



PSC members will march for action to curb climate chaos. **PAGE 4**

'CUNY NEEDS a RAISE!'

Negotiators for the PSC and CUNY management met over the summer in bargaining for a new union contract. Demands from both sides were discussed, and negotiators say that some progress has been made. But CUNY has not yet made an economic offer – and as Fall semester began,

the PSC was pressing management to do so. As Clarion went to press, the union was preparing for a demonstration in late September, which will be called if management does not soon put a viable offer on the table. See inside for details. **PAGE 3**

RACE & INEQUALITY

The summer of our discontent

This summer, African Americans took to the streets to demand respect for human rights and an end to racist violence in all its many forms. **PAGE 10**

PENSIONS

New full-timers must pick plan

Newly hired full-time faculty and staff must choose a pension plan within their first 30 days at CUNY. Get the facts inside. **PAGE 8**

ADJUNCT HEALTH

Sign up for new plan by Sept. 19

It's a major union victory: as of Oct. 1, adjunct health insurance will come through the NYC Health Benefits Program. Sign up before the Sept. 19 deadline. **PAGES 6-7**



ON CAMPUS

Open access to learning

City Tech builds community with OpenLab, a teaching and learning platform where faculty and students collaborate. They hope to expand the project to other colleges. **PAGE 2**



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 61 BROADWAY, 15TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10006.
EMAIL: PHOGNESS@PSCMAIL.ORG. FAX: 212-302-7815.

CUNY conversations on climate crisis

● The People's Climate March of September 21 in New York City is of critical importance. It is very good that PSC is supporting it. Climate change is a problem about which anyone looking seriously at the evidence, and thinking ahead more than five years, can only come to the conclusion that radical new policies are urgently needed. Yet in the present situation the necessary changes will not happen without a push by a strong popular movement.

My point in writing this letter is that we at CUNY have a particular responsibility in this matter towards our students. I think it is our duty to reach out to them and encourage them to educate themselves about climate change and about the popular movement aimed at keeping it under control. Sufficient

information cannot be gotten just from television programs, but it is not difficult to get the statements of The Union of Concerned Scientists, of 350.org, or of Friends of the Earth, to mention only some of the important organizations. Even easier is to get to the basic science-based sources: Statements of the National Academies, The World Bank Report of 2012, and mainly the recent UN Intergovernmental Climate Panel report. All these have easily readable clear summaries.

Adam Koranyi
Lehman College

Inequality and education

● Our union, united with the UUP, NYSUT and others, successfully won college students in education an 18-month reprieve from EdTPA,

the new State of New York evaluation system for student teachers [see *Clarion*, May 2014]. However, the struggle is far from over because basic attitudes have not changed significantly: national and state leaders still see teachers as the problem, overlooking deep inequalities and racism in our society. A recent Economic Policy Institute report shows declining incomes over the last three years in every income group except the top two-tenths.

Teachers, however dedicated and well trained, cannot overcome deep inequalities and entrenched and growing racism. There is an almost perfect correlation between school test scores, student performance, and teacher accomplishment with socioeconomic status. Such inequality is difficult to solve while

pervasive in diminishing school performance.

Our US population is segregated by race, income and ethnicity. There are generally poorer performances from immigrant groups and minorities for reasons of poverty, language, and past and present racist and exclusionary policies.

The authorities are by no means finished with us or with EdTPA because they want to deflect attention from bigger problems by focusing on teachers at all levels as solely responsible for student performance, rather than all the stakeholders including parents, students, and leadership itself.

They want a cheap way out, and a smokescreen that hides underlying problems.

Jack Zevin
Queens College

CUNY IN BRIEF

Molinaro not confirmed

The State Senate ended its legislative session without approving former Staten Island Borough President James Molinaro to the CUNY Board of Trustees. Last December, Governor Andrew Cuomo nominated Molinaro, who had crossed party lines to endorse Cuomo in 2010.

"I didn't hear from nobody. I don't know anything," Molinaro told the *New York Post* in June, when he was contacted about his failed confirmation. "I'm not surprised by anything."

Cuomo's appointment of Molinaro, a Conservative Party leader, rankled many Democrats and women's rights advocates. In a 2012 public address, Molinaro repeatedly called pop entertainer Lady Gaga "a slut"; he has also expressed a desire to slash funds for unwed teenage mothers.

The *Post* reports that it was unclear whether Cuomo withdrew Molinaro's nomination or the State Senate refused to take up his appointment.

Teach, learn and revise on OpenLab

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Faculty and staff at City Tech were dissatisfied with existing software for higher education – so they built their own. The result is OpenLab, a collaborative tool for teaching and learning that's now widely used at the college.

City Tech Coordinator of Library Instruction Maura Smale, one of the first directors of the initiative, says they set out to create a site that would help students feel more connected at the commuter campus. Everything from the back-end development to the airy site design to the OpenLab logo was created by City Tech faculty, staff and students.

"It really encourages a sense of community, because you can see what's happening, what courses are going on," Smale told *Clarion*. "We've had students say they'll look at other courses in their program just to see what those students are doing in the class." OpenLab's emphasis on collaboration makes it well suited for this kind of cross-class connection, or for a joint project that two or more classes might work on together.

OpenLab is part of a five-year City College initiative funded by the federal government with a grant that ends next fall. The site isn't just limited to course pages, though that's its primary use. City Tech clubs can create pages, groups can create projects and City Tech students can create their own electronic portfolios, compiling work done in several classes. To date, more than 500 City Tech faculty and 9,000 City Tech students have created a page through the lab.

In terms of OpenLab's use with courses, Smale says, the aim was to create a pedagogical tool, not a course-management tool like Blackboard. She says the "openness" of OpenLab has advantages and it's a nice option to have.

"It's a place for work to take place and not to just be stored," Smale remarked. "In some sense, work just ends up on Blackboard. It's less of a place where work is actively happening."

'It really encourages a sense of community.'

OpenLab takes inspiration from other CUNY initiatives, like the CUNY Academic Commons developed at the Graduate Center. Both sites were developed by the same lead developer and use a WordPress platform that connects its pages with the online social networking tool BuddyPress.

COLLABORATION

Compared to the Commons, "the main difference is that OpenLab is more course-centered" says Jody Rosen, a co-director of the OpenLab project. "There are a few courses that are taught on [the Academic Commons], but by and large it's not really course-focused – it's more interest-group focused."

Rosen used OpenLab last Spring in a hybrid course (both online and in person) titled "Introduction to Women Writers." She had her students respond to readings with blog posts and make video presentations, all of which were posted on her OpenLab course site. Like other WordPress sites, course sites can have RSS feeds, and post YouTube videos and SlideShare presentations.



OpenLab Codirector Jody Rosen at a campus workshop, where City Tech faculty explored ways to use OpenLab in their courses.

In one learning community, where the same students were taking classes in both hospitality management and English, they created "#TheGuide" for other first-year students at City Tech. In it students explored "local grub," gave tips on good study skills and explored things to do on the Brooklyn waterfront.

Jenna Spevack, an associate professor of advertising design, says that her graphic-design course websites on OpenLab work well as a virtual sketchbook. Spevack, who is also a co-director of the OpenLab

project, says an important aspect of the platform is teaching the process of design, with her students learning to "revise, revise, revise."

ONLINE PORTFOLIOS

Early in the semester in one of her design courses, Spevack conducted class online and had students use an OpenLab discussion board to critique each other's work. "The students that never spoke were there posting and commenting quite readily," said Spevack, noting that the online discussion helped make in-class discussions more lively

later in the semester. "It reinforced the critique process, which is a huge part of the design process."

This year Spevack has worked on making the site more mobile-friendly. The group is also looking at ways to continue funding the project once the current grant ends next year.

NEXT STEPS

Students who choose to publicly display their e-portfolios and other work on OpenLab find that this can help when trying to score a job or internship, according to Damon Baker, an assistant professor who teaches on interactive entertainment. Baker, who uses OpenLab for all his classes, says he's seen students take projects that they did in class and translate them to the start of a career. One student posted a short video that showed the successful result of his project and gave a short explanation of how he accomplished it.

"He had rigged up a drum kit, so if he played the drums it would trigger LEDs that he'd built inside of it," Baker told *Clarion*. "Now he does this for theatrical and some commercial display systems."

The architects of OpenLab hope to expand it beyond City Tech to other colleges and CUNY campuses. That could mean packaging the open-source code OpenLab uses so it's easily shared, much like the "Commons In A Box" developed by the CUNY Academic Commons.

"I think in a lot of colleges you're separated in your department," Spevack said. "With OpenLab students, faculty and staff will have a greater ability to see what other people are doing, and perhaps collaborate, work on coursework together."

Union asks management to make an economic offer

By PETER HOGNESS

Representatives of the PSC and CUNY management were busy over the summer, in talks for a new collective bargaining agreement. Demands from both sides have been discussed, and negotiators say that some progress has been made. CUNY has not yet made an economic offer, however – and as Fall semester began, the PSC was pressing management to do so.

“Every time I’m on a CUNY campus, members ask me how soon we will get a raise,” said PSC Secretary Arthurine DeSola. “It is the number-one thing I hear. They tell me that their expenses keep going up, that an increase to our salaries is long overdue – and they’re right!”

In an August 29 statement, PSC President Barbara Bowen, the union’s chief negotiator, said that Chancellor Milliken’s stated commitment to reaching a contract settlement was welcome, and she praised “the tone of respect for the faculty and staff that has characterized the approach of CUNY’s Office of Labor Relations – a marked departure from the start of previous rounds of bargaining.” But PSC negotiators say management must make an economic offer soon,

In contract negotiations

in order for contract talks to be successful.

NO ECONOMIC OFFER

The labor agreement for faculty and professional staff at CUNY is different than other municipal union contracts in NYC. The PSC negotiates with CUNY management, not with the City or State – but because CUNY is funded by both levels of government, both play a role in any contract settlement.

“The PSC bargaining team... understands the complexity of working with both State and City governments to develop an economic offer,” Bowen noted. “But we also understand that members cannot wait much longer.” While the two sides have discussed how some economic issues might be resolved, no bargaining on economic questions can take place until management puts an economic offer on the table. That includes bargaining on retroactive pay, relief on teaching load, equity increases, and any item with a significant economic cost.

“We cannot risk waiting indefinitely for an economic offer,” Bowen

emphasized. “The momentum to settle NYC contracts may be lost, and the real economic need of PSC members is too great.”

In past rounds of contract negotiations, discussion took place mainly in formal bargaining sessions. In the current round, the two sides have taken up a number of issues in smaller subcommittees, with the goal of doing preliminary work that enables the formal sessions to make more rapid progress.

Both sides’ demands have also been presented in formal sessions this summer. Discussion has identified each side’s respective priorities and has explored potential areas of agreement.

COMPETITIVE SALARIES

The union’s top priorities continue to be the need for more competitive salaries at CUNY (especially important for an institution in a high-cost area that recruits nationally); the need for a more reasonable teaching load for full-time faculty; the need for employees in the Higher Education Officer series to be able to advance in their careers; and the need for progress toward equity and fairness for CUNY’s adjuncts.

Union negotiators report that some progress has been made on noneconomic issues such as the grievance procedure. PSC representatives have also made clear that there are some management demands on which union members are not willing to budge, such as eliminating salary steps.

Among the equity issues dis-

cussed at the table so far is the need for library faculty to have the same amount of time for annual leave as other full-time faculty. One bargaining session included detailed, compelling testimony by several CUNY library faculty on the national standing of CUNY library faculty on the basis of research.

MEMBER POWER

The recent agreement to shift adjunct health coverage to the NYC Health Benefits Program is good news for covered adjuncts, for whom it ends a crisis they had lived with since 2011. By putting the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund on a more sustainable financial footing, the change also has a positive effect on contract negotiations: in many past bargaining rounds, the talks were forced to grapple with severe problems in the Welfare Fund’s financial condition.

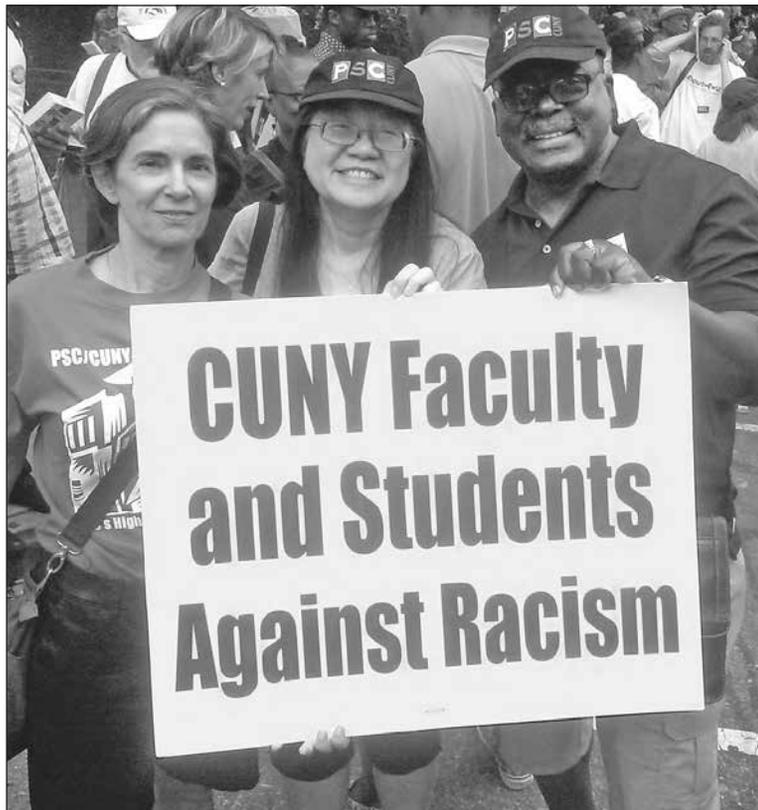
As the new academic year began, union leaders urged PSC members to be ready to take action in support of a fair contract settlement. Plans for a mass membership meeting in October, and a possible protest in late September, were being finalized as *Clarion* went to press (see below).

“A few years ago we had a mass meeting in Cooper Union, and it had a tremendous effect,” said Felipe Pimentel, assistant professor of sociology at Hostos and a member of the PSC bargaining team. “We had been stalled in negotiations with CUNY. But we had a huge turnout at that meeting, and management got the message! This was what got negotiations moving again.”

“Chancellor Milliken has spoken publicly about his interest in making salaries at CUNY competitive,” noted Bowen. “The best way to do that is to put a fair and respectful contract offer on the table.”

Some progress on other issues, union says.

Marching for justice



(From left) Andrea Vasquez, Cheryl Wu and Paul Washington, of the PSC’s Higher Education Officer chapter, and dozens of other PSC members were among 6,000 demonstrators protesting the killing of Eric Garner by a police officer’s chokehold. The August 23 march took place on Staten Island.

PSC plans demonstration and a mass meeting

As *Clarion* went to press, the PSC was finalizing plans for a mass membership meeting in October, focused on the current negotiations with CUNY for a new union contract. Other member actions to secure a fair agreement, including a possible protest in September, were also being weighed.

“The best way to show the strength of the union and the urgency of a new contract is to stand and be counted together,” said Barbara Bowen, the PSC’s president. “If a new contract is important to you, you should be there.”

PSC negotiators said that while

they hoped to see further progress at the bargaining table in September, the union was ready to demonstrate if a viable economic offer was not on the table soon.

You can make sure to be kept informed about plans for the mass meeting or other contract actions by signing up for the union’s weekly electronic newsletter, This Week In the PSC, at tinyurl.com/ThisWeekPSC. If you would like to help organize for or volunteer at the mass meeting, email the PSC’s Moses Merisier at mmerisier@psccmail.org for more information.

CALENDAR

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13 / 9:30 am – 12:30 pm: Meeting of the PSC International Committee. For location and other information, contact Renate Bridenthal at Bridenthalr@yahoo.com.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19 / 6:00 pm: Labor Goes to the Movies screens *The Island President* (2011), a documentary that depicts the Maldives president’s effort to curb sea level rise by capping carbon dioxide emissions. Shot mostly during the 2009 UN Climate Summit in Copenhagen. This year’s theme for the monthly series is “Apocalypse,” with films on nuclear confrontation, resource wars and nature’s metaphysical revenge. PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 21 / 10:30 am: The PSC contingent for the People’s Climate March will assemble on the park (east) side of Central Park West at 64th Street. Expected to be the largest climate protest in history, the march will proceed from Columbus Circle to the United Nations, demanding that world leaders take effective action against the carbon pollution that is destabilizing the world’s climate. PSC members are organizing for the march on CUNY campuses; for more information, contact PSC Solidarity Committee Co-Chair Jim Perlstein at jperlstein@bassmeadow.com. (See article, page 4.)

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30 / 5:30 – 8:00 pm: The PSC Health and Safety Watchdogs meet at the PSC office, 61 Broadway. For further information, contact Jean Grassman at grassman@brooklyn.cuny.edu.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 2 / 3:00 – 5:00 pm: The PSC Academic Freedom Committee meets at the PSC office, 61 Broadway, 15th floor. For further information, contact Steve Leberstein at sleberstein@ccny.cuny.edu.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 6 / 1:00 pm: PSC Retirees Chapter holds its monthly meeting at the PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor. Featured topic is environmental politics. For further information, contact Bill Friedheim at friedheim@gmail.com.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10 / 4:30 pm: “First Fridays” adjunct meeting will be held at the PSC, 61 Broadway, 15th floor. For further information, contact Marcia Newfield at mnewfield@psccmail.org.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16 / 6:00 pm: Metro NY Labor Communications Council holds a forum on “The War on Labor in the Legislature and the Courts.” CUNY Law Professor Frank Deale and DC 37 Associate Director Henry Garrido are among the panelists who will address the assault on organized labor throughout the country, from attacks on teacher tenure to right-wing interests using the courts to cripple unions. For more info, email Greg Heires at GHeires@dc37.net. (Location not yet announced.)

Clarion's Roving Reporter talks with PSC members about the People's Climate March (peoplesclimate.org)

Why are you marching on Sept. 21?



Chloe Pinkerton

ROSS KENNEDY-SHAFFER
Physics Teacher
Hunter College High School

This is no longer some distant, ideological campaign, but a problem that will affect all of us. The less action we take as a society to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions now, the more dramatic changes we and our descendants will face. The fact that so many people – especially policy-makers – either believe that climate change is not the biggest problem facing humanity or refuse to act because of vested interests terrifies me. Direct action now seems to be the only option left to spread awareness.



Jean Michel

CAMILLE GOODISON
Assistant Professor of English
City Tech

I am going with a group of peace activists and environmentalists from Brooklyn. I recently met with some Buddhist monks and nuns and was really blown away by their respect for the earth and its resources. I've always been a bit of an environmentalist, but I was really won over by their gentility and goodness. Watching them put such great respect for the earth – for humanity, really – in their daily lives, through careful mindfulness practice, was very inspiring. I think it's important to remember we really are all interdependent. It does come back to you, the good or bad you do today.



Shomial Ahmad

EILEEN MORAN
Research Associate (Retired)
Michael Harrington Center
Queens College

Global warming threatens almost all of us, but its worst effects are experienced by the poor and people of color here and around the world. The march on September 21 is an opportunity to organize for good, clean, green jobs and challenge the carbon power industry that's causing havoc and pollution everywhere. I'm working with the PSC committee to recruit members of the CUNY community to join us but will invite all my friends and family too. I also have a number of friends who had their homes destroyed by Sandy and are still dealing with it. Clearly the next generation will confront more of the negative consequences of global warming going forward.



ADAM KORANYI
Distinguished Professor of
Mathematics
Lehman College

I decided to attend when I first heard about the march. This is a matter of conscience for me. I think we all have a share of responsibility in the climate policy of the country. I consider that policy which has been consistent ever since the rejection of the 1997 Kyoto agreement as genocidal, and I have to protest. I hope that an impressive march will call the attention of the misinformed wider public to the gravity of the situation and will, with continued popular pressure, force a radical change towards a policy directed at preserving a livable world. I have a hope that there will be real momentum by the mere fact that there are more than 500 organizations endorsing this march.



Amalia Reinhardt

NADIA GOMEZ
Graphic Designer
Marketing & Communications Office
Baruch College

I care a lot about this issue. I feel like the industry and the leaders in the world aren't making enough substantial changes that would be really simple to make to better the environment and reduce pollution. Being a part of a collective action inspires me. It's great to see that everyone who cares is getting together and showing that they care and speaking out about it. It's being billed as the largest demonstration of its kind. It will be historic, and it'll be cool to be a part of it.

Interviews by Shomial Ahmad

Labor mobilizes for historic climate march

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

On September 21 thousands of people will demonstrate in New York City, in what is billed as the largest climate-change protest in world history. Hundreds of PSC members are expected to take part, demanding action to dramatically reduce the carbon pollution that causes global warming.

The People's Climate March will take place on the Sunday before a week-long United Nations Climate Summit with government leaders from around the world. The PSC contingent will gather at 10:30 at Central Park West and 64 Street. According to the UN website, the Summit will aim to "mobilize political will for an ambitious global agreement by 2015 that limits the world to a less than 2-degree Celsius rise in global temperature." But past global conferences have not led to this kind of decisive action; with the pace of climate change accelerating, march organizers say global protest is needed to prevent a crisis from becoming a catastrophe.

City College's Catherine Seavitt Nordenson, an associate profes-

Carbon pollution is the target

sor of landscape architecture who works on coastlines battered by Sandy, will be one of the PSC members at the march.

"We need to work hard to heal our radically disrupted carbon cycle," Seavitt Nordenson told *Clarion*. "Though my work is coastal and terrain-based, the real root of the problem is in the air, in the damaged atmosphere of our planet."

ALARMING DATA

Seavitt Nordenson's work is about responding to the effects of climate change, like rising sea levels. She's currently working on a multi-university coastal resiliency project at Jamaica Bay, which seeks to improve water quality and circulation, enhance the edge of the coast and build salt marshes, measures that help decrease the intensity of waves and aid in carbon sequestration, removing some carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Seavitt Nordenson has seen how recent extreme weather events and droughts that have focused more

public attention on climate change. "Katrina was a huge wake-up call, particularly the social inequalities that the storm revealed," Seavitt Nordenson said.

It's not only specialists working on environmental issues who are getting that wake-up call. Sean Sweeney, who co-directs Cornell's Global Labor Institute, says many in the labor movement view the September 21 march as a "tipping point" for labor and global-warming activism.

"As more scientific data comes out, the more alarming the picture gets," Sweeney told *Clarion*. "Those that don't follow the science, they follow the weather. We've had Sandy and other extreme weather events in the US and around the world that are getting union members' attention." For example, subway workers who had to restore the system after Sandy now have a much deeper understanding of the consequences of global warming for NYC.

'Katrina was a huge wake-up call.'

Things have come a long way since the AFL-CIO Executive Council opposed the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on reduction of greenhouse gases. Around 70 labor organizations have endorsed the September march, though the AFL-CIO is not one of them.

The PSC is one of the endorsing unions, and PSC Solidarity Committee Co-Chair Jim Perlstein is on the march's mobilization committee.

"Most CUNY students come from communities of color, working-class communities, and these are the communities that are most threatened by climate change," said Perlstein, who wants to make sure PSC participation in the September march is not a one-shot effort. "For us, the march is an opportunity to kick off a longer-term environmental justice project on CUNY campuses," Perlstein said. (For more information, email him at jperlstein@bassmeadow.com.)

GREEN ENERGY TRAINING

SEIU 32BJ, whose 145,000 members include janitors, doormen and building superintendents, is reach-

ing out to its members with flyers, radio appearances, Instagram images and member videos online. To help its members take positive action on the job, the union has established a "green super" program, a training fund to educate building superintendents on reducing their buildings' climate impact.

GLOBAL CRISIS

IBEW Local 3, the electrical workers' union, is another endorser of the march whose members are dealing with the issue on the job. Local 3 members work to retrofit buildings to reduce their climate impact and work on installing green power in newer construction. Members of the local recently refurbished a dilapidated Long Island motel to become the union's solar-powered educational and cultural center.

Local 3's Partha Banerjee, who teaches classes to members, hopes that a thousand of its members will attend the march. "We believe in a green energy and a futuristic jobs policy," Banerjee told *Clarion*. "This is not really 'our problem' versus 'their problem' anymore. This is everybody's problem."

COCAL comes back to NYC

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

The Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) came to New York City on August 4 for its biennial conference, which was held this year at John Jay College and hosted by the PSC. The meeting, COCAL's eleventh, drew more than 200 people from the US, Canada and Mexico.

"The COCAL movement provides the opportunity for diverse contingent faculty from three North American countries to come together...to discuss the challenges of our working conditions [and] the plight of higher education," said Maria Peluso, an adjunct faculty member and union leader from Concordia University in Montreal.

PSC's Vice President for Part-Time Personnel Marcia Newfield, who was on COCAL's local organizing committee, told *Clarion* that organizers "wanted to break the frame" of traditional academic conferences.

"It was the format of presentation, presentation, presentation and then some discussion that we wanted to move away from." Newfield explained. "People get frustrated because there's so much information to digest and not enough time to learn from one another."

INTEREST GROUPS

So instead of just listening to panelists at one session and then moving to the next, conference attendees mapped out strategies in one of five different "interest groups," which met over the course of three days. There were still plenaries at the conference, which brought together tri-national perspectives on adjunct

Adjuncts build a movement



Panelists (l to r) Sylvain Marois, Maria Teresa Lechuga, Stanley Aronowitz, Cindy Oliver and Maria Pelusa shared tri-national perspectives on organizing contingent academics in Canada, Mexico and the US.

organizing and were simultaneously translated. But this year's meeting allowed for more interactive discussion in the smaller working groups.

Jennifer Chancellor, a co-coordinator of the CUNY Doctoral Student Council's Adjunct Project, was on the local COCAL organizing committee. She helped devise protocols that would shape the discussions in the different groups.

"The goal of COCAL is not COCAL," Chancellor told *Clarion*. "It's to create networks and continue the conversation that leads, hopefully, toward action."

In Chancellor's group, participants talked about how to create coalitions of undergraduates and adjunct faculty working together on issues of mutual concern. About 20 people at-

tended the session and shared ideas that had worked on their own campuses, from hosting a coffee hour to paid internships for undergraduates at an academic union.

By the conference's last day, the groups had developed some goals that they presented to the conference as a whole. One group proposed development of a "democracy index," scoring colleges and universities on criteria like pay equity and shared governance. The media working group urged activists to "retire the image of 'poor adjunct' and rebrand as 'pillars of the university.'" Plenary participants backed a statement supporting a minimum adjunct salary of \$7,000 per three-credit course, along with other job protections.

Joe Berry, a COCAL founder and

author of *Reclaiming the Ivory Tower: Organizing Adjuncts to Change Higher Education*, has seen the discussion at the conferences evolve, from what began as a much-needed space to vent about the adjunct experience. "Now they can talk about strategy, and that's huge for a group like this that cuts across union lines and public and private higher education," Berry told *Clarion*.

MEDIA CAPITAL

"COCAL's importance has grown as the scandal of contingency within the academy started to become a media issue," PSC Treasurer Mike Fabricant told *Clarion*. "Returning to the media capital, NYC, at this particular moment was a very smart strategic decision."

The conference was launched, at first informally, in 1996 during the Modern Language Association conference. In 2001, COCAL attendees made plans for the first Campus Equity Week, now an annual event, which draws attention to contingent faculty working conditions at colleges across the US and Canada. The 2009 COCAL conference saw the formation of New Faculty Majority, a membership-based group that has taken up legislative issues. New Faculty Majority has organized adjuncts to testify before Congress about the effects of health care reform on contingent faculty, and has worked for federal legislation that would require colleges to disclose their dependence on part-time and contingent faculty.

Holly Clarke, an adjunct lecturer who has taught at John Jay since

1988, has attended several COCAL conferences and was on the local organizing committee for the 2014 session. Clarke told *Clarion* there was a "developing conversation" over the course of this year's conference, "drawing on the knowledge and experience of the people in the room."

Clarke said she was struck by the commonality of adjuncts' experience across national lines: "There is a common theme that raising and transforming the circumstances of contingent faculty is the lynchpin to pushing back against an agenda that would undermine both public and private higher education," Clarke told *Clarion*. "Hopefully full-time, tenured faculty who feel themselves threatened will recognize that this fight is their fight."

Clarke, who attended the bargaining for equity workshop, said she had learned from the experience of other activists there, from new organizing tactics to how to avoid unintended consequences in new contract language.

Hunter College adjunct lecturer Yvonne Groseil attended COCAL for the first time this year. Groseil said the conference fostered a sense of community, an important counter to the often-isolating experience of being adjunct day-to-day, and that she was inspired by organizing efforts at other colleges.

This fall, Groseil is helping plan an adjunct meeting on her campus on September 17 to share what happened at COCAL, and this Spring she plans to organize a session where Hunter adjuncts present research that they're working on.

"COCAL energized me," Groseil told *Clarion*. "It made me want to get out and think of something creative."

Rebranding adjuncts as 'pillars of the university.'

HEO & CLT chapters build membership

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

This summer, members of the PSC's Higher Education Officer (HEO) Chapter and College Lab Technician (CLT) Chapter reached out to colleagues who had not yet signed union cards, and invited them to become PSC members.

Most CUNY faculty and staff signed cards soon after they were hired and are thus PSC members – but others did not, often because they didn't know that signing a card is required.

Anselma Rodriguez was one of the HEO activists who took part in the outreach campaign on the Brooklyn College campus. Rodriguez says many of her colleagues didn't know they were not union members.

Non-members are required to pay an "agency fee," equivalent to union dues, to cover the union's costs of representing *all* employees in the bargaining unit (as required by law). Non-members often see the agency fee taken out of their check, Rodriguez told *Clarion*, and wrong-

Ready to sign a union card

ly assume that it is their membership dues.

Becoming a PSC member does not cost more, Rodriguez noted, and it allows you to vote in elections for union office and on whether to ratify a proposed contract settlement.

UNION DEMOCRACY

"For people to have a voice in a democratic process is really, really crucial to me," Rodriguez told *Clarion*. In the card-signing effort, she says she told co-workers that by becoming members, they increase representation of HEOs within the union and can have a louder voice in decisions about their work.

Active participation in the union is a family tradition for Rodriguez. Her mother, who made handbags in a Brooklyn factory, was a shop steward for the Pocketbook and Novelty Workers Union, and her father was a union member working in a Staten Island

nursing home. "Being a unionist can mean more than voting on a proposed contract," she says today. "It's about joining committees and getting involved." That, she says, is where a strong contract comes from.

"Most people are receptive" to signing a union card, said Lucy McIntyre, who works in the University Controller's Office at CUNY Central. "Once they know they're paying for something anyway, it's not hard to get them to sign a card. I don't encounter much resistance."

When she spoke with colleagues about becoming a member, one of the most common questions was when a new contract will be finalized, McIntyre told *Clarion*. Once potential new members start talking, she added, they start to voice things they'd like to see in the contract, such as tuition reimbursement for dependents, systems training and salary increases. Once you're a

'It's about getting involved.'

member, she points out, these concerns can be raised at a chapter meeting.

Trudy Hilton also works in CUNY Central. "For most people," she said, "the minute I say to them that the contract is being negotiated – I'll ask, 'Do you want to vote on it?' – then they sign the card."

Many of the more than two dozen people she's approached asked why they weren't automatically given a card when they were first hired, Hilton said. When Hilton began working at CUNY Law School in July 2002, a card was given to her when she started, but that's not the case for all new hires.

Cindy Bink, director of counseling at City Tech, has been reaching out to other HEO-series employees on her campus. Bink and other chapter activists set up tables at HEO meetings and arranged one-on-one meetings with people who had never signed a card. Bink says she didn't see the goal as "just recruiting members" – the outreach, she said, was also an opportunity to listen to other

people's concerns and connect with them. "Membership," Bink tells her colleagues, "is going to help get your employment needs met."

CLT Chapter Chair Albert Sherman says he met with CLTs at different campuses to build the chapter, and arranged a lot of one-on-one meetings. Because individualized outreach takes time, Sherman told *Clarion*, progress in the membership drive was "slow but very steady." He talks to CLTs about the breadth of union-provided benefits, directing them to the PSC, Welfare Fund and CLT websites.

ADDRESSING CONCERNS

Sherman said the membership push has been one step in building a relationship with the people they talked to, figuring out their issues and concerns and talking with them about how the union could address those concerns.

"Once they become members, they become involved," Sherman said. "It's an opening to a door that's a new adventure."

The 'impossible' adjunct

By PETER HOGNESS

As of October 1, health coverage for adjuncts will be provided by CUNY, through New York City's Health Benefits Program, as has long been the case for full-time faculty and staff. The change brings stability to adjunct health insurance, ending the threat to its survival that came to a head in 2011.

The shift to CUNY was the result of a prolonged struggle which the union has fought for 14 years. "Moving adjunct health insurance to the City plan is a triumph of persistence," said Marcia Newfield, the PSC vice president for part-time personnel. "For 14 years, in the face of reactions of 'improbable,' 'impossible' and 'you must be dreaming,' the PSC never gave up because of its commitment to justice. So many societal advances require this kind of stubborn spirit and dedicated work. We are fortunate to have built a union that can stand up to these challenges."

THE WHOLE UNION

"Everyone who had a hand in this victory, which defies the current austerity agenda of reducing worker benefits, can be proud," PSC President Barbara Bowen said in a message to covered adjuncts on August 1. "The agreement is a landmark in the PSC's history of fighting for equity for adjuncts," Bowen wrote. "We took a collective, principled stand on equity, and at last we have succeeded."

"It took the whole union to win adjunct health insurance," said Steve London, PSC vice president and Welfare Fund executive officer and trustee. "For years, the Welfare Fund trustees insisted on maintaining a quality, free health insurance plan for adjuncts, even as CUNY representatives attempted to charge adjuncts and provide a lesser benefit. The entire bargaining unit, full- and part-timers, devoted millions of dollars from a contract settlement to the Welfare Fund to stabilize its finances as all its costs rose and the unfunded cost of adjunct health insurance soared. This gave us the time to work out a permanent solution. I am proud of our union for its consistent united action to maintain adjunct health insurance and make it permanent."

WE OWE THIS VICTORY to the persistence of the union. I am a transplant patient, and need medication to stay alive. I also needed surgery this June, and I was terrified when I learned that adjunct medical was extended just through June 30 – beyond that was uncertain. Thankfully, we were able to finally ensure that adjuncts get access to medical care without fear of losing it in the future. I feel very strongly that it's something we should have had permanently and now we do.

Renee Mizrahi
Adjunct Lecturer, English
Kingsborough Community College

Plan now on secure footing

Coverage under the old adjunct health insurance program, from the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund, comes to an end after September 30. Adjuncts who currently have health insurance **must fill out enrollment forms for the new plan and submit them to their campus Human Resources office by September 19** in order to ensure continuous coverage when the new City plan takes effect October 1. (See page 7 for details on how to sign up.)

Under the new program, health insurance will be provided through the NYC Health Benefits Program, and prescription drug coverage will be provided – as it is for full-timers – through the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund. The PSC also won expanded benefits for adjuncts eligible for health insurance: they will now be entitled to individual optical, hearing and dental benefits through the Welfare Fund.

A prime goal for the union – which the PSC achieved – was to keep eligibility requirements unchanged.

As in the past, health insurance will be available only to those adjuncts who consistently carry substantial workloads and who do not have access to other coverage. Terms for family health insurance coverage remain similar to those under the old insurance program provided through the Welfare Fund, with individual participants able to buy family coverage at full cost.

CLOUD LIFTED

"It's great that the PSC has gotten this put in place," said Linta Varghese, an adjunct assistant professor of Asian American studies at Hunter College. "It's been stressful not knowing what would happen. I'm relieved that the health insurance is on a permanent footing now." With half of CUNY's classes taught by adjunct faculty, Varghese and others said, the survival of the program never should have been in question. But even if the change was long overdue, it was still welcomed with enthusiasm.

"Being a part of the City Health Benefits Program, like the full-time faculty, feels like we're finally being acknowledged for the work that we

do," said Jenna Lucente, an adjunct lecturer in art and design at City Tech. "It's an acknowledgment that adjuncts really are part of the staff and we therefore must be included in a stable system of benefits."

The long-running problem of inadequate funding for adjunct health insurance at CUNY had made the program financially unstable for many years. Union proposals for a more rational, sustainable system had been repeatedly rebuffed by management, leaving adjunct coverage to be kept afloat through a variety of short-term measures. By 2011, however, the underfunding had become so severe that stopgap solutions would no longer work: in July 2011 the Welfare Fund's Trustees announced that the current adjunct coverage could not survive for more than another year. Unless a more sustainable funding source or an alternative form of coverage was put in place, the trustees concluded, the current plan would have to be replaced by a severely curtailed benefit.

The root of the problem went back to the creation of adjunct health coverage at CUNY in 1986. Before then, despite increasing reliance on adjunct labor, CUNY had offered its adjunct faculty no health insurance coverage of any kind. That changed in 1986, when CUNY reached an agreement with the PSC under its previous leadership in response to adjuncts' demands. But unlike the health insurance for full-timers, which is funded through per-capita payments for each member enrolled, the health insurance for adjuncts was funded with an annual lump sum.

GROWING GAP

CUNY's lump-sum payments soon began to fall short of the actual cost that the Welfare Fund incurred in purchasing insurance coverage for eligible adjuncts. As the number of adjuncts employed by CUNY grew sharply and costs of health insurance escalated, the gap grew wider and wider, and the resulting deficit ate into the Welfare Fund's reserves.

When the current PSC leadership took office in 2000, it plunged into contract negotiations with CUNY. A priority demand for the PSC was to change the system for adjunct health insurance. CUNY adjuncts should be covered the same way other part-time municipal workers are covered, the union said: through the NYC Health Benefits Program. But management rebuffed this proposal, agreeing only to a small increase in its annual flat-rate contribution.

In subsequent rounds of contract bargaining, the PSC again proposed that adjunct health insurance should be provided through the City



Five hundred adjuncts and full-timers rallied together outside a CUNY trustees meeting

plan, and management again resisted the idea. The contracts ratified in 2006 and 2008 did include some increases in CUNY's contributions to the Welfare Fund, but these were still inadequate. The deficit continued to grow.

In 2003, the basic premium cost paid for by the Welfare Fund for each covered adjunct was about \$3,500, while CUNY's average payment per participant was about \$2,600. By 2011, the average premium cost had risen to \$8,100. But CUNY's average payment per participant had dropped to \$1,700, a consequence of more and more adjuncts coming into the system while CUNY stuck with flat-rate payments. The roughly \$900 per-person gap in 2003 had grown to \$6,400 per person by 2011.

When the Welfare Fund trustees announced at the end of July 2011 that the current system could not survive for more than another year, the union's response was immediate. "The Professional Staff Congress is prepared to use every resource at our disposal to maintain adjunct health insurance – and we believe we can win this fight," President Bowen wrote in an August 16

letter to members. The defense of adjunct health insurance, she said, was the union's top priority for the coming year.

Strategy and training sessions in August 2011 led to plans for a mass rally on September 26, 2011 at the Board of Trustees' first meeting of the new academic year. The goal of the campaign was straightforward: maintaining comparable health insurance for eligible adjuncts with no lapse in coverage. Accomplishing that would require securing alternative funding and finding a structural solution to the chronic cost gap, such as including CUNY adjuncts in the City or State Health Benefits Program.

SUPPORT

The immediate goal was to press CUNY to include the funds required for such a transition in its budget request for the upcoming fiscal year. Union leaders had concluded that in order for the funds to be approved by the legislature, they had to be included as a regular part of CUNY's budget, just as funds for full-timers' health insurance are.

The run-up to September 26 saw

FOUR YEARS AGO when our health insurance was in danger, it was very, very upsetting to me. I did a lot of price shopping, and at the time I think the minimum for outside coverage was \$800 a month. I panicked. But it's now permanent. You don't have to worry, and that's an amazing feeling. I'm proud to have been part of the campaign to keep adjunct health insurance.

Bonnie Lucas
Adjunct Lecturer, Art Education Program
City College

health care fight



in September 2011.

an outpouring of support for the demand. More than 2,600 faculty and staff signed a petition demanding that CUNY ensure that adjunct health insurance would continue, while close to 5,000 emails were sent to then-Chancellor Goldstein and the CUNY Board of Trustees. Adjuncts spoke out about how vital health insurance was to them, and how their lives would be affected if their coverage was curtailed.

On September 26, 500 PSC members turned out for a militant demonstration outside the trustees' meeting at Baruch College. Part-timers and full-timers were both well represented. "It boils down to the issue of fairness," Yunzhong Shu, an associate professor of Chinese at Queens College, told *Clarion*. "Half of our courses are taught by adjuncts."

"Let them die" is not an appropriate stance for CUNY's upper-level administration to take in regard to half of its faculty," declared Jane Weiss, an assistant professor of English at KCC who had worked for 16 years as an adjunct at Hunter College.

Inside the meeting, PSC activists sang union songs ("Health care is a human right, we shall not be moved!")

WHEN THE NEWS BROKE that it was a done deal, I was at a party with other faculty. The mood in the room was ecstatic. The news came on someone's device, and when it was announced, there was a loud cheer and a round of drinks to the PSC. There really was a sense of what we'd just accomplished. Both part-timers and full-timers realized that we'd done something big.

Michael Batson
Adjunct Lecturer, History & Women's Studies
College of Staten Island

and presented the trustees with the signed petitions. When the union delegation came back outside, they had good news: Chancellor Goldstein had announced that CUNY would propose the necessary funds in its upcoming State budget request.

"It's the first time CUNY has ever moved on our demand on adjunct health care," PSC President Barbara Bowen told the hundreds who rallied outside. But Bowen cautioned that convincing CUNY to include adjunct health insurance in its budget request was only a start: "The next step is to hold them to that priority, to insist that it's funded by the State."

The union kept up the pressure in November, when dozens of members testified on adjunct health care at a public hearing of the Board of Trustees. "As an adjunct professor who had thyroid cancer three years ago, and is still in need of regular medical check-ups, health insurance is crucial for me," Alexandra Story, an adjunct lecturer at BMCC, told the trustees. "On the wages I make as an adjunct, I am just able to barely get by as a single mother of two boys, ages 5 and 8. The loss of my health insurance would be crippling to me." It's a matter of simple justice, she emphasized: "We put in the same work for each course as the full-time professors. We deserve to have our health needs treated equally."

POLITICAL PRESSURE

As the new year began, and with it the annual budget battle in Albany, PSC members met with more than 100 State legislators in a grassroots lobbying effort, pressing them to support CUNY's budget request. Members and union leaders testified at Albany budget hearings, and thousands of letters were sent to State Senators and Assemblymembers.

When the State budget was finalized on March 30, 2012, the funds required for a transition to a more stable system for adjunct health coverage were included in CUNY's budget allocation. The full-court press since September had had its effect.

But the struggle was not over. The next stage was negotiations with CUNY management over the transition to a more sustainable health insurance program. The union's goal was simple: continuation of comparable health insurance with no break in coverage. But making that happen required negotia-

tions over a thousand details. Even though CUNY had followed through on the joint effort to secure funding, these talks were not always smooth and the bargaining was prolonged.

The PSC held a question-and-answer session for covered adjuncts at its Union Hall in August 2012. While those attending appreciated the chance to learn more about the state of the talks, union negotiators could not answer their most pressing question: when will there be a final agreement?

Existing adjunct health insurance coverage was extended twice in September and October as the talks entered their final stages. The funding in CUNY's new budget made this possible, but both sides knew that this was not a long-term solution. Transition to City coverage was essential to the program's future.

CUNY and PSC reached agree-



Kim Ferguson, college benefits officer at CCNY (left), talks with Adjunct Lecturer Annette Swierzbinski about how to enroll in the new City plan. (See sidebar at right.)

ment on details of that transition in October, and those who had protested outside the trustees' meeting the year before felt ready to celebrate. While the process had not been easy, the two sides had stuck with it and reached a solid agreement. But the final stage of the process, securing City approval, unexpectedly became a stubborn obstacle.

"After years of refusing our demand, CUNY's administration became an unwavering ally in talks with the City," Bowen told *Clarion*. "CUNY's support was essential to our eventual success."

The joint union-management agreement at CUNY was put to the test when it collided with the Bloomberg administration's decision to put its labor relations in the deep freeze. By 2013, every single municipal union was working under an expired contract, the first time in NYC history that this had occurred. With the City demanding deep concessions from the unions on their health care coverage, while offering little or nothing in return, the mayor's advisors refused to act.

The NYC Health Benefits Program is a massive plan, covering

more than one million employees, retirees and their families. As such, it can realize economies of scale and exert far greater bargaining power over costs than a small plan like the 1,900-member health insurance the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund administered for CUNY adjuncts. A plan based on per-capita funding was also more rational, stable and sustainable to manage the finances of health care for the adjunct faculty on whom CUNY students depend. But none of these arguments swayed the Bloomberg administration.

The impact on CUNY adjuncts was severe. As talks with Bloomberg's representatives became drawn out, a series of short-term extensions of existing coverage occurred, with each expiration date becoming a focus for adjunct anxiety. When it became clear that discussions with the Bloomberg ad-

Must sign up for new plan by Sept. 19

The old adjunct health insurance program, which was offered through the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund, will end on September 30. *To be covered under the new City plan, which takes effect October 1, you must submit completed enrollment forms to CUNY by September 19.* If you do not submit enrollment forms, you may not have continuous coverage.

The forms to enroll in the new plan are included in CUNY's Adjunct Health Insurance Enrollment Packet, available from your campus human resources office or online at tinyurl.com/AHI-Forms. Form #1 enrolls you in the NYC Health Benefits Program, for basic insurance coverage. Form #2 enrolls you in PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund coverage for prescription drugs, as well as the individual optical, hearing and dental benefits newly available to covered adjuncts as a result of this transition.

ENROLL NOW

Form #3 is required if you select an option that has an additional cost, such as family coverage or an optional rider. This form authorizes direct monthly payments from your bank account to cover the cost.

Form #4 is part of your overall enrollment in the new plan. All forms should be submitted to your campus Benefits Officer as soon as possible, and no later than September 19.

Further information and additional forms (for example, for coverage of dependents up to age 29) are available on the website of CUNY's University Benefits Office (UBO). Go to cuny.edu/benefits, select "Benefits at a Glance," and then select "Adjunct Staff (Teaching and Non-Teaching)."

CONCERNS?

If you have questions, call CUNY's dedicated adjunct health insurance helpline at 646-664-3401. You can also email your questions or concerns to UniversityBenefitsAdjuncts@cuny.edu, or ask your campus benefits officer. CUNY First Employee ID and both CUNY and personal email addresses should be listed on all paperwork.

An overview of the changes is also on the Welfare Fund website (pscunywf.org).

Continued to page 8

I WOULDN'T HAVE A STRONG PROGRAM without outstanding adjunct faculty in school counseling. Too often CUNY adjunct faculty don't have full-time jobs and cobble together 3 or 4 classes at different campuses, constantly on the run; it's beyond critical to have secure health insurance. Since almost half of CUNY instruction is done by contingent faculty, the least we can do is ensure their health care is maintained as they often have few other resources in the country's most expensive metro area.

Stuart Chen-Hayes
Associate Professor, School Counseling
Lehman College, School of Education

Pension choice for new full-timers

By **ELLEN BALLEISEN**

Former PSC Pension Counselor

& **JARED HERST**

PSC Coordinator of Pension & Health Benefits

Pensions probably don't top the list of concerns for most newly hired CUNY faculty and staff. Yet within 30 days of their start date, new full-time CUNY employees must choose between two radically different pension plans. The decision is irrevocable, and making a wise choice requires careful consideration of several factors.

Your basic choice is between a defined-benefit plan and a defined-contribution plan. CUNY's defined-benefit plan is provided by the New York City Teachers' Retirement System (TRS), a municipal government agency. The defined-contribution plan is known as the Optional Retirement Program (ORP), which includes TIAA-CREF and two alternative investment vehicles, MetLife and Guardian.

Below is some information to help new full-timers make the decision. Pension rules for newly hired faculty and staff at CUNY are based on New York State's Tier VI pension legislation, which covers those newly hired on or after April 1, 2012.

TRS: THE BASICS

The NYC Teachers' Retirement System guarantees retirees a fixed monthly pension payment for life, with small periodic cost-of-living adjustments. There are no fluctuations based on investment returns. Retirement allowances are calculated using formulas that are based on years of service and highest annual earnings.

A TRS pension is funded by both employee and employer contributions, but the employer contribution is much larger. An employee participating in TRS does not see CUNY's contribution in a separate account in his or her own name. Instead, CUNY makes regular lump-sum payments to TRS as a whole, based on actuarial calculations made about all CUNY employees with TRS pensions in active service.

ORP: THE BASICS

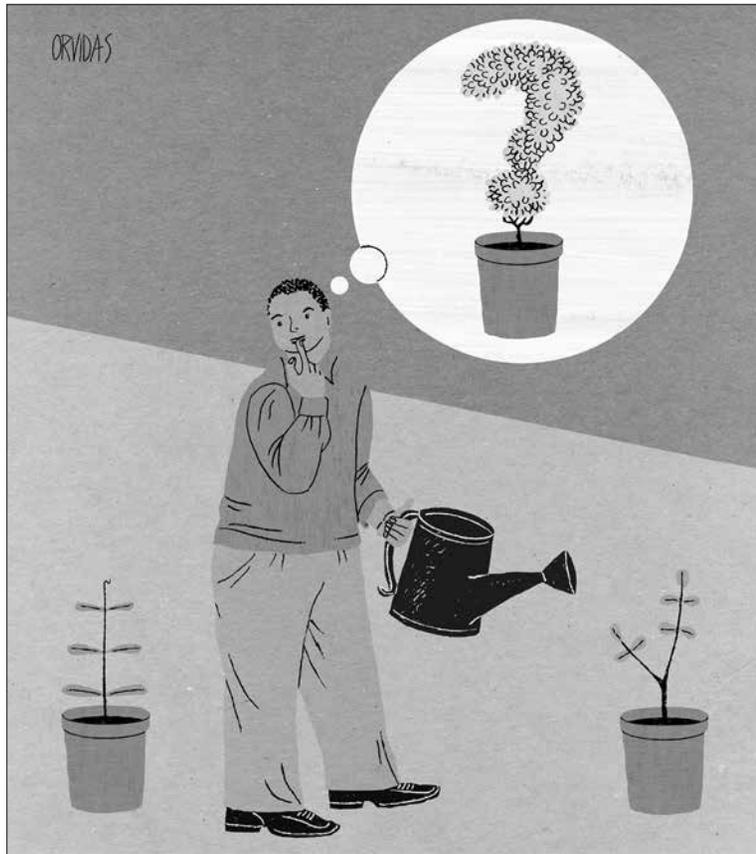
In the Optional Retirement Program, there is a retirement account in the employee's name that is funded by both employer and employee contributions.

The employee decides how money in this retirement account is invested. Investment choices include

Alert new full-time colleagues

Newly hired full-time faculty and staff must make a final choice of pension plan during their first 30 days on payroll. But new hires do not receive *Clarion* until after their first few pay periods – so please show this article to your new colleagues right away!

Must decide in first 30 days



stock, bond, fixed-rate and real estate funds managed by TIAA-CREF. The Optional Retirement Program may also include investments in the alternate funding vehicles, The Guardian and MetLife. A retirement account may be invested in several different funds, and employees may periodically change their allocations among different accounts.

An ORP pension is funded by the amount of money in the individual employee's account. There is no way to predict how much the account will be worth at retirement because the value of an employee's investments changes constantly.

For new participants in TIAA-CREF and the other ORP plans, CUNY contributes 8% of gross pay during the first seven years that an employee is at the University; from the eighth year on, the employer contribution is increased to 10% for the remainder of the employee's service.

EMPLOYEE CONTRIBUTIONS

The required employee contributions are the same for both TRS and the ORP plans. Employee contributions are calculated as a percentage of regular compensation on a federally tax-deferred basis, with the rate dependent on an employee's salary. For all new full-time hires at CUNY, those rates are as follows:

\$45,000 or less	3.00%
More than \$45,000 to \$55,000	3.50%
More than \$55,000 to \$75,000	4.50%
More than \$75,000 to \$100,000	5.75%
More than \$100,000	6.00%

These gross salary deductions occur from an employee's paycheck through automatic payroll deduc-

tions. If deductions are not occurring after you choose a plan, check with your payroll office.

VESTING

When you are vested, you become eligible to receive a retirement allowance when you reach retirement age. TRS participants are vested once they have 10 years of TRS credited service. If TRS participants leave CUNY employment before they are vested, they don't lose their employee contributions: participants in qualified pension plans like TRS earn 5% annual interest on these monies while they are waiting to vest. If you leave CUNY before you are vested, you will take these funds with you.

ORP participants are vested after they have worked at CUNY for 366

days; vesting is immediate for those who come to CUNY with an open-vested TIAA-CREF retirement account from a previous employer.

RETIREMENT ISSUES

If you have been newly hired at CUNY and choose TRS, you will become eligible to retire with an unreduced pension benefit once you are vested and at least 63 years old. Under current rules, those vested in TRS who are between 55 and 62 can retire with an immediate, lower pension benefit, reduced by 6.5% per year for each year younger than 63. All TRS participants who are receiving a pension and who have at least 10 years of service credit will retain their City of New York health insurance and the benefits provided through the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund upon retirement.

ORP participants may retire at any age, but can only maintain their health benefits if they have 15 years of continuous service at CUNY. In addition, these health benefits take effect only when the retiree is 62 or older. Since September 2005, if you are a health-benefits-eligible retiree in the ORP, you are required to maintain \$50,000 in reserve with TIAA-CREF, in order to pay for retiree health insurance premiums. Additional reserve amounts may be required depending on the health plan you select, or to cover future insurance rate increases.

PRIOR SERVICE

TRS participants can get pension credit for any work done for the City or State before they became full-time CUNY employees. ORP participants do not have this option.

If you worked previously as a CUNY adjunct and already have significant pension credit under TRS, then TRS will probably be your best choice – but speak to a pension counselor to be sure. If you worked as a CUNY adjunct but were not previously a TRS member, you can pay to “buy back” pension credit in TRS for your prior years of adjunct service. Again, consult a pension counselor about your options.

If you have prior CUNY adjunct service and are hired on a full-time substitute line, the decision is more complex. Details are discussed at tinyurl.com/Adj-Sub-Pension-Choice; note that there are exceptions. Consulting a pension counselor is thus especially important for former adjuncts who are hired on a full-time substitute line.

PORTABILITY

ORP participants in TIAA-CREF can maintain or even possibly merge their TIAA-CREF accounts if they leave CUNY for another employer that provides TIAA-CREF pensions. This is all subject to the CUNY TIAA-CREF ORP Plan Rules. TRS pensions can be transferred to other New York City and State retirement systems, but cannot be transferred to private or out-of-state employers.

LEAVING MONEY TO YOUR FAMILY

ORP participants can leave the entire balance of their accounts to their families after they die. TRS participants can designate one beneficiary who will receive a lifetime pension payout after they die. There are other retirement income options available to the beneficiaries of members in the ORP and TRS. Please consult the retirement system you are affiliated with for more details.

MAKING THE CHOICE

So, which plan is best for you? Age is one key factor in the decision. Older employees may give greater weight to the fact that TRS participants can keep their health insurance in retirement after just 10 years on the job.

Prior work history is another factor. A new full-timer with many years of adjunct service or other work for a New York City or State agency can get TRS pension credit for this work. A new full-timer who already has an open-vested TIAA-CREF retirement account from another institution can vest immediately.

Contact the PSC (at 212-354-1252) if you would like to discuss your decision with a pension counselor.

Adjunct health

Continued from page 7

After one last extension to September 30, and with the critical support of the new mayor, agreement was finally reached at the end of July. “This is the hardest negotiation the PSC has had in the 14 years that I have been in leadership,” Bowen told *Clarion*. “It shouldn't have been so hard. We worked with CUNY to find the funding, CUNY management became a strong partner in the effort, and it makes sense to avail of the economy of scale. Besides that, it was the right thing to do.”

“The Welfare Fund staff and trustees have been heroic,” Bowen added. “The trustees protected the financial solvency of the Fund, but

never lost sight of the human needs of adjuncts.”

Though it is a major step toward equity, the change does not give eligible adjuncts full equality in health coverage with full-time CUNY employees. Family coverage remains more expensive, as eligible adjuncts must still pay the full additional cost for covered family members. And while the existence of adjunct health insurance is now assured, individual adjuncts can still unexpectedly lose coverage if they have a course cancelled at the last minute – even if they have worked at CUNY for 20 years.

“Ideally, we would like to have won even more – family coverage, a shorter waiting period to qualify, coverage into retirement,” Bowen

told members in August. “Those goals remain for future campaigns.” (In current bargaining, for example, the union's demand on adjunct job security could help protect long-serving adjuncts from sudden loss of their health insurance.)

“For now,” Bowen concluded, “we can celebrate what we have won together, and support each other in the union's upcoming campaign for a fair contract for all.”

While it does not end the need to struggle, the agreement to move adjunct health coverage to the City Health Benefits Program stands as one of the union's biggest victories, said the PSC's Steve London: “Working together, union members achieved a result we had often been told was impossible.”

ORGANIZING

CLIP & CUNY Start teachers unite

By A. PRATO

Queensborough Community College

What's been happening to the higher education workforce during the last couple decades should give all of us pause," Rep. George Miller (D-CA) said in January. "The number of part-time contingent faculty at institutions of higher education has been rising rapidly, with more than one million people now working as adjunct faculty, providing a cheap source of labor even while tuition is skyrocketing."

This drive to cut labor costs at all costs is evident throughout the City University of New York system – and the area of remedial instruction is no exception.

SKILLS GAP

The CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP), created in 1995, and CUNY Start, created in 2010, have become prominent parts of remedial instruction at CUNY. Teachers in these programs do work that is central to CUNY's mission, and spend more time in class each week than many faculty who are classed as full-time. Yet we are classified as part-time, contingent or adjunct by CUNY Central, in order to pay us less and deny us the benefits we deserve. Through the PSC, faculty in both programs are organizing for basic improvements, and fighting to achieve a better contract for all.

Throughout New York City, there is often a gap between the skills required to graduate from high school and those required to begin college. In fact, most incoming CUNY freshmen without Regents diplomas fail at least one of the three assessment tests in reading, writing, or math. Remedial instruction, in all its forms, is thus a central part of CUNY's mission. I have taught in the CLIP program for several years, and I know that CLIP teachers believe strongly in the work we do.

"I have former students from ten years ago, some of them now in master's programs, others working full-time after having completed their BAs, who come back to visit me to express their gratitude for CLIP," says Iris Schickerling-Georgia, a CLIP teacher at BMCC for more than a decade. "I love when this happens and, like other CLIP teachers, I love my job. Our program is so important to the functioning of CUNY." CLIP teachers are proud to note that last May, the valedictorians of both York and Hostos Community Colleges were former CLIP students.

DENIED BENEFITS

Despite teaching 25 hours per week (including summers), CLIP and Start teachers are deemed "part-timers" by CUNY Central. This is a bureaucratic fiction, but the motive is clear: to deny us the rights and benefits associated with traditional college teaching – job security, a grievance process, sabbaticals, full-time health care, tuition waivers, tenure, annual leave, etc. And the starting salary for a CLIP or Start instructor, less than \$40 per hour, leaves many of these professionals working second and third jobs just to survive.

In response, a small but vigorous group of CLIP (and now Start) teachers have organized to demand a more equal place at the CUNY table. They have had an impact.

"Before 2000, if you got sick and you took a day off to go to the doctor and feel better, you never got paid," said Monica Sweeney de Gonzalez, a longtime CLIP teacher at

Queensborough CC. "Thank you to the PSC for helping us achieve that benefit."

"When CLIP first started in 1995, we didn't even have a functioning copy machine in the office, and we were not allowed to join the Teachers' Retirement System," recalls Schickerling-Georgia. Over the past 20 years, in addition to sick days and participation in the retirement system, CLIP instructors have organized through the PSC for health insurance, salary steps, and participation in the Adjunct-CET Professional Development Fund.

But more needs to be done. CUNY Start was created after the last contract was signed, and its teachers do not receive many of the benefits that CLIP faculty were finally able to gain.

For faculty in both programs, a higher starting salary is a priority. "I am compensated for 30 hours of work weekly," said Radha Radkar of LaGuardia's CUNY Start program. "But this does not include the time I spend outside the office grading, lesson-planning, as well as collaborating with teachers and advisers in team meetings, all of which are essential to student success."

'Our issues are part of a larger fight.'

Many CLIP and Start teachers would love to pursue a doctorate and develop professionally. At SUNY-Binghamton, ESL lecturers are entitled to tuition waivers at their school. This is the norm for ESL teachers at colleges across the nation, from SUNY-Buffalo to Portland State – but not for teachers in CLIP and CUNY Start.

In addition to higher pay and tuition waivers, CLIP and Start instructors are requesting annualized salaries, summer health care, and job security.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

To accomplish these contractual goals, CLIP and CUNY Start instructors have formed the CLIP-Start Alliance, which has met regularly at PSC headquarters since November 2013 to develop a strategy they hope will yield positive results at the bargaining table. In May, PSC President Barbara Bowen met with over 100 CLIP and Start teachers and pledged to fight for their full-time status in the new contract. Union organizing efforts have continued through the summer. In order to attain much-deserved rights and benefits, continuous orga-

nizing is necessary, and every CLIP or Start instructor is encouraged to join our efforts.

We are not the largest group of employees at CUNY, and in order to win improvements we need to understand that our issues are part of a larger fight. As we push for recognition of the fact that we work for CUNY full-time, we need to support part-time faculty in their ongoing fight for equity. Their problems and ours both result from CUNY's drive to pay less and reduce benefits, to the detriment of both faculty and the students we teach.

As Stanley Aronowitz, distinguished professor of sociology at the Graduate Center, said at this year's meeting of the Coalition On Contingent Academic Labor (see page 5), "PSC members have to recognize that the tendency in CUNY is to substitute adjuncts and part-timers for full-time employees, and we have to work to radically change that situation."

The efforts being made by the CLIP-Start Alliance are one example of what needs to be done, and hopefully a sign of what is to come, if faculty are to stand a chance against CUNY's austerity measures in the future.

Mr. Prato is entering his fifth year as a CUNY Language Immersion Program Instructor at Queensborough Community College.

A teacher, an advocate, a uniter

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Larry Kaplan built up institutions. Whether it was the economics department at John Jay, the PSC Retirees Chapter or a lobbying group for municipal retirees, he approached his task with poise, commitment and persistence. He died on August 5 at the age of 98.

Jack Judd, a former PSC Retirees chapter chair, first met Kaplan in 1967, when the two attended leadership meetings of the Legislative Conference, a predecessor of the PSC. Judd recalls Kaplan being especially interested in disability insurance and life insurance. This focus on bread-and-butter issues continued throughout his work as an activist. Kaplan's approach of bringing people together for a common cause helped advance issues he was passionate about.

"Larry never had an ill word to say about anybody, no matter how much he may have been in disagreement with that person," Judd told *Clarion*. "He was always a gentlemen."

CREATING STRUCTURE

Kaplan grew up in Brooklyn where he attended high school in Coney Island. He received his bachelor's degree in economics from Brooklyn College and his master's in economics from Columbia University.

He fought in World War II from December 1942 to November 1945, serving in Army intelligence. He was with US troops in Battle of the Bulge, the deadliest World War II operation for Americans. In 1945, Kaplan was part of Allied forces that helped liberate the concentration camp at Buchenwald. Later in life, he was a member of many Jewish and veterans organizations, and pushed for building a World War II memorial in Manhasset, where he lived.

Remembering a PSC retiree leader

After earning his doctorate in economics from Columbia University, Kaplan worked for the federal government and then for the City of New York.

When John Jay college opened in 1965, he was invited to be a founding member of its economics department. He worked at CUNY for the next 30 years.

'He just kept on working at it.'

Upon retiring in 1986, Kaplan joined the PSC Retirees Chapter. During his 15 years in leadership positions, he reinvigorated a quiet chapter. He brought outside speakers to give presentations at meetings and started and edited a newsletter that featured informative articles on retiree benefits. He was also active in the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund, serving as secretary and vice chair of the fund's trustees.

In 1995, Kaplan wanted to unite retirees from municipal labor groups. "I realized that small groups cannot accomplish what a united organization can achieve," Kaplan wrote in a reflection on his work. He went on to convene a meeting with several municipal labor unions, and that led to the founding of the Council of Municipal Retiree Organizations (COMRO), an organization that now advocates for more than a quarter million New York City municipal retirees.

DETERMINED & FOCUSED

Irwin Yellowitz, who served as Retiree Chapter chair after Kaplan, recalls City Hall demonstrations over cuts to Medicare Plan B. After the COMRO protests, the program was fully restored.

"When he had an idea in mind, he just kept on working at it until it was clear that he was



Larry Kaplan helped found the economics department at John Jay when the college first opened in 1965.

going to get it," Yellowitz told *Clarion*. "He was very focused. He wasn't someone going off in five different directions."

Kaplan is survived by his wife, Jeanne Leon, to whom he was married for 68 years, and his three children: Harriet Trackman, Sandford S. Kaplan and Marcia Pavone.

'BLACK LIVES MATTER'

From Ferguson to Detroit

By BRIDGETT DAVIS

Baruch College

In this summer of protest, African Americans have taken to the streets with a simple but ambitious demand: "Treat us like human beings."

In Ferguson, Missouri, marchers held placards that reprised the 1960s slogan, "I AM a MAN" (now with the addition of "I AM a WOMAN"). In this town where police fired ten shots at an unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown and struck him six times, apparently while his hands were up, a home-made sign said, "Don't shoot! Black men are people, too!" Others carried signs insisting that "Black life matters."

On Staten Island, those protesting the chokehold killing of Eric Garner by a white City cop voiced the same theme. "The reason I'm marching is because it's time for people of color to be recognized as human beings," 63-year-old Shirley Evans told the *Daily News*. "For years and years, we've been fighting for our rights. It's time we're seen as equals."

BASIC RIGHTS

A human being has the right to not be gunned down by the police for "blocking traffic," and then be left in the rotting sun for four hours. A human being has the right to not be choked to death for "resisting arrest" for allegedly selling loose cigarettes – despite repeated pleas that he can't breathe.

But other basic rights are also required to sustain human life – like access to water. When Detroit's Dept. of Water and Sewage systematically shut off the water of more than 125,000 of its poorest residents – some of whom owed as little as \$150 on their bills – the UN found that the shutoffs were a basic violation of human rights.

"These are my fellow human beings," Detroit's Renla Session told the *Detroit News*. "If they threatened to cut off water to an animal shelter, you would see thousands of people out here. It's senseless...They just treat people like their lives mean nothing here in Detroit, and I'm tired of it."

Meanwhile, Detroit businesses still had access to clean water, despite the fact that 55% of those businesses have past-due water bills. The corporate debtors included the Chrysler Group, real estate firms and a golf-course management company that owed nearly half a million dollars. All were exempted when the shut-offs began. This is in keeping with Mitt Romney's famous comment – in an echo of the Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling – that "corporations are people." But apparently not all people are people.

The denial of black humanity takes many forms. A police officer in a nearby town declared that the Ferguson protesters "should be put down like a rabid dog." Another suburban cop, on duty in Ferguson during the protests, pointed his rifle in protesters' faces and yelled, "I will fucking kill you." After both incidents received news coverage, the two men were obliged to leave their jobs – but these and similar incidents raise questions about the institutional culture they reflect.

Certainly in Ferguson, those protesting Brown's killing were treated by the police force as an inhumane entity en masse. The use of armored vehicles, tear gas, plastic bullets, threatening tactics and unconstitutional arrests sent a clear message: if you

express your anger and your grief, you put your freedom – and maybe your life – at risk. The freedom of speech that the Supreme Court has guaranteed to corporations and the wealthy was not extended to them.

Ferguson's black residents live in fear of the police in part because the police force has 50 white officers and three black ones, patrolling a community where 67% of the residents are black. Not surprisingly, blacks make up 86% of police stops, according to a racial profiling report from Missouri's attorney general.

These inequalities highlight the fact that the Mike Brown or Eric Garner killings aren't just caused by the individual bigotry or hot temper of one "bad apple" cop. They reflect structural inequities that run deep throughout US society and history.

Four miles south of Ferguson is the burial place of Dred Scott, the slave who in 1857 sued for his freedom and lost. He lies in Calvary Cemetery on West Florissant Avenue – the same street that, in Ferguson, has been the center of protests since Mike Brown was killed. In rejecting Scott's claim to freedom, the US Supreme Court's Chief Justice wrote, "A free negro of the African race, whose ancestors were brought to this country and sold as slaves, is not a 'citizen' within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States." Lest we forget, African Americans' slave ancestors were described in the US Constitution as "three-fifths" of a person.

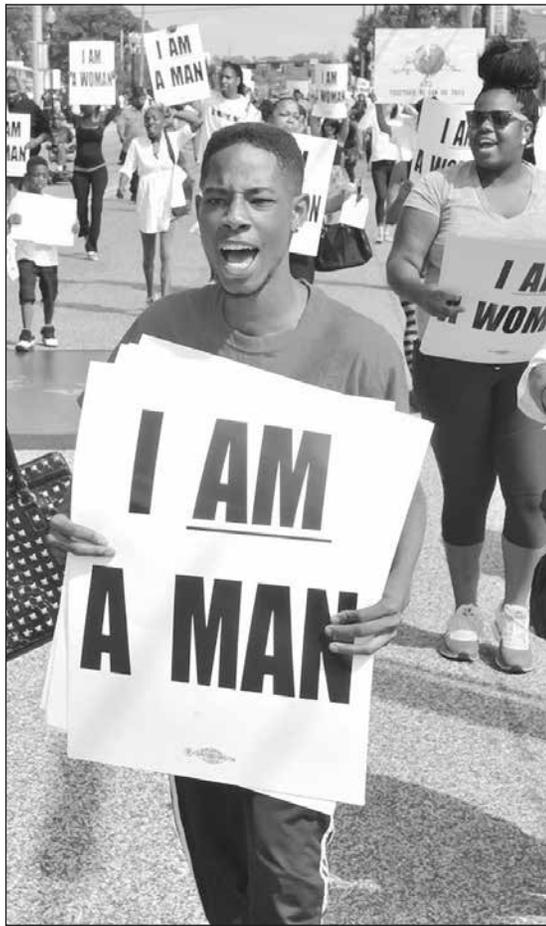
One hundred fifty-seven years after Dred Scott lost his case, and 156 years after his death, the bruising effects of the country's racist history are evident throughout the structures of American society. That history has shaped institutions that deprive black Americans of the political power to shape their future, or the resources they need to do so.

WHITE POWER STRUCTURE

Ferguson and Detroit are both places where a largely black community is run by a white power structure. In Detroit, Republican Governor Rick Snyder appointed Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr to replace elected officials; a new white mayor, Mike Duggan, now runs the city with an emphasis on what sociologist Thomas Sugrue calls "trickle-down urbanism," a focus on selective gentrification that excludes jobs for working-class residents.

In Ferguson, the police chief is white, the mayor is white, and five of the six city council members are white. Moreover, the district where Michael Brown attended high school, in which students are almost entirely black, is controlled by a white out-of-state Republican.

Unequal political power perpetuates unequal access to resources. The largely poor and black residents of Ferguson and Detroit both contend with shrinking city services that impede daily life, abysmal job prospects, punitive social-welfare policies, and under-funded school systems. An acute example is the fact that the high school Mi-



Protestors in Ferguson, Missouri held posters with the 1960s slogan, 'I AM A MAN.'

chael Brown graduated from had only two cap-and-gowns sets for its graduates, who had to take turns wearing them to pose for graduation pictures.

Detroit has been subject to public disinvestment for decades. The water shutoff this summer was the culmination of decades of statewide cuts in public spending, a consequence of anti-tax politics that were significantly fueled by racial animus. From Reagan's fables about "welfare queens" and Cadillacs to Lee Atwater's infamous "Willie Horton" ad, white resentments and fear have been used for decades to consolidate a policy of shrinking the public budget. As was dramatically clear when Katrina hit New Orleans, it's a policy that hurts African Americans the most, even as it injures the public as a whole.

As Missouri's public budget shrinks, the black majority in Ferguson has been obliged to pay for its own oppression. *Newsweek* has reported that despite Ferguson's relative poverty, the town's second-largest revenue source is fines and court fees. Its court issued 24,532 warrants last year, or about three warrants per household. Essentially, the town has been bankrolling itself vis-à-vis racial profiling and harassing black residents with costly tickets, warrants and court fees for such crimes as "driving while black," so-called jaywalking (as Mike Brown was stopped for) and other trumped-up violations.

The reason communities like Ferguson or Detroit lack the funds to pay for basic needs is not because there is no money. Millions of dollars in Federal resources have been allocated to equip local police forces across the country with military combat gear, often

to police largely black communities – a reality on ugly display during Ferguson's street protests. Yet Detroit's 688,000 residents have received no Federal aid to avert or recover from its historic bankruptcy filing. As one man on Twitter, who identifies as @Young-Melanin95, tweeted: "They have the money to bring military-grade weapons to a civilian protest, but not enough money to give Detroit access to clean water."

ATTACKS ON UNIONS

The attacks on unions in Detroit, public and private, have attacked the ability of black workers to maintain a middle-class income. When I grew up in Detroit in the 1960's and 1970s, the UAW was still a vigorous union whose strength insured robust wages and benefits for its members. As a result, my father and cousins and uncles made salaries that enabled them to live well – to own homes, support their families, send their children to college, retire without worry. Concessions demanded of the autoworkers' union disproportionately hurt Detroit's black residents, and more recent attacks on the wages and pensions of public workers have their own racial edge. Nationally, black workers are 30% more likely to hold public-sector jobs. In majority-black Detroit, the figure is much higher. This year Detroit teachers faced a 10% pay cut until public outcry prompted its emergency manager to reverse course days before the start of the school year.

And so the basic rights of more than ten million underprivileged African Americans are undermined by the limited resources allocated to them: those deemed worthy by a racist society receive the most, those deemed unworthy receive the least – and have the most exacted from them.

That is the backdrop against which, this summer, water was withheld in one place, a life gunned down in the other. No wonder that out of frustration and necessity, people in both Detroit and Ferguson – and in solidarity protests across the country – have taken to the streets to demand that their humanity be recognized.

Denial of common humanity has always been fundamental to white supremacy, throughout history. We can draw a direct line from the anti-slavery slogan, "Am I Not A Man And A Brother?" in the 19th century to this summer's protests ("I AM a Man") to see the pattern.

UNSEEN VIOLENCE

A life can be taken by the fast, brutal violence of a police bullet or a chokehold. But there is also the slower violence that can kill you just as dead, more gradually and in pieces – through poor health care, unemployment and bad housing, through denying you the resources you need to live.

From Ferguson to Detroit to Staten Island, this summer's protests have been a source of hope. But if protesters are to ultimately succeed, we have to remember this: without attacking the systemic racism that has been the feeding ground for dehumanizing black life, we will be here again.

Bridgett Davis is a Detroit native and professor of journalism and creative writing at Baruch College. Her new novel, Into The Go-Slow (Feminist Press, Fall 2014), is set in Lagos and Detroit.

'It's time we're seen as equals.'



Pass it on!

Be sure to show new colleagues your copy of **Clarion** – they won't yet be on our subscription list. Since they must make a permanent choice of pension system in their first 30 days on payroll, they should see the article on page 9. The article can also be found on

the PSC website (psc-cuny.org/Clarion). While you're chatting, invite new co-workers to come to the PSC's mass membership meeting that is being planned for October, to learn about the campaign for a new union contract. (See page 3 for details.)

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

What's going on in contract talks?

By **BARBARA BOWEN**
PSC President

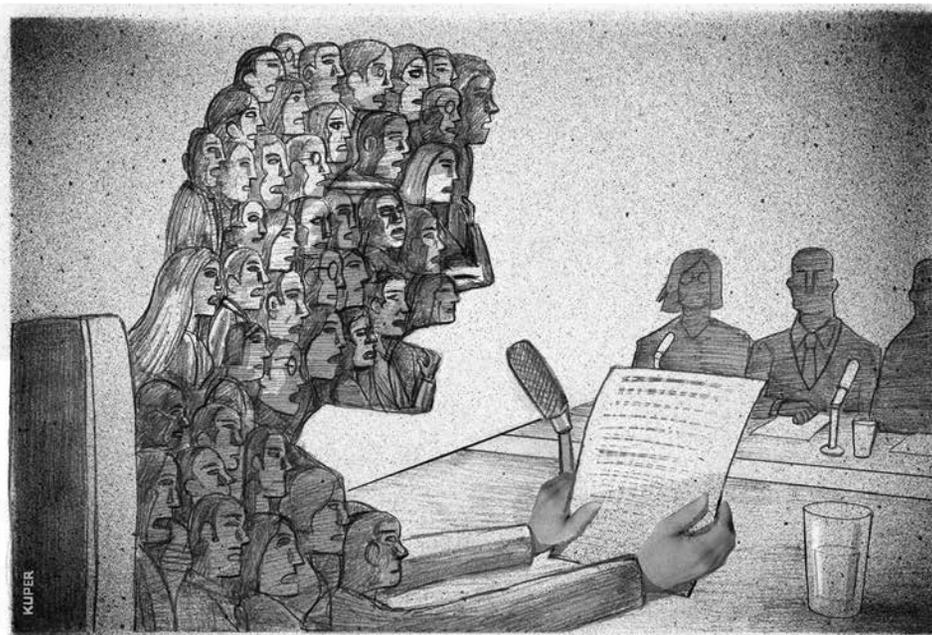
I have opportunities to write to PSC members, but I also rely on your messages to me. I learned many years ago from academics in South Africa that it is a privilege to be accountable to others politically, and I take seriously being accountable to you. So with gratitude to the PSC members who have started conversations on the subway, who have sent emails, phoned the union office or stopped me on the street, here is a selection of the questions you most often ask, together with my replies.

Other unions in the city are settling their contracts; why do we still have no contract?

The paralysis in negotiations created by Mayor Bloomberg's insistence on wage freezes has been ended under Mayor de Blasio. Many of the 152 expired contracts with City unions are being settled. But the PSC's contract is different; it requires approvals by the State government as well as the City. We don't have a new contract because the CUNY administration has not put an economic offer on the table, as of the date I am writing. Without an economic offer, it is impossible to discuss raises or to resolve other issues that would require the expenditure of funds, such as relief in the teaching load. The union can't settle until we can negotiate about money.

Why hasn't CUNY made an offer?

My hope is that by the time you read this, the CUNY administration will have responded to PSC pressure and put a reasonable offer on the table. Otherwise, the question is best answered by CUNY Board Chairperson Benno Schmidt and Chancellor Milliken. But you can also speak directly to your college president, who reports to the chancellor, about the urgency of receiving an economic offer. PSC contracts have often been among the last in the city to be settled because of the complexity of reaching agreement on economics with both the City and the State. This round may be particularly difficult, but CUNY faculty and staff have been patient long enough – we need a viable economic offer now.



What kind of offer can we expect; will it be similar to the economic settlements reached with other public-employee unions?

The PSC bargaining team has made it clear to management representatives that we will not accept a poverty contract. Neither New York City nor New York State is in deficit, and there is no reason to impose further economic austerity on CUNY. While the union leadership is aware of the relatively small annual increases in many recent State and City union contracts, and of the practice of "pattern bargaining," we are pressing for an offer that allows the University to make real progress on salaries and working conditions. Unlike most public employers in this expensive city, CUNY recruits nationally and has to be competitive nationally. An inadequate offer, coming after decades of systematic underfunding, will spell disaster for CUNY.

I need to plan for my financial future. Can you say anything about retroactive pay and whether retirees will receive full retroactivity?

After four years without a contract, I know that many of us are counting on ret-

roactive pay to cover some of the big cost increases we have experienced – whether it's a child's college tuition or the need to find housing in New York City. Retroactivity has to be negotiated, and it's impossible to negotiate retroactive pay increases when the University administration has yet to offer any increase at all. The union bargaining team has made it clear that full retroactive pay is a priority. The PSC has historically been successful in negotiating for full retroactive pay for employees who were on payroll for the period covered by the raise, regardless of whether they have subsequently retired. But in this round of bargaining we have seen some contracts with wage freezes and some with deferred retroactive pay, so the bargaining team is particularly vigilant on the issue of retroactive pay.

We urgently need a raise, but a raise will not end the inequities in the labor system at CUNY. Is the union attempting to address any other problems in this contract?

Yes. A single contract cannot solve inequities that took decades and a larger system of injustice to develop, but the PSC leadership has a history of tackling inequity and made

a commitment to addressing three major priorities beyond salary: relief in the full-time faculty teaching load; a fair system for HEOs to advance in their jobs; and job security and equity for adjuncts. Some of these issues will require economic resources, but some, such as a job security system for adjuncts, are non-economic. Reforming the shameful system of adjunct labor has taken more than one contract, and may take legislative action. The same is true of reducing the teaching load to a level comparable to teaching loads elsewhere. But we must make meaningful progress in this contract.

Every improvement the union has won or demanded is ultimately about the quality of education: as anyone who has taught in a CUNY classroom or tried to use CUNYfirst knows, faculty and staff working conditions are literally students' learning conditions. When the union demands workplace justice in our contract, we are taking a stand against the economic and racial injustice that has created substandard working conditions at CUNY.

Okay – I haven't been active in the union, but the lack of a contract is hurting me personally. What can I do?

You can agree to be part of the collective power we will need to win a good contract in a period when austerity is being imposed on unions and working people. Sign up on the PSC website to organize for the demonstration we will hold this month unless CUNY makes a viable economic offer; make a commitment now to come to the mass meeting in October, where you will hear directly from the bargaining team. (See page 3 for details.)

Agree to be accountable for bringing two colleagues with you to each event. Being accountable means talking to colleagues personally, letting us know that they've said yes, and maybe traveling to the events together. Plan to attend the first union chapter meeting on your campus this fall and help to strategize on how to increase the pressure on your campus for a fair contract.

Resist the message that we are powerless; that is a management lie. As a union of 25,000 people at one of the city's most important institutions, we have more power than many of us have imagined. But it's only by acting together that we can make our power felt.

We need a viable economic offer now.