

# Clarion

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



MARCH 2018



## BARGAINING Contract talks start

The PSC steps into negotiations with CUNY.

PAGE 2



Ellen Moynihan

## JANUS V. AFSCME

# PREPARED FOR THE FIGHT

The Supreme Court is almost certain to hand down a negative ruling for unions in *Janus v. AFSCME*. What would the ruling mean for the PSC? What is behind this case? And how are members preparing for the future?

PAGES 6-7

### GOVERNANCE

## Union confronts SPS plan

The PSC held a lively forum about a controversial proposal at the School of Professional Studies that could threaten faculty governance.

PAGE 3

### BUDGET

## Pushing for full CUNY funding

PSC members are pushing the city and state for full funding for higher education, including for '\$7K' for adjuncts.

PAGE 4

### STUDENTS

## Activists decry fee change

Students protested a Board of Trustees proposal on the administration of student fees. Many say the change is undemocratic.

PAGE 5



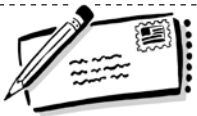
### ELECTIONS

## 2018 union-wide elections

Voting in the union-wide general election takes place in April. Meet the candidates and learn how to cast your ballot by phone or internet.

PAGES 8-11





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

# Clearing the air on SPS proposal

● The CUNY School of Professional Studies Governance Task Force welcomes the opportunity to correct the inaccuracies contained in the article entitled “SPS Governance Plan Cuts Faculty Input,” which was printed in the December 2017 issue of *Clarion*.

First, contrary to *Clarion*’s claim, the CUNY SPS dean neither drafted nor issued the CUNY SPS draft governance plan, and the draft plan is not an administrative attempt to dismantle shared governance. The draft was composed by a committee made up of faculty, staff and administration, which met regularly over the course of one year, researched other CUNY governance plans and consulted with the University Faculty Senate and CUNY Legal Affairs while composing their first draft.

Further, in the spirit of transparency and inclusion, the first draft was shared with the CUNY SPS community, including all current adjunct faculty, and comments and feedback were invited via an anonymous online survey. Following the anonymous comment period, two in-person fora were held in early December with remote participation provided.

The *Clarion* article claims that “under the proposal, only adjuncts with three-year appointments can serve on the SPS governing council, of whom there are about five, but they are not permitted to vote.” This is inaccurate: the draft plan states that adjuncts with three-year appointments, adjuncts who are consortial faculty and adjuncts who serve as academic community leaders are all eligible to serve as voting members of the council. To be clear, at CUNY SPS, an “academic community leader” is a member of the adjunct faculty who participates in and is compensated for program-level administration and other service to the program, such as mentoring and outcomes assessment.

At the CUNY SPS discussion fora, the drafting committee heard suggestions from the community that included a call for broader representation of adjunct faculty and agreed to expand adjunct faculty participation in governance. It is worth noting that these discussions and agreements took place before the publication of the *Clarion* article.

In addition, *Clarion* states that “[T]he proposal defines ‘faculty’ to include administrative employees without underlying faculty appointments to perform traditional faculty roles,” and that “while the academic directors should have a voice in the governance of SPS, their inclusion as part of the faculty is improper.” The truth is that all academic directors at CUNY SPS hold full-time faculty appointments.

We are disappointed that *Clarion* did not reach out to CUNY SPS for comment or clarification before publication of their article.

The structure of CUNY SPS is indeed unique within the University and gives us the ability to be innovative and responsive in addressing the needs of working adult students. We are dedicated to our students and proud of our programs, many of which have been nationally recognized. Our draft governance plan was created by members of the SPS community to best serve the needs of SPS faculty, staff and students. We look forward to reflecting on all comments that have been received, and to composing a plan that sustains shared governance at CUNY SPS.

**Otilia Abraham, Carl Grindley, Washington Hernandez, Ellen Karl, Lia Kudless, Carla Marquez-Lewis, Abi Morrison and Jennifer Sparrow**  
School of Professional Studies

## Queens making progress

● The February 2018 *Clarion* article “A Closing Door? Black Admission at Queens College” accurately reports that over 140 nationalities and 85 languages are represented in the student body. Concern, however, is expressed about the numbers of Latino and black students in certain CUNY four-year units, including Queens College. The QC Strategic Plan, launched in 2015, identified that issue and calls for increased recruitment of African American and other groups underrepresented racially and ethnically among undergraduates and graduate students.

In the past five years, Latino undergraduates increased at QC from 3,708 to 4,711 – an increase of 27 percent; black student enrollment increased from 1,165 to 1,466 – an increase of 26 percent; white student undergraduates decreased from 6,632 to 4,497 – a decrease of 32 percent; and Asian students increased from 3,876 to 4,846 – an increase of 25 percent. These data do not include Native Americans or those who identify as two or more races, or as non-resident aliens – cumulatively a very small percentage of the total.

Much good work is anticipated to build upon our progress thus far, including a sustained outreach to veterans – reaching many prospective students of color – at a campus designated by respected national organizations as “military friendly.” There are many efforts underway to help us achieve our

goal of increasing African American student presence on campus, among them: (1) a partnership between QC and Queensborough Community College to develop STEM “landing courses” to attract, retain and graduate minority and low-income students; (2) increased recruitment and collaborations with high schools in southeastern Queens and also with other local schools that have high African American enrollment; (3) sponsorship at Queens College of NYC Men Teach and My Brother’s Keeper programs – to recruit more African American students interested in becoming teachers; (4) more aggressive recruitment of African American faculty and staff to serve as role models and ambassadors of the College; (5) receipt of a one million dollar grant from the Give Something Back Foundation to recruit low-income, pre-collegiate students is being administered in partnership with community organizations like Upward Bound Schools and the Eagle Academies; and (6) consistent with the QC Strategic Plan, development and implementation of major multicultural events on campus, including programs sponsored by our Center for Ethnic, Racial and Religious Understanding. Furthermore, the QC Middle States Association Self-

Study, completed last year, cites our continuing efforts to expand access, including the Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Program, the Black Male Initiative, Veterans Support Services, the CUNY Opportunity for Students of Success program and Project ExCEL.

We are continuing our efforts to attract African American students – first-time freshmen, transfers and graduate – so that they can enhance the QC student experience and benefit from the great education provided at the College. We are committed to continue the good work to build on the progress made thus far.

**Richard Alvarez**  
Vice President for Enrollment and Student Retention  
Queens College

## Making an open CUNY

● We are grateful to *Clarion* for publishing our opinion pieces on open admissions in the last issue.

Our goal was not merely to revisit the tumultuous origins and ultimate dismantling of open admissions, but to use the past to inform the present. The end result of the dismantling of open admissions has been the formation of a two-tier system whereby the top-five senior colleges are populated mostly by white and Asian students, and the other senior and community

colleges are populated by blacks, Latinos and other minorities. Not only are these students generally poorer, but they also lack the test prep that is available to students from more well-to-do families.

This amounts to a system of academic apartheid. No longer do we have George Wallace standing in the doorway, fulminating “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.” Rather, through increased tuitions and escalating SAT requirements, thousands of qualified minority applicants to CUNY’s senior colleges are rejected every year.

There is a simple remedy. Many colleges are replacing the SATs with a system of “holistic admissions” that places greater weight on high school grades, recommendations and abilities not measured by standardized tests.

We urge faculty and students across CUNY to mobilize against the racial inequalities that some would say are baked into the current CUNY system of admissions. To further this goal, we propose that PSC appoint a task force to reexamine admissions standards at the senior colleges, particularly as they impact racial minorities.

**Stephen Steinberg**  
Queens College and Graduate Center  
**Maureen Pierce-Anyan**  
Queens College

*Editor’s note: Clarion reserves the right to edit letters sent for publication.*

# CUNY contract bargaining begins



As this newspaper went to press, PSC began formal contract bargaining talks with CUNY. Above, Iris DeLutro, a bargaining team member, speaks during a team meeting about union demands and strategies.

## Clarion MARCH 2018

Newspaper of the Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York, collective bargaining representative of the CUNY instructional staff. Vol. 47, No. 2. PSC/CUNY is affiliated with the American Association of University Professors, National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers (Local 2334), AFL-CIO, the New York City Central Labor Council and New York State United Teachers. Published by PSC/CUNY, 61 Broadway, 15th floor, New York, NY 10006. Telephone: (212) 354-1252. Website: www.psc-cuny.org. Email: apaul@psccmail.org. All opinions expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the PSC.

**PSC OFFICERS:** Barbara Bowen, President; Michael Fabricant, First Vice President; Nivedita Majumdar, Secretary; Sharon Persinger, Treasurer; Steve London, Paul Washington, Alan Feigenberg, David Hatchett, Alia Tyner-Mullings, University-Wide Officers; Alex Vitale, Vice President, Senior Colleges; Penny Lewis, Clarence Taylor, George Sanchez, Senior College Officers; Lorraine Cohen, Vice President Community Colleges; Lizette Colón, Michael Spear, Anthony Gronowicz, Community College Officers; Iris DeLutro, Vice President, Cross-Campus Units; Andrea Vázquez, Albert Sherman, Jacqueline Elliot, Cross-Campus Officers; Susan DiRaimo, Vice President, Part-Time Personnel; Blanca Vázquez, Luke Elliott-Negri, Michael Batson, Part-Time Personnel Officers; Steve Leberstein, Glenn Kissack, Retiree Officers; Irwin H. Polishook, President Emeritus; Peter I. Hoberman, Vice President Emeritus, Cross-Campus Units.

**STAFF:** Deborah Bell, Executive Director; Naomi Zauderer, Associate Executive Director; Faye H. Alladin, Coordinator, Financial Services; Renee Lasher, Director, Contract Administration; Deirdre Brill, Director, Organizing; Francis Clark, Coordinator, Communications; Barbara Gabriel, Coordinator, Office Services and Human Resources; Kate Pfordresher, Director, Research & Public Policy; Diana Rosato, Coordinator, Membership Department; Peter Zwiebach, Director of Legal Affairs.

Editor: Ari Paul / Associate Editor: Shomial Ahmad / Designer: Margarita Aguilar / Copy Editors: Teri Duerr, Matthew Schlecht  
© 2018 Professional Staff Congress/CUNY



# Protecting faculty governance

By CLARION STAFF

Late last year, the CUNY School of Professional Studies (SPS), whose faculty is over 90 percent adjunct instructors, released a draft of a new governance structure that alarmed union leaders and faculty activists. At issue, they said, were proposed governance structures that would limit academic freedom, would not permit an independent faculty voice and would not be in compliance with the PSC collective bargaining agreement.

During an open forum on February 7 at the Graduate Center, a group of faculty advocates laid out their concerns and argued for the need of a better plan. Administrators, faculty and students from SPS responded that they value the unique structure of SPS and the “community” it provides. PSC President Barbara Bowen said, “The proposed plan lacks the institutional structures for elected faculty leadership and therefore for independent peer evaluation and personnel and curriculum decisions, essential for academic freedom.”

Bowen stated that SPS has a unique mission and is still expanding and needs to be flexible in its offerings, but said it was not a reason to establish a governance plan that failed to institutionalize shared faculty governance. She added that the structure of SPS, in which most full-time faculty are in non-tenured or consortial positions, combined with the large number of contingent faculty with little proposed voice in governance, disempowers the faculty.

## FIRST SPS, THEN...

Faculty across CUNY should be concerned because the SPS approach could be taken as a model to erode faculty governance, not just at SPS but throughout CUNY.

Government disinvestment in CUNY has resulted in too few full-time faculty and staff to provide support services for students, plus a heightened dependence on low-paid adjunct faculty.

“It doesn’t have to be this way,” said Katherine Conway, the president of the University Faculty Senate (UFS). She noted that throughout the university, about two-thirds of campus senates have adjunct representatives. There are some laudable efforts to increase part-time faculty involvement. At Bronx Community College, for example, adjuncts are paid for participation in governance activities, as their pay rates often preclude them from taking on responsibilities outside of class.

As a school that started as a continuing education program offering certificates to working people, whose lives and schedules often do not conform to regular class schedules, SPS has a courseload that is online. The bulk of its faculty are adjuncts, who, unlike full-time tenured faculty, lack the job security that allows them to speak candidly enough to participate in a meaningful governance process.

## SPS plan: a dangerous model for CUNY?



Philip Pecorino, who serves on the University Faculty Senate's executive committee, was optimistic that more discussions would lead to a mutually beneficial governance plan at SPS.

“The underlying problem is the SPS structure,” Conway said. “More full-time, tenured faculty are needed.” She noted further that UFS has sent proposed SPS-specific changes in the draft plan to clarify the independent role of faculty. SPS now offers undergraduate and graduate degrees and the number of SPS-based, tenured, full-time faculty has not expanded accordingly. In addition, noted Conway, it is a problem that a number of academic directors are quasi-management. UFS has offered feedback on the draft governance document that tries to address these issues, emphasizing that shared governance is about transparency.

## THE GUTTMAN MODEL

Alia Tyner-Mullings, a faculty member at Guttman Community College and PSC chapter chair there, described briefly her colleagues’ efforts to develop a more transparent and effective governance plan at their new, growing CUNY college with no departments. A number of tasks that are traditionally fulfilled by faculty were being conducted by deans and the provost, because of the lack of departments and department chairs.

The newly approved revised governance plan at Guttman, puts most committees under a governance structure, assigns all faculty to “practice areas” and establishes a faculty personnel committee for reappointment, promotion and tenure decisions.

Although most campuses are not as reliant on adjunct instructors as SPS, the union and other faculty advocates fear that if the state does not significantly increase investment in CUNY’s operating budget

to make up for decades of disinvestment, the university will be more reliant on adjuncts (who teach nearly half the courses already). The troubling elements of SPS’s proposed draft governance model – contingent faculty with little or no voice in governance, no institutional structures for independent faculty voice and application of proven contractual procedures, as well as management appointment of untenured faculty in many decision-making roles – could be the norm.

## A fear that this proposal could be the norm

Kate Moss, who worked for nine years as an adjunct at SPS and is now a full-time lecturer in general education, said, “My opinion was sought in evaluation and curriculum decisions when I was an adjunct, but most adjuncts are not on campus.” Several consortial faculty who teach online courses at SPS expressed concerns about the union’s “attack on online education.” David Hauser said “academic freedom should not mean getting rid of adjuncts.” A faculty member from Bronx Community

College noted that SPS has been recognized nationally for the quality of its programs. “Teaching online well is different from teaching online.”

PSC Secretary Nivedita Majumdar noted that the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) studied the inclusion of adjunct faculty in governance in 2014 and presented numerous recommendations. Colleges without departments – where faculty roles in curricular and personnel issues reside – present serious challenges and should have the strongest governance plans.

During the meeting, SPS administrators stressed that they could work with their faculty in a transparent process to come up with a final governance plan, as the draft was only a proposal. In a letter to *Clarion* (see page 2), SPS administration said, for the sake of transparency, it had shared the proposal with the CUNY SPS community, including all current adjunct and consortial faculty, and comments and feedback were invited via an “anonymous online survey” and that “the drafting committee heard suggestions from the community that included a call for broader representation of adjunct faculty and agreed to expand adjunct faculty participation in governance.”

## SPS IS ‘DIFFERENT’

Shakima Williams-Jones, co-chair of the SPS Student Association, said students at SPS feel a strong sense of support and community from the SPS administration: “It is not our intention to undermine existing practices, but SPS is different and is responsive to students.” She emphasized the need to foster more good will and to work together.

Philip Pecorino, a professor of philosophy at QCC who has taught at SPS and serves on the UFS executive committee, said that he was optimistic that a mutually beneficial governance plan at SPS would eventually emerge if the union, the Faculty Senate and SPS administration keep having open discussions about best practices.

## Solidarity with Columbia grad workers



PSC members marched in solidarity with graduate student workers at Columbia University, which refuses to bargain with the union despite the National Labor Relations Board certifying their union and recognizing their right to collectively bargain.



# Demanding full CUNY funding

By ARI PAUL

PSC activists have completed several lobby actions at the city and state level pushing for full funding of CUNY. Adjunct instructors are currently organizing for an Albany lobbying trip on April 24 focused specifically on funding the current contract demand of \$7,000 per course per semester for adjuncts.

In testimony to committees and in one-on-one meetings with lawmakers, the PSC has stated what is needed to fully fund CUNY:

- “\$59 million to cover the ‘TAP gap,’ caused by the law requiring CUNY to waive the difference between full-time tuition (currently \$6,530 for senior college students) and \$5,000 for students receiving full TAP awards. This policy has a noble goal: to shield low-income students from rising tuition costs. But it is eating an ever-larger hole in CUNY’s operating budget.”

- “\$16 million to increase Community College Base Aid by \$253 per FTE student. This would raise the rate to \$3,000 per student and relieve pressure on the community colleges to raise tuition.”

- “\$50 million to begin a three-year ‘CUNY Student Success Initiative’ that would ultimately contribute \$150 million toward hiring full-time faculty, increasing adjunct faculty salaries to \$7,000 per course, hiring academic advisors, and improving advisement technology and student services.”

## ALBANY IS LISTENING

“Some of [the lawmakers] were genuinely sympathetic,” Young-min Seo, an adjunct lecturer in the social sciences department at LaGuardia Community College, told *Clarion* about the first March

## Members press city, state for ‘\$7K’ for adjuncts



Meg Feeley, an adjunct lecturer at Kingsborough Community College, told the City Council that the status quo for adjuncts was a ‘race to the bottom.’ At left is PSC President Barbara Bowen, who also testified.

lobbying trip to Albany. “We had quite a lengthy discussion. We had a really good team.

PSC First Vice President Mike Fabricant noted, “We had more part-time faculty in Albany than we ever had before.”

Among the points adjuncts have made to lawmakers (and will do again in April) are that starting pay for adjuncts at Rutgers is \$5,200 per course and \$4,700 per course at the

University of Connecticut, while it’s only \$3,200 at CUNY. The pay, they said, must be competitive with peer institutions in the region.

New York State United Teachers President Andy Pallotta is optimistic about demanding more from the state for public higher education. Citing that the Assembly forecasted an additional \$1.25 billion in tax money this year and that

the Senate expects \$1.47 billion in additional revenue, he said, “This additional money can also help fund a much larger investment in SUNY, CUNY and our community college system. More higher education funding is vital to covering mandatory costs and supporting these great institutions as they work toward preparing New York students for

## Fighting for additional CUNY funding

the next wave of good jobs created by a better economy.”

The city, for its part, has proposed an increase of \$2.7 million for associate degree programs at the four-year colleges. During a City Council budget hearing on March 6, PSC officers testified that CUNY needs an additional \$48.7 million to cover mandatory costs, \$29 million additional funds to support the four-year colleges and \$10 million in additional funds for associate degree students at four-year colleges receiving TAP money.

## LOW ADJUNCT PAY

In her testimony to the City Council’s higher education committee, Meg Feeley, an adjunct lecturer in English at Kingsborough Community College, highlighted the need for funding for higher pay for adjuncts.

“I wish you could be with me, on the second day of classes, to see the students, their faces shining – on the second day, one young woman said she’d been up all night thinking about the topic for her final project,” she said. “I love my job, and I love my work and I love my students. But the problem of adjunctification is that it’s a race to the bottom. At Kingsborough, it continues with non-teaching adjuncts, many with newly minted bachelor’s degrees, hired for two or three days a week counseling and advising freshmen and sophomores, veterans and disabled students, because there’s a freeze in hiring full-time higher education officers.”

Adjuncts who are interested in going on the April 24 lobbying trip to demand funding for “\$7K” can sign up at <http://psc-cuny.org/form/talk-legislators-about-7k>.

# PSC leads charge on buyback tax

By ARI PAUL

While corporate America assured the public that the Republican Party’s new tax cuts would mean more jobs and more public investment, the actual result has been quite different. In this year alone, publicly traded firms announced \$157.6 billion in buybacks of their own stocks, while worker bonuses since the tax bill’s enactment are a mere \$2.5 billion. Nearly 43 percent of the extra cash corporations have saved from the tax bill are going to buybacks, according to research by several economic think tanks.

## ROBBING THE STATE

Are these transactions taxed? Yes and no. The state of New York taxes stock transfers, collecting \$14 billion each year. However, since 1981, 100 percent of that money is rebated back to the bro-

## Billions for state services

kers. In the end, the state doesn’t see a dime.

But the PSC and other progressive groups are trying to change this situation by demanding a stock buyback transfer tax, which would subject these buybacks to a 0.5 percent tax, to bring billions of dollars into the state, which could be used for affordable housing, health care and public education.

“We are only asking them to pay a fraction of a fraction,” said Assembly Member Yuh-Line Niou during a rally outside the New York Stock Exchange on March 9, adding that a buyback tax would be akin to how “we pay taxes on everything...like toothpaste or shoes.”

In addition to the PSC, the rally in the Financial District included

VOCAL-NY, New York Communities for Change and the Communications Workers of America. The rally was part of a kickoff effort for other

events promoting the tax. Activists, including the Patriotic Millionaires and the New York State Council of Churches, planned to pitch the tax proposal to Albany lawmakers and hold demonstrations in Albany over the next several weeks.

Governor Andrew Cuomo has said that he is interested in mitigating the negative impact the Trump administration’s tax reductions will have on the state, activists said at the rally. The demonstration in March introduced the idea of this tax as an easy way to help the state budget.

## Asking for a ‘fraction of a fraction’



The PSC and other advocates rallied at the New York Stock Exchange pushing a modest tax that could fund state services.

“The richest shareholders get much richer and working people get nothing,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen. “New York State deserves a share of this huge windfall to close the budget deficit and return some of

the taxpayer’s hard-earned money to ordinary New Yorkers.”

As Matt Phillips pointed out in *The New York Times*, the practice of mass stock buy-backs, as it exists now, ap-

Continued on page 5



# Students blast activity fee reform

By BRANDON JORDAN

CUNY Board of Trustees members are expected to vote in March to reform the student activity fee process. What they might not have expected was a movement of students from around the university organizing to stop them from doing so.

On March 12, as this newspaper was going to press, the board was met with student and faculty outrage at the Brooklyn borough hearing. Protesters said the board offered an undemocratic proposal that would limit students' ability to determine how their fees will be used. Protests were expected to continue at the full board meeting on March 19.

## CENTRALIZING CONTROL

Under a court order, the board organized a task force last October to centralize control of allocation of the student activity fees used to fund student organizations and programs. Student activity fees vary depending on the campus and status of the student enrollee. Yet these fees are treasured by student leaders to fund on-campus events and organizations.

As a fact sheet from the CUNY Coalition for Student Rights explains, "Proposed changes include severe restrictions on referenda, the process by which the entire student body can vote to institute a new

## Protests against board



Students protested the board of trustees Brooklyn College meeting in March.

campus service or program. Referenda have been used to jump-start service organizations, day care centers, health-care clinics, entire media boards and new sports teams, among other projects."

It continued, "Additionally, the board is considering removing *community service* as an acceptable use

of the student activity fee....We can vote to increase or decrease our student activity fee, but they won't let us decide where it goes."

## STUDENT NEEDS

Activists have said this limits how students can allocate their funds. "All of us have individual sto-

ries as to why we need the student activity fee, why we need athletics, why we need money for study abroad," Yssed David Tobo, president of York College's Student Government Association, said during a demonstration against the changes at the February board meeting.

Many feared that the board's proposed change could lead to the defunding of the New York Public Interest Research Group.

During the February meeting, Loretta Martinez, general counsel and vice chancellor of legal affairs, noted that a task force was set up last October to redesign the student activity fee on all CUNY campuses. She compared the student activity fee to a rundown car that needed major changes, which elicited groans from students.

"When you start looking at the student activity fee infrastructure, it is complicated," she said.

## PSC BACKS STUDENTS

One student on the task force, Kawthar Abdullah, a student senator from Borough of Manhattan Community College, criticized officials for suggesting the plan and urged a no vote.

"When we were presented with the proposed changes, we ambitiously disagreed and were told by the legal counsel not to inform our constituents," she said.

The PSC has vocally protested the board's proposal on grounds that, as PSC President Barbara Bowen put it in a letter to the trust-

ees, "student groups report that they have not been appropriately engaged in the potential redesign of student fees."

"Students' right to engage in free speech and participate in self-governance – to decide upon, participate in and organize the activities of their choosing – is a fundamental right that should not be abridged," Bowen said.

## A BAD FIX

"In a sense, CUNY is trying to pull the veil over the eyes of students and make decisions about funding without input from those who matter the most," said an op-ed in the *Campus*, the City College student newspaper. "[B]y working behind closed doors, hiding the

truth from students and avoiding town halls or campus visits, the university is attempting to seize control of student activities and student fees, determining where funding goes on a 'one-size-fits-all' scale."

It continued, "Unfortunately, we know that one-size-fits-all is more like one-size-fits-none. Each campus in the CUNY system runs differently. Yet, they all share a profound underfunding and maintain a home to some of the most resource-starved students in the state. Without any public conversation, CUNY's Board of Trustees proposed the removal of referenda voting, an essential part of students' self-determination where they can bring specific issues of funding to the general campus population to a vote."

## Free speech and democracy at stake

## Buyback tax

Continued from page 4

pears to deepen economic inequality. "Those so-called buybacks are good for shareholders, including the senior executives who tend to be big owners of their companies' stock," Phillips wrote in February. "A company purchasing its own shares is a time-tested way to bolster its stock price."

## RICH GET RICHER

Phillips continued, "But the purchases can come at the expense of investments in things like hiring, research and development and building new plants – the sort of investments that directly help the overall economy. The buybacks are also most likely to worsen economic inequality because the benefits of stock purchases flow disproportionately to the richest Americans."

Advocates estimate that the tax on buyback transactions could bring in \$2 billion in revenue for the state. Demonstrators called for the tax as both the city and state were going through the annual budget-planning process.

"While Wall Street has seen record highs, New York State has seen record highs in poverty," said Charles Kahn, the organizing director of the Strong Economy for All Coalition. "Let's demand that Wall Street play by the same rules everyone else plays by."

# UIUC grad workers end strike

By CLARION STAFF

After a nearly two-week-long strike, graduate student workers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign ratified a new contract on March 9 with 98 percent of the members approving the deal.

The agreement, according to *Inside Higher Ed*, "includes several key provisions that stalled negotiations prior to the strike – perhaps most significantly, guaranteed tuition waivers for teaching and graduate assistants enrolled and in good standing. The university previously wanted to reserve the right to determine and modify tuition waiver designations."

## PAY RAISES

It continued, "The new agreement also includes a \$50 payment for teaching assistants who get their appointment letters late and wage increases for the first three years of the five-year contract: 4.5 percent in the first year and 2 percent in each of the second and third years."

"Because of the dedication of the members in this union we have a



UIUC workers on strike.

contract," said Gus Wood, co-president of the Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO), which is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers. "Countless hours of organizing made this happen. We held the lines, we stayed positive and we remained hopeful that we'd get the contract we deserve. I thank all of the GEO members and allies for their support through what is now the longest strike in University of Illinois history."

According to reports, the union had several strike captains and coordinators throughout the work stoppage, and at one point occupied administrative offices overnight.

## A FEDERAL ISSUE

The university's stance on taking more control of tuition waivers drew particular ire from graduate student workers. Late last year, graduate students and higher education advocates across the country had protested a congressional proposal to make tuition waivers a form of taxable income, potentially quadrupling the tax burden on graduate students. That provision, however, was not included in the final federal tax overhaul bill signed by President Donald Trump.

Unlike in New York, strikes by public-sector workers in Illinois are not illegal.

"Going on strike is never an easy decision and we know that GEO had exhausted every possible avenue before taking that step," said Dan Montgomery, president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers.

# Earned Income Tax Credit

By CLARION STAFF

The PSC is among many unions this year urging members to check their eligibility for the Earned Income Tax Credit, which could provide a return of as much as \$2,000. Millions go unclaimed from the federal government every year.

Single filers with no children must earn less than \$15,010, less than \$39,617 with one child and less than \$45,007 with two children to be eligible. A married couple filing jointly must earn less than \$20,600 with no children, less than \$45,207 with one child and less than \$50,597 with two children.

For more information about whether you or someone you know qualifies for the Earned Income Tax Credit, check out <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/earned-income-tax-credit/do-i-qualify-for-earned-income-tax-credit-eitc>.



# The threat we face

By ARI PAUL

In the midst of all the legalese and esoteric constitutional debate, there were two moments of clarity during oral arguments for *Janus v. AFSCME* – moments that summed up what was really at stake, and why the political right is so determined to win this case.

The first moment was when Justice Anthony Kennedy asked AFSCME attorney David Frederick, “I’m asking you whether or not in your view, if you do not prevail in this case, the unions will have less political influence – yes or no?”

Frederick answered, “Yes, they will have less political influence.”

Kennedy responded with a question that was more a statement than an inquiry: “Isn’t that the end of this case?”

The other came at the end, when the attorney for Mark Janus, the Chicago public servant who believes he should not have to pay a fee to cover the union benefits he enjoys, argued that even minor union matters such as grievance handling are a form of political advocacy that nonmembers should be exempt from subsidizing. Justice Sonia Sotomayor said from the bench, “You’re basically arguing [to] do away with unions.”

## A SIMPLE PLAN

That is what this case is about – it is about diminishing and destroying the power of public-sector unions in order to destroy the protections and benefits they have fought so hard to win. Members should be prepared for a long fight ahead.

On February 26, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the case *Janus v. AFSCME*, and as many observers have noted, the conservative majority is highly likely to issue a ruling by this summer that will end the requirement of agency shop fees for non-union members in a bargaining unit.

Put simply, this allows a worker to enjoy the benefits of a union – collectively bargained salaries, health care and other benefits, safety protections and lots else – without having to pay dues. The effects of this ruling on the PSC and other public-sector unions in New York have the potential to be dire.

In the short term, what *Janus* will do is shrink the revenue that unions have to operate. In plain terms, unions will have less money for hiring organizers, member support staff, buses for lobbying trips, legal assistance and office space. A best-case scenario, a union in a so-called “right-to-work” (RTW) regime can still attain high rates of union membership – indeed, at the PSC, the full-time faculty and HEO rate of membership is 93 percent, and the rate is 98 percent among college laboratory technicians. But often that means organizers and activists are spending their hours and

## How *Janus* could hurt labor



PSC First Vice President Mike Fabricant led a group of PSC members in a rally outside the Supreme Court on the day of oral arguments.

days signing up new members, time and energy that could be used for other campaigns. As Justice Kennedy – a Ronald Reagan appointee who by all indications from his line of questioning was ready to vote in favor of scraping agency shop fees – said, this situation would shrink the influence unions have on policy-making.

Here in New York, where full-time public-sector employment has often provided a coveted sense of secure employment with a retirement package and benefits, the loss of union power at the bargaining table and in the political sphere – what were once thought to be permanent and untouchable protections – could be the targets of the same anti-union outfits who funded and pushed the *Janus* case.

## THREATS AHEAD

It might be hard to fathom that things such as public-sector pensions, collective bargaining rights or the merit-and-fitness exam system that defends against nepotism and favoritism in the civil service system could be taken away in a union-friendly state like New York. But states like Michigan and Wisconsin were once considered the bedrock of American industrial unionism and both those states became right-to-work by acts of the state legislatures. In Wisconsin, the state where AFSCME was founded in 1932, public-sector workers (with the exception of cops and firefighters) lost their right to collectively bargain.

With the new reality of *Janus* on its way, it’s worth it to review what so-called right-to-work laws have done to unions and worker protections at the state level.

● **Less take-home pay.** Household incomes are lower in right-to-work states with workers on average

states. In addition, self-employed workers report less personal income than they do in states with collective bargaining.

● **Fewer union members.** The State Policy Network, an umbrella group of think tanks that advocates for right-to-work laws, reported that, in Michigan alone, over 13,000 members left their unions. This caused unions to lose at least \$8 million per year. In anticipation of the *Janus* ruling, the Service Employees International Union, which represents workers in both the public and private sectors, announced at the end of 2016 that it would decrease its annual \$300 million budget by 30 percent.

● **Fewer resources for students.** Thirteen out of 15 states that spend the least per student are right-to-work states. Wisconsin students from low-performing schools did worse on standardized tests after passage of a right-to-work law in 2015.

● **Minor impact on economic growth.** Advocates of right-to-work proclaim it will cause companies to bring jobs despite evidence to the contrary. During the first year after Indiana passed right-to-work in 2012, state officials could not find one company that moved there because of the law.

## THERE IS HOPE

The lesson from this bleak landscape is that these things can happen in New York, but they do not have to happen. That is why unions like the PSC are preparing and organizing for the future.

For the last year, PSC activists have reached out to members and agency shop fee payers to sign recommitment cards, to solidify the union’s standing when the Supreme Court decision comes down. In the

future, this campaign will become permanent. Delegates, chapter chairs and rank-and-file activists will constantly need to be on the lookout for new hires and nonmembers, and talk to them about the importance of joining and becoming a full member.

## ORGANIZING WINS

Such an argument is not hard to make: the gains the union has won, such as teaching load reduction, multiyear appointments for adjuncts, paid parental leave, salary increases and pay differentials for HEOs were made possible because the union stood united. Membership and recommitment from across the PSC bargaining units are the engine of the union’s contract campaign and are critical to winning the demands the union has issued to management, particularly \$7,000 per course for adjuncts, 5 percent annual wage

**‘Right-to-work’ has caused damage nationwide.**

increases and other “equity” salary boosts for professional staff and part-timers.

There are, indeed, points of inspiration. Teachers’ unions around the country are mobilizing and making historic gains. Culinary Union Local 226 in Las Vegas has remained a strong voice for workers in major casinos while maintaining density above 90 percent in a right-to-work state.

PSC can remain strong in light of the loss of agency fees from nonmembers (or “free riders”) if every member considers her/himself an activist and signs up new members every semester. The new, blue union membership cards (available from your chapter chair or PSC staff organizer) or the online membership card (on the PSC website) are a commitment to the union and its ability to sustain power to negotiate a strong contract and advocate for a strong CUNY.

However the court rules, the road ahead for labor is organizing and more organizing. It can be done.

*Additional reporting for this story was provided by Brandon Jordan.*



PSC members attended a pro-union rally in Foley Square in Manhattan the Saturday before *Janus v. AFSCME* went before the Supreme Court.



# There's a reason the right hates unions

By ARI PAUL & BRANDON JORDAN

In his best-selling book *Death of the Liberal Class*, the journalist Chris Hedges posits that in a capitalist economy, liberal democracy can exist because of the strength of five institutions. When those institutions crumble, he argues, liberal democracy is unattainable, giving way to authoritarianism and gaping inequality.

One of those pillars is organized labor. One doesn't have to be a labor partisan to understand that while the American national modus operandi has been one of corporate profit-making, organized labor has played a key role in ensuring that at least some of that economic growth is shared by workers.

## LABOR'S RECORD

With the case *Janus v. AFSCME* expected to deal a harsh economic blow to the power of public-sector unions, it is important to understand why labor has played a significant role in American economic history:

- Union pressure can lead to vital legal protections from all forms of discrimination against workers and ensure safety in the workplace. While government agencies in charge of ensuring these protections now lack sufficient funds to do their jobs properly, many workers at least have a safety net from risks at work.

- Unions represent more than the "white working class." Around two-thirds, or 10.6 million, of unionized workers are women or people of color, according to the Economic Policy Institute. Unions even reduce racial and gender income inequality as black unionized workers are nearly 1.5 times more likely to have benefit plans than non-union counterparts, according to a report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research. For women, public-sector workers earn 15 percent more, or about \$6,500, while in a union, according to the National Women's Law Center.

- Unions are key to reducing income inequality. As unionization grew, so did household wages. Now, as unionization rates fall each year, wages fall for everyone – except the rich. An

## Reacting against economic progress



Union supporters rallied outside the Supreme Court the day of oral arguments in *Janus v. AFSCME*.

International Monetary Fund study found the decline of union power explains the astronomical rise in the wealth of the top one percent.

- When unionized workers benefit, so do their non-union peers. Union workers earn more in wages, around 13.2 percent, compared to non-unionized workers. Yet non-union workers benefit from new labor protections and are eligible for higher wages thanks to strong unionization efforts, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

- Unions fought for the 40-hour workweek over a century ago and secured expanded health care for workers during the 1930s and 1940s.

## THE RIGHT'S AGENDA

It is, of course, not a coincidence that those pushing *Janus*, right-to-work laws at the state level and other anti-labor initiatives have a vested interest in undoing the historic progress of unions. The *Janus* case – like the cases *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* and *Harris v. Quinn* – does not come out of nowhere. It is part of

a much larger and well-financed campaign to undo the power of organized labor.

Here's a look at some of the groups in this movement:

- The American Legislative Exchange Council is notorious for being the network connecting corporations and lawmakers together in secrecy. ALEC doesn't just push right-to-work bills, it promotes legislation prohibiting unions from using dues for political activities, stopping minimum wage hikes and pushing privatization in states such as Michigan, Florida and Maryland.

- The State Policy Network prides itself as a group advocating for a country offering "personal freedom, innovation [and] opportunity." Yet SPN, funded by the Koch brothers, often favors anti-worker policies such as right-to-work. In a 2016 fundraising letter, it listed a variety of "reforms" in states, including right-to-work, and told donors they have a "once-in-a-lifetime chance to reverse the failed policies of the American left."

- The National Right to Work Foundation, as its name implies, is an advocate for the controversial right-to-work laws across the country. The organization's legal arm was behind *Harris v. Quinn*, which challenged Illinois unions from collecting fees from non-union workers. The Supreme Court ruled against the union and ruled that requiring fees is against the First Amendment.

## A broader right-wing war on economic justice

- The Center for Individual Rights (CIR) was one of the biggest boosters of the case *Friedrichs v. CTA*, which would have had the same effect as *Janus* had Justice Antonin Scalia's death not forced the case into a 4-4 deadlock. The CIR has backed other right-wing litigation, such as attempting to have race-based affirmative action in college admissions ruled unconstitutional.

- If there is any person to blame for *Janus*, it is the private equity billionaire and Illinois governor Bruce Rauner. Rauner, a right-to-work zealot who called half of

Chicago Public Schools teachers "illiterate," started the lawsuit against AFSCME that evolved into the case before the Supreme Court today. Meanwhile, his assault on workers in Illinois continues to try to stop organized labor by attacking pensions, keeping right-to-work and more.

- None of the above would have happened if it wasn't for the Koch brothers. Charles and David Koch, two right-wing billionaires, have funded anti-worker candidates such as Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker. Even now, they are offering support to destabilize public schools, promote charter schools, and weaken teachers unions in states such as Arizona, Colorado, and Florida.

## A LONG HISTORY

The *Janus* case is simply the latest episode in a decades-long campaign to defang unions – everything from President Ronald Reagan's busting of the air traffic controllers' strike to widespread offshoring of industrial labor to the current administration's National Labor Relations Board rolling back pro-labor rulings are part of this coordinated campaign. But there is another aspect of this latest attack. It is not simply an attack on public-sector labor, but the public sector itself, as these unions are the strongest and most well-funded organizations that defend public hospitals, public K-12 and higher education, social services and libraries from underfunding and privatization.

This prospect of the *Janus* case does, indeed, sound ominous. But unions have the power to determine their own destinies. PSC activists and organizers are out on the campuses, meeting members and agency fee payers who are either recommitting to union membership or signing up for the first time. The union will keep doing so, regardless of what the court says. More and more public-sector unions across the country are doing the same and will be able to defend their historic gains for working people against the alliance of right-wing organizations.

Claim your right to be a union member  
**SIGN YOUR RECOMMITMENT CARD TODAY**  
 Go to:  
[www.psc-cuny.org/UnionYes](http://www.psc-cuny.org/UnionYes)



# BC members push CUNY for funding

By CLARION STAFF

Faculty and staff members from Brooklyn College were on hand at the CUNY Board of Trustees hearing at their campus on March 12 to speak out about maintaining their campus as well as the need to pay adjuncts \$7,000 per course per semester. Here are just a few of the statements members made to the board about fully funding the campus and the entire university.

## Fixing 'Brooklyn'

A quick look at the "Brooklyn College" Instagram account shows broken desks, broken toilets, broken sinks, broken water fountains, peeling paint, exposed wiring, vermin and crumbling walkways, ceilings and walls. Some of our ancient blackboards have lost their ability to hold onto chalk. On more than one occasion, in more than one classroom, while I was teaching, holes in the ceiling and walls have started sputtering mysterious liquid. Some of our facilities' problems have gotten serious enough to garner the attention of the press. It's demoralizing and it's disgusting, and we need to do something about it.

I make a little bit more than \$3,000 for every class of 30 or 35 students that I teach here. This is a small fraction of what my students pay to take these classes, let alone the contributions of taxpayers. In my years as a Brooklyn College instructor, I've had to subsidize my work by teaching music lessons, test prep, tutoring, after-school religious education, transcribing interviews, fact-checking, babysitting, cat-sitting, and probably a few other things I've forgotten about. With a few exceptions, *all* of those jobs – jobs which, frankly, don't require nearly as much training – are more lucrative than teaching philosophy at Brooklyn College. I have had to turn down several classes I was offered because I couldn't afford it. I'm proud to teach at Brooklyn College, and I love the work we do here. But pride and love for my work don't pay my rent.

**Ian Olasov**  
Adjunct Lecturer  
Philosophy

## Falling apart

Against the backdrop of CUNY's postponement of the pre-construction phase of lecture hall renovations in 2016, there unfolded scenes of extreme discomfort in history classrooms from James Hall through Boylan and Whitehead. We sketch below a composite portrait, based on true stories from the history department.

The season is spring or early fall. The temperature is hovering in the mid-60s outside. Inside a history classroom, with windows bolted shut, and the air conditioner dead (or never there), a thermometer is registering 90 degrees. There are 40 students in the class, but only 36 desks. The professor thinks she

## Cite adjuncts, maintenance



Brooklyn College PSC Chapter Chair James Davis addressed students before the Board of Trustees borough hearing.

might be on candid camera because she is "interrupted twice by students from a neighboring room," foraging desperately for chairs and desks. She invites senior administrators to her class to bear witness to these conditions firsthand, apologizing for her inability to offer them seats – unless of course some students are absent from class – the only circumstance under which all members of the class can sit at a desk on exam day.

### POWERING THROUGH

Several yards away, in a different building, a jumbo class (that typically enrolls 120 students) has just convened. But in the absence of air circulation of any kind, the professor keeps his students just long enough to sign a petition pleading for more congenial learning conditions.

Meanwhile, another professor in a different classroom is trying to make a PowerPoint presentation. But with no working shades on the windows, the glare from the sun outside renders useless "the state-of-the-art projection equipment that the college has spent thousands of dollars to buy." The Chair offers to pay for garbage bags to tape over the windows, but the professor decides to make an "informal switch to the room next door, which another instructor had abandoned because the blackboard had too many holes in it to be usable."

It seems a pity that this most affluent of societies cannot do as well. We appeal to your sense of fairness, and to our shared commitment to public education, and by extension to investment in the future of this state that we all love, to do right by our students.

**Gunja SenGupta**  
Department Chair  
History  
**Jocelyn Wills**  
Professor  
History

## Students deserve more

Years of flat budgets followed the cuts imposed during the 2009 recession, and conditions on our campus have become dire. CUNY's budget request for fiscal year 2019 included mandatory cost increases for the senior colleges of \$63 million. But the governor's executive budget proposes only \$37 million.... Our beautiful campus is crumbling as it ages, as decades of deferred maintenance take their toll. Student enrollment has climbed steadily to 17,000, but hiring of full-time faculty and advisors has not kept pace. Students are in need of full-time professors and advisors if they are to be successful academically and if the university is

to meet its own goals for graduation rates.

Our students deserve your unequivocal support during budget season on another issue that affects them directly: that is, improving adjunct faculty salaries. This is not just a matter of collective bargaining that can be left to CUNY's labor relations staff; it is fundamentally in your purview as our trustees and our advocates. The number of adjuncts at CUNY has doubled since 2000, now hovering around 15,000. Adjunct lecturers make \$3,500 per 3-credit course on average. This is much less than peer institutions pay – even public universities such as Rutgers and Connecticut – and much less than one can live on, and certainly less than the value of their work. Students pay the same tuition, regardless of who their instructor is, yet we continue to exploit adjuncts, who have provided the majority of undergraduate instruction at CUNY every year since 2006. The PSC is seeking \$7,000 per course for adjunct lecturers. That will require a real investment from Albany and the city alike. These instructors and the students they teach deserve no less.

**James Davis**  
PSC Chapter Chair

## Ending 'bare bones'

At my previous job, my colleagues and I worked in an environment where intellectual creativity and curiosity, grounded in our research and pedagogy and set within a healthy infrastructure, allowed us to imagine and then contribute important changes at work and to our larger society. At CUNY, however,

I find that resources are so limited that my amazing colleagues and I cannot dare to think, dream and build. Let me be clear: this results not from a lack of skill or commitment from my first-rate colleagues or our qualified and dedicated staff; this has nothing to do with the drive and desire of our students; nor does it stem from a lack of commitment by administrators.

### 'STRIPPED DOWN'

Rather, we are working in such a deeply underfunded ecosystem that all we can do – this amazing community of educators, administrators, and learners at Brooklyn College – is the bare-bones work of giving our students a first-rate education in diminished circumstances. We do this work because we know it will change lives, even at its most stripped-down execution.

### Decay on campus hurts student life.

Of this we are proud, and at this we excel. But that larger benefit, that greater social good offered by distinguished institutions of higher education – to contribute to the larger social fabric; to develop world-class ideas and cultural institutions; to create the social changes we need; to innovate and build; and to use the resources of mind, community and our amazing city to their greatest potential – this is denied us in an environment where the best of our labor is spent merely and consistently cobbling things together.

Because CUNY has been and can be this kind of first-rate institution, I ask the Board of Trustees to invest all of its energy on behalf of funding in appropriate ways the work of the great people already gathered here, at CUNY, to help us do our very best for the betterment of our students, our city and our world.

**Alexandra Juhasz**  
Department Chair  
Film

# PSC elections – April 2018

## Vote for union-wide officers

(this ID will be provided on the pre-printed ballot sent to members). There will then be a cue to enter your PIN. The internet system will then provide instructions on how to cast your vote or how to cast a write-in vote.

To vote by telephone, call (toll-free) 1-866-458-9861. There will be a prompt to enter your PIN and to then press the pound (#) key. Then follow instructions for voting. The telephone system cannot accept write-in votes, so any member wishing to write in a candidate must vote by internet.

*Editor's note: What follows on pages 10 and 11, as well as the bottom half of page 9, of this newspaper are election materials provided by the one slate that is running in this general election. In accordance with PSC election rules, Clarion provides for equal access and space*

*in this newspaper for all slates participating in a union-wide general election. While only one slate is participating this year, members are nevertheless encouraged to read through all the materials provided and to become familiar with the process.*





# NYSUT, AFT delegate nominees

The nominees for delegates to the NYSUT and AFT conventions are as follows:

|                                  |                                    |                                 |                                   |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Anthony Andrews Jr. – York       | Luke Elliott-Negri – Grad Center   | Geoffrey Kurtz – Manhattan CC   | Jennifer Poggiali – Lehman        |
| Carolina Bank Muñoz – Brooklyn   | Michael Fabricant – Hunter         | John Lawrence – Staten Island   | Anselma Rodriguez – Brooklyn      |
| Hara Bastas – LaGuardia          | Robert Farrell – Lehman            | Steve Leberstein – Retiree      | George E. Sanchez – Staten Island |
| Michael Batson – Staten Island   | Meg Kallman Feeley – Kingsborough  | Penny Lewis – Grad Center       | Emily Schnee – Kingsborough       |
| Joan Beckerman – Hostos          | Harold S. Forsythe – City          | Angela Loguercio – NYCCT        | Jacob Segal – Kingsborough        |
| Cynthia Bink – NYCCT             | Susan Fountain – Grad Center       | Steve London – Brooklyn         | Young-min Seo – LaGuardia         |
| Barbara Bowen – Queens           | Erik Freas – Manhattan CC          | Sean MacDonald – NYCCT          | Scott Sheidlower – York           |
| Robert Cermele – Retiree         | William Friedheim – Retiree        | Nivedita Majumdar – John Jay    | Sigmund Shen – LaGuardia          |
| Stuart Chen-Hayes – Lehman       | Anne Friedman – Retiree            | Gerard Markowitz – John Jay     | Albert Sherman – NYCCT            |
| Arthur B. Chitty – Queens        | James Gallagher – Manhattan CC     | Howard Meltzer – Manhattan      | Carly Smith – Baruch              |
| Lorraine Cohen – LaGuardia       | Arlene Geiger – Retiree            | Franklin Mirer – Grad Center    | Michael Spear – Kingsborough      |
| Lizette Colón – Hostos           | David Gerwin – Queens              | Joyce Moorman – Manhattan       | Pamela Stemberg – City            |
| Jonathan Cope – Staten Island    | Joan Greenbaum – Retiree           | J. Paul Narkunas – John Jay     | Lynne Turner – Grad Center        |
| Berkis Cruz-Eusebio – Hostos     | Anthony Gronowicz – Manhattan CC   | Hemalatha Navaratne – Manhattan | Alia Tyner-Mullings – Guttman CC  |
| James Davis – Brooklyn           | Orit Gruber – Staten Island        | Robert Nelson – Retiree         | Sharon Utakis – Bronx CC          |
| Iris Delutro – Queens            | Maya Harakawa – Grad Center        | Immanuel Ness – Brooklyn        | Phyllis Van Slyck – LaGuardia     |
| Arthurine DeSola – Queensborough | David Hatchett – Medgar            | Marcia Newfield – Retiree       | Andrea Ades Vásquez – Grad Center |
| Myrlene Dieudonne – NYCCT        | Carol Huang – City                 | Anthony O’Brien – Retiree       | Blanca Vázquez – Hunter           |
| Vincent DiGirolamo – Baruch      | Isaac Jabola-Carolus – Grad Center | Sharon Persinger – Bronx CC     | Paul Washington – Medgar          |
| Susan DiRaimo – City             | Amy Jeu – Hunter                   | Daniel Pinello – John Jay       | Dominic Wetzel – Kingsborough     |
| Jacqueline DiSalvo – Retiree     | Glen Kissack – Retiree             | Marianne Pita – Bronx CC        | Stanley Wine – Baruch             |
| Hester Eisenstein – Queens       | Peter Kolozi – Bronx CC            | John Pittman – John Jay         | Janet Winter – John Jay           |

## Why a vote for New Caucus matters in an uncontested election

The 2018 union-wide election takes place against an ominous political backdrop. More than ever, we need to defend and expand union power. The New Caucus has been in the leadership of the PSC since 2000. Current new Caucus leaders Barbara Bowen, Michael Fabricant, Sharon Persinger and Nivedita Majumdar have worked with other New Caucus activists and thousands of PSC members to make our union one of the most effective and progressive in the country. We ask for your vote in the election this spring. Your vote matters, especially now. On February 26, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in *Janus v. AFSCME*, a case deftly orchestrated and financed by right-wing organizations with one purpose – to destroy the political and economic power of public-sector unions like the PSC. The case is the culmination of 20 years of attacks on working people, people of color and progressive movements. Its ultimate aim is to roll back all the gains made by these groups and to create a political climate in which further gains will be impossible. The *Janus* case occurs in a climate of manufactured austerity (turbocharged by the GOP tax bill) that threatens funding for a wide range of federal, state and local programs, including public higher education. CUNY – like many public resources that primarily serve working people and the poor – is in peril of continued underfunding. As the labor movement faces a defining moment in its history, a ballot cast for the New Caucus

affirms your commitment to a fighting union. A resounding vote for the New Caucus empowers the PSC as it negotiates a new contract and mobilizes for more state and city funding for CUNY. **WHO WE ARE** We are the current leadership caucus, presenting a slate of candidates that includes veteran leaders, many new faces, and experience and energy across several generations. We represent every campus and every worksite within CUNY. Our candidates are drawn from senior and community colleges, staff and faculty, full-time and part-time CUNY workers. The New Caucus was founded in 1995, built from the ground up, chapter by chapter. In 2000, we won the top leadership posts of the PSC. What we brought to those early victories and have brought to every union campaign since is a belief in CUNY’s 1847 founding vision – of top-quality college education for “the children of the people, the children of whole people.” Drawing on CUNY’s historic and contemporary diversity as a strength, we have built our collective power to win better working conditions for ourselves and better learning conditions for our students by engaging thousands of CUNY faculty and staff in the life of the union. The New Caucus has refused to accept austerity for CUNY. While successive chancellors and trustees have seen their role as accommodating to fiscal scarcity, the PSC under New Caucus leadership has been the unwavering voice for an

alternative vision. We maintain that the underfunding of CUNY is the result of political and economic policy decisions, not of inevitable trends, and that those policy decisions can be changed. Two years ago we beat back the governor’s proposed \$485 million cut to state funding for CUNY, and last year, in a period of widespread concessionary contracts, we won a contract that brought back pay, raises, three-year appointments for adjuncts, an agreement on reducing the teaching load and more. Under New Caucus leadership, the PSC has joined in coalitions with labor, student, community, faith-based and progressive organizations. We understand that labor unions are at their most powerful when they represent the interests and aspirations of all working people and that alliances increase our strength. Working with CUNY Rising and other coalitions has made a measurable difference in the PSC’s ability to fight for CUNY funding needs and to defend individual members’ salaries, benefits and rights. We have approached contract negotiations as an arena in which to challenge and transform austerity conditions for faculty, staff and even students at CUNY. **HERE IS A PARTIAL LIST OF OUR 18-YEAR RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- Negotiated a three-credit reduction in teaching load for full-time faculty, to be phased in by 2020.
- Won the first paid parental leave benefit for public employees in New York State.

- Defended the 35-hour workweek for HEOs and won rights to overtime pay and compensatory time.
- Won a 12-year battle for health insurance for eligible adjuncts.
- Won graduate employee health insurance.
- Enhanced member benefits for dental, vision and hearing care, and restored the finances of the Welfare Fund.
- Negotiated equity increases for CLTs.
- Won full-paid reassigned time for research for junior faculty.
- Increased sabbatical pay from 50 percent to 80 percent.
- Achieved the first multiyear appointments for teaching adjuncts at CUNY, including a provision for guaranteed income.
- Implemented dedicated sick leave, a sick leave bank and a provision for phased retirement.
- Gained increased annual leave for faculty counselors and librarians.
- Established an additional salary differential for HEOs at the top of their salary schedules.
- Won salary differentials for CLTs and eligible HEOs with advanced academic degrees.
- Created professional development grants for teaching adjuncts, Continuing Ed faculty and professional staff.
- Worked with management to move more than 200 part-time faculty to full-time positions.
- Bargained four contracts with salary and benefit gains through two economic downturns and state- and city-imposed austerity.
- Won paid office hours for eligible teaching adjuncts.
- Won and ratified the first contract

ever for Research Foundation Field Units and negotiated a new RF Central Office contract with enhanced benefits and salaries. ● Protected and enlarged the health and welfare fund benefits of retirees. These were collective achievements, advanced by research, persistence and skillful negotiating, but ultimately powered by the agency of wider and wider circles of membership in the political arena, in the streets and, when necessary, in strike authorization votes. Activating the cumulative knowledge, energy and experience of PSC members has made a huge difference for our union, our university and our students. The New Caucus has amplified the voice of the PSC, not only at the bargaining table, but in Albany, at City Hall and in the larger labor and progressive movements – contesting austerity budgets, advocating for immigrant students, opposing racism, defending academic freedom, moving our national affiliates to oppose an unjust war in Iraq, taking principled stands on elections for political office, protecting teacher-preparation programs against the testing regime, marching as the largest labor contingent in the massive People’s Climate March in 2014, supporting other workers in struggle and on strike – and much more. A vote for the New Caucus means a vote for a robust, engaged union in the age of *Janus*. Vote for union power. **MARK YOUR BALLOT FOR THE NEW CAUCUS SLATE.**



# NEW CAUCUS SLATE FOR 2018 PSC ELECTION

## FOR PRESIDENT

**Barbara Bowen**, current president of the PSC, led the negotiations and campaign that won back pay, raises of more than 10 percent, and improved dental and optical benefits in the last contract – overcoming fierce opposition from Albany. She led the successful negotiation to reduce the teaching load for full-time faculty and is currently organizing the union's campaign to win \$7K per course for adjuncts, finally ending the exploitative labor system at CUNY. Under Barbara's leadership, the PSC also achieved a breakthrough in reclassification for HEOs and a salary differential for CLTs and eligible HEOs with advanced degrees. These gains – together with three-year appointments for adjuncts, 80 percent pay for sabbaticals, paid parental leave, reassigned time for junior faculty and health insurance for graduate employees and adjuncts – represent a challenge to the politics of permanent austerity for CUNY. Barbara earned her PhD in English from Yale and holds faculty appointments at Queens College and the Graduate Center. She has published widely on 17th-century literature and feminist theory. She has gained a national reputation as a principled, effective labor leader. As PSC president, Barbara understands that the union's power to challenge decades of planned underfunding of CUNY derives from the collective action of union members. Bowen believes that the current moment calls for ambitious and visionary unionism and that the PSC has an important role to play.



## FOR SECRETARY

**Nivedita Majumdar** is PSC Secretary, and associate professor of English at John Jay College. As a principal officer of the union, she is on the bargaining team and other major union committees. She is on the executive board of the AAUP Collective Bargaining Congress and the AFT Higher Education Programs and Policies Committee. Nivedita was on the bargaining team that negotiated the 2016 contract with retroactive pay, salary raises, teaching load reduction, and three-year contracts for teaching adjuncts. She was a chapter chair at John Jay College, spearheading the building of a dynamic chapter and leading a successful campaign on workload mitigation for full-time faculty. Nivedita has been active in progressive movements within and outside the university for more than 20 years in the United States and India. She remains committed to improving the working conditions of our members while ensuring that our union actively works with other forces to protect and nurture public higher education and promote a progressive social vision. Nivedita is an active scholar whose research interests include Marxist theory, postcolonial studies, theories of nationalism and cultural studies. Her edited book, *The Other Side of Terror* (Oxford, 2009) offers a left critique of terrorism discourse. She is currently at work on her next book on postcolonial theory and literature.



**George Emilio Sanchez** is a performance artist and writer and a member of the faculty at the College of Staten Island. Most recently he created and presented a 24-hour “performance filibuster” on gun violence in the United States at Abrons Art Center. He continues to create performance works that address social and restorative justice. George is the chapter chair of the College of Staten Island as well as a member of the PSC Executive Council. He directs the Emerge NYC program that explores the intersection of arts and activism. George is the recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship and two New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships.



**Alia Tyner-Mullings** is assistant professor of sociology at Guttman Community College. She has also taught at Hostos and Hunter and was a graduate assistant at the GC. Alia is the third generation of her family to earn a degree at and teach within CUNY. Coming from a background of civil rights and union activities, Alia became the first PSC chapter chair at Guttman in 2014. She is an editor of *Critical Small Schools*, and author of *Writing for Emerging Sociologists*, and *The Sociology Student's Guide to Writing*, and of *Enter the Alternative School*. Alia has served one term on the PSC Executive Council and is on the Bargaining Committee.



## FOR FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

**Andrea Ades Vásquez** is associate director of the American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning and managing director of the Graduate Center's New Media Lab. She is also project director of the CUNY Digital History Archive. For nearly 20 years, Andrea has helped to organize HEOs across CUNY and, more recently, to reconstitute the Graduate Center PSC chapter. She has served on the PSC Executive Council for three terms and, in the last round of bargaining, on the negotiations committee, where she helped win improvements to HEO reclassification and a new HEO salary differential. She is a member of the Legislation Committee, the 7K Committee and the Archives Committee. Currently HEO chapter chair, Andrea has focused on recruiting new activists while spearheading implementation of the HEO contract provisions. She helped form 22 HEO labor management committees across CUNY, created a HEO resources web page and has trained dozens of HEOs to know and defend the contract. As First Vice President, Andrea would be eager to continue to represent HEOs and to expand her contributions and fight on behalf of all members, especially in the campaign for 7K. She is a staunch believer in the PSC's principles and goals and seeks to strengthen and expand union participation and power.



**Luke Elliott-Negri** is a graduate assistant at the CUNY Graduate Center, where he is the PSC chapter chair. He serves on the Bargaining Committee, the 7K Committee and the Working Families Party State Committee. His research interests include social movements and political parties. His forthcoming chapter in *Professors in the Gig Economy: The Unionization of Adjunct Faculty in America* analyzes the adjunct experience at CUNY since the formation of the PSC.



**Michael Fabricant** is professor at the Hunter College School of Social Work. For the past three years, he has been first vice president of the PSC, and he served for nine years as PSC treasurer. As the union's legislative representative, Mike chairs the Legislation Committee and directs the PSC's work on public funding for CUNY. He has served on every New Caucus bargaining team and is currently the union's liaison to CUNY Rising, a community-student-labor coalition he helped to found. Mike has also served as the treasurer of the National Coalition of the Homeless and president of the Elizabeth Coalition to House the Homeless. With Steve Brier, he has recently completed the book *Austerity Blues: Fighting for the Soul of Public Higher Education*. He is the author or co-author of nine other books and numerous articles.



## FOR TREASURER

**Sharon Persinger** has served as PSC Treasurer for the past three years. She was on the bargaining team for the most recent contract and for the recently signed agreement to reduce the teaching load for full-time faculty. She has been a trustee of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund since 2015 and serves on its audit committee. She serves on the Legislation Committee and the Contract Enforcement Committee, and represents the PSC on the NYSUT Higher Education Policy Council, its work group on Adjunct/Contingent Issues, and the AFT Civil and Human Rights Committee. Sharon is a CUNY graduate, with a PhD in mathematics from the CUNY Graduate Center and a master's in computer science from City College. She is an associate professor in the department of mathematics and computer science at Bronx Community College. Born into a union family in West Virginia, Sharon learned about the importance and power of organized labor from the United Mine Workers.



**Steve London** is associate professor of political science at Brooklyn College and a visiting fellow at the Murphy Labor Institute. Steve has served the union in many capacities: five terms as first vice president, one term as university-wide officer, chair of the Legislation and Contract Enforcement committees, member of the Negotiations Committee, trustee and executive officer of the Welfare Fund, and NYSUT director. A founder of the New Caucus, in the 1990s he was elected to three terms as Brooklyn College's chapter chair and as University Faculty Senator. Steve will bring his deep understanding of academic unionism, his rich knowledge of the PSC and his fighting spirit to the new Executive Council.



## SENIOR COLLEGES: VICE PRESIDENT

**Penny Lewis** is associate professor of labor studies at the Joseph S. Murphy Institute. She has held many positions at CUNY, including graduate assistant, adjunct, high school teacher and instructor. She has also held many positions in the PSC, including organizer, delegate, and Executive Committee member. She is currently a senior college officer, and a delegate from the Graduate Center. Her research interests are labor, social class and social movements; she is the author of *Hardhats, Hippies and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory* (Cornell, 2013) and co-editor of *The City is the Factory: New Solidarities and Spatial Strategies in an Urban Age* (Cornell 2017).



**Michael Batson** has been active in the union for more than ten years, serving on the Executive Council as a part-time personnel officer since 2009, and as the adjunct liaison to the College of Staten Island from 2007 to 2009. He is a lecturer in history at the College of Staten Island. As an Executive Council member, he has served on several committees, such as the contract Negotiations Committee and the Legislation Committee, and he has represented the Professional Staff Congress at conventions with our affiliates such as the American Federation of Teachers and the New York State United Teachers. Michael is currently on the Bargaining Committee preparing for the next round.

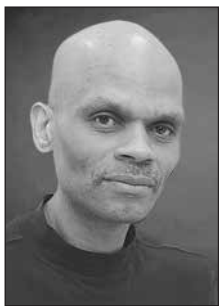


**James Davis** is professor of English at Brooklyn College, where he has taught since 2003. He has served since 2015 as Brooklyn College chapter chair. James has helped to lead campaigns on cross-title solidarity, adjunct equity and served on the PSC committee negotiating the teaching-load reduction for full-time faculty. Elected to leadership positions in the American Association of University Professors, he served on the AAUP's Collective Bargaining Executive Council and is currently a candidate for the National Council. An American literature scholar, James has been a Leon Levy Biography Center fellow and recipient of Brooklyn College's Claire Tow Excellence in Teaching Award.





**David Hatchett** is a lecturer in English at Medgar Evers College. He has been active in the PSC for more than 15 years. He was as a part-time faculty organizer at Medgar Evers and Hostos Community College from 2000-05. In 2005 he became the coordinator of the adjunct organizing project. He works with the New Caucus leadership at Medgar Evers and was member of the chapter's Executive Committee from 2010-12 and is currently a representative of the chapter to the Delegate Assembly. He has served as a member New Caucus Governing Board and the PSC's Executive Council on two occasions.



## COMMUNITY COLLEGES: VICE PRESIDENT

**Lorraine Cohen**, a lifelong activist for justice and professor of sociology at LaGuardia Community College, serves on the PSC Executive Council and is a member of the Bargaining Committee. As LaGuardia's chapter chair, she helped organize against increased workload and served on the Workload Subcommittee for the bargaining team. She actively organized LaGuardia faculty and staff to become involved in the long struggle for a fair contract. Lorraine has been an outspoken advocate for CUNY faculty and staff and believes that the union must act in solidarity with our students, their families and communities. In 2005, Lorraine was NYSUT's Higher Education Member of the Year.



**Howard Meltzer** is professor of music and art at BMCC. He began his career at CUNY as an adjunct at Baruch and BMCC, leaving in 1996 to take a full-time position at the non-union University of North Texas and then Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania. Howard returned to BMCC in 2003 and served as department chair from 2011 to 2016. He is a performer and researcher (technology, politics and music) and a longtime member of the American Federation of Musicians. He has served on two regional boards of the ACLU, Dallas and Central Pennsylvania, and represents BMCC at Delegate Assembly.



**Michael Spear**, assistant professor of history at Kingsborough Community College, is vice-chair of the Kingsborough PSC chapter and has served on the PSC Executive Council since 2011. He is on the PSC Bargaining Committee and the Legislation Committee and was co-chair of the Archives Committee. Michael served on the PSC subcommittee that negotiated the teaching reduction for full-time faculty. His scholarly research is on the New York City labor movement and post-World War II history. Michael's article "In the Shadows of the 1970s Fiscal Crisis: New York City's Municipal Unions in the Twenty-First Century" appeared in the September 2010 issue of *WorkingUSA*.



**Sharon Utakis** is professor in English at Bronx Community College, with a PhD in linguistics from the CUNY Graduate Center. Before coming to BCC in 2000, she taught as a contingent faculty member at City Tech, Baruch and Queens College, as well as at colleges in several other states. She has been part of the BCC chapter Executive Committee for many years and served as grievance counselor, among other roles, before becoming chapter chair in 2015. She has worked to make the chapter leadership more diverse and inclusive, and is a strong believer in one-on-one organizing.



## CROSS CAMPUS: VICE PRESIDENT

**Iris DeLutro**, a senior counselor and CUNY-wide coordinator of the LEAP to Teacher Program of the Murphy Institute since 1984, is PSC vice president for Cross-Campus Units. She serves on the board of directors of NYSUT, the PSC bargaining team and the PSC Legislation Committee. She is also co-coordinator of the Political Action Committee for Queens. Iris has long been a leader in the PSC, and is known across CUNY campuses for her advocacy for all workers and for students. Iris works to ensure equity and advancement for the professional staff and to raise awareness of professional staff issues, including bullying in the workplace, changes to the time and leave time sheets, increased workload and the lack of a promotional system for HEOs and CLTs.



**Myrlene Dieudonne** has worked at New York City College of Technology as assistant director of Campus Services for five years. Prior to joining City Tech, Myrlene worked as Senior Program Manager at the Police Athletic League (PAL) providing career guidance and counseling for young adults. She is an active member of the HEO Steering Committee at City Tech, advocating for a better working environment and joining PSC campaigns with HEOs and faculty. Myrlene is also a member of the HEO chapter's Executive Committee, serving as a delegate who represents the interests of HEOs at her campus and throughout CUNY.



**Jacqueline Elliot** is co-chair of the PSC Environmental Health and Safety Committee, the co-chair of the New York City College of Technology campus Health and Safety Committee, union-wide officer for the College Laboratory Technicians chapter, CLT campus rep, a member of the City Tech Executive Committee and a grievance counselor for the CLT chapter. She works in the biology department at City Tech and has mentored upcoming union activists for many years, encouraging her fellow union members to take their health and safety on the job seriously. She is also a proud graduate of the first class of the PSC's Next Generation leadership training program.



**Janet Winter** earned her Bachelor's degree from John Jay College, and has worked as an HEO there for 30 years. She is currently executive assistant to the director of public safety. She was a delegate, then elected secretary of the HEO Cross-Campus chapter and is currently vice chair of the chapter and a member of the PSC Health and Safety Committee. At John Jay she is on the HEO Labor Management Committee and attends campus labor management meetings. Janet has been involved in numerous campaigns and has a strong relationship with the faculty chapter, serving as a HEO representative.



## PART-TIME PERSONNEL: VICE PRESIDENT

**Carly Smith** is an adjunct lecturer in communication studies at Baruch College, where she has taught since 2008. She began her work at CUNY in 2005 as a graduate assistant and adjunct in theater at Brooklyn College. She is a PSC adjunct liaison, a delegate and serves as the vice chair of the Baruch chapter, where she has worked to build part-timer solidarity and organize around pay parity and job security. She has been active in various movements for economic and racial justice, LGBTQ rights and justice in Israel and Palestine. Her research interests include musical performance and global capitalism and the sociology of theater and opera; she has published on branding as cultural performance.



**Susan DiRaimo** is an adjunct lecturer in English as a Second Language at City College and Lehman and co-author of *Life, Language and the Urban Experience*. Her doctoral dissertation was on the political poetry of Pablo Neruda. Having served on the PSC Executive Council since 2003, Susan lobbies in Albany and testifies regularly at the Board of Trustees, especially for adjunct salary increases and against tuition increases. Susan is co-chair of the PSC Open Access Committee and on the board of the Belle Zeller Scholarship Fund. She is director of the Northwest Support Committee for the Homeless and received her adult nurse practitioner license from Lehman College.



**Meg Kallman Feeley** has been an adjunct lecturer in the department of English at Kingsborough Community College since a mid-career occupational disability propelled her to earn an MFA in creative writing from Goddard College in 2002. She serves as the liaison for part-timers at KCC and completed the union's Leadership Development training program in 2017. She is especially interested in cross-title solidarity and organizing against the multi-tier systems of exploitation in higher education which she calls "tierism." She could not be more proud to be a member of the PSC, but does wish we would sing more songs.



**Blanca Vázquez** is an adjunct associate professor in film and media studies at Hunter College. At the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, she was the founding editor of *Centro Journal* and a researcher on the Culture and Oral History Task Forces. In 2009, she received Hunter's Cecile B. Insdorf Award for Excellence in Teaching for Part-Time Faculty. Blanca has been a PSC delegate, secretary of the Hunter chapter and liaison for part-timers. She served one term on the PSC Executive Council and was on the last bargaining team. She is a lifelong activist in movements for social justice, women's equality and Puerto Rican self-determination.



## RETIREES

**Joan Greenbaum**, an early scholar in the fields of technology and work, held faculty appointments at LaGuardia Community College and the Graduate Center. She has been a PSC delegate since 1993. Joan served for seven years as chapter chair at LaGuardia, where she initiated joint chapter meetings for faculty, CLTs and HEOs. Joan was a founder of the PSC Environmental Health and Safety Committee, which she co-chaired for many years. She started the CUNY-wide Watchdog program, which continues to take action on workplace health and safety. Joan is now editor of the Retirees' newsletter *Turning The Page* and is on the Retiree Executive Committee.



**Steve Leberstein** retired as professor of history at City College in 2005. A founder of City College's Center for Worker Education, he taught history and served as its executive director for more than 20 years. Steve is currently a member of the PSC Executive Council; he has been a grievance counselor, chaired the CCNY PSC chapter, the PSC Social Safety Net Working Group and still chairs the PSC Academic Freedom Committee. His proudest achievement was organizing the campaign to have the Board of Trustees formally apologize in 1982 to the over 50 faculty and staff members at City College who were fired in the Rapp-Coudert purge of 1940-41.







## 15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

# Storming Albany for '\$7K'

The union will be taking members to Albany on April 24 with one major goal in mind: to inform lawmakers about the necessity of funding the demand for \$7,000 per course per semester for adjuncts.

If you are not available for the all-day trip, you can help the effort by informing colleagues

on your campus about the lobby day. Ask them how you can help them attend this trip or arrange substitute coverage in their absence.

These small tasks amount to the larger solidarity it takes to win ambitious campaigns. To attend the trip, go to <http://psc-cuny.org/calendar/7k-lobby-day>.

Professional Staff Congress/CUNY  
61 Broadway, 15th Floor  
New York, New York 10006

Return Service Requested

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

12

## UNION VIEWS

Clarion | March 2018

### SOLIDARITY

# How the West Virginia teachers won

By SHARON PERSINGER

I have lived in the New York metro area for the past 40-plus years, but I am still from West Virginia. I watched the recent strike of teachers and school personnel, inspired by the serious grassroots organizing, the energy, persistence and solidarity they showed. That solidarity kept the school systems of all 55 counties of West Virginia on strike for nine days until the striking workers won a 5 percent increase in pay, passed by the legislature and signed by the governor, for all state workers and a commitment to the creation of a task force to develop a plan for the long-term, stable funding of the Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA).

This solidarity didn't come out of nowhere – there was a long, grassroots organizing campaign. The initial organizing push came from teachers in a few coal-field counties, and then with the support of the leadership of the state teachers' unions, AFT-WV and West Virginia Education Association, grew into rallies at the state capital. The vote to hold a walkout was called by the state unions and passed in every county by teachers and school personnel. Locals organized for the rallies in Charleston, held pickets in their communities and arranged food distribution for the students in their schools. However, there are some specific things about West Virginia, its schools, its students and its communities that made this kind of solidarity a bit easier to achieve than in other places.

### SHARED CONCERNS

The reason there was such widespread support for the teachers and state workers is that solidarity was based on community and shared material conditions.

First, it helps to understand the size of West Virginia and its schools. West Virginia has a population of around 1.8 million people. The largest city in the state, the state capital of Charleston, has a population of around 50,000 people (to put this into perspective, New York City's smallest borough, Staten Island, has about 475,000 people, according to the last census). The largest high school in the state has about 1,900 students, but a typical high school has about 600 students. A typical elementary school has in the range of 150 to 300 students.

These are intimate environments, to be sure. Public school teachers live in the same



West Virginia teachers rallied at the state capitol building in Charleston.

communities as the students they teach. Teachers shop at the same grocery stores as the families of the students they teach, they attend the same churches and their children attend the same public schools and play on the same sports teams as the children they teach. A town's public schools might be its only real public spaces other than its post office, making it a vital part of the community. Teachers know the students in their schools; they know which students live with two parents or one parent or grandparents. They know which students rely on free or low-cost lunches and which students eat breakfast at school. They supply food for dinner and for the weekends for many of these students.

In early coverage of the strike, there were reports of the organizing by local teachers of sites where students and their families could pick up food while the schools were closed. The teachers worked with churches and the state and local food banks to set up these sites, some of them at picket locations. Some teachers even delivered meals to their students. The newspaper reports left us to fill in the reason for the food pick up sites, and that reason provides an important class dynamic. Over two-thirds of West Virginia students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches when school is in session and teach-

ers would not leave their students hungry on any occasion.

West Virginia is a state with staggering poverty across the board. The teachers' motivation for these food pick ups was part of a much larger statement about the economic crisis in the state. More than that, there was nothing transactional about the work of these teachers to see that their students did not go hungry; it was motivated completely by concern for the students' welfare. But this demonstration of concern increased the support for the strike in the community because it led the parents and the students to understand that the striking workers were fighting not just for better pay and benefits for themselves, but for the education and welfare of their students.

### PEIA WAS CENTRAL

Solving the PEIA funding problem was a major demand of the strikers from the beginning. More than 200,000 people in West Virginia get their health insurance through PEIA, not just school teachers, bus drivers, cafeteria workers and school secretaries, but other public employees and people retired from those positions. The striking school workers were demanding adequate funding for the insurance plan that covers more than 10 percent of the people in the state, and that

gave all those public employees and retirees a reason to support the strikers.

Specifically, the superintendent of schools in every county of West Virginia canceled school for the entire period that workers were out. School superintendents get their health insurance from PEIA, so they had a personal interest in the success of the strike, but they also knew that they could not successfully run a school with half of the teachers missing. If the bus drivers didn't show up for work in West Virginia, there would be no students at school anyway.

### LEGAL MATTERS

While public school teachers are not permitted to strike legally in West Virginia, there are no specific legal penalties, and so far, there have not been reports of penalties for workers who went on strike. Some county school systems have shortened spring break, and others have added days onto the end of the year as is done for snow days. In essence, the administrators canceled work, and if work is canceled, the workers aren't technically doing anything wrong by not coming in. This is not only a clever bit of organizing that gets around the state's prohibition on striking, it speaks to the wider ability of the teachers to organize with other workers across the state.

Regardless, the entire ordeal has been inspirational to educational unionists nationwide.

"We commend your imagination and unity in fighting back against the sacrifice of education to accommodate the state's lucrative energy corporations," the PSC said in a statement of solidarity to the West Virginia teachers the day they returned to work. "In militantly rejecting this assault on your schools and your students, teachers in West Virginia set an example for public-sector workers facing a similar onslaught across the country."

It continued, "We especially commend your dedication to your students throughout the work stoppage, during which you found ways to replace the free school meals and other support your students would ordinarily have received. We know that the financial stress caused by a strike does not end on the day the strike is settled, and we are proud to ask our members to continue to contribute to your strike fund."

Sharon Persinger is an associate professor of mathematics and computer science at Bronx Community College and is the PSC treasurer.

## Building power beyond the classroom