

GADFLY

Why Should Full-Time Faculty Support the Demands of Part-Time Faculty?

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[This article is adapted from an article by Sharona Levy and I that appeared in the October 1996 issue of *The Gadfly*. I believe that the arguments are especially relevant today.]

Many full-time faculty wonder why the PSC has put so much time and energy into organizing part-time faculty and championing their demands for equity in wages, benefits and working conditions. Some even believe the myth that increased dental, prescription and optical benefits for part-timers caused the Welfare Fund's crisis. The reality, of course, is that CUNY has systematically under funded the Welfare Fund for nearly 20 years.

There are two very simple reasons for full-timers to support the demands of part-timers. First, the treatment of our adjunct colleagues is unfair—it offends our sense of justice and fair-play. Second, the existence of a low-cost and “flexible” part-time faculty undermines the wages, working conditions and professional prerogatives of the full-time faculty.

Unions exist to “take labor out of competition”—to stop the destructive competition among workers which allows employers to cut wages, increase work load and generally degrade the conditions of labor. In the past thirty years, corporate and government employers' have undermined effective unionism through the creations of a two (and in some cases three or four) “tier” work force. Employers use the growing number of workers—*who do the same work*—but are paid lower wages and have fewer, if any contractual rights to undermine the conditions of the rest of the work force.

The growth of the part-time faculty is simply the University and College administrators' version of the “two-tier” workforce. The availability of a large pool of part-time faculty, paid lower wages and who have little job security threatens the position of full-time faculty. A vulnerable and exploited adjunct faculty is a powerful weapon in the hands of administrators to be used against full-timers. Competition between part-time and full-time faculty leads to a “race to the bottom”—a downward spiral that results in lower wages and more work for both part-time and full-time faculty.

Raising wages and securing rights for part-time faculty benefits *both* full-time and part-time faculty. Improved conditions for adjuncts deprives the University administration of a pool of cheap and “flexible” labor, suppressing competition among faculty, to the advantage of all of us who work at CUNY.

As part-time labor becomes more expensive and secure, the Administration loses the incentive—lower wages and “flexibility”—that comes from replacing full-timers with adjuncts. The increased hiring of full-time, tenure track faculty over the past few years is mostly the result of increased funding for CUNY. However, if the PSC had not been able in the last contract to radically improve the pay and conditions for adjuncts (payment for office hours, etc.), the administration would have likely spent much of that increased funding hiring part-timers rather than full-timers.

The exploitation and abuse of any member of the faculty must always be the PSC's priority. No matter what management encourages us to believe, in reality both part-timers and full-timers have the same interests in achieving *real equity* in wages, conditions and job security for all faculty.