

Clarion

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



NOVEMBER 2010



Dave Sanders

Senior CLT Annette Carrington (pictured above) now takes a cough suppressant to get through her workday at City Tech's Voorhees Building. The building has been plagued by poor air quality and excessive noise since work began this summer on a two-year, \$25 million renovation project. Union representatives worry that hundreds of faculty, staff and students have been put at risk.

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ORGANIZING 'Contract Now!'

say Research Foundation employees as they demand a fair deal.

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CREATIVITY

Queens professor's life of fiction

The novels of John Weir, who teaches creative writing at Queens College, draw heavily on his own life. "I seem to have an inexhaustible interest in my own failures," says Weir.

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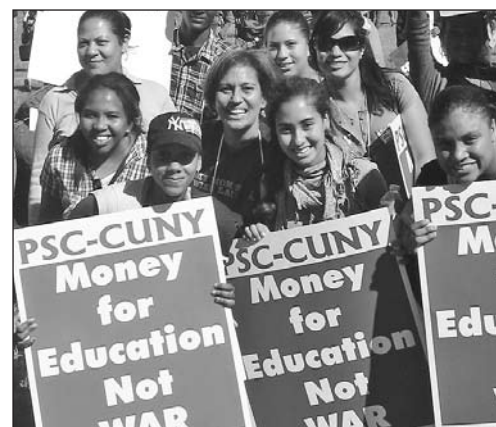


HEALTH CARE

November is time to change coverage

Full-time CUNY employees will have a one-month window to change their health care plans, but it's never easy to know which plan will work best.

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ONE NATION

Faculty, students bring energy to DC rally

PSC members and CUNY students journeyed together to Washington to call for an end to costly foreign wars and full funding for jobs and education.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 61 BROADWAY, 15TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10006. E-MAIL: PHOGNESS@PSCMAIL.ORG. FAX: (212) 302-7815.

Contract bargaining: e pluribus unum

● The September *Clarion* article on the PSC bargaining team raised many important issues. However, it did not discuss the status of college-line Research Associates (RAs). We are permanent university employees, not post-docs on a temporary grant-funded line. RAs are one of the few college positions that lack salary steps. RAs rarely, if ever, receive raises (other than cost-of-living increases). RA positions are not tenure-track and we have no job security.

There are 54 RAs at CUNY, and our positions frequently fall through the cracks. Most of CUNY, including many PSC officers and *Clarion*, seem unaware of our existence, even though some of these issues were raised at a recent CCNY PSC chapter meeting and through letters to the PSC bargaining team. Any assistance *Clarion* can provide in getting the word out would be appreciated.

RAs contribute significantly to their colleges by writing proposals; preparing program reports; publishing scientific papers; directing the research projects of students and post-docs and providing them necessary mentoring; and maintaining and operating essential college research instrumentation for use by members of the college community. It is important to us that the PSC bargaining team and Executive Council become more aware of the needs of RAs and that the next contract includes salary steps for RAs.

**Mark Arend
Al Katz &
eight other Research Associates
at CCNY**

PSC President Barbara Bowen responds: *Research Associates have done a great job of organizing to articulate their needs; nearly one-fifth of the people employed as RAs at CUNY came together to write this letter. The bargaining team takes that kind of organizing seriously. It's exactly the approach that will be needed to make any significant gains in a bargaining climate that has been dominated by demands for concessions.*

No single Clarion article can mention every issue under discussion by the bargaining team, but the 15-member team has studied the notes from each campus meeting on the contract and is well informed about Research Associates' con-

cerns. Many faculty and staff are probably unaware of the important work RAs do and the protections they need, however, so their letter provides important information.

CUNY has many inequities for particular groups, as well as structural problems that affect us all. Our approach to bargaining has been to try to address both – by focusing strategically on certain needs in each round of negotiations. We have been successful when members have fought as hard for the needs of others as for their own. We all gain when CUNY is forced to improve working conditions for any of us.

Beyond today's limits

● While it was a special pleasure to be with the PSC at the October 2 demonstration in DC for jobs and social justice, one aspect of this demonstration was troubling in a surprising way: there were scarcely any police in sight. After years of being pushed around by the police on demonstrations, I am no particular fan of having them out in force. But having been on most of the large civil rights and antiwar protests since the 1960s, my feeling this time was that government did not even bother to pay attention to us – we have obviously become too innocuous.

I am not at all encouraging the useless violence that attracts police brutality. I am saying that unless we make the kinds of demands that rattle power, we are sitting both on our hands and on our own dreams. As the civil rights movement should have taught us, respect for our demands is not won by being respectful, nor by playing by their rules, but by confronting them with a higher morality that stops business as usual.

We need to demand more and to do it more assertively. We need to take at least a moment of partial control of the streets and of the political debate. To simply urge people to vote for Democrats because the Republicans are worse, is to doom ourselves to utter irrelevance.

**Gerald Sider
College of Staten Island & Graduate
Center (emeritus)**

Muslim New Yorkers & civil rights

● Re “Muslim citizenship at Ground Zero” (September *Clarion*):

Those who oppose the Muslim cultural center and mosque in Lower Manhattan are completely wrong. They can only oppose it if they think all Muslims are the same, if they ignore the Muslim New Yorkers murdered on 9/11, if they are insensitive to the Muslims serving in our military today, defending our Constitution with their lives. Victimhood confers no right to bigotry, no right

to judge more than a billion people by the actions of a few.

But that is the garden-variety bigotry that we witness downtown.

For nine years everyone has been calling for moderate Muslims to stand up, and when they do, you see how they are treated: they are smacked down. The well-credentialed moderate cleric building the center has had the guts to stand against Muslim extremism, against people with guns and bombs. For that, he is a hero deserving the same support from us that he has received from the Bush and Obama administrations.

It is the bigots who need to be smacked down.

I for one hope Imam Rauf never backs down, that he stands strong – like that other man of peace, Martin Luther King – against intolerance and injustice. Men of peace are not afraid of controversy. They are not afraid of fighting for what is right. In doing so, Imam Rauf becomes the latest hero of the American Civil Rights Revolution.

**K.J. Walters
Lehman College**

PHEEIA & fracking

● I was pleased to read that the PSC and others defeated Gov. Paterson's Public Higher Education Empowerment & Investment Act (PHEEIA) – but dismayed that supporters might resubmit it.

In addition to privatizing much of CUNY and SUNY funding, PHEEIA would allow SUNY administrators to lease land to private corporations for non-academic purposes without legislative accountability. This could open the door to leasing our public colleges for “fracking” (hydraulic fracturing, a method of natural gas drilling that uses water and chemicals to penetrate rock).

Since the 2005 Energy Policy Act exempted fracking from the Safe Drinking Water Act, it has spread across the country. Fracking has come to land owned by numerous universities, including the University of Texas at Arlington and Penn State, and New York legislators already feel pressured to allow fracking in upstate communities. Millions of dollars are hard to turn down.

Unfortunately, this Halliburton technology has a questionable environmental record. Millions of gallons of fresh water are required, and tons of toxic carcinogens, endocrine disruptors and neurological inhibitors are pumped into the ground. The process brings up radioactive materials, heavy metals and methane from deep underground. All these contaminants tend to leak into the aquifer and the air, causing major health problems, fish kills and even explosions.

PHEEIA's unfettered privatization would open the possibility of

fracking, or other unintended disasters, to New York's public colleges. The PSC is right to fight the bill's adoption.

**Alice Zinnes
City Tech & Damascus Citizens
for Sustainability**

Bubble tea

● Professor William Tabb makes worthy points about Professor Piven (“Tea Party Targets CUNY Prof,” May *Clarion*), but over-generalizes. He identifies the Tea Party with Fox's Glenn Beck. Some libertarians, who created the Tea Party, do not watch Fox. Second, Tabb uses Beck as a red herring. His opponents might equivalently identify President Obama with Louis Farrakhan and then, refuting Farrakhan's anti-Semitism, claim to have disproven Obama.

Third, Professor Tabb plays Rush Limbaugh's game of beggar-thy-partisan-opponent. In his eagerness to blame Bush for the real estate bubble Tabb overlooks the association of bubbles with central banking that starts with the South Sea Bubble, continues through the bubble in the First Bank's own stock in the 1790s, on through the postbellum speculation in railroad stocks with greenbacks through to the 1920s and the “Nifty Fifty” bubble of the 1960s, not to mention the Clinton-era tech bubble. Democrat and Republican, George Bush and Barack Obama, are addicted to the Federalist-Whig-Progressive central banking opiate. The aftermath of the Bush-Obama subsidy to Wall Street will witness a perennially slow economy as our students face a declining real hourly wage. This is a product of Progres-

sivism to which both parties turned between 1890 and 1935.

**Mitchell Langbert
Brooklyn College**

William Tabb responds: *Prof. Langbert suggests I over-generalize by identifying the Tea Party with Beck. In an April New York Times poll, Beck was viewed favorably by 59% of Tea Party supporters (second only to Sarah Palin's 66%). Just 6% of Tea Party supporters viewed Beck unfavorably (compared with 12% for Palin and 27% for G.W. Bush). If polls from the “liberal media” are suspect, Bill O'Reilly names Beck as the most prominent leader in launching the Tea Party forces. So Beck is no red herring.*

Langbert writes “Some libertarians, who created the Tea Party, do not watch Fox.” True. However, poll data indicate that the most frequent source of TV news for Tea Party sympathizers is...Fox.

Yes, our real estate bubble was not capitalism's first bubble ever. I fondly remember the South Sea Bubble. Langbert mentions the First Bank of the United States, and he will be pleased to know I discuss it in my book, Financialization: The Appropriations of Finance and the Restructuring of Capitalism in Our Time, forthcoming in 2011 (a great Christmas-Chanukah-Kwanzaa present for Tea Party folk looking for material for letters to editors).

But we digress. My Clarion article was actually about Glen Beck's irresponsible and paranoid charges against our colleague Frances Fox Piven. If from Langbert's letter you think it was about something else, please go to psc-cuny.org/TeaPartyTargets.htm.



Amanda Magalhaes

NYPIRG steps up for funding

The New York Public Interest Research Group held a press conference on the steps of City Hall Oct. 5, using the occasion of President Obama's White House Summit on community colleges to call for boosting CUNY funding. Speakers included Barbara Bowen and State & City Higher Education Committee chairs.

Clarification

Last month's feature on LaGuardia Community College's urban studies requirement identified Joanne Reitano, professor of history, as co-coordinator of LaGuardia's urban studies program. The other co-coordinator is Larry Rushing, professor of psychology.

City Tech renovation goes awry

By JOHN TARLETON

Voorhees Building revamp spurs concerns

What's it like to teach college in the middle of a construction site?

"It's a disaster," said Bob Cermele, PSC chapter chair at City Tech. "The college, CUNY and DASNY [Dormitory Authority of the State of New York] are in denial about the conditions at that construction site."

The site in question is City Tech's Voorhees Building, an eight-story structure where hundreds of students, faculty and staff are still trying to work and learn as the building is torn apart around them.

Tess Tobin, co-chair of the City Tech chapter's Health and Safety Committee, got a flurry of complaints after the renovation project began this summer. When Tobin went to investigate in August, she told *Clarion*, she could taste dust in her mouth within 15 minutes of her arrival. Construction workers wore air filter masks as they walked through the halls – but CUNY employees were on their own.

'UNCONTROLLED'

Plastic sheeting was falling down or in some cases not present at all, so that dust from construction was not confined. Piles of crumbling ceiling tiles were swept into various hallway corners. Open ceilings with exposed pipes were everywhere.

"I didn't think [the building] was fit for occupation," Tobin said. "There appeared to be very little concern for the well-being of the people who work there."

"It was quite clear construction activities were proceeding in an uncontrolled manner as far as protecting building occupants," said Dave Newman, an industrial hygienist with the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH). In a September 2 visit, Newman saw open flame work taking place in the eighth floor central corridor while students, staff and visitors passed close by.

The air quality inside Voorhees is made worse by the fact that all its windows have been sealed shut for the next two years, while the building's crumbling brick façade gets a makeover.

COUGHING

Annette Carrington, a senior College Laboratory Technician who has worked at City Tech since 1999, says the dust in Voorhees irritates her throat and causes her to cough uncontrollably. She has to take Benzonatate, a cough suppressant, to get through each workday.

"If I go more than six hours without taking my medication, I start coughing," she told *Clarion*.

Carrington has allergies that cause her to have sinus reactions, but she says her throat has never bothered her until now. "This is something different," she said. "It's the first time I've had a problem with coughing."



City Tech Chapter Chair Bob Cermele says renovation work at the Voorhees Building is a "disaster" that is putting the health and safety of faculty, staff and students at risk. The project is due to be completed in 2012.

Voorhees is home to the college's Departments of Architectural Technology, Computer Engineering, Construction Management and Civil Engineering, Electrical and Telecommunications Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, and Entertainment Technology. Roughly 100 faculty and staff work in the building, while hundreds of students attend classes there every week.

WALKWAYS

City Tech student Delores Charles, described Voorhees as "dusty and chokey" and said she was coughing and got sick early in the semester after she began to attend a two-and-a-half hour class at Voorhees that had 36 students and no windows. The class was subsequently moved to another building.

Charles also expressed concern about the lack of proper lighting in the covered walkways that now lead to and from the building. "It's unsafe for young women," she said, noting that the walkways will become more perilous when Daylight Savings Time ends on November 7 and more classes finish after nightfall.

Charles's classmate Britnie Reynoso said the Voorhees dust elicited a violent reaction from her three-year-old niece. "When I walked in the room with that dust on my clothes, my niece who has asthma started coughing so hard she had to [use her inhaler]," Reynoso said.

"Many of our students already live

in neighborhoods that suffer from environmental racism and have high rates of asthma," said a faculty member who asked to remain anonymous. "Why compound their problem at City Tech?"

Breathing didn't get any easier for Voorhees occupants at the beginning of October, when the building's HVAC system broke down for a week and the windowless building was left without air circulation. For Carrington, the stagnant air in the laboratories she works in reignited her coughing. When a reporter dropped by her sweltering sixth-floor office late on a Friday afternoon in early October, Carrington was worried about how long she would be able to remain in an electro-mechanical manufacturing laboratory to assist a class that meets there from 6:00 to 8:30 pm.

"I don't know how it's going to go," she said. "I'm going to see if I can be in-and-out, in-and-out."

PSC members have also raised concerns about asbestos abatement work taking place throughout the building. One City Tech employee told *Clarion* that what appeared to be asbestos materials in a containment area just outside the open fire exit on the building's ground floor started swirling around when hit by gusts of wind on October 7.

"Who knows if some of that didn't fly back into the building," the employee said. "There's crazy stuff going on here. It's not fair that

they won't communicate with us about what's going on."

Start dates for work on the two-year, \$25 million renovation of Voorhees had been announced and then postponed a couple of times. Many were taken by surprise when work began – without notice to the union – in July.

Education has often been disrupted by the noise of construction work that now fills many classrooms, especially the sound of jackhammers helping to remove the building's 50,000 square feet of brick façade. The aging exterior is scheduled to be replaced by 2012 with a state-of-the-art glass curtain wall – and removing the walls of an existing building is not a quiet task.

GRIEVANCE

"[When] I was in a class the other day," one person told *Clarion*, "I watched a teacher's lips moving and couldn't hear a word coming out of her mouth."

As the chapter's health and safety co-chair, Tobin wrote to City Tech VP for Administration and Finance Miguel Cairol on August 17 asking the college to find alternative space for faculty, staff and students to use. With no action on her request, on September 8, the City Tech chapter filed a grievance against the campus administration for its failure to maintain a healthy work environ-

ment at Voorhees, as required under the union contract.

A PSC delegation that included Cermele, Tobin and Jacqueline Elliott, co-chair of the union-wide Health and Safety Watchdogs, met with City Tech President Russell Hotzler on September 23, and held a follow-up meeting with Cairol and officials from CUNY and DASNY on September 30. While the grievance proceeds, they asked that the union be given bi-weekly construction schedules and the project's safety specs, that floors be wet-mopped on a daily basis, that more extensive air sampling be conducted, that the name and contact information for the head manager of the construction project be posted in the lobby, and that regular information-sharing meetings be held with the union.

FINGER POINTING

"They [DASNY] did not feel anyone could or should question them," said Costas Panayotakis, a member of the City Tech chapter's executive committee. Cairol in turn boasted that there had been no accidents at Voorhees – a comment that did not address the widespread complaints about air quality or noise. And as Panayotakis noted, "with occupational diseases, it often takes decades for problems to surface."

According to Panayotakis, the representatives for City Tech, CUNY and DASNY took turns passing responsibility for the situation at Voorhees onto each other. "They know how to use the bureaucracy to shift responsibility from themselves, though the contradictions were a little more obvious because they were all in the same room," Panayotakis said.

As of mid-October, City Tech management was refusing to hold additional meetings with the union. As *Clarion* went to press, CUNY released 600 pages of requested documents to Cermele.

DASNY spokesperson Susan Barnett maintained that "all efforts are being made to accommodate the needs of students, faculty and neighbors." In an e-mail to *Clarion*, Barnett wrote that "compliance with safety and health regulations [is] being monitored and enforced by outside consultants."

City Tech released a statement saying it "continues to work closely with DASNY, the University and the contractors to limit the impact of the construction" and "to ensure that all appropriate and required health and safety standards are being strictly followed."

Cermele says the chapter is determined to press hard for more information, coordination, and action to protect members' health and students' ability to learn.

In the past, Voorhees Hall has been home at Halloween to a haunted house tour crafted by students in the Department of Entertainment Technology. This year, no additional work is needed: the building is scary enough already.

Dave Sanders

On the bus to the October 2 'One Nation' rally in DC,
Clarion's Roving Reporter asks:

What's at stake in this election?



EMILY ANDERSON
 Professor & Department Chair,
 Social Sciences & Human Services
 BMCC

My hope is that this election will result in moving forward with the progressive agenda that the last election started. My fear is that that agenda will be reversed.

Clearly some good things have been started. The war in Iraq is being brought to a close. The automobile industry was saved; that was a bold move and it saved American jobs. And of course there's health care and financial reform – I don't know that these things have been addressed perfectly, but they've been addressed, and that had not been done before.

The New York State elections leave me cold. *[Laughs]* But I always vote. I went to jail for the right to vote. It was in South Carolina, 1963, I was a student at South Carolina State College. So it really annoys me when people say they don't vote. It drives me nuts!



DAVID KOTELCHUCK
 Professor Emeritus, Environmental
 & Occupational Health Sciences
 Hunter College

The two parties' choices for governor really gave me pause. Paladino is of course totally unacceptable. In fact, I don't believe the man can govern if elected, because he's so offensive to so many New Yorkers.

But Mr. Cuomo seems to have taken a platform to the right of the center of the Democratic Party in New York State. In particular, he's adopted an anti-labor agenda with respect to teachers and public employees, and I'm very disturbed about that. It gives me pause as to whether we ought to support him.

But I'm delighted that Eric Schneiderman is running for attorney general. He's a fighter, and he has a fine record of supporting reform, the right to choice, and the struggle for equality in New York State. Schneiderman is the most progressive candidate running for statewide office and I very strongly support him.



RUBÉN RANGEL
 Adjunct Lecturer,
 English as a Second Language
 City College & BMCC

We're seeing the growth of a radical, almost fascist trend. It's becoming more and more bold – people are being attacked, mosques are being targeted. This is something that you have to respond to forcefully and in a united way – otherwise we'll see the problems increase to even more violence, more attacks.

In this election, what matters most is whether they're successful in inciting these attitudes of hatred. I'm not so worried about one person becoming a representative from one particular state or district – it's more whether that kind of politics changes the mood or the sentiment in the country, or gets people thinking that is an acceptable kind of political expression.

In this country's past, lynching people in the streets was once considered acceptable. So when an African American is elected president, it's not too surprising that there's so much racist opposition to any kind of success of his programs.



JOYCE ZONANA
 Professor,
 Department of English
 BMCC

I truly don't understand what the disaffection with the Democrats is about. I don't understand why people would expect things to be miraculously fixed. It's going to take a while, but I also believe the Democrats are the only ones who can get it done.

It does seem like the Fox News, Tea Party messages are being broadcast, and the progressive message isn't. So it seemed crucial to be here, to be counted, so that we can get another story out to the world.

I was born in Egypt. My family's Egyptian and Jewish. The thing that is scariest and most upsetting to me about what's going on now is the racism, particularly the Islamophobia. I'm from a Middle East where Jews and Muslims and Christians lived together peacefully for a long time, and I'm very committed to seeing that happen again – in the Middle East and elsewhere.



JOEL KUSZA
 Assistant Professor,
 Department of English
 Queensborough Community College

The current leadership of the Democratic Party acts like they're afraid of their opposition. They're afraid to stand for something.

But in Schneiderman's race for attorney general, the minute he went to labor, the minute he went progressive, that's when he ran away with it. That's what got him the nomination, and now he's got a big lead heading into November. That happens more often than the opposite.

For some reason, the conventional wisdom is that Democrats need to run to the center. Look at Cuomo. He decided to run to the middle and now the race is getting tighter. He's running against a right-wing nutcase and it's getting tighter, which to me is ridiculous.

The Schneiderman race shows what labor can do. In fact, there are probably a lot of races that show being aggressive has a benefit, that you don't need to put your tail between your legs and hide.

Interviews by PH

PSC activists join rally for progressive change

By **PETER HOGNESS**

A spirited PSC contingent of 250 people traveled for ten hours by bus to be part of the October 2 "One Nation Working Together" demonstration at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. Sponsored by 400 unions, civil rights and community organizations, the rally for "jobs, equal justice, and quality public education for all" drew tens of thousands.

PSC members said they came to show their opposition to right-wing extremism and their sense of urgency about the need to create jobs and end the foreclosure

For 'jobs, justice & education'

crisis. Students joined faculty and staff on the PSC buses, and some danced through the crowd with cymbals and drums as they called for more money for education. The strongest student turnouts came from Hostos Community College and the NAACP chapter at Medgar Evers College, joined by others from BMCC, Queensborough, and elsewhere.

The PSC was one of many organizations that linked the nation's

economic problems to the need to end the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and anti-war signs and slogans were common throughout the demonstration. "Where is the money going?" asked one peace activist as he handed out leaflets to the crowd. "It's not going to Medgar, I'll tell you that!" responded a student in the PSC contingent.

"We had a rainbow of different people here today," retiree Dave

'We want to take our country forward, not back.'

Kotelchuck told *Clarion* afterwards. "And there were a lot of new people taking part, as well as the movement veterans."

Those veteran activists include Kotelchuck and former PSC Secretary Cecelia McCall, both of whom attended the historic 1963 March on Washington in the same location.

BOLDER

In lively political discussion on the bus ride back to New York, PSC members and students reflected on what the day's protest meant, and what it meant for the November elections and beyond.

"In 1963, we were very hopeful that change was about to happen," said McCall, "as opposed to the spirit now, where we're mostly trying to hold onto what we have won in the past."

Many said the protest should have been politically bolder, tackling issues like the loss of lives and money in the war in Afghanistan, and more pointed, with more specific calls for action. But all felt that their day had been well spent. "It's our responsibility to stand up against the Tea Party," said McCall, "and say that we're not going to go back. And I think we were able to do that today."

PSC picks win big in primaries

By PETER HOGNESS

Candidates backed by the PSC and its state affiliate, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), did well in the September primary elections. As the November 2 general election approached, PSC activists were working to put those candidates in office.

Eric Schneiderman for Attorney General and Thomas DiNapoli for Comptroller are the PSC and NYSUT picks at the top of the state ticket. Unions are also working to maintain a Democratic majority in the House. Federal stimulus dollars, an important funding source for CUNY, will end this year unless renewed, and House GOP leadership is pledged to kill federal stimulus funding. The PSC is providing extra support to reelect three congressional candidates: Michael McMahon in Staten Island and south Brooklyn, John Hall in the mid-Hudson Valley, and Tim Bishop on eastern Long Island.

WALL ST. DEFEAT

In the September primary, pro-union State Senators Velmanette Montgomery, Bill Perkins and Shirley Huntley defeated well-funded opponents by wide margins. The three had turned a skeptical eye on under-performing charter schools, and spoken out against profiteering in some of them. In response, charter school backers on Wall Street targeted them for defeat, bankrolling campaigns by outspoken supporters of school privatization (see p.12).

Strong labor support, including from the PSC, was central to Eric Schneiderman's victory in securing the Democratic nomination for attorney general. NYSUT made no

Key Nov. contests up for grabs

endorsement in that primary race, but the PSC and the United Federation of Teachers were among the many unions that teamed up to back Schneiderman. NYSUT is now backing Schneiderman in the general election.

As a state senator, Schneiderman "consistently supported greater funding for CUNY, progressive income tax reform as a fair solution to New York's chronic budget deficits, and championed our adjunct unemployment insurance legislation," said PSC First Vice President Steve London. "As attorney general, he will be vigilant fighting the corrupting influence of big corporations, and will be a consistent advocate for equality for all New Yorkers."

London also urged members to get out to vote for Thomas DiNapoli, a firm supporter of the public employee pension system, running against a candidate who wants to curtail defined benefit pensions.

Union activists are also working on some key races for State Senate. In Queens, the PSC and NYSUT are strongly backing Tony Avella's challenge to anti-immigrant State Sen. Frank Padavan. Just north of the city, the PSC and NYSUT are focusing on four candidates: incumbent Sens. Suzi Oppenheimer, whose district includes Mamaroneck and Larchmont, and Andrea Stewart-Cousins in lower Westchester; and in open seats Mike Kaplowitz in upper Westchester and Dutchess Counties, and David Carlucci in Rockland and Orange Counties. Also receiving union backing in Queens is Toby Stavisky, chair of the State Senate

Committee on Higher Education.

In the Assembly, the PSC and NYSUT are strongly supporting Higher Education Committee Chair Deborah Glick and Speaker Sheldon Silver, who were outspoken critics of Gov. Paterson's plan to privatize CUNY and SUNY funding. On Staten Island, the PSC and NYSUT are focusing on reelecting Janele Hyer-Spencer; in an open seat in Queens, a union push is being made for Ed Braunstein.

In the race for governor, both NYSUT and the PSC have made no endorsement, but both organizations have made it clear that Paladino is totally unacceptable. They say that Democrat Andrew Cuomo, has not earned union backing because his platform is openly hostile toward teacher unions and other public employees.

PENSIONS

Cuomo supports privatizing much of CUNY and SUNY funding, wants deep cuts in public worker pensions, and supports a rigid cap on property taxes similar to California's Proposition 13 (which led to severe cutbacks in education funding in that state). These positions "have raised a lot of concerns among NYSUT members," said NYSUT President Richard Iannuzzi.

"Republican nominee Carl Paladino would be the worst possible choice for New York State," said the PSC's London. He pointed to Paladino's casual racism and sexism, his hypocritical attempt to

present his anti-gay remarks as "pro-family," and his call for firing all public employees and rehiring only those who agree to lower pay and benefits.

"Paladino's proposed 20% cut in the State budget and continuing 10% annual cuts would decimate public services," London added. "His extreme and violent rhetoric – calling Speaker Sheldon Silver 'the Antichrist' and urging that he be beaten up 'a little bit'; promising to take a baseball bat to opponents; telling a persistent reporter that 'I will take you out' – feeds an atmosphere where hate crimes are on the rise, and public meetings are marked by attempts to shout down those with different views."

"There is every reason to get out to vote, but we felt we could not endorse a candidate, like Cuomo, who

is on the wrong side of so many of our most critical issues," said London. With Cuomo far ahead in the polls, London said, union members can send him a message by voting for a pro-labor third-party candidate instead: City Councilmember Charles Barron, running on the Freedom Party line (www.freedompartynys.com), or Green Party candidate Howie Hawkins (howiehawkins.com).

VOLUNTEER

If union members want to vote for Cuomo, they can also send him a message by doing so on the Working Families Party line (www.workingfamiliesparty.org).

To volunteer in the union's get-out-the-vote efforts, contact Isabel Mercado at imercado@pscmail.org or 212-354-1252.



Hostos Chapter Chair Lizette Colon (center, with homemade drum) marches with a contingent of HCC students at the October 2 "One Nation" rally in Washington. Organizers urged the crowd to get active in the fall elections.

LIFE/WORK

Heartbreak and humor

By JOHN TARLETON

John Weir
Associate Professor of English
Queens College
MFA, Columbia University

John Weir teaches in the MFA creative writing and literary translation program at Queens College and is the author of two tender, quirky novels that confront heartbreak with humor, *What I Did Wrong* (Viking, 2006) and *The Irreversible Decline of Eddie Socket* (HarperCollins, 1989). The latter won the Lambda Literary Award for Best First Novel by a Gay Man when it was published at the height of the AIDS crisis.

The making of *Eddie Socket*: I did a lot of work in my 20s with the

Gay Men's Health Crisis, which sent people out to visit people who were sick and dying – make them dinner, do their laundry, stuff like that. It was a very overwhelming experience, but there was a darkly, absurdly funny aspect to it, too. You walk into the church and you're all ready to go and sit down and start mourning, but you can't, because someone else, who you also knew, is already being mourned. I must have gone to a funeral every week for like a year.

I was aware at the time that the experience I was having, going to see these guys who were sick and helping them out, was something that not a lot of people were doing

and not a lot of people knew about. There was so much secrecy and shame around AIDS early on.

Current projects: I'm working on three novels. One is about my father and the early days of TV broadcasting, in which he was involved as an NBC executive. The other two are about bad relationships I've had. Everything I write about is me. I seem to have an inexhaustible interest in my own failures.

Why I write: If I don't write, I'll lose my mind. It's a compulsion.

Queer lit today: The market for books that are specifically about somebody being gay, written by somebody who is gay, has evapo-

rated. That's troubling in certain ways, but good in others, because then maybe some novels about gay characters don't get so ghettoized. Maybe kids in their 20s don't feel like they have to go buy a gay book in order to figure out what that experience is like.

Favorite writers: James Baldwin, Joan Didion, Anton Chekhov.

Why I like James Baldwin: He has a wonderful way with irony, but his irony is profound and harrowing. I often have an ironic tone, but it feels much more flip and kind of foolish. I wish I had Baldwin's gravitas.

Favorite Baldwin: *Notes of a Native Son*. It's a wonderful essay. It's about the events around his father's funeral, and becomes a reconsideration of Baldwin's whole relationship with his father.

Favorite of my own fictional characters: Saul Eisenberg, a gay guy in his 30s, who said whatever came into his head whether it was blunt or upsetting or really funny. It was all the stuff I felt like I couldn't say in my own life.

Black and white movies: Growing up, I saw a lot of black and white, 1930's Warner Brothers movies about wicked gangsters and powerful women who were slightly evil. That kind of black and white, gritty New York reality influenced me.

My mother was a big Bette Davis freak. I think that's why I am gay [laughs] – I was forced to watch Bette Davis movies when I was five.

Why I love teaching at Queens College: Everyone on the planet lives in Queens. It's hard to make any sweeping generalizations, because a student will say, "It's not like that in Guyana" – or Senegal, or South Korea. That's really fun to be around.

What Queens College lacks: Funding...and diversity. Queens is known throughout CUNY for being one of the whitest campuses in terms of faculty and administration, even though the borough is the most ethnically and culturally diverse county in the country. That's a big frustration.

QC prof pens quirky novels

Bargaining team prepares demands

By JOHN TARLETON

At a special meeting on November 4, the PSC Delegate Assembly (DA) will vote on adopting a package of demands for the upcoming round of contract negotiations. The union's bargaining agenda is likely to focus on four major priorities named at the start of the last round of contract talks in 2007: continued progress in salaries for faculty and professional staff; a more manageable teaching load; adjunct equity; and advancement opportunities for HEO-series employees. (These four issues were also a focus of member comments in local discussions on contract demands held last spring on every CUNY campus.)

The PSC's 15-member bargaining team has been working to de-

Core issues dominate talks

velop a proposal to bring to the union's Executive Council, which in turn will decide whether or not to recommend it to the DA.

"We have to be really creative and think outside of the box in order to win our demands in times like this," said PSC Vice President for Community Colleges Anne Friedman, a member of the bargaining team. "We've had to do a lot of listening to each other, to learn about details on issues affecting different constituencies," said Friedman.

THE WHOLE UNION

"Everybody speaks well for the section they come from, while also understanding what we're doing

is for the union as a whole," added PSC Part-Time Personnel Officer Michael Batson.

The union's negotiating team will present its proposed package of contract demands to the PSC Executive Council (EC) in late October. After the EC approves a bargaining agenda, the proposed demands are considered by the union's Delegate Assembly, which has the final say.

Friedman noted that when negotiations begin, CUNY management is likely to present a radically different bargaining agenda of its own. She said it will require a sustained effort by the PSC

membership to turn back regressive management demands while moving the union's own agenda forward.

Terms of the old contract, which expires Oct. 19, remain in effect during negotiations for a new agreement.

To help build the union's power at the bargaining table, the PSC has formed a rank-and-file Committee of 500 – union members who

commit to do six things to help organize for a good contract, such as attending one bargaining session as an observer, or talking to a few colleagues about their contract priorities. To join the Committee of 500, or for more information, go to psc-cuny.org/committee500.htm.

Thinking outside the box will be required.

Kingsborough settlement

By PETER HOGNESS

In a settlement with the NYC Commission on Human Rights, Kingsborough Community College (KBCC) has agreed to anti-discrimination training for "all Kingsborough supervisory staff with responsibility over faculty members, including department chairs and academic affairs administrators." The college also agreed to pay \$7,700 in back wages and \$10,000 in damages to Hanaa Khalil, an adjunct faculty member in chemistry who was fired during the Spring 2009 semester.

Khalil is an Egyptian citizen who has lived in the US for 17 years. The complaint she filed with the human rights commission notes that she is "a practicing Muslim who wears a headscarf," and charges that she was fired "because of her race, creed and national origin."

"The college strongly denies all claims of discrimination," said Kingsborough spokesperson Ruby Ryles. The college agreed to the training, she said, as part of "our long history of promoting equality in the workforce includ[ing] continuing and ongoing training to enhance [an] inclusive academic environment."

COMPLAINT

The complaint states that in March 2009 Khalil got a phone call from an administrative assistant in Kingsborough's Department of Physical Sciences, asking if she was interested in an adjunct position teaching a chemistry class. "They said, 'No need for an interview, you are teaching at St. John's,'" Khalil told *Clarion*. "Classes were starting already."

Khalil reported to campus the next day and went to the department office to get her teaching assignment. The complaint says that when the administrative assistant, Maureen Sharkey, first saw Khalil, she "turned her head away and in

Anti-discrimination training

a dismissive tone asked [the] complainant for her identification."

"She started immediately to have a very different way of dealing with me," said Khalil. "She looked shocked to see that Dr. Hanaa Khalil was wearing a scarf."

According to Khalil, she presented her green card, her New Jersey driver's license, and her passport – but was told by Sharkey that these were insufficient, and that she must provide a Social Security card. Khalil said she offered her Social Security number, but that she had lost the card and would have to get a new one.

Over the next three weeks, the complaint states, Sharkey "grew consistently hostile." After at first refusing to give Khalil access to a computer to print handouts for class, Sharkey relented but sent a security guard to watch over her, it states. When Khalil began to edit her handout, the complaint says, the guard phoned Sharkey and said, "Now she's making changes, I thought she only needed to print."

The complaint adds that the department chair, John Mikalopas, was "dismissive" of Khalil's concerns. At one point, it asserts, Mikalopas asked Khalil, "Between you and me, do you really have a Social Security number?"

Khalil says that when she finally went to the human resources office to complain, she was fired by Mikalopas the same day.

Mikalopas said he could not comment on Khalil's accusations. As department chair, "I accepted and have been entrusted with a certain amount of confidentiality in regards to employment matters concerning the instructional staff regardless of their conduct or the conduct of others," he told *Clarion*. "My duty of

care to Dr. Khalil does not permit me to comment publicly concerning her employment matters."

Sharkey strongly denied Khalil's charges, and said that Khalil was actually fired because of repeated failure to show up for class. She was sharply critical of coverage in the September 29 *NY Daily News*.

"I do not feel that I have to vindicate myself," Sharkey said in a statement to *Clarion*. "The Commission on Human Rights did that for me by dismissing the charges against me,

a fact the newspaper did not print, in their slanted article. Who is the victim? CUNY paid taxpayers' money to someone for not showing up for work, and allowed someone who did to be maligned. I am very happy to be re-tired (not fired) and out of

such an institution that has allowed this travesty to occur." (While part of the settlement does dismiss the complaint against Sharkey and Mikalopas, it makes no findings of fact on Khalil's charges.) Sharkey declined any further comment.

TIMING

"That is not true," responded Khalil. She said that Sharkey had asked her to take a class "that started 20 minutes after my class at St. John's. I said, 'Even if I fly I cannot go there on time.'" Khalil said she expressed concern about leaving students unsupervised in a chemistry lab until she arrived, but was told that the department's CLTs would ensure safety. She said she was urged to take the class at least until someone else could be found. "So I feel they set me up."

Khalil maintains she completely missed class only once, when she was ill, and that she notified the de-

partment by phone and e-mail several hours beforehand.

"It is true that she was showing up substantially late, or not showing up at all, about half the time during those two or three weeks after she was hired," said Patrick Lloyd, associate professor of chemistry. Khalil was assigned to two classes, Lloyd recalled: a six-hour per week class with a lab and a lecture, and another class that met two hours a week. As to whether she was completely absent more than once, or on other details, Lloyd said he had no firsthand knowledge.

JOHN JAY

The question of what kind of identification must be provided by new employees was at the center of another recent discrimination case at CUNY. Last Spring John Jay College agreed to pay more than \$33,000 in back pay and penalties, and conduct training in proper employment procedures, after illegally firing an adjunct for not providing a green card (see *Clarion* Summer 2010).

Federal law does not require that prospective employees provide any single type of identification. The law lists a range of documents that can prove identity and authorization to work; the choice of which to provide is up to the prospective employee, not the employer.

The chair of another department told *Clarion* that Kingsborough requires a Social Security card of all prospective employees. Some employees told *Clarion* that Khalil was asked for a Social Security card for payroll purposes, not requirements of the law – but the different understandings of this issue point to a confusion that is all too common at CUNY.

"I think people at CUNY often are not getting proper training," said Lloyd. "Especially with all the budget cuts, they're overworked and under-trained."

"With this settlement, I am [just] happy...that the whole school will go through this training," said Khalil. "I am hoping that this will help other people have a good experience."

RF won

By JOHN TARLETON

In coordinated protests at three CUNY campuses, Research Foundation (RF) workers picketed and marched during the final week of September to press their demands for a fair contract.

"I haven't received a pay raise in seven years," said Georgina Pierre-Louis, an RF employee at the Graduate Center. "The cost of everything is going up. I need a contract now."

Demonstrators at the Graduate Center, City Tech and LaGuardia demanded that the Research Foundation reach an equitable settlement with its 550 employees at the three campuses after years of negotiations on their first collective bargaining agreements. At each campus, other PSC members joined them on the picket line.

FOOT-DRAGGING

"The CUNY Research Foundation has dragged their heels day after day, year after year, to avoid giving its workers a fair, humane contract," said PSC Treasurer Michael Fabricant, executive officer of the Graduate Center's doctoral program in social welfare.

"They are our colleagues and we would really like them to have a contract with decent wages and working conditions," said the chair of LaGuardia's PSC chapter, Lorraine Cohen. "Their work is extremely important to the work of the university."

"If we all support one another in our different struggles, we can get a better contract in the end," added Junior Tidal, a library faculty member at City Tech who joined the rain-soaked picket line in front of the Namm Building during his lunch break.



At right, graduate student Julian Gantt marching

Workers mobilize

Rallies at City Tech, LaG & GC



Martie Flores (l.) & Jeanne Kreeger (r.), marching in the rain at City Tech on Sept. 27.

When RF employees at each of these three campuses voted in union elections, more than 80% favored joining the PSC. The RF fought against unionization, and used procedural delays to drag the process out for years. “It is hypocritical for CUNY to present itself as the face of public intellectual life in NYC, as a home of liberal values, while denying employees such a basic right,” PSC President Barbara Bowen said at the Grad Center protest. (While the RF is nominally separate from CUNY, CUNY’s Chancellor is chair of the RF’s board.)

RF employees work on grant-funded projects – but while an individual grant may only run for two

or three years, many people remain on the RF payroll far longer. Often they work on long-running projects for which funding is renewed. Some receive raises while others do not: there is no CUNY-wide policy, and there are no guarantees. Without a union contract, RF employees cannot count on accumulating sick time from one grant to the next, and often receive no increase in pay.

Sandra Johnson, an RF employee who works in LaGuardia’s Employment Services Office, has gone years without a raise. “I do the best I can to keep a tight budget,” said the mother of two. “The higher-ups at RF get increases all the time. It’s unfair that

others go years without a raise. I’m not sure why the Research Foundation is still making excuses.”

The Research Foundation is currently offering workers at the three campuses raises of 1.5%, 1.5%, 1.5% and 1.75% while demanding that employees accept an increase in their share of health care premiums from 11-19% by the third year of the contract.

“The pay never goes up. There’s no sense of security. It’s outrageous,” said Ronald Nerio, a social science adjunct at BMCC and a member of the Doctoral Student Council, who previously worked five years on an RF line.

“Their offer is almost embarrassingly low,” said Jay Klokner, an ESL instructor at City Tech’s Adult Learning Center since 1990. Besides larger pay increases, Klokner and the union are demanding longevity increments for long-serving RF employees.

“We would like to see some recognition for people who have been working here for ten or fifteen years or more,” Klokner said. “People don’t get hired for one grant and just disappear.”

PROGRESS

To date, the union has successfully negotiated contract language on the workweek, use of family and medical leave, and other measures that incorporate existing policies into provisions that cannot be changed unilaterally. The bargaining teams have also negotiated a tentative agreement on annual leave that ensures carryover of accrued leave from one appointment period to the next.

“We’ve made a lot of progress on the non-economic issues. Now we need the same progress with economic issues,” said Klokner, who describes the prospective improvements in RF vacation policies as “one of the most satisfying aspects of the negotiations.”

However, none of this progress will take effect until the entire contract is settled. For Selwyn Smart, an RF employee who works in the accounts payable and purchasing office in the Continuing Studies Center at City Tech, this is cause for concern.

Smart traveled to his native Trinidad this summer but was unsure how much paid time off he would receive. “The uncertainty is hard on you,” he said. “You find yourself wondering, ‘Will I have enough money for rent and food when I return?’”

The Research Foundation’s record-keeping system created problems for Smart last semester as well, when he worked 30 hours per week in the Continuing Studies Center and an additional 6 hours per week as a computer lab technician in the Adult Learning Center. Smart received one paycheck and was working more than 35 hours per week, clearly a full-time em-



At right, La Guardia student Elizabeth Mina joins a spirited RF protest on Sept. 28.

ployee. But the RF still considered him part-time, which made him ineligible for dental coverage.

“I have major dental problems that can be expensive out of pocket,” Smart said. “I should be covered for the amount of hours I work.”

The protracted negotiations are due in part to the RF’s relationship with the controversial law firm of Nixon Peabody LLP, which the RF pays roughly \$500,000 per year with funds taken from CUNY research grants. Nixon Peabody advises clients on how to defeat unionization efforts, and one of Nixon Peabody’s attorneys serves as the RF’s lead negotiator. The longer the talks drag on, the more billable hours for Nixon Peabody.

“Why is the Research Foundation spending money on union-busting lawyers when it could use that money to guarantee all its workers better wages?” asked Naomi Zauderer, the PSC’s associate executive director.

The RF unionists also drew support from CUNY students, with a number of students joining the picket lines. Sarah Durand, associate professor of biology at LaGuardia, told *Clarion* that students know how important RF-sponsored tutors are for classes like her five-section anatomy and physiology lecture class. “Being able to talk with someone about the course material on a one-on-one basis or in small groups is invaluable to students,” said Durand.

When students learned from Du-

rand that RF employees staff the Collegiate Science and Technology Program (CSTEP), which provides tutoring assistance for a number of science classes, “they were happy to support them and asked what they could do,” said Durand, who is project director for the CSTEP project.

Faculty, staff and students come out in support.

Carole Harris, a fifth-year assistant professor of English, also walked the City Tech picket line during her lunch hour. Harris teaches a class on the literature of the Civil Rights Era and tries to apply a central lesson from that time to her own union activism. “I think it’s important that we see ourselves as connected,” said Harris. “An injustice to anyone is an injustice to everyone.”

STUDENT SUPPORT

Damian Reynolds came to the City Tech rally with a contingent of SUNY-RF Research Assistants affiliated with CWA Local 1104, who are demanding their own first contract almost two years after they voted to form a union.

Reynolds told *Clarion* that several PSC members had turned out for a CWA picket outside a meeting of the SUNY Board of Trustees in Manhattan this September. “We decided to return the favor in kind,” he said. The weather forecast just made him more determined to come, Reynolds said: “I saw it was going to rain, so I knew they would need help more than ever.”



g with RF employees outside the Graduate Center on September 29.

Adjuncts and winter session

By PETER HOGNESS

In response to requests from department chairs and adjuncts for a change in the contractual provision on Winter session workload, the PSC and CUNY management have agreed to allow adjuncts to teach up to eight hours during the 2011 Winter session at all CUNY colleges (except Kingsborough and LaGuardia, for which a separate agreement on winter teaching loads already exists). Classroom contact hours during the 2011 Winter session will not be counted toward adjuncts' workload in the Fall 2010 semester or the Spring 2011 semester.

"The union leadership appreciates how hard it is for adjuncts who rely on their CUNY employment to make a living wage, and how hard it is for department chairs to staff

Workload limits are changed

their courses given the inadequate funding they receive for full-time faculty positions," said PSC President Barbara Bowen. "I hope this agreement provides some relief; it recognizes the fact that almost all CUNY colleges now offer a significant winter session with courses for full credit."

DISCUSSION

The issue of adjunct work during Winter session was highlighted in discussion last Spring over enforcement of the limits on adjunct teaching load, which are spelled out in Article 15.2 of the PSC-CUNY collective bargaining agreement. Growing management violations of this provision, especially at John

Jay and College of Staten Island, had led the union to insist that the contractual limits be respected, so as not to encourage hiring "full-time teachers at part-time wages" in place of more full-time lines. At the March Delegate Assembly, while some argued that enforcement should be relaxed or abandoned to "do no harm" to any members' income, a wide majority supported the union's stance.

One point made in that discussion was that adjuncts who teach Winter session classes have been especially likely to run up against the workload limits, since those contact hours were counted along with their regular Fall semester

courses. Some delegates argued that changing this rule would not undercut the union's basic policy on Article 15.2, but could help reduce the economic impact for some adjuncts who had received waivers in the past. Some department chairs

Winter hours will not count toward Fall limits.

urged a change as well, to facilitate their planning for winter session classes.

For both reasons, changing the treatment of Winter session under Article 15.2 was an idea that drew support within the union, and the PSC proposed a change to CUNY management. Talks led to a joint announcement on September 27 that the two parties were "very close to an agreement," and the side agreement was signed later that week.

CUNY & race

By CLARION STAFF

In November 2009, after extensive strategic planning, the PSC Executive Council (EC) launched a multiyear project on "CUNY and Race," with the first phase to focus on racial and ethnic diversity in the CUNY workplace.

The project is directed by the EC's anti-racism subcommittee, which is co-chaired by Jonathan Buchsbaum, professor of media studies at Queens College, and John Pittman, co-chair of John Jay's philosophy department. Additional guidance is provided by union officers and staff, as well as an Advisory Council drawn from across the University. The PSC has hired a lead researcher, Carol Wright, who holds a doctorate degree in educational policy studies from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Wright's previous work includes co-directing the recent study of faculty diversity at MIT (see *Clarion*, May 2010).

"We start from the position that the country's most diverse urban public university has a special opportunity – and responsibility – to assemble a diverse faculty and staff," Pittman told *Clarion*. The "CUNY and Race" study will use both quantitative and qualitative data to analyze the University's practices recruiting, retaining, mentoring and promoting faculty and professional staff of color. In-depth interviews and focus groups of faculty and professional staff will begin during the Fall 2010 semester and continue through the summer of 2011.

PARTICIPATION

The CUNY administration has responded to the union's request for quantitative data, and PSC's research team – which also includes CUNY graduate students – is now using the data to identify patterns in recruitment, retention and promotion. The study will systematically explore these patterns across colleges, departments, disciplines and job titles.

"While many union members view the University's diversity efforts as inadequate, and preliminary data support that perception," said Buchsbaum, "the PSC leadership believes that a careful examination of the facts is the best foundation for deeper conversations with members about race in the workplace." That examination will provide the basis for future campaigns to engender a commitment to anti-racism by CUNY management that goes beyond compliance with non-discrimination guidelines, union leaders said.

According to Wright, "This research effort is intended to serve as a tool to identify strengths and weaknesses in the recruitment and retention of faculty and professional staff on various campuses so that the union can develop its campaign to increase diversity at CUNY and improve the work experiences of PSC members."

Members interested in participating in the project should contact Wright at cwright@pscmail.org.

Ending CUNY's overuse of substitute positions

Starting next semester, an important agreement between the PSC and CUNY management will affect the University's use of substitute titles. "The agreement will stop the abuse of the substitute title and establish new rights for PSC members who serve in those positions," said PSC First Vice President Steve London. The agreement settles a long-running PSC grievance that was pending at arbitration.

"The grievance was filed when we discovered that many colleges were violating the contract by using the substitute title as a utility temporary appointment, instead of the way it should be used, as a substitute appointment for an already existing position," London explained. As a result CUNY was hiring hundreds of people every year as "substitute" faculty and staff, with as many as 500 substitute appointments per semester.

While CUNY management said it needed this flexibility in staffing, the collective bargaining agreement is clear. "Substitutes are temporary employees appointed to fill vacancies caused by leaves and/or emergencies," states Article 9.7 of the union contract. The problem, London explained, was that "college administrators were defining 'emergencies' very broadly and in many cases assigning 'substitute lines' to departments and offices when there were no leaves or credible emergencies."

CONTINGENT

"The importance of this settlement is that it reins in CUNY's practice of hiring hundreds of faculty and staff in contingent, temporary positions rather than on full-time lines," said Danny Lynch, professor of English at LaGuardia and chair of the union's Grievance Policy Committee. "Just as with its use of adjuncts, CUNY cites the need for 'flexibility' as an excuse for undermining the secure, full-time positions the University needs."

PSC grievance is settled

CUNY policy limits substitute service to two years, but many individuals worked as substitutes for more than the specified time. Professional staff in the Higher Education Officer (HEO) series, in particular, were kept in substitute titles for years without accruing service credit toward "13.3(b) status," the job security that HEO-series employees can earn under Article 13.3(b) of the union contract.

The union argued that these practices were an abuse of the substitute title that violated the contract, were unfair to individual instructional staff members, and undermined the University's stated goal of hiring more permanent full-time faculty and professional administrative staff.

"The settlement is designed to clarify when substitutes can legiti-

mately be hired, establish new rights for members, and provide incentives for CUNY management to hire more permanent instructional staff," London said.

The agreement affirms that a substitute title can be used only

when a permanent position already exists or a position is being created, and, as a new feature, it establishes time limits on the use of substitutes for a position. The agreement revises the current allowable time lim-

its for individuals serving in substitute titles. Teaching substitutes will be able to serve for four out of six semesters and then will have to wait for four semesters before being eligible to be appointed to a substitute title. Non-teaching substitutes will be able to serve for two six-month appointments within a two-year pe-

No more 'substitutes' where no vacancy exists

riod and then wait for one year before becoming eligible for another substitute appointment.

NEW RIGHTS

The agreement also establishes new rights and codifies existing policy for instructional staff members in substitute titles. For example, an employee appointed as a substitute in an HEO title will receive up to two years of service credit if he or she is appointed to a certificate-bearing HEO position at the same college immediately following the substitute appointment. Also, in the limited circumstances when both the PSC and CUNY agree to waive individual time limits, a substitute faculty member teaching for his/her fifth consecutive semester will have a workload reduced by three credit hours.

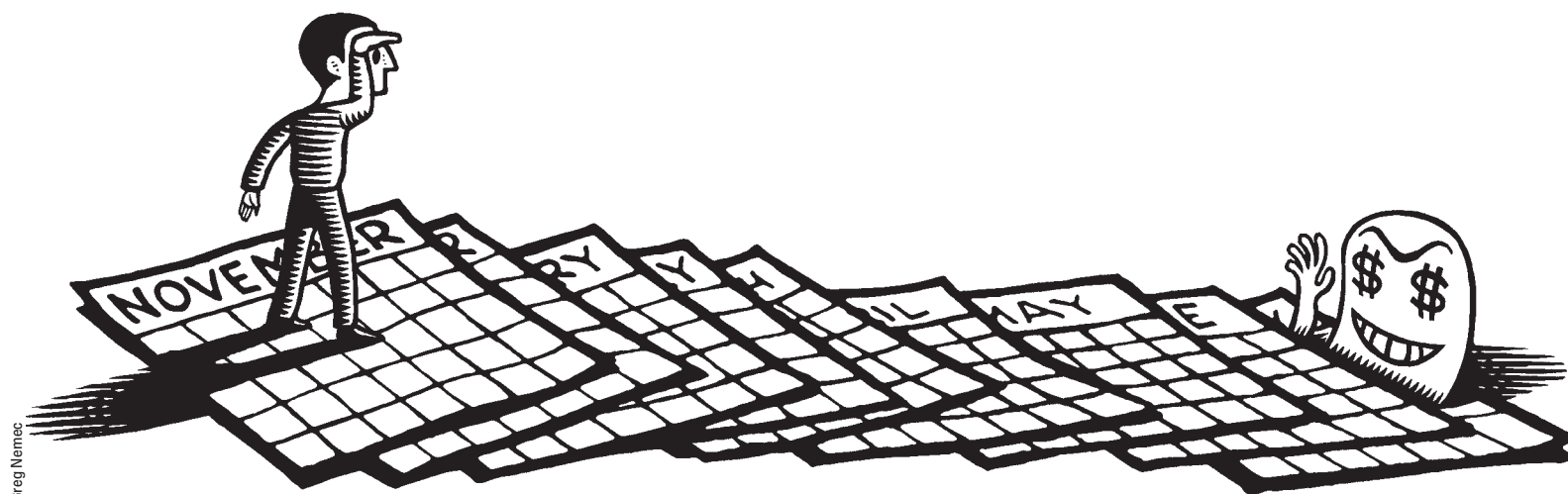
More details and the agreement are online at psc-cuny.org/Sub-Agreement0910.htm.

—PH

Congregations unite for living wage



Members of Convent Avenue Baptist Church in the Bronx participate in a Living Wage Service on October 10. More than 80 houses of worship across the city held similar services over the weekend in support of the Living Wage NYC campaign.



NYC health plan choices: how to weigh possible price hikes

By **LARRY MORGAN**

Executive Director, PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund

The open enrollment period for changing your choice of health insurance coverage will soon be upon us again. The exact dates are usually announced only a short time in advance, and this year is no exception – but the one-month window for changing your choice of health insurance coverage always falls around November. Members should look to their human resources office for notice of exact dates.

It's never simple to anticipate your health needs in the coming year, nor to decide what kind of insurance coverage best fits your situation. For full-time CUNY employees choosing from the plans available under the NYC Health Benefits Program, one of the many difficulties in this decision is anticipating rate increases. Those who choose GHI or HIP pay no premium. Other plans provide different benefit packages at additional cost. For those who choose a plan with this higher cost, premium increases can sometimes be dramatic from the member's point of view. Here are some of the reasons why.

BASIC RATE

For each member's coverage, CUNY pays the HIP basic rate to any of the various NYC health plans. As the HIP rate has gone up in the past, the employer contribution has risen accordingly. (In the recent past, this amount has also been enough to cover 100% of the premium charged by GHI-CBP. Thus, HIP and GHI coverage are both available without any premium paid by the member.)

Any choice other than HIP or GHI requires a member payment through payroll deduction. The amount borne by the employee electing a more expensive option is the amount that plan charges above the premium charged by HIP. (Any additional riders are also paid entirely by the employee.)

Health insurance rate increases are implemented in July, but employees must make their choice of plan the previous November. So

You can make changes in Nov.

employees choose at a time when very little is known about the insurer's future plans. This makes it a gamble against the unknown.

While the Municipal Labor Committee (the union coalition that bargains jointly with the City of New York over health coverage) and the MLC's technical committee review all rates, and can question some components and calculations, the rate is essentially set by the carrier based on utilization.

MIND THE GAP

If one of these carriers increases the amount it charges above the HIP basic rate, the employee must pick up all of that increase. This means that a moderate increase on the total premium can mean a large hike, in percentage terms, in what the employee must pay.

For illustration purposes, let's say that Plan XYZ charges 10% more than the HIP basic rate. A member who chooses this plan must pay the 10% difference. Now let's say that Plan XYZ raises its premium so that it is now 15% more than the HIP basic rate. The plan's total premium has now gone up from 110% to 115% of the HIP basic rate – an

increase, but not a huge one. But the amount the member must pay has now increased by 50%. (That is, the member's additional cost used to be 10% of the HIP rate, but has now gone up by half to 15%.)

This is oversimplified, since the amount the employer pays (equal to the HIP basic rate) generally increases, too. But the basic point is the same: if another carrier increases its rates more than the HIP rate increase – thus widening the gap – the employee will pay all of the difference.

Last year the total biweekly premium (most of which is paid by the employer) for Aetna HMO went up from \$218.83 to \$250.49, an increase of \$31.66. The employer contribution (HIP rate) went up by \$14.77 – so almost half of Aetna HMO's \$31.66 increase was covered by the employer.

The rest of the increase, \$16.89, had to be paid by the employee. This meant that the employee's biweekly premium, which was formerly \$42.06, increased to \$58.95 biweekly in July 2010 – a 40% increase.

Last year's other increases in biweekly employee premiums were \$9.06 for Empire EPO; \$19.88 for

Aetna QPOS; and \$25.78 for CIGNA. In percentage terms, these ranged from 6-29%. (Members in HIP or GHI continued to have no additional premium cost.)

So if you are considering a plan with additional cost for next year, but would find it difficult to afford it if the price went up next summer by 20-40%, you may want to consider other plans.

The likely course of insurance costs next summer is as hard to predict now as it was last year, beyond saying that prices are likely to go up. The PSC and the Welfare Fund have been involved with the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) in ongoing discussions with the NYC Office of Labor Relations, and a great deal of effort has gone into maintaining the current level of benefits. Meanwhile the mayor is relentlessly calling for cutbacks in multiples of \$100 million. As MLC negotiations with the City unfold in the coming year, *Clarion* will keep you informed.

For more information on health coverage choices under the NYC Health Benefits Program, see your campus HR office. For updates on the exact dates for this year's open enrollment period, once they are announced, see pscunywf.org.

Those in HIP or GHI pay no additional premium.

Health reform & dependents up to age 26

By **PATRICK SMITH**

Of all of the changes resulting from this year's health care reform legislation, one of the most anticipated is the extension of insurance coverage to dependent children up to age 26.

The PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund and its vendors and insurers have been following a conventional rule for covering dependent children: both biological and adopted children are covered until age 19, and after that only if they are unmarried, full-time students not yet age 23.

The new law calls for extending benefits coverage to dependents up

to age 26, without regard to student status, marital status or any other considerations of residency or financial independence. The sole restriction is that the dependent must not be eligible for employer-based coverage.

The regulations state that this provision will take effect at the start of the first new plan year that begins six months or more after passage of the health care reform bill. In conjunction with the NYC Health Benefits Program, the Welfare Fund will adopt the new policy on July 1, 2011.

An exception to that date concerns adjunct members of the

Welfare Fund, who receive basic health insurance under a separate contract, one in which, moreover, family coverage is only available by buying it. Adjuncts enrolled in Empire Blue Cross have been advised of the date that the carrier will adopt the new policy for dependents, and those enrolled in HIP will be notified in due course.

The Welfare Fund encourages members to join its e-mail subscription list for benefits information and updates. Visit pscunywf.org, and click on the link in the note, "Get Welfare Fund News Via E-mail."

Adjuncts: tell new campus you're in TRS

By **ELLEN BALLEISEN**

Bronx Community College

Both teaching and non-teaching adjuncts enrolled in the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) who have started working at a new CUNY campus should be aware that the human resources and payroll offices at the new campus will not automatically take account of your TRS membership. If you have not already done so, you need to take the initiative to give your TRS membership number to these two offices at your new school.

DEDUCTIONS

If you are still required to make the 3% contribution to TRS – which is the case for all Tier 4 TRS members who have not yet reached either 10 years of TRS membership or 10 years of credited TRS service – then you need to tell the payroll office at your new campus that it should take the 3% deduction for TRS out of your paychecks.

If you don't have the appropriate deductions taken out of your checks, you will owe TRS the money retroactively, and you will have to pay interest on your retroactive contribution. These contributions pay off when you retire, so make sure to take care of them now.

CALENDAR

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21: 5:00 pm / PSC Treasurer Mike Fabricant will take questions on the PSC budget to be voted on at the Delegate Assembly later that evening. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th fl. All members welcome.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 27: 5:30 pm / Environmental Health and Safety Watchdogs meeting. PSC Office, 61 Broadway, 15th fl. RSVP by calling (212) 354-1252 x208 or e-mailing hswatchdogs@pscmail.org.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30: 9:30 am-3:00 pm / HEO Retreat, PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th fl. For more info contact Alisa Simmons at asimmons@pscmail.org.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13: 2:00-7:00 pm / NYC Pride in Our Union Committee will discuss LGBT unionists' greater union and LGBT issues. Center for Worker Education, The Joseph S. Murphy Institute, 25 W. 43rd St., 19th fl. RSVP to Sheila Sable at ssable@prideagenda.org, (518) 472-3330 x303.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13: 9:30 am-3:00 pm / CLT Cross-Campus Retreat. All CLTs invited, workshops on workplace safety. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 15th fl. RSVP to Alisa Simmons at asimmons@pscmail.org.

REALITY CHECK

Social Security: seven key facts

By DEAN BAKER

Recently there has been a hot debate about Social Security and the federal budget, especially in relation to the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform (see sidebar). Here are seven key facts about Social Security, the budget, and the well-being of workers and retirees. Policymakers and members of the media who influence the debate about these issues should know this information inside and out. Since that is not always the case, members of the public should be sure to know the answers themselves.

1) How much higher are real wages projected to be in 2040 than today? In other words, how much richer do we expect the average worker to be 30 years from now?

According to the 2010 Social Security Trustees Report, the average real (adjusted for inflation) wage is projected to be 48.7% higher in 2040 than it is today. In other words, if our kids work 30-hour weeks on average, they would take home about 10% more than we do today working 40-hour weeks. Deficit hawks have been known to quip about how our children and grandchildren will be living in chicken coops, but they're just kidding, right?

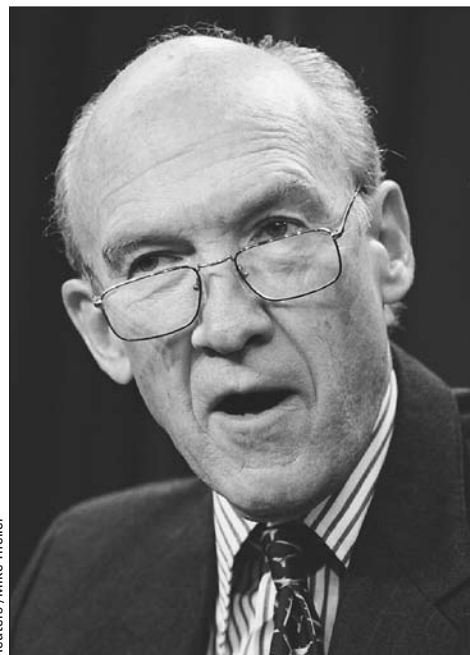
As a practical matter, most workers have not seen much by the way of wage gains over the last three decades, because such a large portion of wage growth has gone to those at the top (people like wealthy policymakers). The upward redistribution of income over this period, and the possibility that it could continue, is the reason that most people who are concerned about the well-being of future generations focus on the distribution of income. The impact of any potential increases in Social Security taxes on the typical worker's income is trivial compared to the impact of a continued upward redistribution of income.

2) How did the 2010 Social Security Trustees Report change the projections for 2040 wages compared with the 2009 report?

The 2010 Trustees Report had good news on the wage front. It assumed that health care reform would slow the rate of growth of employer provided health care benefits. This means that wages are now projected to grow more rapidly since less money will be diverted to cover rising health care costs. In 2009 the Trustees projected that the average wage would only rise by 37.2% between 2010 and 2040. This means that the changes between the 2009 and 2010 Trustees Reports imply that wages will be nearly 10% higher in 2040 than we previously believed. Everyone saw or heard the lead item in the *Washington Post* and on National Public Radio: "New Trustees Report Shows Our Children Will be Much Richer." Okay, maybe they managed to overlook this part of the story, but those who are making decisions about the federal budget should know it.

3) If we solve the projected shortfall in Social Security entirely by raising the payroll tax, what percentage of the gain in real wages over the next 30 years would have to go to pay the tax?

This is somewhat of a trick question, since it depends on which formula we use. The



Reuters /Mike Theller

Former Senator Alan Simpson (R-Wyoming) is the co-chair of the deficit commission.

Trustees Report tells us that if we raise the tax tomorrow by 0.96 of a percentage point on both the employee and employer (1.92% in total), then the program will be fully solvent through its 75-year projection period. If we went this route, then it would mean that the tax increase would take up 5.9% of the projected wage growth over the next three decades.

But we may not want to impose a tax increase like this tomorrow. There is a huge amount of uncertainty about these projections, and the program faces no imminent shortfall. Suppose we raised both sides of the payroll tax by 0.07 of a percentage point annually beginning in 2020 and continuing to 2040. By 2040, the rate would have risen by 1.47 percentage points on both the worker and employer. This would take up 12.0% of the projected wage growth over this period, leaving our children on an after-tax basis just 42.8% richer than we are. This doesn't quite sound like the story about our kids living in chicken coops.

4) What percentage of real wage gains over the last 30 years was absorbed by the increase in Social Security payroll taxes?

The Social Security tax increases of the last 30 years took 6.8% of average wage growth. This is in the same range as the portion of projected future wage growth that may have to go to higher Social Security taxes. The real issue is that people have been living longer through time. If we want to enjoy a growing portion of our lives in retirement, then it will cost somewhat more money. This means that after-tax wages will

grow less rapidly than would otherwise be the case.

It is also worth noting that the gains in life expectancy have not been distributed evenly. Most of the gains went to those in the top two quintiles of the income distribution.

5) What percentage of the projected long-term budget shortfall is due to the inefficiencies of the US health care system?

The United States has by far the most inefficient health care system on the planet. We pay more than twice as much per person as people in other wealthy countries with very little to show for it in terms of health outcomes. If we had the same per person health care costs as any other country in the world, the long-term budget projections would show huge surpluses rather than a deficit.

6) How much wealth should we expect near retirees to have to support themselves in retirement?

Critics of Social Security have held up the image of affluent elderly getting Social Security checks. They talk of seniors driving up to their gated communities in their Lexuses. While this may describe such critics' peers, it is not an accurate description of the vast majority of seniors, most of

whom rely on Social Security for the majority of their income.

This is likely to be even more true of the baby boom generation now at the edge of retirement. Few have traditionally defined benefit pensions. They have seen much of the wealth they were able to accumulate destroyed by the collapse of the housing bubble and the subsequent plunge in the stock market.

7) What percentage of older workers have jobs in which they can reasonably be expected to work at into their late 60s?

Many policymakers are able to still work into their late 70s. This leads many deficit hawk types to think all workers should be expected to work until age 70 or even older.

However, this is not likely to be as easy for most workers as it is for policymakers. Forty-five percent of workers over age 58 work at jobs that are physically demanding or have difficult work conditions.

Dean Baker is an economist and Co-Director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, DC. This article is adapted from a September 2010 CEPR Issue Brief, which includes graphs, tables and references, and is available at tinyurl.com/CEPRsocsec.

The 'Cat Food Commission'

In setting up his National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, Barack Obama is again playing coy in public, but his intentions are widely understood among Washington insiders. The president intends to offer Social Security as a sacrificial lamb to entice conservative deficit hawks into a grand bipartisan compromise in which Democrats agree to cut Social Security benefits for future retirees while Republicans accede to significant tax increases to reduce government red ink....

— William Grieder, *The Nation*, 5/20/10

President Obama has packed the debt commission (also known as the "Cat Food Commission") with members who have an overwhelming history of support for both benefit cuts and privatization of Social Security.

The National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform is operating in secret over the objections of both parties. John Boehner and John Conyers have both raised concerns that the commission will make recommendations in December that could be passed by a lame duck Congress that doesn't have to worry about being reelected. They

requested that the commission report its findings prior to the election so that the public can have a chance to factor in the recommendations into their voting decisions in the election. The commission denied the request.

— Jane Hamsher, Firedoglake.com, 5/10/10

In August, the co-chair of the commission, former Sen. Alan Simpson, said that Social Security is "like a milk cow with 310 million tits." (The remark came in a contempt-filled e-mail to the director of the Older Women's League, who Simpson accused of "babbling into the vapors.") Last March, shortly after he was appointed to lead the commission, Simpson told CNBC that "a lot of blood, hair and eyeballs will be on the floor before we finish. It's going to be anguishing." A hint about who would be feeling the pain can be found in other Simpson remarks – for example, labeling Social Security recipients as "greedy geezers."

Many progressives have demanded that Simpson be fired, while others urge that the commission be disbanded. Neither appears likely. For more on the commission, and what you can do, go to strengthenocialsecurity.org or www.ncpssm.org. — PH

Clarion NOVEMBER 2010

Newspaper of the Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York, collective bargaining representative of the CUNY instructional staff. Vol. 39, No. 6. 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. E-mail: pogness@psccmail.org. All opinions expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the PSC.

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REVIEW & COMMENT

Charters not so 'Super'

By PETER TAUBMAN

Waiting for Superman, a new documentary about charter schools and the current state of education in the US, has received accolades across much of the political spectrum. The day I saw it, a multiracial audience cheered its message of educational reform, gasped at the frightening statistics on the screen, and booed the villain of the piece – the anti-reformist teachers' union.

The movie's message appears simple. Our public schools are in shambles. Incompetent teachers and their obstructionist unions have condemned the nation's most vulnerable children to an educational hell, kept our students from being internationally competitive, and jeopardized the country's economic future. The solution to the crisis lies in financially rewarding teachers who raise students' standardized test scores and firing those who don't, abolishing tenure, closing low-performing schools – and, most important, breaking the unions and opening up more charter schools.

HEROES AND VILLAINS

It's a powerful message. Much of that power comes from its simplicity, a relentlessly binary tale of good charter schools and bad unions. Facts that don't fit with this comic-book picture are simply left out. For example, *Superman* praises the Green Dot charter schools – but never mentions that Green Dot schools are unionized. A Stanford study, later confirmed by a national survey, concluded that just one in five charters gets better test results than regular public schools – the rest get the same results or worse. This, too, goes unmentioned. Such omissions have drawn criticism in the *Washington Post*, the *New Yorker*, *The Nation* and elsewhere – but raves for the film still dominate the media.

Waiting for Superman offers viewers a suspenseful and heart-tugging storyline, replete with stock characters: innocent children, whose futures appear doomed if they do not escape their current schools by getting lucky in a lottery; dangerous buffoons, such as do-nothing teachers who get paid while they let kids fail; villains, in the form of union leaders, like the AFT's Randi Weingarten, who protect these incompetent teachers; and, finally, heroic "reformers," like DC Superintendent Michelle Rhee, who try to bring change but are stymied by bureaucracy and the unions. Even if you know you're being manipulated, when you leave the movie theatre it's hard not to want to join the educational reformers and, as many conservatives have long urged, blow up the system.

The film's director, Davis Guggenheim (*An Inconvenient Truth*), is a self-proclaimed liberal. But it's helpful to remember, that Milton Friedman also insisted he was a liberal, although his disciples and critics consider him the father of deregulated free-market capitalism, or neoliberalism. Friedman called public schools "an island of socialism in a free market sea," and should be privatized as quickly as possible.

That island, now worth billions of dollars, is today being gobbled up at an astounding rate by the corporate sector, intent on making a buck from, among other things, its investments in charter schools. When one takes a more sober look at the film's message, one might conclude that the reforms it advocates actually advance Friedman's

agenda and corporate aims. They certainly support the Obama administration's educational project. But that project and Friedman's agenda are often hard to tell apart. And when unions like the American Federation of Teachers, to which the PSC belongs, are portrayed as something to eliminate, CUNY faculty and staff should take note.

The film's narrative depends on several claims and rhetorical devices, most of which mislead and distract us from the real inequalities in educational opportunity. *Superman* repeats what has become the mantra of the education reformers: public schools are completely broken and we are in an educational crisis. Making the case for this claim requires some rhetorical sleight-of-hand and statistical manipulation.

First, the film equates all inner-city public schools with the worst. While many urban

Perhaps the film's biggest failure lies in its refusal to explore how poverty, with all its attendant problems and disparities, affect education. Even though there is extensive research demonstrating that poverty and underfunding contribute more than anything else to low academic performance, *Waiting for Superman* ignores or disputes any correlation between these factors and dropout rates or school failure.

THE BIG PICTURE

For example, the film's assertion that rising dropout rates are simply the fault of bad teachers seems oddly undercut by the fact that the parents of Daisy, one of the kids hoping to get into a charter school, dropped out of high school not because of incompetent teachers, but because they had to work to support their families.



Greg Nemecek

public schools, disproportionately serving children of color, do have terrible administrators and a disproportionate number of uncertified or incompetent teachers, they are also underfunded and overcrowded. And many other inner-city public schools admirably serve their students and communities, despite their lack of material resources and the complex social and economic problems that surround them.

DISPARITY IGNORED

Next the film equates inner-city schools, now all rendered as dysfunctional, with all public high schools – so that public schools in Scarsdale or Great Neck or Fairfield are all deemed part of the "broken system." The one suburban school the film does portray is criticized for its tracking system, making it apparently inferior to the alternative charter school. At no point does the film point out the funding disparities within the public school system, especially between those in inner-city schools and those in affluent suburbs. Nor does the film distinguish troubled schools in impoverished areas from the vast majority of public high schools, where students continue to do well in the face of budget cuts.

To substantiate its uniformly dismal picture of US public education, *Waiting for Superman* cites reports of falling test scores, skyrocketing dropout rates, and poor test performance relative to other countries. Research that complicates or challenges such claims is blithely ignored.

Superman's frequent comparison between US student test scores and those of Finnish youth omits the facts that in the industrialized world Finland has one of the narrowest gaps between the wealthy and the poor, while the US has one of the widest; that Finland's teaching force is strongly unionized and highly paid; or that Finnish health care and social services are far, far better than those in the United States.

Eric Hanushek of the right-wing Hoover Institution claims in the film that per pupil spending has nothing to do with academic achievement, since money spent on education has doubled since 1971 but US reading scores have remained flat. He omits the facts that in this same period, the percentage of the GDP spent on education declined while wages remained flat.

Hanushek, along with other "reformers" such as Bill Gates, claim in the film that poor academic performance is ruining our economy. But until the current recession, the productivity of the US workforce outstripped that of comparable industrial countries.

Perhaps most striking, the film matter-of-factly assumes the goal of education is job preparation, equates test score results with learning and teacher quality, and suggests that charter school teachers know how to ensure good test results and are thus better teachers. Even on these narrow measures, there is no clear evidence that charter school teachers do better. And while there is some inconclusive evidence that charter schools in

poor neighborhoods may produce students with higher test scores, there is also ample evidence that this results from intensive test preparation and parental commitment to education, demonstrated in the film by the parents' determination to get their kids into the heavily marketed charters.

Waiting for Superman paints a picture of public education in the US that is distorted and alarmist. Its attacks are unfair and that its solutions are wrong-headed. But more disturbing than the flaws of the film are the facts that enormous disparities do exist in educational opportunity in this country, and that poor kids, particularly poor kids of color, are not getting the education they deserve. So when the film presents charismatic reformers like Geoffrey Canada, stating that if we just opened up charter schools and got good teachers, all would be well, or when journalists like Jonathan Alter state that "the unions are a menace," frustration with the status quo may lead some to wonder if maybe charter schools, corporate models of accountability, and union-busting might be the answer.

But just as the film omits Geoffrey Canada's insistence on providing an entire educational ecology of social services in the surrounding neighborhood, which would suggest that school success has to do with more than good teachers and the absence of unions, the film also ignores what equal educational opportunity in the US would really look like.

EDUCATION REVOLUTION

If we want equal educational opportunity for all our nation's children, we should be giving them the education that Sasha and Malia Obama get at Sidwell Friends, that John Kerry, John McCain and George Bush received at their prep schools, that the sons and daughters of the CEOs at Goldman Sachs receive at Hotchkiss and Lawrenceville Academy. (The fact that all these schools are expensive should prompt skepticism of claims from the right that the level of school funding doesn't matter. This is clearly not what the rich and powerful believe when their own children's future is at stake.)

Shouldn't all our children receive an education equal to what the children of the rich receive? Don't all our nation's children deserve small classes like those at Horace Mann or Deerfield? Don't they all deserve a rich curriculum with AP courses and electives, fabulous extra-curricular programs with school newspapers, drama clubs, arts programs and sports teams, safe facilities, tutoring opportunities, and a strong college counseling program – and even, yes, test prep, not as a substitute for curriculum, but as an afterschool program? Those who argue such an education is only for the gifted are mistaken: it is for those who can afford it.

Calling for a prep school education for all sounds utopian, but the seeming impossibility of such a demand tells us how far we have strayed from the ideals that inspired so many educators. Even this radical change would not guarantee student success – ZIP codes and desire still matter – but it would certainly do more than the "reforms" advocated by *Waiting for Superman*, which play into the hands of those out to corporatize education.

It's time educators, our unions and professional organizations started fighting for real equality of educational opportunity, rather than for education as better test prep and job training for the poor. It is time we collectively demanded real change – not educational reform, but educational revolution.

Peter Taubman, professor of education at Brooklyn College, is author of Teaching by Numbers (Routledge, 2009). More info on the film is at notwaitingforsuperman.org and aft.org/notwaiting.

A melodrama with unions as villain



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

On Nov. 2, you are needed

The balance of power in the US Congress, the State Senate, and the outcome of key individual races will depend heavily on turnout in the Nov. 2 election. Polls earlier this fall showed an “enthusiasm gap” that worked in favor of candidates who support reduced spending on public services. Support for progressive and pro-union candidates fell off

among those most likely to vote, compared to the electorate as a whole. But more recent polls show a swing in the other direction, and you can help to turn that tide. Voting in New York is from 6:00 am to 9:00 pm. For information on PSC-supported candidates, see page 5 or psc-politicalaction.org.

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OPINION

Clarion | November 2010

OUR NEXT CONTRACT

Our goals in hard times

Dear Colleagues,

Our contract expires on October 19. I'm sure the next thought for most of us is that this is a bad time to enter into negotiations. New York State, still reeling from its attempt to balance the budget last year, is predicting an even larger deficit for the coming year. New York City projects that the next three years will involve a major budget crisis.

Both of the leading candidates for governor, Andrew Cuomo and Carl Paladino (neither of whom has been endorsed by the union), are busy scapegoating public employees, with Paladino announcing that he would fire all public employees and rehire only those who accept reduced salaries and benefits.

HARSH CLIMATE

Meanwhile, Mayor Bloomberg has broken the collective bargaining “pattern” that for decades imposed a relatively uniform contract settlement on municipal unions. He has told the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), whose contract expired in October of 2009, that the 4% salary increase negotiated earlier by other unions (and presumably part of the “pattern”) will not be available to them. The UFT has now embarked on what promises to be a lengthy legal proceeding to protect their right to a fair increase.

Even more troubling than the state and local picture, however, is the national scene. For many people, the promised economic recovery has not materialized – and according to prominent economists such as Nobel Prize-winner Joseph Stiglitz, it will not appear anytime soon. Unemployment in the US remains stubbornly at 9.6%, meaning that



PSC Cross Campus Office Steve Trimboli and Vice President for Part-Time Personnel Marcia Newfield discuss ideas for the next contract during a recent meeting of the bargaining committee.

at least 15 million Americans are out of work. In New York City, the unemployment rate for blacks and Hispanics is between 15-20%. Many of those who have lost jobs are our students' parents – or our students themselves.

How can we hope to make progress for faculty and staff at CUNY in such an environment? Is it realistic for the PSC to expect anything in this round of bargaining but a fight against concessions?

BEYOND AUSTERITY

I don't underestimate resistance to concessions; that may well be the most important thing in this economic moment. Millions of European workers have poured into the streets to protest concessions; they recognize that imposing economic austerity on working people is precisely what will prevent economic recovery. Critical as it will be to defend the protections we have won, I think the PSC can and must aim for more. Here's why.

First, the union's bargaining

agenda, but the bargaining agenda as a whole is a blueprint for investment in this generation of CUNY students – the working people on whom the city's economic renewal depends. The agenda we will bring to the table has new urgency now.

Second, the PSC's record of resisting concessions last year offers a powerful lesson. We showed that it's possible to take a stand against concessions for public workers and win – defying the conventional wisdom that resistance to austerity for the public sector is futile. The most dramatic victory came in May, when we thwarted the governor's attempt to reduce our pay by 20% through furloughs. Working with our statewide affiliate, NYSUT, and in tandem with other unions, the PSC received a legal ruling that stopped the furlough plan in its tracks.

Earlier we stood fast against the governor's attempt to reduce salaries for future CUNY faculty and staff by requiring much higher pension contributions. Other public employee unions accepted the new Tier V as inevitable, but PSC successfully argued that the concession would make CUNY less competitive for new faculty and staff – and we were not included in the new, lower pension tier. Finally, in late summer we worked with allies in the state legislature to defeat a plan to privatize SUNY and CUNY funding, the Public Higher Education Investment and Empowerment Act, championed by CUNY and SUNY chancellors, and the governor.

While I expect all three proposals to resurface, we should learn from our success. It is possible to

fight back against a concessionary agenda and win against the odds, especially when concessions for us would hurt the quality of education for our students.

It's not enough to be reactive, however. The third reason an ambitious bargaining agenda is not unrealistic is that we couple it with a strategy for long-term economic and political change. The PSC is an active participant in progressive coalitions of labor, policy and community groups working to change the State's economic policies, especially to restore a more progressive system of taxation and allow for public investment.

RESISTANCE

The recession is not an act of nature, nor can it be explained as merely corporate greed or even a failure of banking regulation. It is an outgrowth of years of conscious economic and political policy decisions to concentrate precious resources – like housing, energy

We can do more than fight concessions.

and high-quality education – in the hands of a few. There has not been such a concentration of wealth among the highest-earning 1% since 1928, on the eve of the Depression. Fundamentally, we are working for a redistribution of resources, and to achieve that, our coalitions will have to grow.

The final reason we can aim high in this round is your involvement. With your engagement, we have won against the odds in the recent past. Resisting concessions and gaining real improvements in the contract will require more action by more people. But we are fighting for something worthy of us, and I believe we can win.

Experience shows we can win.

*In solidarity,
Barbara Bowen
PSC President*