

Campus actions

By PETER HOGNESS

PSC members at a dozen colleges organized protest actions the week of April 7 through 11 to demand a fair contract. With picket lines, leafleting, and in a meeting with Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, union members had the same message: it's time to make CUNY salaries competitive again.

At the College of Staten Island, 60 people turned out on April 8 for an informational picket line. The action was jointly organized with the other main union at CUNY, District Council 37 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

"It's not simply that we need a raise for ourselves," said PSC Chapter Chair Vasilios Petratos, who chairs the political science and economics department at CSI. It's hard to hire, he said. "Applicants look at the salary we're offering, and say this is below national standards – and when you couple that with New York's high cost of living, we're way behind."

This in turn affects students. "Our working conditions are the students' learning conditions," Petratos said.

The slogan "CUNY needs a raise!" was also popular with DC37 members. "We don't get enough

Contract protests across CUNY

money," said Barbara Leskowitz, a DC37 member who works in the college's publications office. "If PSC and DC37 can work together, I think it'll benefit both unions." Mickey Eberlein, of DC37's college assistants' local, said they have been working under an expired contract for more than a year.

"The unions came together and saw that we have common objectives," said Petratos.

**Two unions,
one message:
CUNY needs
a raise!**

PSC members at LaGuardia turned out for a picket line on April 7 in bitter weather. "We are out in the cold because CUNY management has put us out in the cold," said Danny Lynch, professor of English. "They refuse to make a financial offer – and without that, we can't have a contract." Professor Michael Frank said it was "disgraceful and disrespectful" that CUNY has made no economic offer.

SILENT MARCH

On April 8 at City Tech, the PSC chapter organized a "silent march" through hallways and department offices. The idea, said Chapter Chair Bob Cermele, was to have a strong, visible impact without disrupting classes. "We got a very good recep-

tion," he told *Clarion*. "In some departments, we got cheers!"

Students who saw the protest were startled and concerned to learn that CUNY faculty are underpaid relative to other area universities, and they readily signed PSC postcards asking for increased public funding. (See pages 7 and 12.)

"We're underpaid and overworked," said Steve Panford, assistant professor at City Tech – and that comment captured the two themes of the City Tech protest: in addition to action on salaries, the march protested City Tech's teaching load, which even after recent reductions is still higher than any other CUNY senior college. "We are the only senior college that has a 24-hour teaching load," said Costas Panayotakis, an assistant professor, "and there is no reason for that."

At Hostos, more than 50 members took part in a lively and musical picket line on April 9. The chapter collected more than 500 signed postcards in support of more funds for CUNY. (See pages 7 and 12.)

At Queens, members took their protest into the cafeteria, where students lined up to sign a petition in support of union demands.

PSC members at John Jay raised the issue of parental leave, among



Gary Schoichet

City Tech faculty and staff during Contract Action Week.

others, in an open letter they handed out when Chancellor Goldstein arrived for a campus meeting on April 7. And as at Brooklyn College (see article below), the chancellor's comments made clear that months of union contract actions were having an effect.

"When asked about providing childcare and parental leave for the many young faculty being hired at John Jay, the chancellor

indicated that he was convinced there was a need and expected to see some movement on funding such benefits in the current round of negotiations," said PSC Chapter Chair Jim Cohen.

As *Clarion* went to press, planning was underway for other contract actions later in the semester. To stay up to date, go to the PSC website (www.psc-cuny.org) and sign up for the union's weekly e-mail update.

Union presses chancellor for an offer

In March the PSC brought its contract issues directly to the chancellor. The union's approach was pointed and persistent – and the central issue was the need for competitive salaries.

More than six months after the last contract expired CUNY negotiators have still presented no economic offer in contract talks. Those negotiators represent CUNY's chancellor – and in a March 17 open letter, PSC President Barbara Bowen said it was time for him to make salary increases a priority.

The consequences of low pay at City University have "reached the point of crisis," she wrote, with departments facing severe problems in recruitment and retention. "CUNY salaries are now thousands of dollars behind salaries at other public universities in the region, such as the University of Connecticut and Rutgers, and totally uncompetitive nationally," she said.

DECENT SALARIES

"The faculty and staff want more than the appearance of a great university; we want the real thing," said Bowen. "And that takes decent salaries – across the board."

The union understands, she added, that CUNY must get City and

Members speak up on campus

State support for any economic offer. "But it is an abuse of our loyalty to expect us to continue giving our all to CUNY without even discussion of a raise."

HEALTH INSURANCE

Bowen called on Chancellor Goldstein to join with the union in drawing public attention to the need for competitive salaries at CUNY. "You have shown that you can be an outspoken advocate before the City and State for your priorities for CUNY," she noted, including spending "millions of dollars on advertising to advance your agenda for the University. If nationally competitive salaries are really a priority, we expect the same level of public advocacy for investment in the faculty and staff."

"The University's financial offer is ultimately a statement of the University's priorities," Bowen emphasized. "Is restoration of our salaries a priority or not?"

Pay is not the only issue in the current negotiations. Unlike SUNY, CUNY's graduate employees do not have health care provided by the

University, and in contract bargaining the PSC has demanded that CUNY provide it. In a March 18 picket at the Graduate Center, the union and the Doctoral Students' Council demanded that CUNY provide health coverage for all doctoral students and graduate employees.

"No health insurance – makes me sick!" the crowd chanted. "Endless

excuses – make me sick!" Ellen Zitani, a doctoral student in history who teaches at Hunter, spoke to the 50 protesters about the disparity with the SUNY system. "SUNY [graduate] students have affordable health insurance with prescription drug coverage," Zitani said. "CUNY students deserve equality and health care." The protest, and the issue, received coverage on NY1.

"It's unrealistic to think that our health care situation doesn't affect our studies or our instruction," said picketer Jolie Cerrazas. The two plans CUNY makes available to its graduate students, she said, require that they pay the entire cost themselves – and many cannot afford it.

**Asking
Goldstein for
'public
advocacy'
on salaries.**

Neither plan, she added, covers prescription drugs.

"I really need health insurance," said Elan Abrell, a graduate teaching fellow at Hunter and a doctoral student in anthropology. "I had coverage, but couldn't keep paying it and had to drop it. When I had an eye and ear infection, a doctor visit cost \$200, and the medication cost another \$200."

DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

The protest was organized to coincide with a visit by Chancellor Goldstein to the Graduate Center, and union pressure and the organizing for the rally had an impact. Five days before the protest, the chancellor and Graduate Center President Bill Kelly wrote to legislative leaders in Albany, requesting funding for CUNY to offer the same coverage as SUNY. In discussions at the meeting, GC faculty continued to press the chancellor on the health insurance issue.

The chancellor was confronted again the next day at Brooklyn College, where he met with faculty. The Brooklyn College PSC Chapter presented him with a letter asking for action on CUNY salaries. "Many departments have gone through multiple, extensive, time-consuming

faculty searches, only to be turned down by our first, second and third choices," the letter said. CUNY is now experiencing "severe problems with faculty recruitment and retention." The letter also called for adding adjuncts to the regular NYC health plan, providing them with some job security, and better opportunities for advancement for HEOs and CLTs.

The statement asked the chancellor to withdraw management's demand to remove department chairs from the PSC bargaining unit, which it described as a "threat to collegiality" – and Goldstein commented on this issue during the campus meeting. The chancellor was quite open about his view that department chairs not only should not be in the union, but also should not be elected. But he also said that if faculty opinion was strongly against taking chairs out of the union, he was prepared to concede the issue.

Months of campus protest against taking department chairs out of the union seem to be getting results. "It shows that if we keep speaking out, he's forced to respond," said Carolina Bank Muñoz, assistant professor of sociology at Brooklyn College. During the rest of the semester, she said, "we need coordinated efforts to express members' concerns and frustrations. Now is the time to keep the pressure on."