



AUSTERITY TARGETS STATE WORKERS



Republican governors in several midwestern states began 2011 by attacking public employee unions. Now the assault has reached the Northeast, where Democrats have joined Republicans in blaming public-sector workers for a fiscal crisis they did not create. Collective bargaining rights have been undercut in New Jersey and Massachusetts this summer, while in New York Governor Andrew Cuomo is taking aim at future pension benefits.

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TIME CAPSULE

When CUNY was free

70 years after his graduation, a Queens College alum reflects on how a free college education during the Great Depression transformed his life.

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CURRICULUM

Gen Ed changes approved

Trustees vote to overhaul general education and transfer policies despite faculty concerns. Critics say faculty authority over curriculum is at risk.

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D.I.Y.

PSC members make media

Last semester union activists at several campuses used both old and new media to promote struggles for public higher education and worker rights.

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INTERNATIONAL

Egypt's unions surge forward

Independent labor movements played a key role in bringing down the Mubarak regime. Now they are fighting for the power to help shape Egypt's future.

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When CUNY didn't cost a cent

By JOHN TARLETON

During the Great Depression, public higher education expanded in New York City to serve the children of its immigrant working class. The 1930s saw the founding of Queens and Brooklyn Colleges, and construction of the campus that later became Lehman. Tuition remained free, thanks in part to student protests at City College.

One of the many beneficiaries of these far-sighted decisions was George Scherr, the son of poor Ukrainian immigrants who toiled in the garment industry. A member of Queens College's original graduating class in 1941, he returned to the campus for its 2011 commencement, which honored Scherr and eight other members of the Class of '41.

After graduating from Queens, Scherr became a medical researcher, the head of a multi-million dollar company and the longtime publisher of *The Journal of Irreproducible Results*, a science humor magazine. He spoke with *Clarion* this summer after returning from a business trip to India, reflecting on his life and what it meant to come of age at a time when culture and education were made available free to the working people of New York City.

An original QC grad looks back

Starting with the Letter "A"

I grew up near a public library at 156th and Southern Boulevard in the South Bronx. Books to me were a golden opportunity. I used to live in that library.

I decided I couldn't miss a good book. So I walked among the stacks in the library until I got to "A," and started taking out one book after the other so I wouldn't miss anything – which was silly, since obviously you never get past the A's.

Music for the People

Mayor LaGuardia said poor people in New York City should be able to enjoy music, so we had free concerts in Central Park and every week at the Brooklyn Museum. He took over one of the opera halls so people could see grand opera for a quarter. In fact, he turned trucks loose that brought entertainers into the side streets of Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx to sing and give performances.

You wouldn't believe this, but as a child I sat in public school class listening to the Metropolitan Opera House tenor singing to us. He was sent by the mayor to go around

the schools and expose children to music.

Queens College, Day 1

When we started at Queens College, not all of the classes were ready. So we sat on the grass outside with a bulletin board propped up with a chair.

They really picked some of the best people they could get to staff Queens College in its opening years. Some of them had international reputations. I took lots of courses that diverged from my interest in the sciences – some of them mandated – and this helped enormously later on: courses on how government works at all levels, ancient history, language, speech. I took a course in music appreciation although I didn't play an instrument. I just liked music. This kind of broad education has an enormous advantage as you mature. When you're young, you often don't know what you're going to be doing in 15 or 20 years.

Post-Graduate

I served as a Morse Code instructor in the Army during the War. Afterwards, I got my master's

[1947] and my PhD [1951] in microbiology from the University of Kentucky – without having to pay a dime, thanks to the military.

A Lifetime of Innovation

My research has focused on how to kill dangerous bacteria without harming the patient. I currently hold 100 patents. My first one was for a small device that made it easier to gauge which antibiotic to give to a patient. I currently have a patent pending for a solution to post-surgical infections that occur when people have prosthetic body parts installed, like an artificial knee or hip. Too many infections are taking place, and that's very serious because you have to go in surgically and take the whole thing out to start again.

Looking Ahead

According to biomedical scholars, we can live to 120 years and be reasonably intact. Next month I'm going to stop doing all research to write another book and probably do some painting.

I've never been sick. My knees are going, and I've got a couple of arthritic knobs poking at my back, but I work every day. As long as I can think, I can go on working.



George Scherr, Queens class of '41



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR |

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General education & open enrollment

● CUNY's community colleges are the portal to NYC's commitment to "open enrollment." They are the workhorses that prepare undergraduates for two-year, not just four-year degrees, and not just four-year degrees at CUNY institutions. Undergraduates qualified to enter four-year institutions know academic success while undergraduates entering community colleges do not necessarily know academic success. In paring down general education to a horde of "learning objectives" taught by whatever faculty in whatever discipline, CUNY reneges on NYC's commitment to open enrollment.

Community college students do not necessarily command the proficiency of general education skills enjoyed by students qualified for four-year institutions. Historically CUNY's faculty have crafted undergraduate courses/programs to enable undergraduates to earn two-year degrees as well as transition to four-year institutions. What the *NY Post*, in supporting CUNY's changes, labels "pointless low-level courses" are often bridging courses to maintain an undergraduate's academic status while they acquire the remedial and academic skills necessary to succeed.

CUNY's elected faculty leaders, based on decades of experience

with CUNY's undergraduates, have judged CUNY's proposal to amend general education as ill-conceived, ill-advised, and in violation of CUNY's Bylaws. The *Post* says faculty critics "seek to protect pay and perks." I submit that CUNY academic governing bodies and faculty leaders are protecting the value of CUNY's associate and bachelor's degrees and concomitantly NYC's commitment to open enrollment.

Philip Belcastro
Chair, BMCC Academic Senate

Unacceptable 'litmus tests'

● As a union delegate and member of the PSC Academic Freedom Committee, I believe the shameful treatment of Pulitzer Prize recipient Tony Kushner, recommended by John Jay College for an honorary degree, raises questions about the CUNY Board of Trustees.

The initial rejection of the college's decision was based on Trustee Jeffrey Wiesenfeld's allegations concerning Kushner's political positions regarding Israel – a distorted account that did not reflect Kushner's real views. Whether one agrees with Kushner or not, what is shocking is that no other trustee rose to challenge the idea that dis-

agreeing with a candidate's political opinions should justify withholding approval. CUNY, a premier urban university, must stand firm against such challenges, which are antithetical to academic freedom, civil rights and civil liberties.

In a similar incident, also subsequently reversed, Mr. Wiesenfeld worked to remove Kristofer Petersen-Overton, a Brooklyn College adjunct faculty member, based on political considerations. In this case, Mr. Wiesenfeld involved State Assemblyman Dov Hikind, who also brought political pressure to bear.

I decry the use of a political "litmus test" to select or confirm candidates for CUNY positions. Similar concerns raised in *Clarion* by Barbara Bowen and Karen Kaplowitz, head of the John Jay Faculty Senate, relating to the process for selection of trustees, need to be revisited.

Wiesenfeld should go, and the Board of Trustees must be re-evaluated.

Shirley Rausher
BMCC

Against Koch & Kushner

● *Clarion* cites Ed Koch, *The New York Times* and the PSC's leadership in calling for the resignation

of Trustee Jeffrey Wiesenfeld. All three are Democrats. In the pages of *The Wall Street Journal*, the nation's leading Middle East expert, Bernard Lewis, has exposed *The New York Times*'s reporting on the Arab Spring and Iran. *The Times* has mis-translated speakers and overtly lied in its coverage. Its editorial page is as important as *Stormfront*'s.

The call for Trustee Wiesenfeld's resignation is consistent with a totalitarian interpretation of "academic freedom" whose origin is in the 19th Century German Idealists' *Lehrfreiheit*. Today, *Lehrfreiheit*, which differs from most Americans' interpretation of the word "freedom," is seen in Democrats' one-sided claim that it applies to them but not to those who disagree with them, like Trustee Wiesenfeld. "Suppression for thee, free speech for me," is the Democrats' totalitarian *Clarion*-call.

Mitchell Langbert
Brooklyn College

Clarion editor Peter Hogness responds: *The PSC has made a more careful distinction than Prof. Langbert between a trustee's right to his individual views and his attempt to impose those views on academic life.*

"Of course Mr. Wiesenfeld has the right to freely express his views

at board meetings," PSC President Barbara Bowen said in May. "The union is calling for his resignation not because of the positions he expresses, but because he consistently abuses his position as trustee."

Earlier this year Wiesenfeld tried – at first successfully – to block the appointment of a faculty member at Brooklyn College because he disagreed with the instructor's political views. When City College faculty organized an anti-war teach-in in 2001, Wiesenfeld called their dissent "seditious." Such attacks on academic freedom are the opposite of what we should expect from a university trustee.

The fact that Ed Koch – who has endorsed Republican candidates for mayor, governor, Congress, Senate and president – would call for Jeffrey Wiesenfeld's resignation from the CUNY Board of Trustees only underscores that this is not a partisan political position.

The larger issue, as the PSC has emphasized, is the flawed selection process for CUNY trustees, which elevates political operatives over those with experience in higher education. (See page 5.)

It's not every day we get a letter that equates The New York Times with a neo-Nazi publication, or that labels the Democratic Party a totalitarian organization. Prof. Langbert's assertions about the PSC and academic freedom are equally inaccurate.

State passes 5-year plan

By JOHN TARLETON

CUNY tuition set to soar

CUNY students could see their tuition rise by more than 30% by 2016, after the State Legislature passed a measure in June that allows the Board of Trustees to increase tuition by \$300 per year in each of the next five years. The five-year plan includes a “maintenance of effort” commitment not to reduce State support below the previous year’s level, but it will not take effect until the next fiscal year. This means that this year’s current low level becomes the base for next year’s funding.

CUNY wasted little time acting on the new legislation, which was approved in June. On July 21 the Board of Trustees Executive Committee voted to approve a \$300 tuition hike in 2011-2012 for both senior and community college students. This comes on top of a \$230 senior college and \$150 community college tuition hike that the board authorized last November.

GENTRIFYING CUNY

A State Supreme Court judge briefly blocked the new hike in response to a lawsuit by three Lehman

students, who contended that action by the full board was required. The full Board of Trustees quickly met on August 3 to approve the increase, raising annual tuition to \$5,130 per year at CUNY’s senior colleges (an 11.5% rise over Fall 2010) and \$3,600 per year at the community colleges (a 14.3% hike over Fall 2010).

“The more expensive CUNY gets, the more exclusive it becomes,” said Domingo Estevez, a BMCC student who had planned to transfer to City College in Spring 2012 to study political science and pre-law or international law. Now, he is uncertain about whether to continue his education as the increased tuition will make it necessary for him to take out loans, something he is reluctant to do. Estevez, 23, participated in several protests this spring against budget cuts, and is now organizing against increased tuition.

“Trying to fund CUNY through tuition increases is bad public policy,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London. “Expecting some of the nation’s poorest students to pay

more and more will only reduce access to college and expand social inequality – the opposite of CUNY’s mission. And it will never provide the funds that CUNY needs.”

Public funding for CUNY has been reduced by more than \$300 million in the last three years. The PSC and other CUNY advocates have urged renewal of NY’s “millionaire’s tax” and other progressive tax reforms to provide CUNY with stable funding.

THE PLEDGE

The new legislation includes a “maintenance of effort” requirement for State funding during its five-year term – that is, State funding is not supposed to go lower than the previous year’s budget. This provision represents a pledge not to use the tuition hikes as an occasion to slash public support even further, as done in the past.

This “floor” on funding comes with several limitations. The “effort” that must be maintained – the budgetary baseline set by this year’s budget – is lower than last

year’s budget. The requirement can be suspended altogether if the governor declares a “fiscal emergency.”

Crucially, this funding floor is set in current dollars, with no adjustments for inflation. “There were provisions in both the Assembly and Senate versions of the bill to cover mandatory cost increases in the maintenance-of-effort formula,” said London. “But the governor refused to include this, and it was not included in the final bill.” (This means the legislation is missing a central element of the “CUNY Compact” advocated by CUNY central administration.)

“Next year we’re going to have to fight for inflation-adjusted increases in the budget,” London explained, “or the value of the base budget will decline as it has in years past.”

The new tuition law was the remnant of a much more ambitious effort to “deregulate” CUNY and SUNY funding that has been fought out in Albany over the last few years. Supporters of the proposed Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act (PHEEIA)

had sought tuition increases of 9-10% per year, including unlimited differential tuition by campus and even by major. They also sought to greatly scale back State oversight of SUNY in its colleges’ partnerships with private industry and real estate developers. Differential tuition and most of the anti-oversight provisions were defeated, while the multi-year tuition hikes were approved.

If a student receives the maximum TAP award of \$5,000, he or she will not have to pay tuition in excess of the maximum, but the University will have to absorb the difference

A new maintenance-of-effort pledge falls short.

and give the student a tuition credit. In other words, in an effort to help low income students, the State law is making CUNY pay for a tuition credit without providing CUNY with more funds.

Fifty-four percent of CUNY students come from households earning less than \$30,000 per year. Many CUNY students are eligible for only limited TAP assistance or no TAP at all. This is especially true for those attending part-time, financially independent students without children, and the undocumented. For these and other students, this so-called “rational tuition” policy will place one more impediment in their way as they seek an education.

Council restores \$21 mil.

The New York City Council restored almost \$21 million in CUNY funding after the PSC and its allies waged a multi-front campaign against deep cuts proposed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg. In a sense, the union fought the mayor to a draw: the end result was that City funding remained about the same as last year.

Under the Mayor’s original FY 2012 budget proposal, CUNY’s six community colleges would have been shortchanged by \$63.1 million – \$37.2 million less than the original budget adopted for the current fiscal year plus another \$25.9 million in unfunded mandatory expense increases. The Mayor’s push for deep cuts came on top of a \$10.6 million reduction in State base aid to CUNY community colleges this year.

STAYING EVEN

In the end, City Council restored \$20.9 million in funds, leaving City support for CUNY in the coming fiscal year (\$257.3 million) at roughly its current level (\$257.1), in a budget year when most mayoral agencies were subjected to 10% cuts.

A spokesperson for City Council Higher Education Chair Ydanis Rodriguez told *Clarion* that during the budget talks the mayor promised not to seek mid-year cuts from CUNY. However, the final restorations did little to help CUNY meet expenses of growing enrollment, the new community college, and infla-

PSC members play key role

tionary costs such as an expected rise in heating bills.

“In a year when cuts were being made across the board, maintaining a steady state budget is an achievement,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London. “Without the efforts of many members, the restorations would not have been made.” This year’s budget fight came on the heels of the \$4 million mid-year budget restoration for CUNY that was won in January by the PSC and other CUNY advocates.

The Council maintained funding for a number of initiatives the Mayor had sought to eliminate, including CUNY’s Black Male Initiative and support for the Murphy Institute. However, funding was eliminated for the Vallone Scholarships, which provided annual stipends to CUNY students maintaining a B average or higher.

“The dismantling of the Vallone Scholarships will be harmful to a number of students,” said Paul Washington, a HEO at Medgar Evers and a member of the union’s Legislative Committee. He noted that this comes at a time when CUNY students face tuition increases of up to \$300 per year in each of the next five years (see story above).

The PSC pursued a number of tactics in this year’s budget campaign. Union members testified at City

Fighting the mayor to a draw

Council hearings, wrote and called their elected representatives and visited them at their City Hall and district offices. From February to May, PSC members visited 129 state and local representatives, including most of the 51 City Council members.

The union combined advocacy for CUNY with a push for progressive tax reform at the State and City levels, working in coalition with other groups to oppose cuts to all essential public services and increase revenue.

INSIDE-OUTSIDE

While the union worked from inside City Hall, it was also active on the outside. The PSC held a rally and march from City Hall to BMCC on May 5 that drew 1,000 people. On May 12, the union joined a coalition of municipal unions and community organizations in a demonstration of more than 10,000 people in the financial district, demanding that the wealthiest New Yorkers pay their fair share.

In mid-June, a network of community and labor activists launched “Bloombergville,” a makeshift protest encampment on the sidewalk across the street from City Hall. Court rulings held that the “sleep-out” was a constitutionally protected form of free speech,



PSC members demand more funds for CUNY at a May 5 rally that drew 1,000 people.

and several PSC members were active in the project. The protest camp included a “free university” with nightly teach-ins by CUNY faculty, including Distinguished Professors Frances Fox Piven and Stanley Aronowitz. On the night before the budget was passed, 13 Bloombergville protesters were arrested when they blockaded the entrance to the Council office building where the final budget-cutting deals were sealed.

Ron Hayduk, a member of the Legislative Committee, said the various protests strengthened

City Council’s resolve to turn back Bloomberg’s most damaging budget cuts. But he added that reversing the entire direction of New York City’s budget decisions will require action on a much greater scale.

“We have to redouble our efforts in these next budget cycles,” said Hayduk, “so we can shift the debate from how much we cut, to how we get the revenue to meet human needs. New York is a very rich city – we just have to get the money to where it’s needed most.”

—JT

CUNY scales back Bylaws changes

By PETER HOGNESS

A wave of protest from PSC members won changes to the administration's proposed amendments to City University Bylaws, changes that would have sharply curtailed the rights of CUNY faculty and staff. But significant problems remain in the most recent drafts, and the union is asking the Board of Trustees to postpone its scheduled September vote on the plan.

DISCUSSIONS

"We are pleased that CUNY management was responsive to some of our concerns," said PSC President Barbara Bowen. "Real changes have been made, but several remaining elements would still damage the rights of faculty and staff. There is no reason to rush the trustees' vote – discussions should continue."

But many problems remain

In a May 20 letter to CUNY, Bowen wrote that the amendments would "eliminate almost every bylaw provision the PSC has cited in defending our members' rights." The package of amendments eliminated job descriptions for most positions in the PSC bargaining unit, and created new positions like "Affiliated Professional" with no description of duties or qualifications. College presidents were given the power to remove any member of a departmental Personnel & Budget committee (P&B). Provisions on retrenchment procedures were deleted, and bylaw provisions on academic due process were also removed.

Union urges vote delay until mid-Fall.

The PSC sent out an e-mail alert to members on May 24—and by the end of the day close to 1,000 people had signed an online petition protesting the proposed amendments.

That same day, CUNY management agreed to reschedule the vote from June 27 to a later time.

After meeting with PSC leadership, management offered substantive changes on several points. For example, the union had objected that eliminating job descriptions from the Bylaws could undermine the union's ability to file a grievance if someone is forced to do work that has nothing to do with his or her job. Now the administration is proposing language that is aimed

at preserving the union's ability to file such grievances to protect the integrity of job titles.

"We still have some concerns with the language used in the current version of these amendments," said PSC Director of Legal Affairs Peter Zwiebach. "But we are glad management has responded seriously to the union's critique." Another example, Zwiebach said, is on procedures for retrenchment, where new language "meets many of our concerns."

INTRANSIGENT

But on other points, there has been no progress. In several problematic amendments, management has not changed a word. If the current amendments are adopted, union leaders say, they would still harm the University and those who work here.

In May the PSC noted that for the trustees to act on the proposal at their June 27 meeting, as originally planned, "would have the appearance, at least, of attempting to limit participation in discussion and opportunity for dissent by CUNY's faculty, staff and students." The union therefore asked that the vote be postponed "until mid-Fall."

CUNY management subsequently postponed the vote until September – but it has still not made the text of the proposed changes publicly available. "While the PSC has intervened to protect the rights of faculty and staff, it is essential that all employees be able to read the amendments for themselves," Bowen said.

"Given that there are still problems with the proposed amendments, that the text of the changes has not yet been made public, and that discussion so far has made progress, there is no reason to rush to a vote in September," she told *Clarion*. "The trustees should reschedule the vote to their November meeting."

PSC chapter election results

By PETER HOGNESS

The PSC's Spring 2011 chapter elections favored continuity over conflict. Each candidate ran unopposed, and 11 of the 12 candidates for local union chapter chair were incumbents seeking re-election. The New Caucus, which won the last union-wide elections in 2009, fielded nine slates, and the other three slates included many New Caucus supporters.

The low-key voting nonetheless brought some new blood into local union office: more than half the posts were filled by people new to

that position, about one-quarter of whom had not held local office in the previous term (2008-2011). Alan Feigenberg of City College is the one new chapter chair.

PSC elections occur on a three-year cycle. Union-wide elections, for principal officers and the union's Executive Council, will be held in Spring 2012, with half the chapters holding local races in 2013, and the other half – the same chapters that had elections this year – following in 2014.

"I think the biggest task is to increase the number of people in our chapter who are really active," said

Sharon Perinsger, union chapter chair at Bronx Community College. "Most people I talk to have positive feelings about the PSC, and I want to encourage them to take the next step."

The names of those elected follow below, with those new to their position listed in italics.

Baruch College: (New Caucus Slate) Chair, Peter Hitchcock; Vice Chair, Gail Graves; Secretary, Stan Wine; Officers-At-Large, *Frank Cioffi*, Gayana Jurkevich, Glenn Petersen; Delegates to the DA, *Bryant Hayes*, George Hill, Stan Wine; Alternates to the DA, *Sultan Catto*, Abdullah Tansel, *Clarence Taylor*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Advisory Council, George Hill

Bronx Community College: (BCC New Caucus Slate) Chair, Sharon Persinger; Vice Chair, *Sharon Utakis*; Secretary, *Nikos Apostolakis*; Officers-At-Large, John Athanasourelis, *Nicole McDaniel*, Suzan Moss, *Vrunda Prabhu*; Delegates to the DA, Leonard Dick, Claudio Mazzatenta, *Alex Wolf*; Alternates to the DA, Nikos Apostolakis, Simon Davis, *Nicole McDaniel*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Advisory Council, Laroi Lawton, *Okena Littlehawk*

Brooklyn College: (New Caucus Slate) Chair, Scott Dexter; Vice Chair, *Alex Vitale*; Secretary, *Karl Steel*; Officers-At-Large, James Davis, Joseph Entin, *William Gargan*, Joseph Wilson; Delegates to the DA, Alan Aja, *Joseph Entin*, *Darryl Kenneth Estey*, Jean Grassman, Priya Parmar, Timothy Shortell, *Jocelyn Wills*; Alternates to the DA, *David Arnou*, Carolina Bank-Munoz, *Miranda Martinez*, Martha Nadell, *Greg Smithsimon*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Advisory Council, *William Gargan*, *Irene Sosa*

City College: (New Caucus Slate) Chair, *Alan Feigenberg*; Vice Chair, Philip Barnett; Secretary, *Susan DiRaimo*; Officers-At-Large, *George Brandon*, *Michael Green*, *Hope Hartman*, *Alice Baldwin-Jones*; Delegates to the DA, Philip Barnett, *George Brandon*, *Alice Baldwin-Jones*, *Kathy McDonald*, *Ruben Rangel*, *Gordon Thompson*, *Joshua Wilner*; Alternates to the DA, *Susan Besse*, *Carla Cappetti*, *Joseph Davis*, *Susan DiRaimo*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Advisory Council, *Alan Feigenberg*, *Ruben Rangel*

CUNY Central Office: (Central Office United Slate) Chair, Gregory Dunkel; Vice Chair, *Julio Caragiulo*; Secretary, None; Officers-At-Large, None; Delegates to the DA, *Bernadette Thomas*, *Lucy Scalici-McIntyre*; Alternates to the DA, *Julio Caragiulo*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Advisory Council, *Olga Vega*, *Deborah Hairston*

Hostos Community College: (Defending Union Rights/Defendiendo Lo Nuestro Slate) Chair, Lizette Colón; Vice Chair, *Craig Bernardini*; Secretary, *Ernest Ialongo*; Officers-At-Large, *Andrew Hubner*, *Hamide Laucer*, *Rupert Phillips*, *Olga Steinberg*; Delegates to the DA, *Andrew Hubner*, *Olga Steinberg*; Alternates to the DA, *Rupert Phillips*, *Elizabeth Tappeiner*, *Diva Weiss-Lane*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Advisory Council, *Edwin Diaz*, *Paula Korsko*

Hunter College: (New Caucus Slate with the exception of Sándor John, who ran as an independent) Chair, Tami Gold; Vice Chair, *Tom Angotti*; Secretary, *Blanca Vazquez*; Of-

ficers-At-Large, *Jennifer Gaboury*; Delegates to the DA, *Jennifer Gaboury*, *Harriett Goodman*, *Tim Portlock*, David Winn, Sandor John; Alternates to the DA, Michael Perna.

John Jay College: (New Caucus Slate) Chair, Carl Williams; Vice Chair, *Nivedita Majumdar*; Secretary, Bonnie Nelson; Officers-At-Large, *Angela Crossman*, Andrew Karmen, John Pittman, Francis Sheehan; Delegates to the DA, Avram Bornstein, Holly Clarke, *Jay Gates*, *Nivedita Majumdar*, Peter Mameli, *Catherine Mulder*, *Paul Narkunas*, *Daryl Wout*; Alternates to the DA, *James Hoff*, *Bonnie Nelson*, Gerald Markowitz, *John Pittman*, *Karen Okamoto*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Advisory Council, *Judith Coverdale*, Dan Pinello

LaGuardia Community College: (LaGuardia New Caucus Slate) Chair, Lorraine Cohen; Vice Chair, Daniel Lynch; Secretary, *Sigmund Shen*; Officers-At-Large, *Evelyn Burg*, Michael Frank, Karen Miller, *Eduardo Vianna*; Delegates to the DA, Timothy Coogan, *Francine Egger-Sider*, Daniel Lynch, Sigmund Shen, *James R. Walker*, George Walters; Alternates to the DA, *Nancy Berke*, Denise Carter, Michael Frank, Karen Miller, *Laura Tanenbaum*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Advisory Council, Melanie Abreu, Terry Parker

Queens College: (New Caucus Slate) Chair, Jonathan Buchsbaum; Vice Chair, Hester Eisenstein; Secretary, Roopali Mukherjee; Officers-At-Large, Alyson Cole, *Julie George*, *Keena Lipsitz*, Richard Maxwell; Delegates to the DA, Ann Davison, Hester Eisenstein, Hugh English, *Keena Lipsitz*, *Diane Menna*, *Francois Pierre-Louis*, Manny Sanudo, Abe Walker, Jack Zevin; Alternates to the DA, *Mary D. Diaz*, *Jennifer Eddy*, Duncan Faherty, *Julie George*, *Jeff Maskovsky*, Bette Weidman; PSC-CUNY Welfare Advisory Council, Ben Chitty, Marci Goodman

York College: (New Caucus Slate) Chair, Janice Cline; Vice Chair, Steven Weisblatt; Secretary, *William Ashton*; Officers-At-Large, Denise Agin, *Linda Michelle Baron*, *Charles Coleman*, *Lou D'Alotto*; Delegates to the DA, Jean Francois, Shirley Frank, *Eric Metcalf*; Alternates to the DA, Lidia Gonzalez, Scott Sheidlower, *Dorothy Staub*, *Eva C. Vasquez*; PSC-CUNY Welfare Advisory Council, Stephen Barrera, Sherrian Grant-Fordham

College Lab Technicians (CLT): (College Lab Technicians Slate) Chair, Albert Sherman; Vice Chair, Alan Pearlman; Secretary, Amy Jeu; Officers-At-Large, *Jacqueline Elliott*, *Terry Parker*, *Alberto Rivera*, Bob Suhoke; Delegates to the DA, *Sharif Elhakem*, *Amy Jeu*, *Okena Littlehawk*, Camille McIntyre, *Fitz Richardson*; Alternate to the DA, Lee Cambridge, *John Graham*, *Joy Johnson*, *Henry Wang*



More than 10,000 Verizon workers and their supporters rallied July 30 in Lower Manhattan to demand a fair contract. Verizon, which earned \$10.2 billion in profits in 2010, is seeking sweeping givebacks from the two unions that represent 45,000 company workers on the East Coast. The current contract is set to expire on August 7 (see p. 12).

Gary Schlichtel

CUNY Board approves Gen Ed overhaul

By JOHN TARLETON

The CUNY Board of Trustees unanimously approved sweeping policy changes on general education and transfer credits at its June 27 meeting, despite intense opposition from many faculty members.

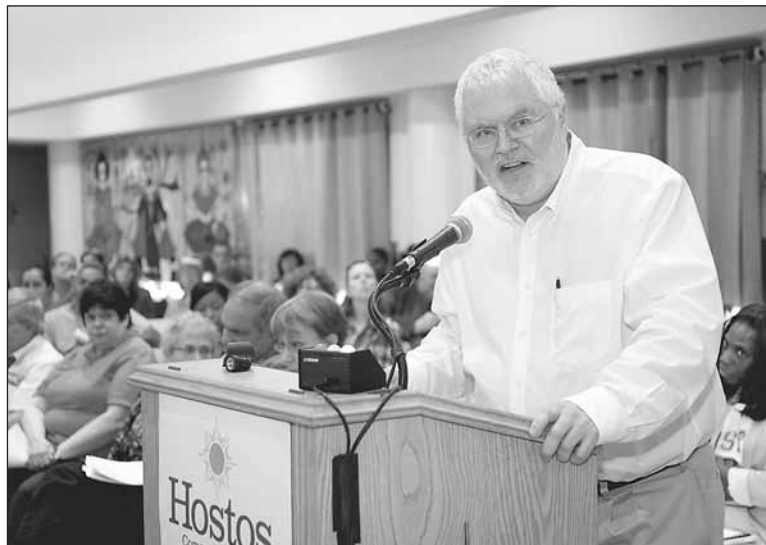
The new plan imposes a University-wide structure on each college's general education requirements, with all undergraduates required to complete a 30-credit "Common Core" before they are granted an associate's or baccalaureate degree. Courses in a college's Common Core will have to meet certain University-wide criteria, and CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs will have the power to reject courses if it concludes they do not comply. Recommendations for those criteria are to be made by a task force appointed by the chancellor, with a report due on December 1.

Under the new rules, which take effect in Fall 2013, colleges will not be allowed to require more than 12 additional general education credits beyond this Common Core.

Other changes will have a significant effect on college departments' authority to define requirements for an academic major. New committees for each discipline, appointed by the chancellor, are to recommend no fewer than three and no more than six courses to be accepted as entry-level courses for beginning a major. "All campuses offering these majors will have to offer these courses and accept them for transfer credit starting in Fall 2013," said a CUNY statement after the trustees' vote.

The recommendations on major requirements are to be submitted

Transfer policy also changed



Matthew Moore of Brooklyn College spoke against the changes at a June 20 hearing.

for approval to the University Office of Academic Affairs by May 1, 2012. CUNY's existing discipline councils – University-wide groups of elected department chairs in a given field – are given no role in this process, which is entrusted instead to new committees with membership decided by CUNY central administration.

FACULTY AUTHORITY

Vice Chancellor Alexandra Logue assured the Board that the plan "preserves the special role of faculty." However, UFS Chair Sandi Cooper, a non-voting member of the Board, disagreed.

"You are voting for a veritable coup in higher education," Cooper told the

other trustees. "You have moved to an administrative office in the chancellor's, not staffed by teaching faculty, the thousand-year-old authority of university faculty to determine curricula in higher education. This is step one towards the creation of a high school system in all but name."

Supporters of the administration's plan emphasized the frustrations that many community college students experience when they seek to transfer their credits to a senior college. USS Chair Cory Provost, the student representative on the Board agreed, telling *Clarion* "[This] is something that students have been seeking for a long time."

Faculty governance bodies at 10 of the 11 senior colleges passed

resolutions opposing the administration's plan. At the community college level, only QCC acted similarly – but no elected faculty body supported the measure. On June 16, the PSC Delegate Assembly unanimously approved a resolution in defense of shared governance that called on the Board of Trustees to reject the proposed changes and meet with the UFS to revise the plan, so that the UFS is "properly structured into the University's general education and transfer policy and is in accordance with CUNY Board of Trustees' Bylaw Article 8.13."

Under Article 8.13, the UFS is charged with "the formulation of policy relating to the academic status, role, rights, and freedoms of the faculty, University-level educational and instructional matters, and research and scholarly activities of University-wide import."

The plan to overhaul general education requirements was the subject of passionate testimony from faculty and students at a public hearing held a week earlier on June 20 at Hostos in which participants packed a third-floor cafeteria where the event was held.

The administration engineered the speakers' list so that the first couple of dozen all testified in support of the plan. "It was unconscionable to make faculty wait outside in the beating sun while allowing others who supported management's position to sign up early and go to the front of the queue," said PSC Treasurer Mike Fabricant.

There was broad agreement among the dozens of people who testified that CUNY's current system for transferring credits between community and senior colleges needs repair – but views were split on the merits of the chancellor's initiative.

SUPPORTERS

Supporters said the changes would simplify the transfer process, helping students avoid repeating courses already taken in community college.

"The current system is antiquated and in dire need of repair," said Lawrence Stranges, a senior at Queens College who said his graduation had been pushed back due to credits he had lost in the transfer process.

"To some of our students, every credit hour represents a choice they would rather not have to make: a utility bill, clothing for a child, rent," added

80th St. will make decisions on curriculum.

Carl James Grindley, an associate professor of English at Hostos. "To ask anyone to choose between re-taking freshman literature and paying a doctor's bill is unacceptable."

But others said the plan was a misguided attempt at a quick fix. "This resolution undermines the historic role of faculty in determining curriculum," said Bill Crain, Professor of Psychology at City College. "Trust your faculty. Address the transfer issue but address it separately."

Opponents of the plan said that CUNY should instead devote the necessary resources to labor-intensive but more effective measures, such as hiring more academic counselors, supporting the existing discipline councils' work on course articulation, and ensuring effective online access to the information needed to make the transfer process work.

John Brenkman, chair of Baruch's English Department, said CUNY's plan reflected a "mismatch of diagnosis and remedy," arguing that most transfer problems are unrelated to general education. "There is a disjunction between the transfer problem and the general education requirements," he testified.

'ACT OF HUBRIS'

Elizabeth Harris McCormick, an assistant professor of writing and literature at LaGuardia, called the administration's plan a "reckless act of hubris" and urged the Board to heed "the open opposition of a majority of the only group actually qualified to educate, the faculty."

Though CUNY central administration pledged that "consultation" with the University Faculty Senate would influence the administration's appointments to the new disciplinary committees and the committee on the Common Core, UFS President Sandi Cooper was both bitter and skeptical in the wake of the vote.

"I'm sure they [the administration] will find the people they want and then say they represent all of us," Cooper told *Clarion*.

Trustee reform gets new attention

By PETER HOGNESS

When CUNY trustees voted to block an honorary degree for playwright Tony Kushner, their action was widely condemned. As protests grew, the decision was reversed—but many people asked how it could have happened in the first place.

Now a growing number of voices are urging a re-examination of how CUNY trustees are chosen. "It calls the whole process into question," art historian Diane Kelder told *New York Times* columnist Clyde Haberman. "Who are these people on the board? How do they make judgments?"

Kelder, professor emerita at the CUNY Graduate Center and College of Staten Island, received her own honorary degree this year from CSI. She told Haberman the "whole shabby procedure" around the Kushner degree might be of some use if it sparked reform in the trustee selection process.

Todd Gitlin, a professor of sociology at Columbia, voiced the same concerns on his blog at *Chronicle of Higher Education*. This fall the John

Seeking higher ed expertise

Jay Faculty Senate is planning to explore how trustees are chosen for the boards of other public university systems across the country.

Critics have noted that CUNY's Board of Trustees is made up largely of political appointees, many of whom were appointed with little background in higher education. A board with deeper knowledge of academia would be less likely to countenance attacks on academic freedom and academic judgment, they suggest. But experience in or knowledge of public higher education is not a requirement for CUNY trustees under current law.

STAFF APPOINTMENTS

"Too often governors and mayors have appointed their senior staff to the boards of SUNY and CUNY as a means of controlling a block of votes on those boards, preferring toadies to trustees of higher education in the truest sense of the word," Assemblymember Rory Lancman told the *Queens Courier* in 2010. Ten

CUNY trustees are appointed by the governor and five by the mayor, subject to State Senate confirmation, with heads of CUNY's student and faculty senates serving ex officio.

Last year Lancman was a sponsor of a bill requiring that CUNY and SUNY trustees not be direct employees of either the governor or mayor. It passed the State Senate and Assembly, only to be vetoed in September by then-Governor David Paterson. The legislation was backed by the PSC and its state affiliate, NY State United Teachers, as a first step toward deeper reform.

The PSC has supported legislation to establish baseline qualifications for prospective CUNY and SUNY trustees and create independent commissions to recruit, screen, and recommend candidates according to those criteria. This year a measure with those goals (A159/S5321) was introduced by Assemblymember Kevin Cahill and State Sen. Joseph Robach. "Over the years,

many trustee appointments have been made based on political alliances rather than the [nominees'] qualifications and real connections to public higher education," the bill's authors explained.

The Cahill/Robach bill would create separate blue-ribbon commissions for CUNY and for SUNY,

Time to set a new standard of excellence

each with eleven members. The CUNY commission's members would be named by the governor, the mayor of NYC, the Assembly's speaker, the State Senate's president pro tem, and the heads of CUNY's faculty and student senates.

Commission members could not all belong to the same political party, and a certain number would have to be CUNY graduates.

"Imagine what CUNY policy decisions might look like if trustees were selected mainly for their knowledge of higher education and their intellectual independence," said PSC President Barbara Bowen. "The legislature should repair this fundamental flaw in CUNY's governance."

NJ state workers take a hit

By JOHN TARLETON

Bargaining rights rolled back

In June, New Jersey became the latest state to pummel its public employees when legislators adopted a new law limiting workers' collective bargaining rights and making them pay far more for their benefits. Democratic legislative leaders united with Republican Governor Chris Christie to enact the anti-union bill.

Under the plan, the right of public workers to bargain over healthcare was rescinded for four years. Instead, dramatic cost increases will be imposed on them. New Jersey public workers currently pay 1.5% of their salaries to health insurance. Going forward, they will be required to pay a steadily increasing percentage of their insurance premiums. By the fourth year of the plan, they will have to pay anywhere from 3% to 35% of their insurance premiums for family health coverage, depending on their income.

COSTLY

According to Communications Workers of America District 1, which represents most state employees in New Jersey, public employees making \$45,000 per year will have to pay 9% of their premium for family coverage and will see the cost of coverage grow from \$675 per year at present to \$1,710. A public employee earning \$65,000 per year will have to pay 19% of premium for family coverage – \$3,610 compared to \$975 per year at present.

The rollback of bargaining rights has broader implications than just increased costs, NJ union officials said. "Under current state law, in a contract impasse, a governor or mayor can go through a series of steps and impose terms on most employee groups – on every issue except health care," reported *The New York Times*. "If you take away health care bargaining, you take away bargaining," the CWA's state director, Hetty Rosenstein, told the *Times*. "It's the only leverage we have."

Democrats cast deciding votes.

The new law also requires public workers to contribute 2% more of their salary toward their pensions while increasing the retirement age and suspending cost-of-living increases for current and future retirees for as long as 30 years. According to *Salon.com*, the measure could save the state \$120 billion over those three decades while costing the average public employee thousands of dollars per year.

The measure was championed by Gov. Christie, who has become notorious for his hostility toward teachers and other public-sector workers. Unlike Republican governors in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio who have pushed through anti-union initiatives, Christie's push won support from Democratic legislative leaders, including both State Senate President Stephen Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver. Democrats hold majorities in both houses of the New Jersey State Legislature; about one-third of the Democrats in each house sided with Christie against the unions.

More than 8,000 union workers protested in Trenton on the day of the vote, the *Newark Star-Ledger* reported, in their third large protest within two weeks. They marched behind a New-Orleans-style funeral procession in which a black hearse carried "the soul of the Democratic Party," and chanted "Shame on you!" from the gallery when the bill was passed.

'DARK DAYS'

"This is a dark day for workers' rights as the race to the bottom continues," said CWA President Larry Cohen after the measure was approved on June 23. The NJ branch of the American Federation of Teachers said the bill was "part of a coordinated right-wing campaign to suppress wages and workers' rights."

Mass Dems target muni workers

Massachusetts moved to shrink the collective bargaining rights of public workers on July 12, when Democratic Gov. Deval Patrick signed legislation that undercuts municipal workers' ability to negotiate health care benefits.

Massachusetts towns and cities can now unilaterally transfer their employees into the Group Insurance Commission, a plan already used by state employees. GIC charges lower premiums but higher co-pays and deductibles, at rates that would not be subject to local unions' bargaining. Municipal unions said the net result will be significantly higher costs for their members.

The measure, which was passed by a Democratic state legislature, left several members infuriated. "We are here in Massachusetts cut-

ting away at collective bargaining rights," said State Senator Marc Pacheco. "That is not Massachusetts. That's not our values."

The new law is projected to save local governments \$100 million per year. Some towns initiated the process for enrolling their workers in GIC within days of the law being enacted.

The Massachusetts AFL-CIO opposed an earlier version of the plan passed by the State House of Representatives in April. However, it gave its support to the final version after a provision was added requiring that 25% of GIC savings be dedicated to assist union members with special healthcare needs. The allocation of these funds will remain a subject of collective bargaining.

– JT

Hetty Rosenstein, the union's state director, said that New Jersey's Democratic Party "has abandoned the middle class and its own core values," and unions vowed electoral retribution against Democrats who voted against union rights. "Remember this November!" said a CWA message to members.

'REPUBLICRATS'

"You don't know who's who anymore. We call them Republicrats," said Elvin Padilla, the outgoing president of Local 10 of the Firefighters Mutual Benevolent Association Local 10 in Orange, New Jersey.

Padilla said the Democratic support for anti-union legislation largely came from the southern part of the state where wealthy insurance magnate George Norcross III controls the local Democratic Party machine. Norcross ("a good friend of Donald Trump," according to *Salon*) has allied himself with Christie, and his north Jersey ally, Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo, also backed the bill. Only one Democratic legislator independent of these two party bosses voted for the measure.

Padilla told *Clarion* that the firefighters' union had been willing to make concessions short of giving up its rights, but was rebuffed when it sought a meeting with Gov. Christie.



NJ Governor Chris Christie (left), a Republican, teamed up with Democratic State Senate President Stephen Sweeney (right) to pass anti-union legislation.

He said the same thing happened at the local level in Orange, where the mayor refused to meet with representatives of public sector unions to discuss givebacks they were willing to offer. Instead, 76 out of approximately 300 public employees were laid off in January, including police and firefighters.

READY TO TALK

"It was disheartening," said Donna K. Williams, a member of the Orange City Council who works as a legal assistant at the PSC central office. "He didn't give them an opportunity to bring their solutions to the table. Instead, solutions were imposed on them that might not have been necessary." Williams added that some

of the city's cutbacks had not even saved money. For example, she said, the police layoffs led to short-staffing that forced an increase in overtime.

New York's Gov. Andrew Cuomo is waging his own anti-union campaign – but he is not likely to follow Sweeney and Oliver's example, says Kate Bronfenbrenner, director of Labor Education Research at Cornell. "Cuomo has national ambitions," she told *Clarion*. "If he attacked collective bargaining, he wouldn't be able to run for national office as a Democrat." Bronfenbrenner said Cuomo had "tiptoed up to the line" of going after public employees' collective bargaining rights but had not crossed it, choosing to rely on layoff threats and budget cuts instead.

NY State workers held

Gov threatens 10,000 layoffs

By ARI PAUL & PETER HOGNESS

Governor Andrew Cuomo has successfully used the threat of massive state worker layoffs to force concessionary contract settlements, with wage freezes, from the two largest state worker unions. As *Clarion* went to press, members had not yet ratified the tentative agreements.

The Public Employees Federation, the second-largest State workers' union, announced the settlement on July 16, six days before the first of 742 announced layoffs were due to go into effect. Cuomo had threatened to lay off nearly 10,000 workers unless State employee unions gave him major concessions. A week before the accord, PEF blasted the governor for "us[ing] the threat of layoffs to hold hostage our members [and] their families."

FURLONGHS

The tentative deal was nearly the same as one reached by the larger Civil Service Employee Association, with no wage increases in the first three years of a five-year contract, and increased health-care costs for working members and retirees. The PEF and CSEA settlements also include nine unpaid furlough days, officially dubbed "deficit reduction leave."

The proposed agreement provides for one 2% pay hike in each of the last two years of the agreement, along with lump-sum payments in the third and fourth years that total \$1,000. Employees would eventually be paid for four of the nine furlough days – without interest – over an 18-month period in 2016 and 2017. The civil service paper *The Chief* concluded that, overall, members of both unions would be "literally losing money over the course of the five-year deals."

In exchange for these concessions, the settlements give members some protection against the layoffs that Cuomo had threatened. But as *The Chief* noted, those protections are "not ironclad." Layoffs are still allowed if they result from closing a state facility through legislation or the decision of a Cuomo-appointed commission, or if there are "material or unanticipated changes in the State's fiscal circumstances, financial plan or revenue." All limits on layoffs expire in April 2013, while the contract runs until April 2016.

As *Clarion* went to press, CSEA members were voting on ratifica-

tion, with results due to be announced August 15. The PEF agreement will not be sent to members for a vote until September 2, with ballots counted September 27.

A front-page story in *The New York Times* and extensive coverage in *The Chief* both questioned whether members would ratify the concessionary agreements. "The membership is at a point of boiling over," one CSEA activist told

The Chief. But while there were many reports of wide discontent with both deals, organized opposition has not been highly visible in either union. Opinion was sharply split in the hundreds of messages that State employees left on the Albany *Times-Union's* Capitol Confidential blog.

INFLAMMATORY

The Chief observed that Gov. Cuomo had not helped prospects for ratification with his July 13 interview in the *Times*. "Cuomo Says Curbing Public Pension Benefits Will Be His Top Goal in '12" was the headline, and CSEA and PEF members who read it might well wonder if the concessions would ever end: both

CSEA/PEF leaders accept pay freeze.

Cuomo's pension attack

By ARI PAUL

It seems like only yesterday that New York imposed a new fifth pension tier for State workers, but Governor Andrew Cuomo is now proposing a sixth one, which would reduce retirement benefits drastically for future employees. As *The New York Times* reported in June, Cuomo's plan would raise the retirement age from 62 to 65 for State workers, and from 57 to 65 for public-school teachers; raise the employee pension contribution from 3% of salary to 6%; and "ban the use of unused sick leave or unused vacation time to enhance an employee's pension calculation."

The changes would affect those hired in the future, because the New York State constitution prohibits cutting basic retirement benefits for current employees.

BAD COMPANY

Cuomo is joining the ranks of other governors, like his neighbor Chris Christie of New Jersey, who blame state budget problems on the compensation of state workers but refuse to consider rolling back some of the tax breaks awarded in recent years to the richest residents.

"A lower pension tier is a bogus solution to the State budget defi-

Tier 6 is his top goal for 2012

cit," said PSC President Barbara Bowen. "Tier 6 would not produce any new income for the State in the short term—and the State's budget problem is immediate, not ten years away."

"Calling for a lower pension tier is pure political opportunism," Bowen added. "Not one word should be said about slashing workers' salaries and benefits while New York State is still handing a tax break to billionaires."

In a July 13 interview, Cuomo vowed to the *Times* that the pension cutbacks would be his top legislative priority in the coming year. The current public-worker pension system, Cuomo said, is unsustainable. But that claim doesn't stand up to scrutiny. As with the Tier 5 pension, the new reforms, if imposed, would not reap any financial benefit for the State for at least another generation, resulting in no relief for the current budget shortfall. Moreover, explained Frank Mauro, executive director of the Fiscal Policy Institute, Cuomo is attacking a non-existent crisis.

"The biggest problem that exists nationally with pensions doesn't exist in New York, and that is under-

funding," he said. "The New York State pension funds are among the most fully funded in the country."

One reason for this, Mauro noted, was that when pension investment returns fell, employer contributions into the funds automatically increased. "This is one way where it is very fiscally prudent," he said of the retirement system.

HIGH RETURNS

Current returns for both State and City pension systems have been quite healthy. On July 14, State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli reported that New York's Common Retirement Fund had earned a 14.6% rate of return. "The Fund remained resilient during a tough economic period," DiNapoli said. "The strong returns should reassure our beneficiaries and New York taxpayers that the Fund is strong and sustainable."

City Comptroller John Liu announced July 5 that New York City pension funds achieved a 20% return – their highest in 13 years, "While the markets remain volatile, we have vigorously pursued a diversification strategy to enhance our returns while lowering pension costs to the City," Liu said in a statement. "This will protect pensioners and taxpayers alike in the long run."

Anti-labor politicians and news media often ignore the big picture, preferring to cherry-pick a handful of cases where civil servants' pensions are boosted by large amounts of overtime in the final years of employment. Limiting this practice is part of both Tier 5 and Cuomo's latest proposal, but Mauro called it a red herring.

EXTREME CASES

"This is something that pensions can and should crack down on, and New York State can do that," Mauro said. But pension system critics "take these extreme cases and imply that they're the norm when really they're the exceptions," he emphasized. "Most NY public employees get very modest pensions. At the State level, for career blue-collar and clerical workers, the average pension is in the high teens or the low \$20,000 range."

With the legislative session closed, the proposal is technically in limbo. But as indicated in Cuomo's remarks to the *Times*, the real fight over the governor's plan will come in the fall. Potentially affected unions have signaled their opposition.

"This is just another attack on middle-class workers at the behest of big business and corporations," New York State United Teachers Executive Vice President Andrew Pallotta said in a statement. "This proposal would not provide a dime

of savings in the near term for the state or for school districts, nor would it provide an iota of mandate relief from the pension cost spikes caused by Wall Street's greed."

"It would have working people working longer and receiving less," said Stephen Madarasz, spokesperson for the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA). "We frankly don't believe that the Tier 6 is necessary or appropriate. We only enacted a Tier 5 less than two years ago."

That was the same Tier 5 that both former Governor David Paterson and Mayor Michael Bloomberg said would fix the City and State's budget problems, but that Cuomo now calls unworkable.

BURNED

Members of both the CSEA and the Public Employees Federation may feel especially burned by Cuomo's zealotry on pensions, considering that both unions agreed to the major concessions in Tier 5 in 2009. They did so in exchange for a no-layoffs pledge from then-Governor Paterson in 2009 – but now Gov. Cuomo has used the layoffs threat to extract concessions on pay and benefits from both union leaderships. Resentment over Cuomo's announced intention to seek further pension givebacks on top of those past concessions might sink ratification of the latest CSEA and PEF contract (see article at left).

The *Times* reported that in its July interview with Cuomo, the governor "criticized unions for resisting lower retirement benefits for what he described as 'the unborn' – future State workers for whom he wants to reduce pensions." But State Senator Diane Savino, former chair of the State Senate Labor Committee, told *The Chief* that labor's resistance is understandable because such two-tier deals result in weaker unions. "When you see a union sell out its future membership, that makes it even harder" to encourage new workers to join, Savino said.

The benefit cuts in Tier 5 were steep. Under Tier 4, employees are required to contribute 3% of their pay until they reach 10 years seniority; under Tier 5, those employees must continue those payments as long as they are on the payroll. The effect is a permanent loss of 3% of take-home pay, compared to current employees. The minimum retirement age for many workers was raised from 55 to 62, and qualifying for a Tier 5 pension benefits now begins after 10 years instead of five.

"After the PSC mobilized intense resistance in 2009 to a lower pension tier for CUNY employees – Tier 5 – New York State backed off," said Bowen. "A lower pension tier at CUNY would seriously undermine the University's competitiveness in national job searches."

Unions urged to sacrifice future workers.

d 'hostage'

unions had agreed to a reduced Tier 5 for new employees' pensions in 2009, in part to stave off nearly 9,000 layoffs threatened by then-Governor Paterson. "I was surprised at [Cuomo's] statement in the middle of a ratification," one union leader told *The Chief*. "You don't want to throw oil on the fire."

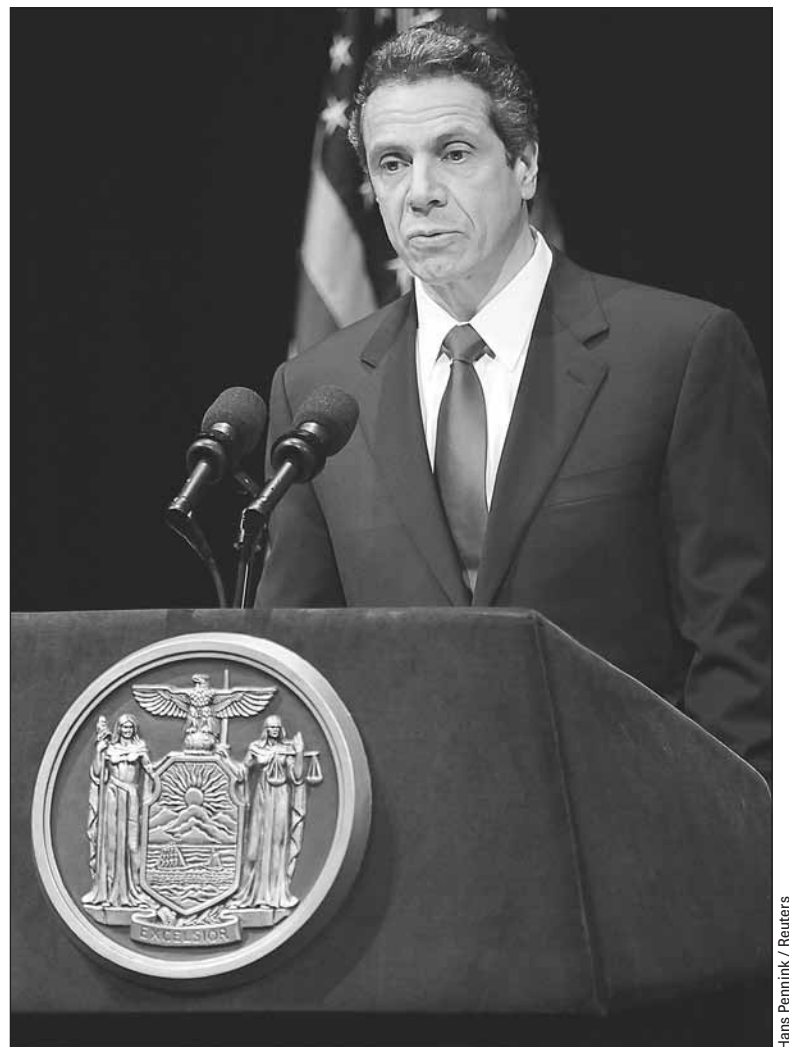
When PEF held statewide rallies against Cuomo's layoff threats this June, its members chanted, "Cuomo doesn't care, unless you're a millionaire." Both PEF and CSEA had supported the unsuccessful push in March to renew New York's "millionaire's tax," and the issue was a common theme for union members advocating a "no" vote on the contract settlements. "Stop screwing over middle-class workers for your millionaire buddies," one wrote on Capitol Confidential. "We need a revolt and we need it now," wrote another.

But leaders of each union argue that it was the best that could be achieved in a tough political and economic environment. "This was a difficult agreement to reach, but with our members' jobs in peril and the State's fiscal hardship, we've stepped up and made the necessary sacrifices," said PEF President Ken Brynien.

Many members, particularly in high-unemployment areas, feel that even limited protection against layoffs is an offer they can't refuse. "If I vote no to the contract, my twin sister is slated to lose her job," one CSEA member wrote online. "If I vote yes to the contract, I can't afford to pay my bills....I would rather vote yes to keep her employed and my 1-year-old niece with health care."

PUSHING BACK

Some other recent state employee contracts have not had a smooth path to ratification. In mid-April, the 1,200 members of the Agency Law Enforcement Services section of Council 82, which represents NY State peace officers, rejected a proposed contract with even steeper concessions than the PEF/CSEA deals; this month those workers broke away to form a separate union. Recently, a concessionary deal between Connecticut and a state union coalition fell short of the support required for ratification. It was approved by 57% of voting members, far short of the 80% required by the union coalition's rules. Those rules have now been revised to set a lower bar for approval, and a revote is now underway.



Gov. Andrew Cuomo has vowed to push for more pension givebacks in the coming year.

Hans Pennink / Reuters

Making some news of their own

By JOHN TARLETON

People who work in public higher education know that it is in crisis – but it's a crisis largely ignored by corporate media. When large media outlets do pay attention, coverage tends to echo the overall attack on labor and the public sector: colleges should be run more like a business, taxing the rich is unrealistic, and unions are obstacles to progress.

Clarion, the union's website (psc-cuny.org) and its weekly electronic newsletter *This Week in the PSC* all work to convey a different vision, one that is grounded in the experience of union members and the people they serve. During this past semester, PSC members at several campuses also responded to the drumbeat of attacks – by making their own media.

COUNTER-NARRATIVES

"As we get pummeled by the narratives of the corporate media, it's important for us to develop our own narratives," says Bill Marsh, an assistant professor of English at QCC and one of the founders of *The Campus Ledger*, an eight-page, black-and-white newspaper.

Marsh and Joel Kuszai, an assistant professor of English, took the lead in developing the paper, which is published independently of the central union. The first issue came out on March 2 with a front page story about the occupation of the State Capitol in Madison, Wisconsin. Four more issues followed by the end of the semester (see nyfree.net).

Faculty and student contributors wrote about immediate concerns such as organizing against budget cuts, the future of public-sector pensions and proposed changes to general education requirements. *The Ledger* also covered a potpourri of other issues – gay rights, vegetarianism, Tibet, the joys of living an ordinary life and the frustrations of using social media – while also offering poetry, crossword puzzles and a regular advice column for union activists.

"It has a little bit of everything," commented Aranzazu Borrachero, an associate professor of foreign languages. Borrachero says the paper allows faculty to explore sensitive topics in a thoughtful manner. In the final issue of the semester, she wrote about the impact of social and economic class on the lives of QCC students.

DISTRIBUTION

"There is a lot of fear at CUNY about talking about poverty with the poor or discrimination with the discriminated," Borrachero told *Clarion*. "Our students lose the opportunity to reflect critically on their own experiences."

With a print run of 2,000, *The Ledger* is distributed by leaving copies at prominent public venues around the QCC campus, Marsh

Members create newspapers, blogs & more



QCC English Professors Joel Kuszai (left) and Bill Marsh (right) helped start *The Campus Ledger* newspaper last semester.

said. Printing costs are about \$200 per issue. Faculty members also share copies with their departmental colleagues and have sometimes used them in class.

The paper was conceived as a vehicle for organizing on campus, and Carl Lindscoog, an adjunct lecturer in history, has taken advantage of this potential. Lindscoog placed an announcement on the back page of the *Ledger* to promote a pair of first-ever campus-wide meetings of adjuncts in early April and wrote an article about the meeting ("Adjunct Network Launched at QCC") for a subsequent issue.

OUTREACH

When doing one-on-one outreach, Lindscoog told *Clarion*, "I would open it up and say, 'Hey, did you see this?' It's nice to have something tactile to point to," he added, "and if it's a nicely laid-out, interesting newspaper, it can be a good tool for organizing." Lindscoog has used *Clarion* in the same way, he added, but a local publication has its own advantages.

Print, of course, is not the only way to organize. Adjuncts took advantage of digital media when one of their own, Kristofer Petersen-Overton, was removed from teaching a graduate seminar on Middle East politics by the administration at Brooklyn College on January 24, days before the semester was scheduled to begin. The action was prompted by complaints from Assemblymember Dov Hikind and CUNY Trustee Jeffrey Wiesenfeld, who objected to Petersen-Overton's political views.

As Petersen-Overton sought support from within CUNY and across academia, a blog on academic freedom sponsored by the Graduate Center's *Advocate* newspaper became a major online organizing center. A petition on the *Advocate*'s website drew more than 1,000 signatures within 24 hours, while the blog served as a magnet for statements from a striking number and diversity of scholars across the country and around the world. Updates also went out on Facebook and Twitter.

Media projects boost campus organizing.

"We worked around the clock for as many days as it took for the situation to resolve itself," said Michael Busch, a doctoral student in political science and an adjunct at CCNY who worked on the blog.

"It showed the volume and the speed with which the international academic community was rallying," added Corey Robin, an associate professor in Brooklyn College's political science department. "They [the BC administration] felt their decisions were being watched by the whole world."

Faced with the BC Political Science Department's unanimous backing of the Petersen-Overton appointment and a growing chorus of dissent from around the world, the college re-hired Petersen-Overton on January 31, just in time for his first class of the semester.

Busch said he didn't let his non-tenured status deter him from taking action. "There was a job that needed to get done," he said. "Better to fight the fight you believe in than to sit down and worry."

At John Jay, a group of faculty members turned to humor to make a point by publishing *The Rap Scallion*, a satirical, faux newspaper modeled on *The Onion*. Front-page stories reported arrests on campus for trafficking in enslaved adjuncts, and a burgeoning controversy over deceased French philosopher Michel Foucault's announcement that Wisconsin's union-busting governor Scott Walker is an "essentialist." Ads promoting the May 5 demonstration and other PSC-backed protests and lobbying days were sprinkled throughout *The Rap Scallion*.

CREATING A BUZZ

"We wanted to do something that would create a buzz," said Avi Bornstein, an associate professor of anthropology, who put the paper together with the help of eight other contributors. "We thought satire might be a better way of getting at some faculty and staff who aren't mobilized by other forms of communication."

At York, PSC Chapter Secretary William Ashton came up with a creative solution to a long-standing communications challenge. The college does not have e-mail lists dedicated specifically to faculty and professional staff that the union chapter can use to communicate with its members. So last fall, Ashton and Chapter Chair Janice Cline compiled an e-mail list of 335 union members on campus. Ashton told *Clarion* he was able to sign up a number of part-timers by reaching out to department chairs for the e-mail addresses of newly hired adjuncts.

MESSAGES

On November 10, Ashton began sending out messages at a rate of about one per day on issues of concern to union members and how they could get involved in PSC campaigns (see tinyurl.com/YorkPSCNews).

"I think it's paying off," he told *Clarion*, noting that union members at York are now participating more in e-mail, phone call and letter-writing campaigns to influence elected officials and CUNY administrators.

From electronic bulletins to newsprint tabloids, PSC members this year have been putting their own stamp on an old adage: "If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own."

Clarion SUMMER 2011

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Workers and Egypt's revolution

By JOEL BEININ

One of the less noticed events of the “January 25 Revolution,” as Egyptians call the popular uprising that ousted President Hosni Mubarak, is the formation of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU). Its existence was announced at a press conference on January 30, 2011, in Cairo’s Tahrir Square – the epicenter of the popular movement – while Mubarak still held power. Independent unions of Real Estate Tax Authority workers, healthcare technicians, and teachers initiated the new federation, joined by representatives of textile, pharmaceutical, chemical, iron and steel, and automotive workers from industrial zones in Cairo, Helwan, Mahalla al-Kubra, Tenth of Ramadan, and Sadat City. This independent trade union federation was the first new institution to emerge from the popular uprising, and it linked the cause of workers to what had become an explicitly revolutionary movement.

Labor-oriented nongovernmental organizations and trade unionists had been debating establishing independent unions for several years. Such unions are necessary because the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), with a legal monopoly on union organization, has been an institution of the state since its establishment in 1957. Its mission has always been to control workers rather than to mobilize them to improve their working conditions or standard of living.

CRONY CAPITALISM

After over a decade of resistance, the ETUF leadership accepted the IMF’s harsh program for Egypt in 1991. In 2004 it raised no objection to the installation of the “government of businessmen” led by Prime Minister Ahmad Nazif, which accelerated the neoliberal transformation of the Egyptian economy and the sell-off of the public sector. Not coincidentally, they were cronies of Egypt’s first son, Gamal Mubarak. This is the cabinet Hosni Mubarak dismissed days before his own departure.

Independent strikes, sit-ins, and other collective actions had been generally trending upward since 1998 – and working people responded to the Nazif government with an immediate escalation. In 2004 there were 265 collective actions – more than double the 1998-2003 average. By 2007 the movement encompassed virtually every industrial sector, public services, and civil servants. University professors, K-12 teachers, doctors and other professionals joined in.

The first substantial attempt to form an independent trade union since 1957 came at the giant Mistr Spinning and Weaving Company (Ghazl al-Mahalla) in the central Delta city of Mahalla al-Kubra. After a successful strike in December 2006 – one of the most politically significant labor actions in the last decade – nearly 13,000 workers signed petitions calling for impeachment of their local trade union committee (which did not support the strike) and formation of an independent union. These demands were rejected – but to end the strike the regime was compelled to negotiate with the workers’ elected strike committee. Using extreme repression against the Ghazl al-Mahalla workers, as frequently occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, might have disrupted the Mubarak regime’s program of encouraging foreign direct investment. Instead, it responded with a combination of moderate repression and cooptation.



More than 20,000 workers went on strike at the Ghazl al-Mahalla textile plant in December 2006.

From 1998 to 2010, well over two million workers participated in at least 3,400 strikes and other collective actions – the largest social movement in the Arab world in six decades, except for the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962). These collective actions were largely motivated by threatened or actual loss of jobs or social benefits after privatization of public-sector enterprises, low wages, and delays or nonpayment of bonuses or incentive pay.

Workers’ collective actions were spreading in private enterprise. In 2009 37% of all collective actions were in the private sector; in 2010 the figure reached 46%.

In December 2007 Real Estate Tax Authority workers had struck and occupied the street in front of the Ministry of Finance for ten days. They won a stunning victory – a 325% wage increase – and strike leaders went on to organize an independent union, which was recognized in April 2009 over the strenuous opposition of ETUF.

Independent unions of healthcare technicians and teachers were established in 2010.

There were setbacks as well, such as the government’s largely successful effort to thwart a national strike planned for April 6, 2008 (a protest for which the April 6 Youth Movement is named). But years before the “January 25 Revolution,” a social movement of workers had established its presence. Economic gains won through strikes and other actions taught many Egyptians a crucial lesson: Engaging in collective action, previously regarded as a losing game by all but committed middle-class activists, could achieve something of value.

When I lived in Cairo during 2004-2005 and 2006-2008, Western journalists – who typically viewed “Islamic fundamentalism,” the nonexistent “peace process,” and economic “reform” as the main stories in Egypt – persistently asked if workers would transition from “bread-and-butter” to “political” demands. But in an autocracy like Mubarak’s Egypt, the capacity to organize large numbers of people to do anything is a potential political challenge to the regime. Workers electing strike committees and debating whether or not to accept strike settlement terms was one of the most democratic public activities during the Mubarak era.

During the September 2007 strike at Ghazl al-Mahalla, strike committee mem-

ber Muhammad al-’Attar told a crowd of workers, “Politics and workers’ rights are inseparable....What we are witnessing here right now, this is as democratic as it gets.” Independent labor leaders saw the workers’ movement as an incubator for substantive – not merely formal – democracy from below, something that NGOs led by middle-class professionals or the ineffectual opposition parties who participated in the regime’s parliamentary charade could never provide.

The most important weakness of the Egyptian workers’ movement of the 2000s was the absence of a national or regional organizational framework or a developed program. Workers thus participated in the “January 25 Revolution” from the start, but as individuals, not as organized workers.

On February 9, Kamal ‘Abbas of the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS), an independent NGO, called on workers to strike in support of the demand to oust Mubarak, abandoning his “bread-and-butter” emphasis of the previous decade. Thousands of workers did so in Suez, Ismailia, Helwan, Kafr al-Zayyat, Sadat City, Giza, and Cairo – a cross-section of lower Egypt. Cairo Public Transport Authority workers struck and announced their intention to form an independent union. These strikes, which paralyzed the economy, were likely a major factor in the army’s decision to ease Hosni Mubarak out of the presidency.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Despite repeated calls by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces for labor peace and its threats to break up strikes, workers persisted in striking and demonstrating after Mubarak’s departure (and they continue to do so as of this writing in July). They seized the opportunity to pursue an agenda for social and economic justice beyond the Facebook youth’s demands for liberal democracy, and far beyond the military’s limited conception of political change.

On February 19, forty labor leaders affiliated with the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) issued a declaration embracing the revolution and demanding the right to form independent trade unions, the right to strike, and the dissolution of ETUF, “one of the most important symbols of corruption under the defunct regime.” Most importantly, they asserted, “if

this revolution does not lead to the fair distribution of wealth it is not worth anything.”

On March 2, EFITU leaders convened a conference under the slogan “What Workers Want from the Revolution.” One of its key demands was that the army remove the man it had appointed as minister of manpower and migration, ETUF treasurer Isma’il Ibrahim Fathi. The independent trade unionists called for him to be replaced by Ahmad Hasan al-Bura’i, a professor of labor law at Cairo University who had for several years advocated trade union pluralism. Within two weeks both demands were met, and Al-Bura’i promptly announced that the ministry would draft a new trade union law based on recommendations of the CTUWS and the Egyptian Center for Economic & Social Rights.

On March 9, the generals forcefully indicated that it was time for the revolutionary process to end. The protesters who remained in Tahrir Square as a symbol of popular vigilance were attacked by stick-wielding thugs, as under Mubarak – and then arrested by the army, with many detainees subjected to beatings and torture. Eighteen of the women arrested were subjected to “virginity tests.”

MILITARY MANEUVERS

More subtly, the army acted to bring a quick end to the revolutionary process by bringing nine narrowly drafted amendments to the 1971 constitution to a referendum last March 19. The CTUWS and EFITU called for a “no” vote in the referendum, along with a women’s coalition, the “Revolutionary Youth Coalition,” and most of the other political currents that participated in the “January 25 Revolution” – with the notable exception of the Muslim Brothers. The proposed amendments nonetheless passed with 77% of the vote, in the freest election in Egypt in over sixty years. “No” votes were heaviest in Egypt’s cities.

The election due to be held in November 2011 will favor those forces who are already organized on a national scale – the Muslim Brothers and the former ruling National Democratic Party (or whatever it may rename itself). This will likely result in a more conservative parliament than the January 25 revolutionaries hoped for.

The workers’ movement appears to be the largest and best-mobilized component of the more left-wing elements of the revolutionary coalition who have challenged the army’s efforts to limit the gains of the popular uprising and the continuation of practices such as torture and detention without trial. But neither the labor movement nor the left and liberal intelligentsia have shown adequate capacity to mobilize a nationwide grassroots constituency sufficient to challenge the army.

What comes next for Egypt’s unions? Will the army implement its threat to use force to disperse strikes, which show no sign of abating? Will the minimum wage be increased significantly above the poverty line? Will ETUF be dissolved, as the CTUWS and EFITU have demanded? The answers to these questions may indicate the extent to which workers can persuade or force the generals and the new parliament to adopt the labor movement’s agenda.

Joel Beinin is Donald McLachlan Professor of History at Stanford University. Adapted from a longer article forthcoming in International Labor & Working-Class History, Fall 2011, Issue 80, published by Cambridge University Press (tinyurl.com/ILWCH).

Labor’s role in the fight for democracy.

POEMS

Two by Roger Sedarat

Ghazal Game #1

Think of the greatest love you’ve ever had ().
Write his/her name in the space provided _____.

As long as you reiterate this name,
The semblance of this ghazal is complete: _____!

Don’t doubt, no matter what terror may come,
That God will fill your emptiness with Dear _____.

For me, Janette. For Dante, Beatrice.
For Rumi, Sham-y-Tabriz. And for you? _____.

Space makes the greatest rhyme. Sufis know this,
In spite of their lust for someone just like _____.

Now burn your useless books! You’ll learn much more
Inside schoolhouses of desire taught by _____.

Is it so silly, making readers work?
Doesn’t most poetry ask you to find _____?

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered here
To join (state your full name) and (state his/hers) _____.”

Computer code, universal language,
Breaks down when translating the essence of _____.

Would you obsess over your petty shame?
Instead, substitute it with a kiss from _____.

All maps lead you to bliss. Your G.P.S.
Just estimates the time and distance to _____.

Before the loggers come for the last tree,
Write this last line with a sharp knife: I ♥ _____.

At this point, do you think you really chose _____?
Before you were born, you were chosen by _____!

The Sword

It’s true, “The pen’s mightier than the sword.”
But what cuts off the poet’s hand? The sword.

Deconstructionists unscrewed handles and
Melted metal to understand the sword.

After the overthrow of the regime,
Newly elected leaders banned the sword.

Because it hurt children, as a father
I decided to reprimand the sword.

So hot in hell the holy warrior
Fed on his frozen heart and fanned the sword.

The victim’s mother stopped eating kebab.
She liked the meat, but couldn’t stand the sword.

Please excuse my use of “the sword.” It takes
Violent language to split apart this word.

Roger Sedarat is the author of two poetry collections: *Dear Re-gime: Letters to the Islamic Republic, which won Ohio UP’s 2007 Hollis Summers’ Prize, and Ghazal Games (Ohio UP, 2011).* His translations of classical and modern Persian poetry have recently appeared in *World Literature Today*, *Drunken Boat*, and *roger: an art and literary magazine*. He is an associate professor at *Queens College*, where he teaches poetry and literary translation in the MFA program.

PUBLIC HIGHER ED

A voice from the trenches

The Campaign for the Future of Higher Education (futureofhighered.org) is a new grassroots national campaign to defend quality higher education. It was initiated this year by leaders of faculty organizations from 21 states, including the PSC.

Several CFHE leaders, including PSC President Barbara Bowen, spoke on May 17 at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. The remarks of one, Heike Schotten, appear below. Although Schotten teaches at the University of Massachusetts, her remarks will resonate with those who work at CUNY.

By HEIKE SCHOTTEN
Faculty Staff Union / University of Massachusetts

I have only been teaching at the University of Massachusetts, Boston for 6 years. But I have taught there long enough to understand the impact that the lack of state funding has on the quality of education. First, I know that state disinvestment from higher education means increasing student fees. Increasing student fees means that students work even longer hours in order to compensate for the increased cost. This profoundly affects the quality of education at UMass Boston. I know

this because I see those overworked students in my classrooms every week. I know that by the time mid-semester rolls around, a third of my students will already have gotten sick enough, exhausted enough or overworked enough to miss at least a week of class, if not more. I know that by the time the tenth week rolls around, a fifth of my students will have stopped coming to class altogether. And I know that by the time of final exams, a number of those students will never have come back. So when the state divests from public higher ed, our students pay the price—in wages, failed classes, burnout, exhaustion, and overwork.

CAUSE & EFFECT

I also know that when the state disinvests from public higher education, we have larger class sizes. And larger class sizes mean a dilution of the quality of education. This is true logistically: some of my classrooms don’t have enough desks to seat all of the students. Some of my classrooms have enough desks, but the rooms aren’t big enough for that many bodies. None of my classrooms regularly have

chalk to write on the chalkboard, much less working technology or internet access. So there are practical problems with bigger classes. But there are also pedagogical problems. If I teach three classes of 35 to 40 students, that means I am single-handedly responsible for the academic progress of over 100 students in a single semester, as I was last fall. And I know that when my 100 and 200-level classes go from 25 students to 35 students, as they have during my brief six years at UMass Boston, I assign less reading, I am able to grade less writing, I offer less individualized help, and I let more struggling students fall through the cracks.

Students understand this, too. When they are warehoused into lower-level classes that are taught at increasingly rudimentary levels of instruction because their professor is unable to grade the kind and amount of work necessary to give them a quality education, you can bet that they are less likely to come to class and less likely to get the instruction they deserve when they do come to class. So when the state divests from public higher ed, the quality of education suffers.

But I also know something else about this state disinvestment from public higher ed. Beneath the explicit claims about budget cuts and financial crises, something more subtle is being communicated to us. What state disinvestment from public higher ed says to us is: you don’t matter. The education of the students who go to UMass Boston doesn’t matter to the state of Massachusetts. The work of the educators employed there doesn’t matter to the state of Massachusetts.

SPEAKING UP

And yet it does matter very much – to the success of not only the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, but to our entire country. It’s time for Massachusetts and the nation to recognize that among its greatest assets are the students and educators who study and work in our nation’s public colleges and universities. We are engaged in important work at UMass Boston, and it is time the state lived up to its responsibility to support it.

That is why I am here to speak for this campaign. I am here on behalf of my struggling, overworked students and on behalf of my tireless and devoted colleagues. We stand in proud support of this campaign, and we will help to build it.

Larger classes mean less education.

OUR SHARED FATES

Reclaiming public institutions

By MICHELLE FINE

Michelle Fine is distinguished professor of psychology, urban education and women's studies at the CUNY Graduate Center. This article is adapted from her May 27 commencement address. Original text, and a list of cited works, is at tinyurl.com/FineGC2011.

Today, 334 of you will graduate from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, representing 41 countries from China to Congo to Colombia – and also, of course, from the Bronx to Staten Island. Most of you were raised in homes that did not originally speak Foucault. Some of you have earned a PhD after 10, 12, 17 years. A double Mazel Tov to you for persistence.

Before you are hooded, I have one more assignment for you. Consider it a lifetime comprehensive exam. You – the brilliant, diverse and deserving graduates of *a*, perhaps *the*, thriving, democratic, critical public institution for doctoral education – know intimately the joys of a stunning public higher education. Thus in gratitude to the taxpayers of New York and with love for the children of generations to come, I ask you today to consider *how*, not *if*, you will engage in the struggle to defend and reclaim public education as vital to our collective lives in a multi-racial democracy.

One might ask, when did *public* become a four-letter word? In the Spring of 2011, we have witnessed a dramatic fiscal and ideological makeover of the public sphere – a grotesque shredding of budgets for public education and social services while millionaires and corporations enjoy tax breaks.

On every measure of social life, inequality gaps are swelling. British epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett document how these gaps jeopardize our collective human security in terms of health, infant mortality, crime, fear, violence, civic participation, voting and sense of shared fates. Former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich keeps reminding us that the wealthiest 1% own at least 25% of privately held wealth, while law professor and scholar Michelle Alexander, in her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, tells us that there are more black men in prison today than were enslaved in 1850. Financial assistance to higher education is in jeopardy for low-income youth and shamefully unavailable to students who are considered undocumented. On the front of educational policy for democracy, we have indeed lost our way.

PAIN & PROFIT

At the dawn of the 1900s, W.E.B. Du Bois published *The Crisis*, a magazine committed to chronicling the ongoing exploitation of the African American community. Brilliant man, he understood that our country would not likely attend or respond to the cumulative structural neglect and miseducation of black children until a profit could be made or until the people would revolt. One hundred years later, the perverse braiding of poor people's pain with corporate profit is now becoming an American tradition, evident in predatory lending, housing foreclosures, the proliferation of for-profit charters and the money being made from the prison-industrial complex.

As my 96-year-old mother would say, from Du Bois's mouth to your ears, now we hear there's a crisis! The media circulates caricatures of K-12 educators, especially those with tenure and experience, by distributing popular images of "rubber rooms," incompetence, greed and educators with criminal records. Some conservative media tried – unsuccessfully – to unsettle the reputation of our own brilliant Frances Fox Piven and other critical scholars of participatory democracy and labor studies. Periodic twitters bemoan fat pensions and the "tragedy" of public universities. These media stories occlude the sustained conditions of poverty and discrimination, highlight public sector "failure," selectively report "data" on priva-

Kushner's much-deserved honorary degree, insisting that our Trustees respect intellectual integrity and faculty governance and shaming their moments of silence.

UNLIKELY ALLIES

These eruptive moments for educational justice have provoked funny little opportunities for new allies, for surprising solidarity. When busloads of PSC members traveled to Albany on March 23 to protest the budget cuts to CUNY, a small group of faculty, students and HEOs agreed to engage in civil disobedience, to demonstrate the breadth and depth of this fiscal injustice. As the state troopers gently placed handcuffs on the aging "PSC 33," a few whispered, "Thanks for



Distinguished Professor Michelle Fine at the Grad Center commencement on May 27.

tized success and serve as ideological lubricant for aggressive budget cuts, policies of privatization and relentless power grabs.

Enter a new regime of power brokers subsidizing this reconfigured "common sense." The public sector is said to be inefficient, corrupt, greedy and in need of radical reform, takeover and salvation. Leeching onto the pain of cumulative structural disinvestment in poor communities, this message resonates for some with justified outrage over generations of miseducation in low-income communities. But while corporations and market logic promise to save poor people from the inefficiency of the public, crucial political questions of participatory democracy, racial and ethnic justice, schools and universities as a resource in community life, the autonomy of knowledge, questions of community/youth/educator power, and accountability gently slip off the policy table and into a neoliberal wastebasket.

But this was Spring 2011 – your Spring, Arab Spring. The drumbeats of organizing for educational justice can be heard across the United States, stretching from the University of Puerto Rico to Madison, Wisconsin, to Detroit, Michigan, where 5,466 teachers – all of them – were given pink slips. Students, staff and faculty are organizing against the privatization of the University of California system – and at the City University of New York, students, staff and faculty, with scholars, artists and activists around the globe, organized a stunning and victorious campaign in support of Tony

doing this for public workers. You know, we can't." In Albany as in Madison we witness the emergence of a tentative but swelling alliance among college students and educators and police officers, firefighters, housing activists, K-12 educators, social service advocates, public health workers and other public employees. Indeed, Chuck Canterbury, National President of the Fraternal Order of Police, not someone I have quoted often, spoke for his colleagues in Madison, asking, "Who are these evil teachers who teach your children, these evil policemen who protect them, these evil firemen who pull them from burning buildings? When did we all become evil?"

CHUTZPAH NEEDED

But let's be honest. We don't want to fight to keep lousy institutions open just because they are public. Engaged struggles for public financial support and democratic governance are necessary but not sufficient. Our vision must be bolder. We need your wisdom, scholarship and chutzpah to reclaim and restore the wide-open intellectual culture, participatory passions, and radical imagination of public institutions, to protect their vibrancy and to build a deep recognition of our profound interdependence. (I see some of you confused by the word chutzpah. If you don't know what chutzpah is...you can't really say you have a PhD from CUNY! Ask a friend!)

Let me borrow an image from biology writer Janine Beynus, who has lectured around the globe on mighty oak trees that survive natural disaster. Beynus pulls social prob-

lems up by their roots and asks, "How would nature solve this?" Standing tall, almost unbowed, she tells us, oak trees grow in communities, expansive, bold and comfortably taking up lots of space. While they appear autonomous and free-standing, in truth they are held up by a thick, entwined maze of roots, deep and wide. These intimate underground snuggles lean on each other for strength, even and especially in times of disaster.

Because you have had the privilege of being educated at the Graduate Center and have probably taught throughout the CUNY system, networked by subways and e-mail systems equally likely to fail at just the wrong moment, you know the thrill and terror of shared fates, the sweet comfort and knotty entanglements of entwined roots, and you know in your belly the intimate pain of inequality gaps sketched into the faces of your students. You know that we are weakened by segregated neighborhoods and schools, with some of us locked in gated communities, others behind bars, and others deported. And you know how jazzed we can get in our wildly diverse CUNY classrooms, as students or faculty, when we meet strangers in pulsating public spaces like parks, libraries, basketball courts and subways; as we listen to National Public Radio, bike in Prospect and Central Park, visit the Bronx Zoo and Botanical gardens; as we breathe in the luscious sounds and visions of museums and public concerts.

COMMITMENTS

These spaces constitute productive sites of public possibility, provoking what John Dewey called "aesthetic" experiences which inspire sensual imagination for what might be, which he contrasted with "anesthetic" experiences that deaden "heart, mind and soul."

Public education may be a deeply flawed, highly uneven system, a work in progress. It is, however, our only chance for participatory, collective sustainability. And so it is our work to deepen the roots and resurrect the aesthetic, provocative possibilities of public life, even and especially in hard times.

I leave you with a thought from the political theorist Hannah Arendt, who took the position that "public" is not simply a noun or an adjective. At its most compelling, public is a verb: a set of commitments, your commitments, activities, labors, solidarities, disappointments and desires. Public grows deep and wide so we can all lean upon each other in good times and even more so in trying times. Public captures the dreams of the parents and grandparents sitting in the balcony of Avery Fisher Hall, whose blood, sweat and tears helped ensure that their babies could sit here in the orchestra, with caps and gowns.

A mighty oak grows on Fifth Avenue. The Graduate Center stands strong and sturdy, public and democratic, diverse and intellectually provocative. But these are precarious times, financially, politically, ideologically and intellectually. Unless we redress the unregulated rush to privatize and reclaim the soul of the public, you could be the pruned generation, among the last to enjoy the sweet roots of public support.

And so, to the gorgeous, brilliant and diverse graduating diaspora of the Graduate Center, I wish you lives of meaning, justice, friendship, outrage, joy, long walks, sweet dreams, thrilling scholarship and laughter.

Give money to the Graduate Center, remember your roots, and go public – everywhere you can.

Best hope for a vibrant democracy



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

Support Verizon workers

The collective bargaining agreement between Verizon and unions representing 45,000 workers from New England to Virginia expires on August 7. Verizon made \$10.2 billion in profits in 2010, and its top five executives have received \$258 million in compensation during the past four years. Now they

want their workers to make concessions on healthcare and pension benefits, sick days, work rules and more. Verizon workers have a long history of striking to defend their rights. If they have to do so again, see district1.cwa-union.org for information on how you can support them. An injury to one is an injury to all!

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COMICS PAGE

Clarion | Summer 2011

Pop art

Heroes of the Great Recession

Salon called it "the funniest economic primer ever written." Britain's *Observer* called it a "savage, Swiftian telling of the recession story" that is "a tonic for the toiling classes." Robert Reich just calls it "fantastic."

Look, up on the bookshelf! Is it a comic book? Is it a graphic novel? It's *Unemployed Man*, a superhero story about the "new normal" of our jobless recovery that's both funny and deadly serious. The title character, Unemployed Man, teams up with a group of other unemployed superheroes to fight villains like Pink Slip, The Broker and the Toxic Debt Blob. In a final confrontation, they battle the awesome power of The Invisible Hand.

At right is the "origin story" of one of these fighters for justice, the Master of Degrees. It is perhaps no surprise that one of the book's authors, Erich Origen, is a former adjunct faculty member at a California community college.

"On the page, it looks just like a Marvel or DC comic from the 1970s," says the *Observer's* Rachel Cooke. "Every frame includes some kind of in-joke for comic fans. But it's more than just a parody. Read it, and you'll realize that what you have in your hands is a kind of economic primer, an A-Z of how the American economy...got into such a parlous state."

In today's economy, says co-author Gan Golan, "the villains think of themselves as the actual superheroes! So to begin our daring escape from the Great Recession, we as a society must name and confront the sinister villains of our time...so we can reclaim our true superpowers." (More info at unemployedman.com.)

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