Supreme Court may agree to hear this coming fall. The expected decision by the conservative majority high court would prohibit public-sector unions, including the PSC, from collecting fair share payments from nonmembers to whom they are still legally obligated to offer services. The result would be a devastating loss of members, funds and power. “If we're not prepared, we're doomed,” added Huang.

Huang and other City College chapter leadership members plan on engaging in an aggressive effort for the recommitment campaign, re-

Results from the Spring chapter elections



Daniel Pinello, the newly elected chair of the PSC John Jay Chapter, decided to step up his involvement with the union after this past November's presidential election.

cruiting members to attend union-led trainings and establishing liaisons in different departments to do outreach.

The new chapter chairs replace former CCNY Chair Alan Feigenberg and former John Jay Chair John Pittman, both of whom remain active delegates in their respective chapters.

“The stakes are so very high. If *Janus* comes through, we stand to lose lots of money in one day,” said Pamela Stemberg, the new vice chair for the PSC chapter at City College. Stemberg, as a part-time liaison, plans systematic outreach to adjuncts on campus.

The new leaders assumed office on May 22. Half of PSC's chapters held elections this April in mostly uncontested elections. Many current chapters chairs and delegates were reelected, most in uncontested elections.

CONTESTED ELECTIONS

Contested elections took place at Hunter College and the Graduate Center. At Hunter College, several independent candidates challenged the New Caucus-affiliated slate, Organize Hunter/New Caucus, for seats and alternate seats on the delegate assembly. The only independent to win was Andrew Battle, who is now an alternate delegate. Candidates on the CUNY Struggle slate at the Graduate Center ran for several races in the chapter's election, but ultimately lost. In several

races, CUNY Struggle candidates garnered close to 100 votes, but ultimately that fell short for victory because New Caucus and Fusion Independents candidates secured at least 180 votes.

The newly elected leaders will serve three-year terms. Half of the chapters held elections for local leaders this year; the other half will vote in Spring of 2019. Union-wide

elections for officers and the Executive Council will be held next year in the Spring of 2018.

Names of those elected are listed below. Those who were reelected are listed in regular type; names of those newly elected are in italics.

BARUCH COLLEGE: Chair, Vincent DiGirolamo; Vice Chair, Carly Smith; Secretary, Stanley Wine; Officers-at-large, *Lisa Ellis, William Ferns, Peter Pepper, Glenn Petersen*; Delegates to the DA, Vincent DiGirolamo, *Frank Cioffi, Lisa Ellis, Glenn Petersen, Carly Smith, Gregory Snyder, Stanley Wine*; Alternates to the DA, *Andrew Slein, Elizabeth Wollman*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council, *Jennifer Harrington, Karl Kronebusch*

BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE: Chair, Sharon Utakis; Vice Chair, *Peter Kolozi*; Secretary, *Kerry Ojadian*; Officers-at-large, *Jose Acevedo, Leonard Dick, Kenya Harris, Alex Wolf*; Delegates to the DA, Sharon Utakis, *Diane Price Banks, Yasmin Edwards, Hisseine Faradj, Monique Guishard, Peter Kolozi*; Alternates to the DA, *Sophia Cantave, Allison Gorr, Nichole McDaniel, Maria Treglia*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council, *Laroi Lawton, M. Jawied Nawabi*

BROOKLYN COLLEGE: Chair, James Davis; Vice Chair, *Carolina Bank Muñoz*; Secretary, Karl Steel; Officers-at-large, Alan Aja, David Arnov, Joseph Entin, *Alex Vitale*; Delegates to the DA, James Davis, Scott Dexter, Darryl Kenneth Estey, Mobina Hashmi, Veronica Manlow, Timothy Shortell, Jocelyn Wills; Alternates to the DA, *Heidi Diehl, Christopher Ebert, Madeline Fox, Greg Smithsimon*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council, William Gargan, Diana Irene Sosa

CITY COLLEGE: Chair, Carol Huang; Vice Chair, *Pamela Stemberg*; Secretary, *Kathlene McDonald*; Officers-at-large, William Crain, *Harold Forsythe, Michael Green, Richard Steinberg*; Delegates to the DA, Carol Huang, Philip Barnett, Susan

DiRaimo, Alan Feigenberg, *Kathryn Gelsone, Kathlene McDonald, Alexander Punnoose, Gerardo Renique, Pamela Stemberg*; Alternates to the DA, *Joseph Davis, John Krinsky, Jack Levinson, Iris Lopez*

COLLEGE LAB TECHNICIANS: Chair, Albert Sherman; Secretary, Amy Jeu; Officers-at-large, Syed Amir Abdali, Jacqueline Elliott, *Lourdes Rosario, Jocelyn Samuel*; Delegates to the DA, Albert Sherman, Syed Amir Abdali, *Tracy Campbell, Ernts Gracia, John Graham, Amy Jeu, Fitz Richardson*; Alternates to the DA, Sonia Acevedo, David Barthold, *Ed Coppola, Sharif Elhakem, Pedro Irigoyen*

CUNY CENTRAL OFFICE: Chair, Julio Caragiulo; Delegate to the DA, Julio Caragiulo

GRADUATE CENTER: Chair, Luke Elliott-Negri; Vice Chair, *Anh Tran*; Secretary, David Chapin; Officers-at-large, *Jean Grassman, Susan Saegert*; Delegates to the DA, Luke Elliott-Negri, Stephen Brier, *Tahir Butt, Susan Fountain, Maya Hara-kawa, Marc Kagan, Penny Lewis, Franklin Mirer, Rosa Squillacote, Travis Sweatte, Anh Tran*; Alternates to the DA, *Chloe Asselin, Nina Connelly, Isaac Jabola-Carolus, James Jasper, Stephanie Luce, Ruth Milkman*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council, *Jennifer Lee, Zee Dempster*

GUTTMAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE: Chair, Alia Tyner-Mullings; Vice Chair, Andrea Morrell; Delegate to the DA, Alia Tyner-Mullings; Alternate to the DA, *Kristina Baines*

HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE: Chair, Lizette Colón; Delegates to the DA, Lizette Colón, Marcella Bencivenni, *Felipe Pimentel, Olga Steinberg Neifach*; Alternates to the DA, *Joan Beckerman, Jo-Ann Rover, Lauren Wolf*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council, Iber Poma

HUNTER COLLEGE: Chair, Jeremy Glick; Vice Chair, *Tanya Agathocleous*; Delegates to the DA, Jeremy Glick, Tanya Agathocleous,

Thomas DeGloma, Peter Dudek, Jennifer Gaboury, Marlene Hennessy, Michael Lewis, Janet Neary, Christopher Stone, Blanca Vázquez; Alternates to the DA, *Tami Gold, Michael Fabricant, Andrew Battle*

JOHN JAY COLLEGE: Chair, Daniel Pinello; Vice Chair, *J. Paul Narkunas*; Secretary, *Elizabeth Hovey*; Officer-at-large, *Jonathan Epstein*; Delegates to the DA, Daniel Pinello, *Ellen Belcher, Holly Clarke, Elizabeth Hovey, Susan Kang, Peter Mameli, J. Paul Narkunas, John Pittman, Ellen Sexton*; Alternates to the DA, Robert DeLucia, *Gerald Markowitz*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council, Daniel Pinello, *Barbara Young*

LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE: Chair, Sigmund Shen; Vice Chair, *Karen Miller*; Secretary, *Lara Beaty*; Officers-at-large, *Nancy Berke, Milena Cuellar, Colleen Eren, Laura Tanenbaum*; Delegates to the DA, Sigmund Shen, *Carrie Conners, Francine Egger-Sider, Youngmin Seo, Nichole Shippen, Phyllis van Slyck, Rachel Youens*; Alternates to the DA, *Hara Bastas, Timothy Coogan, Sarah Durand, James Gior-dano, Christopher McHale*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council, Soloman Kone, Terry Parker

MEOC: Chair, *Karen Berry*; Vice Chair, *Samuel Paul*; Secretary, *Caughey Gwynette Kearsse*; Officers-at-large, *Jacqueline Andrews, Catherine Clark-Nelson*; Delegate to the DA, *Karen Berry*; Alternate to the DA, *Lawrence Williams*

QUEENS COLLEGE: Chair, David Gerwin; Secretary, *Edmund Leites*; Officers-at-large, *Carol Giardina, Roopali Mukherjee, José Martínez-Torrejón*; Delegates to the DA, David Gerwin, Edmund Leites, Jack Zevin; Alternate to the DA, *Kevin Birth*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council, Benjamin Chitty

YORK COLLEGE: Chair, Scott Sheidlower; Vice Chair, Steven Weisblatt; Secretary, *Margarett Alexandre*; Officers-at-large, *Margarett Alexandre, Tania Levey, Galila Werber-Zion*; Delegates to the DA, Scott Sheidlower, Shirley Frank, Olajide Oladipo, Tonya Shearin-Patterson; Alternates to the DA, Ian Hansen, Rishi Nath, Kay Neale, Steven Weisblatt

QC Chapter Special Election

The election committee set the following dates for a special election at Queens College to fill positions left blank on the ballot.

9/11/17 – Candidate Declaration Forms are due.

9/18/17 – Pre-printed nominations are available.

10/18/17 – Signed nominating petitions are due.

11/1/17 – Ballots are mailed.

11/30/17 – Ballots are due at 5 pm.

12/1/17 – Ballots are counted at 10 am.

Adhesion campaign

Rank-and-file members organize a CUNY to prepare for the threat ahead

By CLARION STAFF

The Supreme Court is considering hearing the federal lawsuit *Janus v. AFSCME*. With Neil Gorsuch confirmed as the justice to fill Antonin Scalia's seat, the 5-4 conservative majority has been restored, and there's little reason to think any of the five conservative justices will discover their inner unionist when confronted with this case.

The case seeks to do what other anti-union lawsuits are also pursuing – to overturn a four-decade precedent that public-sector unions may charge nonmembers in their bargaining units an agency shop fee for the services and representation the union provides them.

A loss for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), one of the largest national public-sector unions in the country, in the high court would mean an end to the agency shop system and a likely decline in revenues for unions as

fee payments end and some workers stop paying dues. These revenues are what fund union services, including bargaining power, legal representation and much more. The union victories that save jobs, stop budget cuts, secure back pay, fix health and safety problems and advocate for public higher education in the political arena are all the result of hard work by the union, built with unions dues. Organized capital is aiming to stem that revenue stream in order to destroy labor's power.

RECOMMITMENT CAMPAIGN

The good news is that PSC members are preparing for this new regime. Through the recommitment campaign, rank-and-file members are reaching out to their colleagues through one-on-one conversations to urge them to recommit to staying dues-paying union members.

More than 3,000 members have already signed red recommitment

cards, declaring that they won't become "free riders," people who benefit from union gains but who do not pay dues. At campuses across CUNY, members are having conversations about the future of the union and how people can commit to remaining invested in the union so that it continues to be strong.

Members are off to an encouraging start, but this is just the beginning. As the months wind on, this kind of energy will put the PSC in a position to retain its power regardless of what the Supreme Court does.

Organizers and chapter chairs have held trainings for members on how to engage other members about the recommitment campaign and how to best educate members on the possible Supreme Court case and how the union dues structure builds the power of the union. While many campuses are at their quietest over the summer, this is a vital time for year-round employees – especially higher education officers, college laboratory technicians and library faculty and staff – to conduct outreach and organize to build momentum for an even bigger adhesion and recommitment push when the Fall semester starts.

What follows are a few success stories from around the university that outline how rank-and-file members are building power in the face of this daunting challenge.

ANTHONY PARRELLA

**Administrative Coordinator
Accelerated Study in Associate
Programs (ASAP)
Bronx Community College**

I'm making the one-on-one conversations really personal. I don't send emails or do phone calls. If I notice a staff member on a break, then I'll approach them. I'll basically give them a lot of information. I won't just say, "Oh, here's a card. Please sign it." I spend a good 15 minutes with each staff member, telling them of the importance of the Neil Gorsuch confirmation and what it means for us moving forward. I tell members how important it is for us to continue to pay dues so we can maintain our bargaining power.

If we maintain our bargaining power, they can't really hurt us. Everyone on my team has been really enthusiastic about committing to the union. They do understand that without any money, the PSC can't continue to win raises, good health care, a pension. They get it.

I come from a family of union workers. I didn't grow up really



Erik McGregor

Sharon Hawkins said that most people she spoke to understood the importance of the union standing strong.

wealthy but I grew up in a middle class household. I was able to get braces. I was able to go to the doctor and the dentist. My parents were able to retire. We lived in a house. These were things that the union fights for.

The facts are, if it wasn't for unions – would there even be pensions and 401(k)s? Would I be blessed to be paying \$1 every paycheck for health care? I really don't think so. I feel very lucky to have the job that I have.

ALEXANDRA LEWIS

**Graduate Music Performance
Advisor and Lecturer
Brooklyn College**

When I'm able to approach people face-to-face, everyone has been more than willing to hand in those cards. I would say that the support for the union now is stronger than ever, given the Trump administration and the attacks coming from every direction every day. People are very aware of how important it is. I don't have to do any arm twisting. The final pay increase, which was a long time coming, was proof that union power works.

There was one adjunct who voiced her concern about some union benefits. She said, she'd turn in her card later. She's an anomaly. Another adjunct whom I talked to told me it was her goal to get all the adjuncts in her department to sign cards. The full-time faculty

are like, "Yeah!" I think it's a good opportunity just to have a face-to-face conversation with people just to remind them of the importance of the union. I've collected at least 20 cards in a couple of weeks. I'll keep going until I get to everybody I can.

Musicians know the importance of union strength because of the musicians' union. The plight of a musician is notorious for exploitation; they're constantly underappreciated and undervalued. A union gives them some kind of protection. I don't know if that played in to the fact that most of them signed cards without hesitation.

FITZ RICHARDSON

**College Laboratory Technician
Department of Television
and Radio
Medgar Evers College**

My father always says, "A good preacher is the one who makes people do the right thing for themselves." So if you preach the right words to union members, they'll understand why the recommitment campaign is very important. You have to stress what a union stands for, and you have to make them feel it. You have to tell stories about our gains. You don't have to shout or scream, you just have to tell the truth. Like a good preacher does, he gets up and says, "amen" and "hallelujah."

The union's got my back. I'm backing the union.



George Sanchez, Professor
College of Staten Island



Saavik Ford, Professor
BMCC

The PSC defends my rights at work, fights for my salary, and stands for justice. Trump's Supreme Court is poised to decide *Janus v. AFSCME*, a case designed to drain public-employee unions of members, money and power. The outcome will almost certainly be the culmination of a decades-long attack on workers. Regardless of the Supreme Court decision, I will pay my dues and will always be a union member.

I won't be a free-rider.

PSC-CUNY.ORG/UNIONYES



Jackie Elliott, Sr. College Laboratory Technician
NYCT



Blanca Vázquez, Adjunct Associate Professor
Hunter College

Photo Credit: Dave Sanders

One of the union's recommitment posters

across head

PSC President Barbara Bowen came and spoke to our campus this Spring semester. She spoke about the importance of staying together – which I always knew. It was nothing new to me because I've been to several marches and other actions. During that meeting, I collected some blank cards and I began to talk to my CLT members. So far, I have gotten 100 percent signatures. I call it on the positive note.

Everybody took the bonus and back pay. So when I talk to my colleagues, I tell them that they're part of the union. Nobody said "no." Nobody said, "I don't want no benefits, no dental; I don't want no health care." I tell them about the gains the union got them despite the obstacles. You got people who got arrested, you have people who marched, you have people who woke up at four in the morning to go to Albany, you got people doing a whole lot of things, while basically, the only thing you got to do is sign a paper. I tell them, "You ate the steak, you pay for the meal."

SHARON HAWKINS

**Higher Education Assistant Health Services
York College**

I've been having conversations, taking the cards the union has provided and sharing with the members that we need to stand as a strong body because of the Supreme Court's possible decision that would state that we don't have to be paying members, but can use the benefit of the union, which would eventually dismantle the union.

When I've talked to the people, they've all been on board. I have not had any adversity with anyone. They get it, they understand it. They know that we need the union to negotiate our contract and our rights.

I think a lot of members are not aware of the Supreme Court case, so that message might need to be shared more broadly, as well as the understanding behind the consequences. If we have people who are not going to be participating as paying members, but yet want to use a service, it's not fair, because if you're not going to pay, then why should you get to have the union represent you? Because all of this takes money.

For me, personally, it's self-evident why the union is important, we wouldn't have had the contract that we received, to get the benefits we've been able to get.

CARRIE CONNERS

**Associate Professor
English Department
LaGuardia Community College**

The process of talking to my fellow union brethren about recommitting to the union has been a positive and rewarding one. So far, I've mainly spoken to members of my department, colleagues whom I know well and newly hired members whom I am just getting to know. In our conversations, people have had questions about *Janus v. AFSCME* and how it poses threats to our union. We've spoken about how our union dues are used and why they are integral to our union's strength and ability to support contract negotiations.

Faculty members have expressed their feelings about our current contract, mainly positive, and their hopes for the next one after the current one expires this fall. Full-time faculty members are eager to receive a course reduction in the new contract, something essential to serve our students well and to add sorely needed balance to our lives. Several colleagues worry that a weakened union might not have the resources needed to secure that reduction.



David Unger focuses conversations around members' concerns.



Ellen Moynihan

Fitz Richardson, a CLT in the department of television and radio at Medgar Evers College, has been urging his colleagues to recommit to the union. So far, he said, all the members he has approached have signed up.

It's been heartening to hear members' commitment to the union. One colleague penned exclamation points on the recommitment card after the sentence, "Now more than ever, I'm sticking to the union." Responses like that give me hope that our union will be resilient despite external attempts to weaken it.

DAVID UNGER

**Coordinator
Labor Relations Certificate Programs
Murphy Institute, School for Professional Studies**

We have had a bunch of conversations and meetings about it, and we say to people, "How does this case impact the things you care about?" I can then talk about how the right is attacking the power that we have collectively to get things done. That's a real thing. You care about students? You care about CUNY's ability to service its community? You care about your own wages and working conditions? *Janus* is an attack on our ability to defend our students. How? By making our collective power weaker.

I think we can powerfully state: if you care about education budgets, then, well, in the past decade us working collectively in our organization has been the only backstop to CUNY budgets getting cut. You care about your ability to get wages? It always has to start from the interest of the audience, not the interest of the organization.

AMY JEU

**College Laboratory Technician
Department of Geography
Hunter College**

There has been an overwhelmingly positive turnout to sign the recommitment cards. CLTs on each

campus are seeking out fellow CLTs, surveying them and talking about the union and contract demands. We genuinely want to hear from CLTs about their reservations, concerns and needs. Our approach is very simple: meeting people wherever they're at, being quick to listen and slow to speak, learning of their needs and empowering them to be more proactive. One of the biggest challenges is overcoming their perception of the union and realizing the untapped power CLTs possess.

We are moving people from a position that the union is something we get goodies from to *we* are the union because the union is comprised of *everyone* within the organization coming together. It's also helping people to understand that if we want something or want to see change in a particular area, *we* CLTs need to fight for it, be heard and be persistent. CUNY doesn't give us anything for free; all that we and other groups have gained has been achieved through hard work, organizing, research, campaigning and fighting for what we believe in. We CLTs must do the same moving forward.

KRISTINA BAINES

**Assistant Professor
Anthropology
Guttman Community College**

Here at Guttman, we are a small faculty and we all know each other. After my experience leading a union campaign as my project for the union leadership training I just finished, I am well recognized and trusted, it seems, and all the faculty members I have asked to sign were very quick to do it without really needing to enter a discussion. We have a strong union commit-

ment here at Guttman, especially among faculty, which I think has a lot to do with our curriculum and its focus on social justice. Our interdisciplinary lends itself to solidarity as well.

ROBERT FARRELL

**Associate Professor,
Coordinator
Information Literacy and Assessment
PSC Chapter Chair
Lehman College**

Recommitting to the union is a no-brainer once you realize how our collective strength benefits us all. Our goal at Lehman is to

'It always has to start from the interest of the audience.'

increase the visibility of the union's presence on campus and to help educate members about our union-won rights and benefits – rights and benefits none of us would have if we pushed for them alone. We're holding frequent meetings and have begun to train a core group of faculty and staff who will talk with colleagues about what we've won in the past and what we can lose going forward under this new Supreme Court.

Additionally, we're creating new ways for faculty and staff to get directly involved in the work of the union. For example, over the past year, our chapter formed a Social Justice Committee. That committee, in collaboration with students, organized a post-election speak out, a teach-in on changing government, and a town hall on social activism that attracted over 400 students, faculty and staff. Connecting our members with opportunities for creative and engaged action makes real the truth that we – each one of us together – truly are the union.

Union drives rats out of York College

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Thanks to a quick-footed reaction by the York College PSC chapter, the union's Environmental Health and Safety Watchdogs and the central PSC office, rats are no longer invading York College. The April 2016 issue of *Clarion* reported on the rat and rodent infestation on the campus that PSC's health and safety watchdogs described as "out of control" and "extremely unhealthy and dangerous." In the Spring semester, York College's faculty caucus unanimously passed a resolution declaring the campus a "non-functional teaching environment," because of the rat infestation.

'UNDER CONTROL'

Scott Sheidlower, the PSC chapter chair at York College who had pressed York's administration to take action, said the pest problem is now "under control."

"[We] brought proof in the forms of video and pictures and asked for a resolution to the problem," said Anthony Andrews, a PSC HEO representative who attended the meetings. Andrews said the campus administration took action and looked into getting a new exterminator. Andrews said that there still may be "occasional sightings" of rats, but the situation is vastly improved. "The rat pack no longer performs nightly shows in the cafeteria and the occasional sighting of a rat on campus is now little more than a cameo appearance."

"Basically, you can walk in the building and not expect for a rat to run over your feet and not expect to

PSC chapter intervened



Anthony Andrews (l) and Chapter Chair Scott Sheidlower (r) pressed York College administration to take necessary steps to curb the rat and rodent infestation on their campus. Sheidlower said that the situation at York College is now, "under control."

see a rat running in the cafeteria," Sheidlower told *Clarion*.

Sheidlower and PSC officials pressed the president for union-wide meetings and did constant walk-throughs of York facilities.

He credited the progress in part to organizing by all the unions on the campus, including units in District Council 37 and leaders in the PSC's HEO and CLT chapters.

"Everyone was affected by this:

students, faculty; it didn't matter who you were. You showed up at York, you were affected by the rats," Sheidlower said. "That's why it was important that we work together."

Due to intense pressure from Sheidlower and other activists, the union stewards began to meet monthly with York College President Marcia Keizs.

OUTSIDE OVERSIGHT

The PSC's health and safety watchdogs were also monitoring progress. They conducted inspections of the campus, once when the issue was at its peak and another a year later when it was under control. The PSC health and safety team also contacted the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Bureau of Veterinary and Pest Control Services, which did its own assessment of the campus with the PSC experts. Jean Grassman, co-chair of PSC's Environmental Health and Safety Watchdogs, said that a key to prevention was to make sure rodents didn't have access to food.

"This happens at a lot of campuses, because garbage sits around," Grassman told *Clarion*. "If rats have access to the dumpsters, that's like a buffet."

FOOD WASTE

Grassman said the main culprit is not food waste brought by students, but major food waste in cafeterias, dining halls and dumpsters that aren't "isolated and protected."

York College officials have put in place preventive measures, including keeping food waste in sealed containers, moving trash

cans away from desks and encouraging faculty, staff and students to practice proper trash control methods. The administration also began moving on fixing the problem last spring.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

A central PSC demand was that a more aggressive exterminator be hired, and this demand ended in victory for the union: York terminated its contract with its previous pest control vendor at the end of May 2016 and it signed up with a new pest control company

'Everyone was affected by [the rats.]'

that uses integrated pest management, which takes a proactive approach to dealing with rodent problems. After two months of aggressively trapping the rats in their habitats and conducting campus visits

five times a week, York saw progress and reduced their visits.

College officials said that they first began to notice progress in September of 2016, when calls to buildings and grounds fell significantly from an excessively high three to five calls per day to about one to two per week.

James Minto, the executive director of facilities at York College, said in an email, "To date, we continue to utilize a monthly routine [integrated pest management] approach that consists of weekly visits of two to three each and can state confidently that the rodent infestation problem of last Spring has been reduced substantially to an occasional sighting."

New top lawyer at CUNY

By CLARION STAFF

CUNY announced on June 5 that Loretta Martinez, who has previously held legal positions in the Colorado State University system and at Harvard University, would become CUNY's next general counsel and vice chancellor for legal affairs.

A CUNY statement said that "she was instrumental in creating public-private partnerships across a variety of industry sectors for improved experiential learning and she cofounded a coalition of Latino educators focused on improving recruitment, retention and graduation rates for Latino students," and that "these objectives are also important elements of CUNY's new strategic framework."

PREDECESSOR

She replaces Frederick Schaffer, who announced his retirement soon after his conduct was criticized in a New York State Inspector General report released in November documenting abuse of college and foundation funds within the university system.

RF workers prepare for bargaining

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Across-the-board wage increases, freezing health insurance costs and compensation for increased workloads are some of the things that CUNY Research Foundation (RF) employees who are working at the RF central office will be asking for in their upcoming contract negotiations. The unit's current five-year contract expires at the end of this year and rank-and-file members of the RF unit are meeting to become familiar with the existing contract. They are also learning the terms of the National Labor Relations Act and participating in sessions about the negotiating process. All the unit's members have completed a bargaining survey, and they've elected a 15-person bargaining team.

BARGAINING PRIORITIES

"You see a lot more people stepping up this year," said Barbara

Focus on pay, health care

Rose, an administrator in the procurement and payables department and an RF worker with more than 15 years of service. "I feel like this team is ready to fight. They're outspoken and they're not going to stand for anything but the best," she said.

The top goal for the nearly 100 workers in the RF Central bargaining unit is increasing wages, but they're also concerned about rising health insurance costs. Currently, RF workers pay 21 percent of their health care premiums and, with health care costs increasing, their cost of the health care premium is rising. Members want to cap costs to a maximum dollar amount.

Other priorities include compensation for increased workload, ability to use more of their paid sick

leave if a family member is sick and a longer-term contract.

The most recent contract, which went into effect on January 1, 2013, secured gains, including compounded salary increases of 15.4 percent over five years, a \$750 bonus, ability to use two weeks of sick leave for paid parental leave and the use of up to five sick leave days to care for an ill family member.

Jamie Cheung, who works as a project administrator in the grants and contracts department, became more involved, because, she said, "I feel that I should participate in things that I believe in." She added, "I believe that there's strength in numbers."

The RF is a private nonprofit organization, so unlike other PSC members who are public-sector

'You see a lot more people stepping up.'

Closed presidential searches worry union

By ARI PAUL

When Vincent Boudreau, a dean at City College of New York and a former professor of political science, became City College of New York's (CCNY) interim president last year to replace the embattled Lisa Coico, faculty were pleased with the choice. "He has a real history here, he worked his way up," said Alan Feigenberg, then the City College PSC chapter chair and current union delegate. "This was a really good move. Most of us felt good about it."

Faculty members felt so good about it, in fact, that members of the college's faculty senate pushed the administration to consider Boudreau for the permanent position, Feigenberg recalled. But early on in the presidential search process, Feigenberg and others learned that Boudreau was no longer being considered. Moreover, there was no explanation of the reason, and the administration appointed a search committee that did not include a union representative. "The whole routine was very closed," Feigenberg said. "It was a departure from past practice."

NEW CUNY POLICY

City College isn't alone. Presidential searches at John Jay College and Brooklyn College have disturbed faculty and union officials because they have been conducted according to a new CUNY policy that allows candidates for CUNY presidencies to remain secret. In such searches, there are no public meetings on campus for finalists with faculty, staff or student representatives. The new policy provides that when one candidate demands confidentiality, all candidates are granted confidentiality. The fear among faculty is that closed searches will be the new norm for presidential searches at CUNY.

"I think this is a continuum by CUNY Central to assume more and more control over pretty much everything, to de-democratize what happens on campus," said Feigen-

Leaving out faculty and union input



Dave Sanders

To find a new president at City College, where Alan Feigenberg teaches, the college convened a "closed" search committee without a union representative. Feigenberg said the process went against past practice.

berg. Closed searches mean that there is no opportunity for candidates to meet union representatives on campus or for union leaders to interview them. The trend of not including the union in searches is troubling on several fronts, including labor relations.

"It is imperative that candidates for the position appreciate that they will be working in a unionized environment," PSC Secretary Nivedita Majumdar said in testimony to the CUNY Board of Trustees in April. "As a former chapter chair, I can testify that college presidents not only work closely with PSC chapters on contractually mandated matters, but also on issues relating to strategic directions for the institution. Because a productive relationship between college presidents and the union is deeply in the interest of the institution, the formal exclusion of the PSC in

presidential searches is both inexplicable and unacceptable."

That same month, dozens of faculty and staff at John Jay College signed a letter to Chancellor James Milliken arguing that the current model for the presidential search process, they believed, "eschew[ed] transparency," by invoking candidate confidentiality.

The letter stated, "John Jay College is a public institution that provides a service to its students and the people of New York, and a community of learning and scholarship bigger and far more important than any one individual. Acknowledging this reality is all the more important for the college's leaders, whose service to the institution, its mission, its history and its present-day community must be unequivocal and beyond reproach. We the undersigned do not believe that individuals unwilling to publicly declare their intention to serve John Jay College as its chief executive...can fulfill these criteria. This manifest lack of transparency raises serious questions about the legitimacy of the whole process and undermines our institution's commitment to 'educating for justice.'"

'CONFIDENTIAL' SEARCHES

The search committee at Brooklyn College to replace Karen Gould did include three faculty members and two students, all selected by the college administration, in addition to administration officials. However, the administration made it clear that confidentiality would be granted to the candidates into the final stage of the search, which traditionally has been a public stage. Michelle Anderson, a former dean at the CUNY School of Law, was

eventually appointed.

The administration's rationale, according to Brooklyn College PSC Chair James Davis, who served on the search committee, is that confidentiality would make it easier for candidates to participate

'It's all in the name of greater efficiency.'

in the search, as rumors of their departure from their current institutions could disrupt their work. George Mason University academics Judith Wilde and James Finkelstein, emeritus, wrote in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in April, "anxiety among candidates fearing that their names will become public has resulted in a substantially increased workload for search committees and consultants attempting to recruit top candidates," which has increased the use of confidentiality agreements.

Davis said that on the one hand this made sense, however, "it's a creep into the corporate model of executive searches that is not typical of how academia has conducted itself over time."

He also noted the lack of transparency in the search for a new executive lowered faculty and staff morale. "It has fed into the cynicism that the administration wants to keep us in the dark," Davis said. "If CUNY management wants to diminish that cynicism it would be good to be inclusive and transparent when they can."

The trend doesn't violate New York State law or internal CUNY policy; it does, however, fly in the face of a long-standing American Association of University Professors (AAUP) standard. In fact, the association's Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities reads, "Joint effort of a most critical kind must be taken when an insti-

tution chooses a new president. The selection of a chief administrative officer should follow upon a cooperative search by the governing board and the faculty, taking into consideration the opinions of others who are appropriately interested. The president should be equally qualified to serve both as the executive officer of the governing board and as the chief academic officer of the institution and the faculty. The president's dual role requires an ability to interpret to board and faculty the educational views and concepts of institutional government of the other. The president should have the confidence of the board and the faculty."

CORPORATIZATION OF COLLEGES

The dual role of a president is key, said Michael DeCesare, the AAUP's chair of the standing committee on college and university governance. The reason for faculty input on presidential hiring has been that the president isn't just an executive of the university as a business entity, but the leader of the pedagogical workforce. But the corporatization of colleges and universities in the past few decades has prompted, or has led to college and university boards focusing their searches on the former role but not the latter.

In addition, college and university presidential searches nationwide have relied more heavily on outside search consultants. Between 10 and 12 percent of searches used such firms in the 1970s; the number is up to 80 percent now, according to the AAUP, and these firms are used to do the search work that was once the domain of faculty representatives on search committees.

"The idea is that it eases the burden on the search committee and that the firm is best suited to choose the best candidate," DeCesare told *Clarion*. "It's all in the name of greater efficiency. There's no evidence that I've seen that it results in better searches or applicant pools."

'RIGHT TO PRIVACY'

Wilde and Finkelstein commented, "This so-called right to privacy increasingly has become the norm in presidential searches. However, it is based on a premise for which we can find no empirical support. Rather, we are forced to rely on 'evidence' provided by those who stand to benefit most from secrecy – the successful candidate and the search firm that is paid to find the candidates. This degree of confidentiality seems to be at odds with standard practices for hiring other public executives, as well as contrary to the core values of a university."

Davis noted that the Brooklyn College search included an outside search firm, which on the one hand "was very helpful," but also "created a context in which the new confidentiality policy would be an inevitability."

Continued on page 10



Ellen Moynihan

Nivedita Majumdar testified against the "closed" search process and the lack of input from the union at an April board of trustees meeting.

NYSUT member wins assembly race

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

In a surprise victory for a state assembly race in a strong Republican district in Long Island, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) union member Christine Pellegrino, a Democrat, won the district with a more than a 15-point lead. Pellegrino, a 25-year veteran reading teacher, a delegate for Bernie Sanders at the Democratic National Convention and an advocate for free college tuition for all students, won the special election for a state assembly seat left vacant when the former assembly member, Joseph Saladino, a Republican, was appointed Oyster Bay supervisor. Pellegrino defeated Republican opponent Tom Gargiulo in a special election held on May 23.

A GOP STRONGHOLD

The ninth state assembly district, which Pellegrino carried, has long been a Republican stronghold. It's on Long Island's south shore and includes parts of Nassau and Suffolk counties. *City & State New York*, which covers New York politics, wrote that the district contained "the central artery of Nassau's vaunted GOP machine." In November, President Donald Trump won the district with 60 percent of the vote. In 2016, when Democratic candidate Brendan Cunningham ran against Republican incumbent Saladino, Cunningham lost in a big way.

"Something is happening," tweeted Cunningham on the night that Pellegrino was declared the victor. "BIG congrats to Christine Pellegrino on flipping this conservative assembly district. I got 31 percent in 2016."

Trump carried district with 60% of the vote



Christine Pellegrino, in a special election for the ninth state assembly district in Long Island, won against her GOP challenger in a Republican-leaning district.

Steve London, a PSC legislative committee member and an associate professor in political science at Brooklyn College, said in special elections, which typically have low voter turnout, mobilizing voters is crucial. Across the nation, he said, Democrats have come close to defeating Republicans in Republican-leaning districts.

"The difference between coming close and winning was both

Pellegrino's worker-friendly message and NYSUT's and Working Family Party's (WFP) organizational support," London told *Clarion*. "What Pellegrino's victory says to me is that progressive candidates and the power of union and WFP organizing is the secret sauce for transforming anti-Trumpism into a meaningful electoral movement for change."

Pellegrino will bring a progressive vision to Albany.

NYSUT is the PSC's state-level parent union. NYSUT President Andrew Pallotta celebrated Pellegrino's win, saying in a statement, "Christine's message resonates – it's time to send a teacher, mom and opt-out leader to Albany to make public education policy. She's one of us and we're very proud today. NYSUT volunteers made thousands of

phone calls and knocked on countless doors to convince ninth district residents that Christine would put the community's needs ahead of anything else – and they listened."

ANTI-TRUMP RESISTANCE

Republicans have been on the defensive in special elections in districts that normally vote Republican. Also this May, a Democratic candidate in New Hampshire beat her Republican contender for a seat on the New Hampshire House of Representatives in a district that went for Trump by seven points. In the Atlanta suburbs, a June 20 runoff for a seat on the U.S. House of Representatives is seen by many political experts as a toss-up between Jon Ossoff, a Democrat, and Karen Handel, a Republican. That house district has had a Republican representative since 1979, when Newt Gingrich was first elected to represent it.

Pellegrino's win doesn't tip the balance in the New York State Assembly where there's a clear Democratic majority; there are currently 108 Democrats and 42 Republicans. Pellegrino, who has a history of union and progressive activism, will advocate for adequate funding for education and other progressive measures.

"I will be a strong voice for all New Yorkers in Albany," posted Pellegrino on her campaign's Facebook page. "I will fight for our children, our communities, our schools, health care, clean drinking water, more resources to help combat the growing opioid addiction many families are facing on LI, and to make sure that we are protected in case of another natural disaster."

Pushing for fair MOE bill in Albany

By CLARION STAFF

The union is encouraging members to push state lawmakers for an enhanced maintenance-of-effort (MOE) bill for CUNY and SUNY that would increase funding to the state's public university systems, which would include funding for collective bargaining increases in the future.

"The enhanced MOE would provide CUNY with an additional \$157 million for academic and student support services," PSC First Vice President Michael Fabricant said in a dispatch to members.

Fabricant encouraged members to call to support S.1596 in the Senate, sponsored by Senate Higher Education Committee Chair Kenneth LaValle and A.934-A in the Assembly, sponsored by Assembly Higher Education Chair Deborah Glick.

He noted the current language is inadequate. "The current MOE assures the steady creep of disinvestment in CUNY. It provides essentially flat funding, requiring that CUNY's funding be no less than it was in the prior year," he said.

FUNDING MANDATORY COSTS

Education activists have noted that the current situation forces cash-strapped campuses to divert tuition money from academics to basic needs like heat and lighting.

Fabricant told members, "The bill would provide reimbursement for a portion of the gap between the current maximum Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) award and the actual cost of tuition. CUNY now has to absorb that gap at a cost of more than \$50 million a year."

Closed presidential searches worry union

Continued from page 9

One consequence of this trend is an increase in campus spending on outside consultants while faculty are left out of the process, he said. Another problem is that this trend has contributed to more presidencies going to lawyers, politicians and other people with managerial experience but little to no experience in academia.

CUNY responded in a statement, "Searches for university presidents and chancellors, at public universities across the country, have become a balance between the openness most would like to see and the goal of attracting the best candidates to the pool. At CUNY, the board's guidelines for these searches require that the committee include members of the faculty, the administration, the students and alumni, among others, so that faculty are integral to the process. In addition, finalists meet with

and are interviewed by groups of faculty and students, and that has been the case in recent searches. But the simple fact is that sitting presidents and other high-profile leaders from other institutions are seldom inclined to be part of a very public process with other candidates; it can create challenges for these leaders at their current institutions if they remain at them. So it's not surprising that many of the leading universities in the country conduct searches that are confidential."

More colleges are conducting 'closed' searches.

Most recently, for example, SUNY's chancellor search concluded with the announcement of a single, successful candidate, with no open process at the end. CUNY noted that the recent appointment of a new chancellor at SUNY ended without an open process at the end. "This has become the rule at our largest public universities," the statement said. "In addition, even the confi-

dential search process, adopted only upon recommendation of the search committee, includes many faculty, student and staff participants in the final stage."

UNION INPUT

"Locally, faculty and staff have to fight against this," DeCesare said. "So when there's a search happening, they need to demand a role on the search committee."

PSC President Barbara Bowen told *Clarion*, "Closed presidential searches violate the norms and goals of a public institution. There is no substitute for the knowledge gained on both sides when candidates meet with elected campus leaders and groups of faculty, staff and students. What worries me is the normalizing of corporate conventions in a public institution and the deliberate exclusion of faculty, staff and their union. The PSC leadership has registered our concern about the pattern of such searches with the chancellor's office."

CLIMATE JUSTICE

There is hope after ‘Paris’

By STEPHEN PEKAR

One of the most humiliating events to befall the United States in recent years has been Donald Trump’s decision to pull out of the Paris climate accord, which placed the United States in a notorious group of only two other countries, Syria and Nicaragua, that have not signed onto the landmark agreement. No doubt, his position to drop from the Paris agreement was rooted in his allegiance to his political constituency – joined by a large group of Americans who take in spurious information peddled by the conservative media and right-wing status quo about climate science. Even with a significant portion of the population supporting the Paris agreement (i.e., 69 percent of the public), 22 Republican Senators did not fear voter outrage and single-mindedly advocated withdrawing from the accord. This is even the case at a time when overwhelming scientific evidence has amassed over many decades showing that climate change and its effects are real, and it

is mainly caused by human activity. Indeed, arguing the facts about climate change appears to increase polarization on the subject.

UNFOUNDED CLAIMS

Trump has stated that the Paris Agreement will hurt the U.S. economy’s competitiveness in the long term and reduce our potential to generate new and innovative businesses, but this claim has been contested by industry and corporate leaders. In addition, Trump has accused the accord of being “unfair” because large polluting countries such as India and China are not required to replace their fossil-base and environmentally unfriendly standards until 2030. On the contrary, China and India are doing more than they agreed to in the Paris accord – India plans to have nearly 60 percent of electricity capacity come from non-fossil fuels by 2027 and China has agreed to spend at least \$360 billion on renewable energy by 2020.

Worse, Trump’s executive orders on climate change and his appointment of Scott Pruitt to head the EPA have the potential to be more damaging than pulling out of the climate accord. For example, his administration directed the EPA to review former President Barack Obama’s Clean Power Plan, rescind the moratorium on coal mining on federal lands and urge federal agencies to “identify all regulations, all rules, all policies that serve as obstacles and impediments to American energy independence.” It also repeals at least six Obama-era executive orders aimed at addressing global warming, including those that instructed the federal government to prepare for the impacts of climate change.

LIMITING DAMAGES

There is some good news: many of Trump’s executive moves will certainly end up in court. In fact, getting rid of the Clean Power Plan of 2014, which put a limit to the amount of

carbon dioxide produced by a range of power plants, will be far harder than just signing an executive order. However, other avenues exist for Trump to implement his draconian measures to reduce the use of fossil fuels in the United States. Pruitt has already begun the process of abandoning the Clean Power Plan. As damaging as leaving the Paris accords might be, Pruitt’s EPA is more dangerous.

A surge of support for keeping with the Paris accords has occurred since Trump’s decision, both at the state and local levels across the country, as exemplified by the creation of United States Climate Alliance (USCA). A nonpartisan group of states, this makes up more than a third of the U.S. population with the main goal of upholding the 2015 Paris agreement on climate change. The familiar expression, “think global, act locally” may be the battle cry for advocates of transforming our world to a sustainable, renewable economy for the coming years. At least until 2018.

Stephen Pekar is a professor of earth and environmental sciences at Queens College.

Reversal of environmental progress

AUSTERITY

Like CUNY, UPR faces a neoliberal assault

By JEFFREY HERLIHY-MERA

When I was a boy, my grandfather spoke to me about the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) in Mayagüez with great esteem. And with good reason. It graduates many more Latino/a engineers than any other university in the world. Various departments on campus receive funding from NASA, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation and other respected institutions. Ninety-eight percent of enrolled students are Latino/Hispanic, and over 60 percent receive Pell Grants.

But the Middle States Commission on Higher Education has threatened the UPR’s accreditation in response to the university’s student strike in protest of proposed brutal austerity measures. All 11 campuses in the UPR system have been occupied in recent weeks.

IN CONTEXT

But the accreditation board should take a broader view of what is happening on the island. Like Detroit, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Orange County, California, the Puerto Rican government approved a comprehensive bankruptcy package to relieve unpayable debt. But as U.S. policy is to “make all needful rules and regulations” on the island, the bankruptcy protection was ignored and ultimately nullified.

Rather than respect a bankruptcy procedure similar to that of Argentina, Greece, or a U.S. state, the U.S. Congress passed the

Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), a body of legislation that granted a seven-member board – known locally as *La Junta* – absolute plenary power to overrule the Puerto Rico Legislature, governor and public authorities.

‘AUTOCRATIC’ BOARD

La Junta is “a de facto government,” said Carmen Beatriz Llenín-Figueroa, who teaches comparative literature at the University of Puerto Rico, “a farcical colonial apparatus wielding autocratic, absolute control of all Puerto Rican public institutions.”

The mission of PROMESA is not unlike that of a bank: to protect the interests of bondholders. (One member of PROMESA has over \$250,000 in personal investment in Puerto Rican bonds.) Many economists agree that privileging shareholders at the expense of Puerto Rican public institutions – including health care, education and utilities – is unsustainable and negligent and may be illegal.

Nobel Laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz said the board lacks “any understanding of basic economics and democratic accountability” and has a strategy that “makes a recovery a virtual impossibility.” Stiglitz’s analysis is clear: “People will experience untold suffering. And to what end?”

La Junta’s reach includes the University of Puerto Rico. And their demands – \$512 million in cuts – are as irresponsible and unethical as the existence of the board itself.

Our students are engaged in a struggle

with the colonial apparatus that threatens their education. Their solidarity movement is a check on the power of PROMESA, one that seizes a collective, public and democratic voice as an oppositional force to the absolutist power wielded by *La Junta*. Their demands include:

- That the UPR’s administration shall not penalize any student for expressing themselves and participating in this process of stoppage, manifestation and conflict in defense of the UPR.
- That all sectors of the UPR community present a university reform plan that represents said community.
- That the Public Debt Auditing Commission and its funds be reestablished immediately, that the auditing process begin immediately and that a moratorium on the debt be established before and during the auditing process.
- That no tuition increases or tuition exemption eliminations be considered.
- That no budget cuts to the UPR be considered.

Number three suggests that students believe – as do many Puerto Ricans – that much of the debt could be illegal; at the very least, the accounts must be audited before any cuts come into effect. If the budget reductions are engaged, they will bring to an end the university’s ability to attend to students. It will cease to function on the most basic level as an educational institution.

As an educator, I have a profound objection to Middle States’s legitimization of *La*

Junta. Civil society is grounded in principles like democracy, equality, sovereignty and representation, precisely that which PROMESA seeks to displace in Puerto Rico.

Middle States’s capitulation to the demands of the board concedes the integrity of our profession to a corporate transaction, one that privileges the pockets of those far from Puerto Rico over the severe human costs on the island.

Rather than posturing about rescinding accreditation, and thus redoubling the exploitation from *La Junta*, Middle States should uphold its own mission, one that is consonant with the student movement at the UPR: the Middle States Commission “assures students and the public of the educational quality of higher education.” In this case, such action can be done only in solidarity: voicing opposition to federal legislation that is intended to supersede democracy.

As Middle States has no policy on record for public institutions that have been seized by external powers, this is an opportunity to instate one: while PROMESA exists and until Puerto Rican debt has been audited, current accreditation certifications should stand in perpetuity. This action would at once contest the unethical nature of PROMESA and assure the existence (and thus quality) of higher education on the island.

UNILATERAL CUTS

Without a doubt, such a policy would be in effect in an analogous situation on the U.S. mainland: if a Puerto Rican board with no U.S. representation were to legislate unilateral cuts to a public university in Washington, D.C., Middle States would approach the circumstance in civil objection, not by penalizing the students or the institution through revoking accreditation.

La Junta will destroy Puerto Rican higher education. Our students know that. Middle States should act with the same shrewdness as the strikers – in support of education, democracy and local control of public institutions.

Jeffrey Herlihy-Mera is an associate professor in the department of humanities at the University of Puerto Rico. A version of this article original appeared in Jacobin.

Shareholders’ needs over the public’s



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

Keep the union strong

The U.S. Supreme Court is currently considering hearing *Janus v. AFSCME*, a case that aims to strip unions of their power, their money and their membership. It's considered almost inevitable that a conservative majority high court will side with the right-wing forces supporting the case, and such a ruling

could hinder the power of public-sector unions, including the PSC. If you don't know about the case and its effect on your union, your benefits, your bargaining power, talk to your chapter chair who can also direct you on how to get further involved. For a list of chapter chairs, go to tinyurl.com/PSC-chapters.

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UNION VIEWS

Clarion | June/July 2017

FREE SPEECH

We defend Sarsour's speech rights

By MEENA ALEXANDER, MICHELLE FINE, NICHOLAS FREUDENBERG, GERALD MARKOWITZ and ROSALIND PETSCHESKY

For the past few weeks, right-wing and conservative religious groups have protested the City University of New York Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy's invitation to Linda Sarsour, an Arab-American activist and co-organizer of the national Women's March on Washington in January, to speak at its graduation. They called on New York's governor and the city's mayor to force the school to withdraw the invitation.

This is not the first time conservatives have tried to pressure CUNY to rescind an invitation to a speaker who disagreed with their views on Israel. In 2011, in response to outside pressure, the CUNY Board of Trustees voted to force John Jay College of Criminal Justice to disinvite Tony Kushner, the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright. Later, CUNY rejected that view [*Editor's note: CUNY allowed the talk after PSC and activist pressure*]. And in 2013, when Brooklyn College received strong criticism for cosponsoring a panel discussion about the movement that calls for economic boycotts and sanctions against Israel, Mayor Michael Bloomberg observed, "If you want to go to a university where the government decides what kind of subjects are fit for discussion, I suggest you apply to a school in North Korea."

FREE SPEECH RIGHTS

As distinguished professors in various disciplines at CUNY, most of us Jewish, we support the right of our colleges to select graduation speakers and of our students to hear the views of those who are bringing new voices into the nation's political discourse.

In an era when free speech is under threat, we feel it is an essential task of the university to provide a space where diverse points of view can be aired and debated. What could be more central than this to the maintenance of our democracy? Right-wing critics are quick to complain when college students protest inviting speakers like Betsy DeVos, Milo Yiannopoulos or Charles Murray to speak on campus, but feel justified in calling for limits on free speech when they disagree with speakers, a double stan-



Civil rights activist Linda Sarsour delivered a commencement address at CUNY's School of Public Health amidst right-wing activists protesting the decision to let her speak.

dard that fundamentally misunderstands the First Amendment.

Like other Americans, CUNY students and faculty disagree about Israeli – and American – politics, policies and leaders. In our classrooms, clubs, civic organizations and even at faculty gatherings, we take pride in these often difficult, but always enlightening discussions. Such differences, and our willingness to hear multiple perspectives, highlight our strength as a crucible for democratic discourse. Colleges and universities should not establish rules about which political views can be discussed and debated and which cannot.

The CUNY School of Public Health selected Linda Sarsour to deliver the keynote address June 1 because the selection committee believed she represents the new activism of young people, women, immigrants and others speaking out against discrimination and intolerance and in favor of democracy, solidarity and human rights. In 2012, President Barack Obama designated Sarsour a Champion of Change. The White House observed that "Linda's strengths are in the areas of community development, youth empowerment, community organizing, civic engagement and immigrants' rights advocacy."

Time magazine recently named Sarsour one of the 100 Most Influential People of 2017 because of her work in organizing the Women's March, and *Fortune* magazine also included her on their 2017 list of the world's 50 greatest leaders.

U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York has written that the Women's March was "a lightning bolt of awakening for so many women and men who demanded to be heard...and it happened because four extraordinary women [including Sarsour] had the courage to take on something big, important and urgent.... The images of January 21, 2017, show a diverse, dynamic America – striving for equality for all."

NEW VOICES

That's the person and message that the School of Public Health honored at its graduation. The others honored at the graduation ceremonies included Chirlane McCray, the first lady of New York City, for her work in promoting better access to mental-health services, and Mary Bassett, the commissioner of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, who has led municipal initiatives to reduce racial, ethnic and income inequalities in health in the city.

In the view of the selection committee, these three women represent new voices for more inclusive activist approaches to improving public health and social justice.

In their opposition to inviting Sarsour, conservative and religious critics cited her alleged connection to Arab militant organizations and her condemnation of Israeli policies and leaders. If American universities invited only graduation speakers whose every statement and tweet over their lifetime offended no one on the right or left or in any religious group, our graduation ceremonies would be dull and vacuous, inspiring no one and detached from the larger world.

BROAD SUPPORT

Fortunately, other important voices in New York City supported the School of Public Health's right to decide whom to invite. An editorial in the *New York Daily News* chastised critics of the invitation for objecting to cancellation of right-wing speakers at other universities and asserted that "her right to deliver the address ought not be in question." Two New York rabbis wrote a *Daily News* op-ed calling Sarsour "a friend to Jews." CUNY Chancellor James Milliken noted that, while he disagreed with Sarsour's position on some issues, "difference of opinion provides no basis for action now. Taking action because critics object to the content of speech would conflict with the First Amendment and the principles of academic freedom."

CUNY has long prided itself on providing a path for equitable access to higher education, a crucible for democracy, a place where faculty and students can hear and debate controversial ideas, and an institution that cherishes social justice and freedom of speech. In its selection of Sarsour, the School of Public Health graduation honors those principles.

Meena Alexander, Michelle Fine and Gerald Markowitz are distinguished professors at the Graduate Center. Nicholas Freudenberg is a distinguished professor at the Graduate School of Public Health. Rosalind Petschkesky is a distinguished professor emerita of political science at the Graduate Center. A version of this article first appeared in Inside Higher Ed.

An organizer of the Women's March