



**EXTRA!**  
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**PAGE 6**

# PSC to CUNY: NO MORE EXCUSES!

After more than a year in office, Chancellor James B. Milliken has failed to offer a single dollar for raises or back pay, despite the fact that CUNY faculty and staff have worked without a raise for nearly six years. Consequently, the PSC is stepping up its efforts to achieve a fair

settlement with "a new level of resistance" and "an escalating series of actions," as PSC President Barbara Bowen described the union's plans to members. These include a mass protest and a major disruptive action.

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## **2016 ELECTION** **Controversial endorsement**

When the AFT Executive Council took a vote to give a boost to Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, many members took exception.

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## **WALKING IT BACK** **Faulty metrics**

Responding to opposition from the PSC, AFT and college leaders, the Obama administration amends its college ratings scheme.

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## **NEW OFFICERS** **New perspectives**

Nivedita Majumdar, PSC secretary, and Sharon Persinger, the union's new treasurer, discuss their paths to activism and hopes for the future.

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## **BLACK LIVES MATTER** **Surveillance revealed**

Experts in policing and racial justice weigh in on news of the collection of information on BLM activists by the NYPD and transit police.

**PAGE 10**



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 61 BROADWAY, 15TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10006. EMAIL: ASTAN@PSCMAIL.ORG

# Ocean of disinformation on climate

● Almost a year has passed since the September 2014 People's Climate March, which was supported by our union. The important UN-sponsored conference on climate change in Paris is only a few months away. How good are its chances to limit the coming climate catastrophes? Not good at all, as things stand.

In 1997, about the time of the Kyoto negotiations, US policy, as clearly signaled by deeds more than words, was to do nothing about the problem. There has been no change since, and the world has had to put up with it.

As for the global accord to be concluded in Paris, there is no talk of common legislation or common financing. Governments are in the process of submitting plans for their targets on greenhouse gas reductions. *The New York Times*

reported on these (tinyurl.com/nytclimateconf), and notes that experts say targets are almost certainly insufficient. That's all. Is there any hope left? The situation is widely known; now we also have *Laudato Si*, the encyclical of Pope Francis, in which he tells it like it is. There are positive initiatives by President Obama, by Mayor de Blasio, but there is also an ocean of disinformation. Our best chance lies in spreading correct information as widely as possible. *Clarion* could have a part in this.

Adam Koranyi  
Lehman College

*Clarion* Editor Adele M. Stan responds: *Clarion welcomes articles from members who are engaged in the fight against climate change and the battle for sustainability. Send us a pitch at the email listed above.*

## Corrections to July 2015 issue

In a caption for the photo at the bottom of page 6, we mistakenly labeled PSC member Marjaline Vizcarrondo (second from right, top row) as a student. We regret the error.

On page 7, the photograph of Alex Vitale (bottom, right) should have been credited to Stephen Lovekin, not Dave Sanders.

In the byline and photo credit for Alice Ollstein's page 9 article, "Scott Walker's war on the University of Wisconsin," the author's name was misspelled.

## 40 years of research unheeded

● The important and well-reasoned article by Shomial Ahmad, "Student surveys under scrutiny" in the July 2015 issue of *Clarion*, brought to mind that serious discussion and research about this topic has been going on at least since the 1970s. In a 1972 issue of *Science* magazine, psychologist Miriam Rodin and mathematician Burton Rodin published an article titled "Student Evaluations of Teachers" that noted, "Students rate most highly instructors from whom they learn the least."

Here are two quotes taken from the end of their paper that I believe reflect their conclusions: 1) "There is evidence that student evaluations, to a large extent, tend to reflect the personal and social qualities of an instructor, 'who he [or she] is' rather than 'what he [or she] does.'" 2) "The major defense for defining good teaching in terms of good scores on the student evaluation forms is based on an analogy between the student and the consumer ... However, the present data indicate that students are less than perfect judges of teaching effectiveness if the latter is measured by how much they have learned."

As Ahmad's article points out, a valid measure of student evaluations for teachers has not yet been devised, and I am not sure that one ever will be given the difficulty of validating such an instrument. If such an instrument could be devised, it might be useful as a feedback mechanism for improvement. But with the increasing and simplistic desire of administrators to reduce a teacher's competence to a single number, it behooves all instructors and the union to be very careful in how student evaluations are allowed to be used.

If readers have difficulty in finding copies of the full text of the articles mentioned, I would be happy to supply them by email ([hcarroll123@comcast.net](mailto:hcarroll123@comcast.net)).

Harvey F. Carroll (emeritus)  
Kingsborough Community College

## Pricey keys at Hostos

● Thank you for publishing the July 2015 article regarding our key replacement policy at Hostos and its fee rates. At our last Labor Management meeting in May, we brought to the attention of David Gómez, then the Hostos acting president, the problem of this long-running policy with its high replacement fees. The policy has been in place since before Dolores Fernández was our president (1999-2008). With the other Executive Council members of our chapter, I asked Dr. Gómez to revisit this policy and consider eliminating this punitive approach, which stands in contrast to the modest fees charged for replacement keys at other CUNY institutions. We are looking forward to our first Labor Management Meeting with Dr. Gómez, now our newly appointed president, to learn of his decision concerning our request to bring Hostos' key fees in line with those of the other colleges.

A point of clarification regarding your story: Although the fee the college administration charges faculty and staff for the replacement of master keys is indeed \$100 (including bathroom keys), the fee that I was charged for the lost key to my office was \$25, as it was not a master. Nevertheless, compared with the fees charged for replacement keys at all the other CUNY campuses, which range from \$0 to \$15, our key replacement fees are much higher.

Lizette Colón  
Hostos CC Chapter Chair

## CUNY IN BRIEF

### New heads of CUNY colleges

The CUNY Board of Trustees appointed two new presidents to community colleges this summer. David Gómez, who has spent decades working within the CUNY system as a senior administrator and a professor, became president of Hostos Community College. Thomas Isekenegebe was chosen to lead Bronx Community College. He most recently served as president of Cumberland County College, a New Jersey community college. At Brooklyn College a search is underway to replace President Karen Gould, who announced that she will retire at the end of the academic year.

Gómez, a Bronx resident, spent more than a decade at Hostos Community College in senior administrative positions, including dean of the college, interim dean of academic affairs and special assistant to the president for management and planning. He went on to hold several senior administrative positions at Kingsborough Community College, including provost and interim vice president for academic affairs. Most recently, Gómez served as the interim president of Hostos.

BCC's Isekenegebe led Cumberland County College for more than five years. In that role, he directed the redesign of remedial courses at the college and developed partnerships with neighboring high schools to align curriculum in English and math. Isekenegebe has also been a leader in data-driven academic programs, CUNY Newswire notes. In a 2011 interview posted on NJ.com, Isekenegebe voiced his support for the DREAM Act, and singled out the anti-union film "Waiting for Superman" as a good movie about education and "reform that is needed."

## A letter to our readers

It is a great privilege to edit *Clarion*, the newspaper of PSC members, especially as you engage in a battle for the future of public higher education. It's an understatement to say that Peter Hogness, who retired as editor this summer, will be a tough act to follow, but I shall do my best.

My aim is simply to continue to provide the same great mix of stories and information that *Clarion* has long presented – news and features about topics of critical importance to you in this age of disinvestment in public education, in addition to the profiles and human interest stories that share with our readers the projects and advocacy work of PSC individuals and groups. And, of course, we will continue to welcome your essays and letters to these pages.

I come to this position with a background in both labor and journalism; a lifelong member of the labor movement, I devoted much of my career to chronicling the right wing of American politics for progressive and liberal media outlets. Most recently, I served as

*The American Prospect's* senior editor.

As a product of New Jersey's public education system (from kindergarten through college), my passion is strong for the fight you are waging, a fight for the resources fundamental to providing students with the education they deserve – a fair contract for you, adequately funded facilities and departments, and a workload and class sizes that ensure an academic environment that is conducive to learning.

More than anything, I wish to continue *Clarion's* grand tradition as an advocacy tool for the educators and education professionals who bring such dedication to their work at CUNY, one of the nation's greatest public education systems, and for the cause of providing higher education to the working people of the City of New York.

As always, *Clarion* is your newspaper. Please don't hesitate to contact me with your letters, essays, story ideas and tips at [astan@pscmail.org](mailto:astan@pscmail.org).

–Adele M. Stan



## Sept. 12: March with your union

Celebrate labor and join union members from across the city in this year's Labor Day March, which will take place on Saturday, September 12. Join bus drivers and supermarket workers, teachers and health care workers, and all who make New York City work. The PSC will assemble at 11 am on 45th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues. We'll be building solidarity and bringing visibility to our own struggle to get a just contract, so we can continue to educate the whole of New York.

# AFT's Clinton endorsement controversy

By ADELE M. STAN

When the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) announced its endorsement of Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton on July 11, social media and news commentary lit up with the anger of those who saw the early nod as a shot in the arm to a candidate whose positions are less aligned with labor than those of her nearest competitor, Bernie Sanders, the United States senator from Vermont. Sanders, who defines himself as a socialist, has been moving up in the polls and drawing large and enthusiastic crowds at campaign events.

But others saw it as a smart, politically savvy move on the part of AFT President Randi Weingarten, a longtime Clinton ally. The early endorsement is the first by a national union in the 2016 presidential race. Weingarten sits on the board of the pro-Clinton super PAC Priorities USA Action.

"This is not a step the AFT has taken lightly, but the 2016 presidential election is already underway," reads a statement on the AFT website. "There are important issues facing this country, and the debate on those issues is taking shape. In order to best affect the debate, the AFT and our members must engage now."

## PSC DISSENT

PSC President Barbara Bowen is one of three among the 45-member AFT Executive Council who voted against the Clinton endorsement.

"I voted and spoke against the resolution because I felt that an early endorsement of Clinton would help to foreclose debate and progressive critique within the Democratic Party; it would further the sense that the nomination of Clinton is inevitable," Bowen told *Clarion*. "At just the moment when a socialist candidate within the Democratic Party is mounting a serious challenge to the failure of Democrats to offer an alternative to austerity politics and endless war, an AFT endorsement of Clinton would be read as an attempt to make sure the challenge does not succeed."

Many other AFT Executive Council members, however, spoke strongly in favor of an early Clinton endorsement, especially those from battleground states, where leaders felt it was crucial to start building support as early as possible for a Democratic candidate and policies that would defend public education and services.

## AN EARLY ENDORSEMENT

In an interview given to *The New York Times* the day the endorsement was announced, Weingarten noted that during Clinton's tenure in the US Senate, the presidential hopeful earned a 100 percent rating from AFT. Weingarten also told the *Times* that members were telling her that Clinton would "make the country a fairer place for working people." The AFT endorsement resolution cites Clinton's longtime support for public education and health care.

Bowen stated her concern that a

## Bowen votes against resolution



Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton takes questions from AFT President Randi Weingarten (left) and members of the AFT Executive Council on July 11.

Clinton endorsement at this stage could be counter to the direct interests of AFT members. In a statement posted on the website of the California Federation of Teachers (CFT), Executive Council member and CFT President Joshua Pechthalt, who voted with Bowen against the endorsement, concurred.

"[T]he progressive movement would best be served by delaying an endorsement for as long as possible," he wrote, because it would allow the Sanders message to shape the Democratic campaign.

"Bernie Sanders and growing Left populist movements could push Clinton to the left on such fundamental issues as education policy and higher ed funding," Bowen said. "An endorsement sends the message that she does not have to move in a more progressive direction."

"The resolution itself is something I cannot support," Bowen continued. "It says that Hillary Clinton 'shares our values.' While Clinton clearly shares certain values with

our members, a candidate who voted for the war in Iraq and then explained her vote as 'a mistake' is not one whose values are fully shared by them."

## Foreclosing progressive critique of Democratic Party

Despite news reports of a request to union affiliates from AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka to refrain from making endorsements until the AFL had vetted candidates at its own Executive Council meeting later in July, Weingarten and the AFT Executive Council forged ahead with the endorsement vote, citing a poll of AFT members conducted in June, which Weingarten said showed overwhelming support for the former secretary of state in the 2016 presidential primary contest. But that polling was likely conducted at least a month after the AFT informed the AFL-CIO of its intention to make an endorsement. AFL-CIO rules for endorsements by affiliate unions require the affiliate to serve 60 days' notice of the intention to endorse. Accord-

ing to a July 16 *Politico* report, AFT followed that protocol.

On the AFT's Facebook page, members made their displeasure known. "This endorsement is an outrageous attempt by Clinton cronies in the AFT to derail Bernie Sanders before the primaries," wrote Carolyn Boutte of Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Steve Schmitz of San Diego, California, summed it up this way: "Rescind this endorsement, unless your goal was to unite your troops against both your leadership and Clinton."

Weingarten took to Twitter to defend the endorsement. "By more than 3-1 margin, our members who vote in D primaries told us to endorse @HillaryClinton."

In his CFT statement, Pechthalt sounded a note of caution to those threatening either to leave the union or to withhold their political contribution in protest.

"While I understand the frustration felt by members about endorsements, I disagree that withholding one's political contribution or quitting the union is an effective way to

change the union's politics," Pechthalt wrote.

He also noted the irony of how a revolt from the left feeds the agenda of the right, which is fighting on all fronts – including in an upcoming Supreme Court case (see page 8) – to deprive public-sector unions of resources.

But Pechthalt and Lee Saunders, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and chair of the AFL-CIO's Political Committee, noted that AFT's process followed the union's and the AFL-CIO's democratic process. AFT rules allow a membership vote at the union's annual convention to determine the union's endorsement of a presidential candidate in the general election, but primary season endorsements are left to the AFT Executive Council. This year's AFT primary endorsement, however, comes uncharacteristically early. In the 2008 cycle (the last time Democrats had a contested primary), the union held off making a primary endorsement until October 2007.

## VAGUE ON TPP

When Clinton appeared before the AFL-CIO Political Committee a mere two weeks after winning the AFT endorsement, she remained vague about her position on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal championed by President Barack Obama, which the AFL-CIO opposes. Also appearing before the committee, Bernie Sanders and former Maryland governor Martin O'Malley, another Democratic presidential contender, made clear their opposition to the deal.

If the AFL-CIO Executive Council puts forward an endorsement for the Democratic nomination – and AFL-CIO Richard Trumka has hinted that it may not – it is not expected to come until late in the primary process.

# \$51 million CUNY budget shortfall

## Colleges face greater austerity

As CUNY's fiscal year drew to a close this summer, administrators at the senior colleges began to grapple with a \$51 million budget shortfall, thanks to the failure of the state to fund mandatory increases in expenditures for the colleges, including building rents and energy costs. In addition, CUNY management claimed that anticipated costs of a contract settlement with the PSC would be responsible for further budget strain.

## THREE PERCENT CUT

When asked by *Clarion* to respond to word of a resulting \$3.2 million budget cut at the Graduate Center (GC), CUNY management issued a statement that confirmed the imposition of a 3 percent budget cut across the board for the 2015-16 academic year at all the senior colleges: "This action is required in part to retain flexibility to address

anticipated collective bargaining increases. CUNY is taking a number of steps to manage this reallocation, including significant reductions in non-personnel budgets and realizing savings in operations and increases in other non-tax levy revenues. This combination of measures will help mitigate the required reallocation, but the cuts will still be impactful."

"The last thing we need at CUNY is to ratchet up the level of austerity," said PSC President Barbara Bowen. "Students and academic programs will inevitably suffer."

## 'Students and academic programs will inevitably suffer.'

provides for steady public funding for CUNY's annual cost increases and contractual raises."

*Clarion* learned of these new austerity measures when Graduate Center President Chase Robinson sent a July 2 email message to the GC community, advising of the shortfall and his administration's plan for addressing it.

"Of course, core academic programs and activities will be the last place we will look to effect savings," Robinson wrote. "However, a cut of this magnitude, especially one that has been confirmed at the very last moment in our planning cycle, requires us to examine all expenditures. We have begun a thorough

review of all current and future costs, including OTPS (other than personal services), position replacements, and searches."

## USING RESERVES

At Baruch, the budget will be reduced by 1 percent because of a reserve the college accumulated through increased revenues in prior years, according to a July 16 message distributed to the college community by David Christy, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, and Katharine T. Cobb, vice president for administration and finance.

Nonetheless, the Baruch austerity plan carries its share of challenges, including severe restrictions on filling vacancies, and no release of vacancy savings. Christy and Cobb's joint statement noted: "Departments are urged to review how they deploy all staff."

—AMS

# New faces on CUNY Board

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Una Clarke, a long-serving City Council member nominated by Mayor Bill de Blasio, and Jill O'Donnell-Tormey, an executive at the nonprofit Cancer Research Institute (CRI) nominated by Governor Andrew Cuomo, joined the CUNY Board of Trustees this summer. Both bring academic experience to their new posts.

The 17-member board wields decision-making power on major university issues. It has the final say in approving the CUNY budget, tuition hikes and the PSC-CUNY contract. The board also exercises a role in setting curriculum; most recently it backed the Pathways agenda despite near-unanimous faculty opposition.

## AN ADVOCATE FOR EDUCATION

Clarke is Mayor de Blasio's first appointment to the board. She taught courses in education at Brooklyn College and Medgar Evers College, and from 1994 to 2001, she represented Brooklyn's 40th Coun-

## Both bring academic experience



Una Clarke

cil District, which includes Prospect Lefferts, Prospect Park South and Ditmas Park. A Caribbean American, Clarke was an active member of the City Council's Black and Hispanic Caucus. She sponsored hundreds of pieces of legislation on issues including education, child welfare and economic development. Recently, Clarke criticized the governor for



Jill O'Donnell-Tormey

failing to back initiatives that she says would benefit the city.

"It's clear that the governor is not supportive of the mayor and that's unfortunate," she told the *The New York Carib News*. "It hurts the city."

She holds a bachelor's of science from Long Island University and master's of education from New York University. She will serve as

a member of the board's standing Committee on Fiscal Affairs and the Subcommittee on Investment. Clarke is also the mother of Yvette Clarke, New York's 9th District representative in the US House of Representatives.

## HEAD OF SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTE

Jill O'Donnell-Tormey, appointed by the governor, fills a seat vacant since 2013. A resident of Staten Island, O'Donnell-Tormey is CEO and director of scientific affairs at the Cancer Research Institute in Manhattan. Prior to becoming an administrator at CRI, O'Donnell-Tormey was a research associate at the Weill Cornell Medical College and a postdoctoral fellow at Rockefeller University. With a BS degree in chemistry from Farleigh Dickinson University and a PhD in cell biology from SUNY Downstate Medical Center, she will serve on the Board's Standing Committee on Academic Policy, Program and Research.

Clarke replaces Joe Lhota, the former chairman of the Metropoli-

tan Transportation Authority and the Republican candidate in the 2013 mayoral race won by de Blasio. Lhota stepped down earlier this year after serving on the board since 2001.

The governor originally intended O'Donnell-Tormey's seat for former Staten Island Borough President James Molinaro, but Molinaro faced confirmation hurdles, in part for offensive remarks, including his comments on cutting funding for programs that benefit teen mothers, and for calling singer Lady Gaga a "slut" in a 2012 public speech.

By state law, political appointments to the CUNY Board of Trustees must be confirmed by the State Senate. Of the 17 board members, 10 are appointed by the governor, and five are appointed by the mayor. The chairperson of the University Student Sen-

## The board decides major CUNY issues.

ate also sits on the board, as does the chairperson of the University Faculty Senate in a non-voting capacity. The trustees nominated by the governor and mayor serve seven-year terms that can be renewed once. The first Board of Trustees meeting for the academic year is Thursday, October 1. The PSC has an action planned for that day. (See pages 6 and 7.)

# Cops spy on BLM activists

By ADELE M. STAN

At least three different police departments in New York City have turned their cameras and undercover officers on leaders and members of the Black Lives Matters (BLM) movement. The Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) and Metro-North Railroad police forces worked in coordination with intelligence officers at the New York City Police Department to photograph and profile participants in BLM protests in Grand Central Terminal and elsewhere, reports the news website *The Intercept*.

The surveillance appears to be in violation of a long-standing consent decree on the limits of information that police in the city are permitted to collect on members of dissident and protest movements.

Perhaps that is why the police documents revealed by *The Intercept* frame the spying on BLM activists as "counterterrorism" efforts — despite the fact that BLM protests have been peaceful, a fact police concede in their own accounts of movement activities. CUNY faculty and staff have been among the leading voices critical of the surveillance.

## DIVIDE AND CONQUER

"I think there's a two-pronged approach to this that is both racialized and intended to discourage any further criticism of the police," Delores Jones-Brown, professor of law, police science and criminal justice at John Jay College, told *Clarion*. "There's a notion [within law enforcement] that if we lump these [dissident] brown people... with the

## Effort to curtail the movement

brown people who are international terrorists, then we can divide and conquer, or at least block the kind of solidarity ... that I saw in some of the demonstrations that I've participated in against police."

Local Black Lives Matter leaders launched a series of large protests in response to the police killing of Eric Garner of Staten Island. Garner, an unarmed African-American man, died on July 17, 2014, when Officer Daniel Pantaleo, who is white, applied a chokehold to Garner's throat. The PSC put out a call to members to participate in the We Will Not Go Back March, prompted by Garner's death, that took place on Staten Island the following month, and PSC members continue to take part in BLM activities.

The actions of the police forces involved appear to violate the Handschu agreement, a 1985 consent decree that resulted from a case launched by attorney Barbara Handschu and members of dissident groups. The groups claimed a violation of their First Amendment rights after a 1971 case against members of the Black Panther Party revealed widespread police surveillance on antiwar and racial justice groups by New York City police. The ruling limited the NYPD's spying activities to organizations and individuals whom the department had reason to suspect of criminal activity.

Then in 2003, CUNY Law professor Steve Zeidman told WNYC re-

porter Soterios Johnson, the police department went to court to argue that the agreement should be vacated for the purpose of monitoring potential terrorists in the wake of the 2001 September 11 attacks. While the court did not grant the request in its entirety, it did dilute the agreement with language that leaves it open to interpretation.

## Profiling rank-and-file activists

"The NYPD pretty much seized upon the fear and anxiety, post 9/11, to remove or to relax the Handschu guidelines," Zeidman told WNYC. "Where before the police had to prove that they had specific information that a criminal act was about to take place before they could surveil or infiltrate dissident groups, the 2003 ruling allows police to spy for 'a reasonable indication' that a crime was about to or might occur," Zeidman said. "[It's a] much more relaxed standard that opened the door for this kind of monitoring."

The documents published by *The Intercept*, obtained through a Freedom of Information Law request filed by activists, cover the period from December 2014 to February 2015, with a focus on the People's Monday protests at Grand Central, the Midtown train station for Metro-North that sits atop major stops for several MTA subway lines. (The protests take place each week at varying locations throughout the city.)

"Historically, law enforcement, both local and national, have a track record of keeping files on activists, engaging in surveil-

lance, and targeting for excessive enforcement action people identified in leadership roles in social movement," Alex Vitale, associate professor of sociology at Brooklyn College, told *The Intercept*.

## NO COINCIDENCE

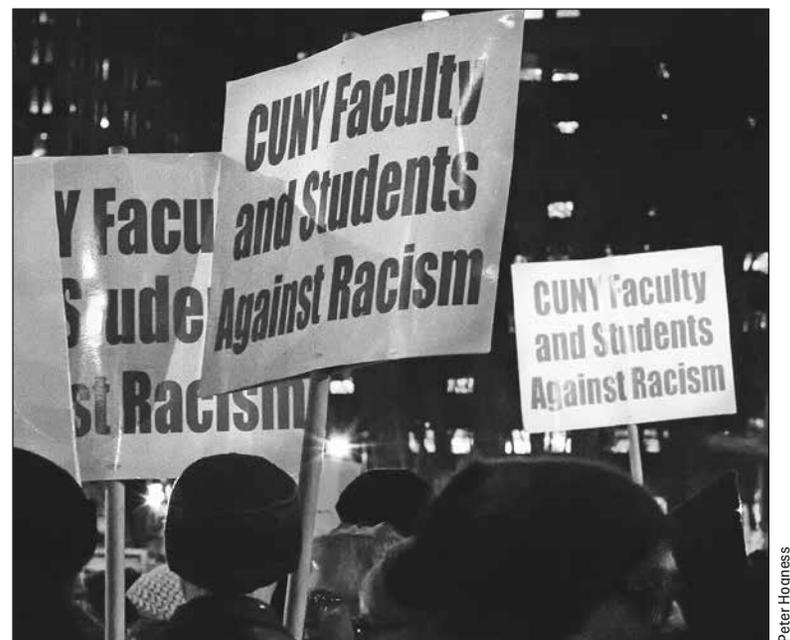
The fact that the Handschu agreement grew out of police spying on one movement for racial justice, and is now being defied to spy on another racial justice movement is not a simple coincidence, according to Jones-Brown, who is the founding director of John Jay's Center on Race, Crime and Justice.

"Unfortunately, with the notion of surveilling the Black Lives Matter movement, we get a modern-day, new-millennium manifestation of the racial legacy that America has never fully admitted to [or] attempted to address," Jones-Brown told *Clarion*.

"But it's not new," she explained. "The same thing happened during the civil rights movement of the 60s, where the folks who were most active in trying to get civil rights for African Americans were spied on and presented as these horrible people."

Paul Washington, a HEO at Medgar Evers and a longtime civil rights activist agrees, adding: "What the state fails to comprehend is that BLM is a protracted source of resistance. Just as in the 60s and 70s, it is not just a moment in history but a movement."

"I think most people would agree that there's precious little information and any sort of intel that anybody can point to as a result of all these efforts," Zeidman explained to WNYC's Johnson. "What's the gain? The cost is very real. People are afraid to exercise First Amendment rights; it chills free speech. It's essentially a scare tactic."



Union members at a December 4, 2014 protest in Foley Square to protest the killing of Eric Garner, a Staten Island man who died in a 2014 police confrontation.

# Chapter-building is key

By ADELE M. STAN

Long before Nivedita Majumdar became a professor, she was an activist for workers' rights. So it should come as no surprise that the recently elected PSC secretary comes to her new role with a focus on engaging the membership, as well as the students and communities served by PSC members.

"Chapter-building is our number one job," she told *Clarion* during an interview in her PSC office. "I think having a dynamic relationship between the leadership and the base is crucial to the development and growth of a robust union."

Having served as chapter chair at John Jay College before winning election to union-wide leadership, Majumdar knows of what she speaks. (She credits colleague John Pittman with functionally sharing the chapter chair position with her.)

## WORKLOAD REDUCTION

In 2014, the PSC chapter at John Jay, where Majumdar is an associate professor of English, won a significant victory on the issue of workload mitigation for full-time faculty. "Starting in 2014," she tells *Clarion*, "all post-tenure and CCE faculty members at John Jay, with a few reasonable exceptions, accrue 1.5 credits of reassigned time per year." It took a three-year campaign to achieve that victory, Majumdar says, but the win alone wasn't the most important result of the effort.

"By far, the most rewarding aspect of the campaign is that it dramatically increased the level of political awareness and participation among our members," Majumdar says, "and made John Jay one of the most dynamic PSC chapters."

Having begun her career as an adjunct at Hunter College, Majumdar is also aware of the differing needs of the various kinds of educators and education professionals represented by the PSC. She is keen to see the union focus on "building cohesion amongst our own constituencies within the union."

## BUILDING SOLIDARITY

"There are certain areas of tension, and there is some real basis to it," Majumdar explains. Nonetheless, she takes heart from her own experience. "Full-time members marched for adjunct health insurance," she says. "Adjuncts show up regularly for full-time concerns." The struggles and triumphs of HEOs and CLTs are also of critical importance to the CUNY educational experience, she contends.

"It cannot just be a rhetorical unity," she says. "It has to be something that we work on all the time."

Her gaze is cast beyond the PSC membership, as well. "We have to work on becoming relevant outside of ourselves," she adds, especially among students.

In her new position, she says, she takes the literal requirements of the

## New secretary of the PSC



Nivedita Majumdar

job very seriously, and is studying her copy of *Robert's Rules of Order*, a guide to parliamentary procedures. "It's important to be transparent,

democratic and make sure people's voices are heard." The official place where that happens, she points out, is in the minutes of meetings.

The CUNY mission of providing a liberal arts education to people of any social class is one that Majumdar, who identifies as a socialist, says requires union activism to maintain. "Not very many politicians or programs even voice that anymore," she says, noting a shift toward emphasizing technical education for working-class students, especially those from non-white and immigrant communities.

"It's subtle, but it's there throughout this politics [of austerity]," she says.

## COLLEGE ACTIVISM

Majumdar's activist life began while she was in college at the University of Delhi in India, and was elected vice-president of her college's student union, running on a left-wing slate that, she says, displaced a student regime that was "a right-wing bastion."

She hadn't intended to study English, or to become an academic. The child of a schoolteacher and a manager in an Indian conglomerate, Majumdar grew up in Delhi with a desire to study political science and

become a journalist. But when a friend convinced her that she could execute a wider political critique by becoming a scholar of literature, the trilingual Majumdar was sold. Her 2009 anthology, *The Other Side of Terror* (Oxford University Press), is a case in point, as are her many writings on topics ranging from nationalism to economics.

After receiving her master's in English from the same university, Majumdar worked with the Delhi-based People's Union for Democratic Rights, an organization that defends democratic rights of oppressed and marginalized groups. There, she met her future husband, Vivek

Chibber, who went on to become a sociologist and today teaches at New York University. (They live in the West Village with their 12-year-old daughter, Ananya.) It was his path that brought her to the United States and spurred her to pursue her PhD, which she earned at the University of Florida.

Almost immediately upon her arrival in Florida, a so-called "right-to-work" state, Majumdar became active with graduate student organizing. In 2000, she moved to New York with her husband and the following year, started teaching at Hunter. Once

Continued on page 12

# Born to organize

By ADELE M. STAN

Throughout her life, Sharon Persinger, the recently elected PSC treasurer, has found herself in positions deemed improbable for a West Virginia daughter of a pastor from a small, rural church and the granddaughter of a coal miner.

Her career in math and computer science, her degree from Princeton, her past as a radical peace and anti-nuclear activist, and her life in New York City – none of these was forecast for her.

Of her latest achievement, her election to PSC leadership, she told *Clarion*, "It still in some ways seems a little bit of a surprise to me..."

## 'GO AHEAD AND DO IT.'

Yet dig a little deeper, and clues emerge to the means by which Persinger has carved her path. Her page on the website of Bronx Community College (BCC), where she's an associate professor, features – in big, bold letters – a quotation from Grace Hopper, a pioneer in the development of computer languages: "Go ahead and do it, because it's much easier to apologize later than it is to get permission."

The obstacles facing women who seek careers in the hard sciences are well-documented; asked how she found the fortitude to follow her path, Persinger's eyes well up. The opportunities denied her mother and grandmother helped propel her, she says.

## The union's new treasurer



Sharon Persinger

Her maternal grandmother, she explains, had to quit school at age 13 in order to help take care of her family. And her mother, a good high school student who won a partial scholarship to college, ultimately couldn't attend because her family needed the income she could earn working.

"They didn't want to see that continuing in my life, they didn't want those opportunities to be lost for me," Persinger says. "And I guess I somehow internalized enough of that to be very persistent."

Persinger's union activism is also rooted in her family experience. Her grandfather was a member of the United Mine Workers of America, and after his health made it impossible to continue working, the union won benefits for miners with black lung disease that allowed him a more comfortable existence.

She learned as much about how to rally people in service of goal, however, from her father's line of work: being a pastor in a small town. "That's community organizing," she says.

After doing two years of undergraduate work at West Virginia University, Persinger transferred to Princeton. It was like being air-dropped into another world, Persinger says. "Princeton had just become coed, so I attributed a lot of the difficulties and confusion [I experienced there] to being about gender," she explains. "I really wasn't all that class-aware. It took getting through there, and then reflecting later, to acknowledge how much of it was about class."

## BUILDING COMMITMENT

After graduation, Persinger came to New York to tutor at Hunter College, and enrolled at the CUNY Graduate Center to pursue her PhD. During her early years in the city, she worked with the Shad Alliance, participating in civil

disobedience designed to prevent Long Island's Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant from going on line. The activists won.

Persinger's work with the PSC began when she took a teaching position at Bronx Community College. She was content to remain an activist member of the rank and file, but she was asked to run as vice chair of the BCC chapter. When her chapter chair became pregnant, Persinger became the chapter's de facto leader, tasked with organizing a 2010 hearing on the BCC campus about the CUNY budget and the impact of austerity on CUNY campuses. "I had great assistance from the organizing staff here," she says of the PSC.

At Bronx Community College, austerity measures made a profound impact on the PSC's new treasurer. "The floor that has the chemistry labs had all the ceiling tiles falling in, and leaks from the roof," Persinger says, adding that the message this sent to CUNY

students is that "the work you're doing just isn't that important."

Although BCC has seen some improvement in the physical plant over the last several years, Persinger hastens to add that "there are still unmet needs throughout the (CUNY) system."

Perhaps that's one reason why she sees the future of PSC at its grassroots. "Any union's strength is in its membership and it is proportional to the activity, to the dedication, to the real commitment of the membership," she says. So, in addition to tending to the financial health of the PSC, she says, "that's what I want to be working on: building members' commitment to their union."

## Committed to building an active union

# No contract = bad deal

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

It's been nearly six years that PSC members have been working without a raise. The stagnant wages, the austerity conditions, the doing-more-with-less mind-set have all hurt CUNY – especially its students – in significant ways.

Since the expiration of the last contract in October 2010, housing and transportation costs have steadily increased while wages have remained stagnant, leading to worries about retaining talented faculty and forcing many who work at CUNY to live far from their place of employment. When educators can't afford to fully take part in their college communities, students are the ones who ultimately suffer.

Between 2011 and 2014, median rents in the city outpaced the rate of inflation. Meanwhile, PSC members are stuck at 2010 levels of compensation. According to the US Census Bureau, when utility costs are included in the calculation, median rental housing costs in New York City rose during that period by 4.3 percent. Over the last year, it has only gotten

## Learning conditions suffer amid retention fears

worse, according to real estate expert Jonathan Miller, who writes in the Elliman Report that between January 2014 and January 2015, the median Manhattan rent rose by 5.9 percent, while the median rent in Queens soared by more than 30 percent.

Department heads and program administrators tell *Clarion* they have had trouble recruiting top candidates. Several prominent academics have recently left CUNY, touching off a new round of worries about retention in the absence of a contract.

Here, CUNY faculty share how working five years without a contract affects their work lives and their ability to give students the educational experience they deserve. There are more stories than we can include here; future issues of *Clarion* will include reports from other faculty and staff about the cost to CUNY students of management's failure to settle a contract. *Clarion* wants to hear from you: To share your story, contact Editor Adele Stan at [astan@pscmail.org](mailto:astan@pscmail.org).

### XIANGDONG LI PROFESSOR, COMPUTER SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY

NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

I am in charge of computer and network security courses at the Department of Computer Systems Technology. We offer 24 sections of classes each year and there's increasing demand for our courses. However, I am the only full-time faculty member in the department who teaches these sections; all others are taught by adjunct faculty.

We have tried very hard to hire new and qualified full-time faculty members in this field, but failed. If I retire in a few years, I am not sure these courses can be provided by the department. Five years ago, our security program was competitive with those at NYU Polytechnic, Pace University and New York Institute of Technology, but now we are getting weaker and weaker due to the lack of qualified full-time faculty. [People at other institutions

know that] we have not gotten a raise in six years, while the cost of living, transportation and food have increased each year. I'm worried that our lack of salary increases will continue to make it difficult to recruit faculty, and our department will continue to suffer.

### HEATHER ROBINSON ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, ENGLISH YORK COLLEGE

Our stagnant pay is impacting my department in terms of on-campus presence for full-time faculty. I live in New Jersey, partly because of the lower cost of living. My days at York are long because I try to commute to the college as few times a week as possible; tolls and train fares keep rising, but our salaries stay the same. Starting this fall, going to campus three days a week on the train brings my weekly commuting cost to more than \$120. I can drive, but the tolls keep going up, too. The lack of a contract means that tele-



Rebekah Johnson (center) holds a sign in solidarity.

commuting for certain aspects of my job is the only financially feasible option.

Some of my colleagues have also moved out of the city. They come to

# Join the fight for your contract

The new academic year begins with a new level of resistance by PSC-CUNY members to the failure of CUNY management to make an offer for a contract.

The union is not sitting still. "Starting on the first day of this new academic year, the union will accept no more excuses," PSC President Barbara Bowen told members.

The new term begins with an escalating series of actions, starting with emergency campus meetings, a demonstration outside the building where Chancellor James Milliken lives in a luxurious apartment – for which CUNY pays \$19,500 a month – and a mass disruption later in the

fall. In between, there will be teach-ins and teach-outs, and training available to union members on disruptive protest tactics and militant picket lines.

To be part of the action, mark dates for union-wide actions listed below and check the listings by campus for activities in your chapter.

To make a commitment to fight for your contract, sign up at [tinyurl.com/escalate-psc](http://tinyurl.com/escalate-psc).

Check the PSC calendar, which will be continually updated at [www.psc-cuny.org/calendar](http://www.psc-cuny.org/calendar).

In PSC's six full bargaining sessions (and a dozen smaller negotiation meetings) since the union

made a salary proposal in May, CUNY management has not moved to put money on the table. While almost every public employee union in the state has settled its contract this year, PSC members, who have been working without raises for nearly six years, are still waiting. Chancellor Milliken said in February that a new contract and retroactive raises are a priority, but change has yet to come.

For more information, contact your chapter chair (see [tinyurl.com/PSC-chapter-chairs](http://tinyurl.com/PSC-chapter-chairs)) or PSC Organizing Director Deirdre Brill at [dbrill@pscmail.org](mailto:dbrill@pscmail.org).

## UNION-WIDE ACTIONS

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1** / Wake-up Call for Chancellor Milliken protest outside his expensive apartment – for which the people of New York pay \$234,000 a year (on top of the chancellor's \$670,000 salary) – on the morning of the CUNY Board of Trustees' first meeting of the school year.

**OCTOBER 19 – 30** / Teach-In, Teach-Out, Teach CUNY on CUNY campuses. Two weeks of local actions and activist curriculum.

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4** / Disruptive Mass Action

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19** / PSC Mass Meeting



## CAMPUS & CHAPTER MEETINGS

**BARUCH** | Tuesday, September 8 / 12:30 – 2:30 pm / Room VC 14-250

**BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE** | Thursday, September 10 / 12:00 – 1:50 pm / Room LH 36

**BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE** | Wednesday, September 16 / 2:00 pm / Room N452

**BROOKLYN COLLEGE** | Thursday, September 10 / 12:30 – 2:00 pm / 222 Whitehead Hall



**BROOKLYN EOC** | Tuesday, September 8 / 3:15 – 4:30 pm / Room 304

**CENTRAL OFFICE** | Wednesday, September 9 / 12:30 – 1:30 pm / Fifth floor training area, 395 Hudson Street

**CITY COLLEGE** | Thursday, September 17 / 12:15 pm / Room NAC 4-220B

**CITY TECH** | Thursday, September 17 / 12:45 – 2:00 pm / Room N-1002

**COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND** | Tuesday, September 8 / 2:30 – 4:00 pm / Room 1P 201



**THE GRADUATE CENTER** | Thursday, September 10 / 12:30 – 2:00 pm / Room 9204-6

**GUTTMAN** | Wednesday, September 16 / 6:15 – 7:30 pm / Room 401

**HOSTOS** | Wednesday, September 16 / 2:30 pm / Room B503

**HUNTER** | Wednesday, September 9 / 1:00 – 3:00 pm / FDA Lounge, Eighth Floor West

**JOHN JAY** | Tuesday, September 8 / 1:30 pm / Ninth Floor Conference Room



# ... for students



...arity with adjuncts at a March 31 rally this year.

campus less often because commuting costs make coming to campus tough. That means students have fewer opportunities for face-to-face time with us – fewer chance meetings in the hallways, and less participation by faculty in extra-curricular activities. As deputy chair of my department and writing program director (reassigned-time roles I'm filling because of faculty

attrition) I would like to be on campus more often, but the lack of a new contract means that it's just not possible.

**IVELISSE RODRIGUEZ**  
FORMER ASST. PROFESSOR, ENGLISH  
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Being Puerto Rican, I think it is important for students to see role models who look like them. I came to CUNY because I wanted to work in a more diverse environment and I got that at BMCC. I taught English composition, and each semester the typical class size was 29 students – an excessive number for a writing course. I couldn't effectively teach writing with a class that large. Students come in with many writing issues, such as problems with grammar and essay organization. For many, English is their second language. At times, I would have more than 90 papers submitted within a single week. When giving feedback to students, I would sometimes have to go with my surface-level thoughts rather than going deeper because I had to keep grading. I felt that the workload didn't allow me to do right by my students. It was exhausting, and I felt that I spent most of my time working. I resigned this past spring because I felt there was no work-life balance.

**REBEKAH JOHNSON**  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,  
EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE  
ACQUISITION

LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
I am considering leaving CUNY because the cost of living in New York City is too high, and our salaries, due to our lack of a contract, are not keeping pace. While our salaries remain stuck at 2010 levels, rent is

increasing at a ridiculous rate, and it's difficult to manage other costs, like childcare for my two-year-old son and paying back student loans. It's increasingly impossible, especially for young families, to live in this city now.

I know one colleague who left New York City and CUNY because he and his wife could not afford good housing for their two children and themselves. Now I'm expecting a second child and we really need to move out of our one-bedroom place, but I don't know if I can afford a bigger one. If I move out of the city, my commuting time will increase, which means more childcare costs and more time away from my children. I don't want to leave my job; I love my job! I just became an associate professor and I'm on the tenure track. I'm excited about getting to the point where I am designing my own course content. I like teaching and serving the students of the city. But I'm wondering if I can afford to live in the city with my two kids. I just don't know.

**JASON SCHULMAN**  
ADJUNCT ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,  
POLITICAL SCIENCE  
LEHMAN COLLEGE

I have worked as an adjunct at Lehman for 10 years. The head of the political science department has been very good to me, ensuring that my reappointment each semester is all but guaranteed. But I am still an adjunct. I have not been offered a full-time tenure-track position. If CUNY schools were funded such that more tenure-track jobs were offered, I suspect this would not be the case and I would be at least a full-time assistant professor in the political science department by now. As it stands, I have had to look for outside work at non-CUNY schools in order to supplement my low income at Lehman. Even with that additional income, I make around \$30,000 a year. In New York City, that simply isn't enough, and if I didn't live with a partner who makes more than twice what I do, I'd be in serious trouble. I work hard. I've worked hard for years. I deserve to be paid a hell of a lot more than I'm currently being paid. And so do my adjunct colleagues at all the CUNY schools. It's time for CUNY to start paying up.

**CAROLE HARRIS**  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, ENGLISH  
NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

I was promoted to associate professor at the same time that my rent increased by \$275, so the raise in salary that came with the new position has been completely eaten up by the cost of my rent. I live in a rent-stabilized one-bedroom in South Slope, but my rent, which



Carole Harris (center) marching with her students at the People's Climate March.

was \$1,700 when I moved in 2010, has still increased significantly in recent years. With my most recent lease, my rent increased by another \$100. I had to turn down a modest apartment that completely suited my needs because the rent was too high. I need to move to a less expensive neighborhood, but I fear being priced out of that new neighborhood down the road. Just consider, in July 2010 I was paying \$1,100 per month in rent for my old apartment; in August 2015 I am paying \$2,200. I'm not willing to

move every five years, and I may not be able to afford to buy in New York City. I have devoted my life to higher education, and now, just as I have achieved job security, I'm reckoning with the fact that I can barely afford to live in this city. I feel like I'm living as provisional a life as I did in graduate school, with no chance of saving for the future. It's scary. Worries such as these make it difficult to find the peace of mind required to do the research and writing that make a successful academic career.

## Negotiations continue for a fair contract

By CLARION STAFF

The PSC Negotiations Committee continued to meet with CUNY through the summer months on non-economic issues, particularly job advancement for HEOs and job security for adjuncts.

"Despite CUNY's complete lack of progress on economic issues, PSC pressure has produced some real movement on these two non-economic issues – both long-standing PSC priorities," said PSC President Barbara Bowen. "More movement is needed, but the union bargaining team has countered many of management's objections and engaged in detailed discussion of the changes we demand. Discussions need to be finalized; it is time for Chancellor James Milliken to reach agreement."

To the union's proposal for wage increases, put forward at a bargaining session in May, there has been no response on the part of the University. "At this point," Bowen said, "with nearly all other state and city contracts settled for the period

since 2010, the failure of CUNY to make a salary proposal has to be understood as an attack on us, as CUNY employees." None of the other unions representing workers at CUNY have received an economic offer, either.

In a letter to members at the start of the 2015-16 academic year, Bowen stated, "Six years without a raise is unconscionable. There is simply no excuse." PSC leaders have laid out a plan for systematic escalation of pressure on Chancellor Milliken and the CUNY Board of Trustees to win a fair contract settlement and to resist the attack on CUNY faculty, staff and students.

**No excuse for six years without a raise.**



**KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE** | Monday, September 21 / 3:00 – 4:30 pm / Room M239

**LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE** | Thursday, September 3 / 12:15 – 1:00 pm / Little Theater

**LEHMAN** | Thursday, September 10 / 3:30 pm / APEX Conference Room

**MANHATTAN EOC** | Thursday, September 3 / 1:00 – 2:00 pm / Rooms 1509 and 1510

**MEDGAR EVERS** | Wednesday, September 9 / 11:30 – 12:30 pm / Room B2008

**QUEENS COLLEGE** | Wednesday, September 16 / 12:15 – 1:30 pm / Dome

**QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE** | Wednesday, September 2 / 12:00 pm / Faculty Dining Room

**YORK COLLEGE** | Thursday, August 27 / 12:00 – 1:50 pm / Room IM 06

**RETIRES** | Tuesday, September 8 / 1:00 – 3:00 pm / PSC Union Hall

# SCOTUS case could gut unions

By IAN MILLHISER  
ThinkProgress

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *The latest salvo in the right-wing assault on labor comes in the form of a case that many analysts see as an existential threat to public sector unions such as the PSC. Not surprisingly, the forces behind the case Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association include Charles and David Koch, the billionaire brothers who have wreaked havoc in Wisconsin and throughout the country by funding a network of "dark money" organizations – nonprofits that are not compelled to reveal their donors' names – that is dedicated to the destruction of the labor movement. The Friedrichs case is brought by the Center for Individual Rights, which has received funding through Koch-linked foundations, including the Claude R. Lambe Charitable Foundation, Donors Trust and Donors Capital Fund.*

Here we present the first in an ongoing series of articles exploring the Friedrichs case, the powers behind it, and the potential ramifications of the upcoming decision, which is expected in June.

In an expected but potentially devastating blow to public sector

## Public sector workers face threat

unions, the Supreme Court announced in June that it will hear a case called *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* in its next term. *Friedrichs*, as Justice Elena Kagan explained in a similar case last year, asks the justices to "impos[e] a right-to-work regime for all government employees" throughout the country, and it does so based on an aggressive reading of the First Amendment that could have absurd consequences for the government's relationship with its own employees. Should this case prevail, moreover, that decision could be an existential threat to many public sector unions, potentially draining them of the money they need to operate.

### FAIR SHARE

The primary issue at stake in *Friedrichs* is "fair share service fees," also known as "agency fees" – fees that unions charge to non-members in order to cover the costs of the bargaining on those non-members' behalf, as well as the provision of other services, such as the arbitration of grievances. Under well-es-

tablished law, public sector unions are required to bargain on behalf of every worker in a unionized shop, regardless of whether a specific worker elects to join the union. This means that union members and non-

### Bargaining requires a sophisticated team of experts.

members share alike in the benefits of working for a unionized employer.

And wages are only one aspect of the benefits workers receive through union representation. Unions may negotiate with management for the conditions in which workers perform their work, for the size of the workload and for benefits other than wages, such as health care, paid leave and retirement plans. When individual workers are treated unfairly by their employer, they can often pursue a grievance process with union representation that protects her from losing her job for lodging a complaint.

If workers were allowed to accept these improved working conditions or higher wages without having to pay anything in return, however, that would create a free-rider problem – where workers would have no

incentive to join the union because they benefit regardless of whether they are members. Eventually, the union would be starved for funds, and all workers would lose the collective benefits they gain from being unionized.

### SIGNIFICANT COSTS

To combat this problem, unions have historically charged agency fees to non-members in order to recoup the costs of bargaining or arbitrating differences with management on the behalf of non-members. These costs can be significant, as collective bargaining or the arbitration of grievances often require a sophisticated team of experts and lawyers who must be paid as professionals. *Friedrichs*, however, asks the Court to invalidate these agency fees – or, at least, to declare them optional – and permit non-members of a public sector union to gain many of the benefits of being in a union without having to pay for them. Should this case succeed, it would place enormous, potentially crippling, financial pressure on public sector unions.

The legal theory animating *Friedrichs* is rooted in the First Amendment's prohibitions on compelled speech. In essence, the plaintiffs claim unions engage in a form of

speech when they bargain on behalf of workers, and some of those workers may disagree with that speech. So requiring workers to fund collective bargaining amounts to a kind of compelled speech.

In *Harris v. Quinn*, the 2014 case that ultimately ended one union's ability to demand agency fees for its representation of home health-care workers, Justice Kagan offered a hypothetical that suggested the plaintiffs' free speech argument against unions could splash back on government employers, creating impediments to properly managing the workforce. Even Justice Antonin Scalia indicated in that same case that he found the First Amendment argument troubling.

The bad news for unions is that Scalia did not heed his own warning when he voted, along with the Court's four other conservatives, to limit many unions' ability to charge agency fees in the *Harris* case. Given that precedent, as well as a 2012 decision that also calls the viability of public sector agency fees into question, the future of agency fees looks grim.

*Ian Millhiser is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress Action Fund, editor of ThinkProgress Justice and the author of Injustices: The Supreme Court's History of Comforting the Comfortable and Afflicting the Afflicted. A version of this piece originally appeared at ThinkProgress.org.*

# What disability rights mean for you

By JARED HERST

For many workers, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), first passed into law 25 years ago, finally provided a clear and comprehensive elimination of disability-based discrimination in the workplace. New York City celebrated the silver anniversary of the ADA this year by hosting the first annual New York City Disability Pride Parade on July 12. The parade attracted thousands of onlookers, who cheered on about some 3,000 disabled parade participants.

The prevalence of such ADA hallmarks as ramps and elevators to provide access to people with limited mobility are among its most visible accomplishments, but the range of conditions covered by the law include many that are less obvious.

### LANDMARK LEGISLATION

The ADA defines a person with a disability as someone "who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment."

A basic tenet of the ADA is that many people with disabilities are capable of work, especially if they are provided "reasonable accommodation" that does not impose an "undue hardship" on their employers.

## 'Reasonable accommodation'



Participants in New York City's first Disability Pride Parade held July 12, 2015, commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

An undue hardship is described as an excessive cost, substantive enough to disrupt the fundamental nature or even operation of a business. One example of a reasonable accommodation is job restructuring. For example, let's say that someone who has a severe hearing impairment works in an office in which answering the phone is a non-essential job function of the position occupied by the disabled person, thus allowing the task to be reassigned to the employee's office colleagues. Another example for a person with a manual dis-

ability could be the provision of office equipment in the form of a telephone headset, adaptive light switches or even a speaker phone. For more examples of reasonable accommodation, go to [tinyurl.com/reasonaccom](http://tinyurl.com/reasonaccom).

### STRAIGHTFORWARD PROCESS

Susan Kopp, a veterinarian and professor at LaGuardia College who has presented at national education meetings on the proper handling of student disability issues, went through the process of requesting her own reasonable accommodation.

"The process was straightforward and collaborative between Human Resources and my own academic department, and all in accordance with ADA guidelines," she says.

### REDEFINED STANDARDS

The ADA's original mandate was bold in nature, but due to subsequent Supreme Court rulings, it came to be interpreted more narrowly. After the courts disqualified many claims of disability – even though the plaintiffs suffered from epilepsy, depression, diabetes and a range of other conditions that an average person might view as a disability – Congress realized the limiting effects these judicial interpretations were having and, in 2008, passed the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA), which both redefined and broadened the meaning of disability.

The ADAAA and the final regulations define a disability using a three-pronged approach:

- a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (sometimes referred to in the regulations as an "actual disability"), or
- a record of a physical or mental impairment that substantially limited a major life activity ("record of"), or
- when a covered entity takes an action prohibited by the ADA because of an actual or perceived impairment that is not both transitory and minor.

If you believe you may be eligible to receive a reasonable accommo-

## Your ADA rights

For further information about applying for a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as a potential or current CUNY employee, go to: [tinyurl.com/cunyreason](http://tinyurl.com/cunyreason).

If you feel you have been a victim of disability discrimination, contact immediately both the New York City Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in NYC to learn more about your rights.

### New York City Commission on Human Rights

40 Rector Street  
New York, NY 10006  
Phone: (212) 306-7500  
Discrimination Complaint Hotline:  
(212) 306-7450  
(An automated voicemail system responds to callers in English and Spanish.)

### Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

(EEOC) – New York District Office  
33 Whitehall Street  
New York, NY 10004  
Phone: (212) 336-3620  
TTY: (212) 336-3622

dation, contact your employer for information on the benefits afforded to you under the ADA and ADAAA.

*Jared Herst is the PSC's coordinator of pension and health benefits.*

## PSC, AFT OPPOSITION BEARS FRUIT

## Obama backs off college ratings plan

By DAVE SALDANA

When President Barack Obama announced a plan in 2013 to have the Department of Education rate colleges and universities by a “bang for the buck” measurement that was heavily weighted toward institutions with the lowest rate of tuition increase, the plan met with resistance from college administrators and faculty alike – especially those at public institutions of higher learning. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) was a leading force of opposition to the proposed ratings system, due in part to the system’s failure to take into account the austerity measures that are taking their toll on public colleges and universities.

The PSC weighed in early against the Obama proposal. As one in a small group of AFT leaders, PSC President Barbara Bowen met with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to voice those concerns. At the January 2014 meeting in Washington, DC, Bowen argued strongly against the proposed ranking system, which she described as a false solution to the real problem: systematic public disinvestment in higher education.

“Thirty percent of funding for public universities and colleges has been withdrawn over the last 25 years; the proposed ranking system pretends that the way to remedy the loss is to rate colleges on measures that are certain to disadvantage colleges already most disadvantaged,” she told the education secretary. “The only serious solution is to use federal influence and funding to restore state support.”

Now the president and his administration appear to be backing away from the original ratings plan, which would have rewarded, with federal aid, colleges best able to cap tuition increases and speed time to graduation – a scheme that clearly would have placed most public institutions at a disadvantage in the ratings. A new plan put forward by the Department of Education is designed to offer prospective students a range of tools for determining the best institution of higher learning for them.

## FLAWED METRICS

“Colleges that keep their tuition down and are providing high-quality education are the ones that are going to see their taxpayer money going up,” Obama told a packed arena at the University of Buffalo in 2013.

But opponents of the plan asked how public colleges can keep tuition down when state governments systematically reduce public funding. The AFT, PSC and many others opposed the plan because of its flawed metrics and failure to address public disinvestment in higher education. In particular, they objected to the proposal to grade institutions on the rate of tuition increases and the number of years students take to graduate, because of built-in limits on public institutions’ ability to change such outcomes.

Tuition costs at public colleges and universities are largely controlled by state and municipal budgets, not simply college administrators. Between 2008 and 2013, according to the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education, in which the PSC is active, “state funding for higher education as a percentage of state personal income declined by 22.6 percent.”



President Barack Obama introduces his proposed “bang for the buck” college ratings plan in a speech at the University of Buffalo on August 22, 2013.

The criticism appears to have been effective. In June, the *Washington Post* reported that the administration abandoned its original ratings plan in favor of an approach that offered prospective students a range of tools for evaluating which college best fits their needs and interests. The department’s new plan for constructing metrics for evaluating college and universities aims to provide a larger array of data more relevant to informing student choices, as well as a more complex and inclusive rating scheme that it says will be built to describe schools’ levels of success or failure in meeting various goals set by the department.

Notably removed from the plan is a government-sanctioned listing of “best to worst” institutional classifications along the lines of the annual *U.S. News & World Report* “Best colleges” feature.

The administration’s original plan “use[d] a single metric – cost – to determine a college’s worth, ignoring important issues and factors, including intellectual and academic strength; cultural, ethnic and racial diversity; and student support services and commitment,” says Stephen Brier, professor in urban education at the CUNY Graduate Center. “This is especially important in schools that draw a heavily urban student population that may have real academic deficiencies because of poor public schooling.”

## CONTINGENT AID

The *U.S. News* list ghettoizes certain institutions of higher education by marginalizing and stigmatizing schools that heavily enroll minority and low-income students. The Obama administration’s original plan threatened to exacerbate the existing stratification of colleges and universities. But this dynamic would be altered if the factors on which the original plan zeroed in are examined in context. Take, for example, the factor of the time a student takes to graduate from the date of

enrollment. Low-income students, who comprise the majority who study at many public higher education institutions, are far more likely to have their education disrupted for economic and other reasons.

But Obama’s original plan wasn’t just any ranking system. It had the federal government’s imprimatur, with its ratings attached to its purse strings. The original plan, for instance, proposed tying the size of a student’s Pell grant to the rating given to the institution the student attended, regardless of whether the college’s rating was the result of diminished public funding.

## CONSUMER MODEL

Equally important, the variables used to measure the effectiveness of an institution would have distorted the ratings by failing to assess, for example, the academic preparedness of its students. The plan also would have held educational institutions accountable for specific student outcomes without providing the public funding necessary to achieve such outcomes.

There is also the matter of whether higher education should be treated as simply another cash transaction, rated like a marketplace goods-and-services exchange. Even in its most benign form, this approach to higher ed contributes to the corporate model of education, which treats students more like customers than active learners.

Meanwhile, in public systems such as CUNY, faculty salaries stagnate, tenure-track positions disappear and underpaid, unprotected adjuncts pick up an increasing portion of the teaching workload, even as top-level administrators reap corporate-level payouts. These trends undermine the capacity of public higher education institutions to meet federally imposed goals.

The Campaign for the Future of Higher Education, a coalition of more than 60 academic unions (including the PSC), fac-

ulty associations and advocates for public education, was both direct and blunt regarding the capacity of the Obama plan to address the present crises of public higher education:

“President Obama’s plan endorses proposals that, at best, tinker around the edges of the problem and could have hugely negative consequences for students and for the future of higher education. In the absence of a mandate for increased investment, the president’s proposal to reduce time to graduation is likely to promote a cheapened curriculum. This is hardly a formula for increasing American competitiveness during an era of intensified global competition.”

## INVITING SCRUTINY

How the DOE plans to measure success in its revised plan will continue to invite scrutiny. Comparisons between elite colleges sitting on billion-dollar endowments and cash-strapped public universities are intrinsically unfair. Private colleges can often pick from the top of high school graduating classes; public institutions of higher education have statutory admission standards, which may include admitting students who enter college without adequate preparation.

To its credit, the DOE seemed to recognize the shortcomings of a ranking system in light of the many variables necessarily in play, even as it invited public comment on the president’s proposal. The new plan, according to the Department of Education website, will feature “easy-to-use tools that will provide students with more data than ever before to compare college costs and outcomes.” Some of the tools will feature data that has never before been published, promises Jamiene Studley, deputy under secretary of education and acting assistant secretary for postsecondary education, in a post on the department’s website.

The DOE also introduced its latest ratings system idea with a statement that suggests a greater appreciation for the complexity of assessing institutions of higher education: “For many reasons – including the desire for simplicity of the ratings system, institutional autonomy and differences, and lack of shared approaches and data – it seems preferable at this time to concentrate on the core data elements,” which it listed as “excel[ling] at enrolling students from all backgrounds, focus[ing] on maintaining affordability, and succeed[ing] at helping all students graduate.”

Still, the structure of the ratings system and its inherent fairness remains to be seen in the variables it chooses – relative to starved public institutions – to use or ignore. With no funding for increased maintenance costs, and the lack of a contract for faculty over the last six years, CUNY colleges could find themselves at a disadvantage in any ratings system, but still be the best bet for students coming from the working class, as its many successful graduates can attest.

Clarion contacted the Department of Education to address many of the issues surrounding the administration’s initial plan and the criticism leveled against the policy by faculty and administrators. A response was still pending as of press time.

Dave Saldana is an award-winning journalist, attorney and labor activist, as well as a former university adjunct.

## Plan ignored public disinvestment

## PETITION GARNERS HALF-MILLION SIGNATURES

# Hunter prof helps bring down Confederate flag

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

**K**aren Hunter doesn't really sign petitions, much less write them. But the day after nine black worshippers at a historic black church in Charleston, South Carolina, were murdered by 21-year-old Dylann Roof, the Hunter College distinguished lecturer penned a petition to "take down the Confederate flag" from the statehouse grounds. Roof, later revealed to be a white supremacist, was shown in photos with his car, which displayed three depictions of the secessionist battle standard on its front plate, along with the words "Confederate States of America."

Hunter, a journalism teacher and frequent commentator on MSNBC, learned of the massacre as news unfolded on June 17. The next day, flags around the South Carolina Statehouse flew at half-staff, but the Confederate flag, which was reintroduced to statehouse grounds during the battle to end segregation, flew at full-staff. Hunter felt compelled to do something.

## SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE

"I called [South Carolina Governor] Nikki Haley's office and said, 'I'm calling to get that flag taken down from the statehouse,'" Hunter recalled. "And the woman who answered the phone was like, 'You can't do that.'"

The seemingly insuperable obstacle, at least for the receptionist, who, like Hunter, is African American, was a law that requires an act of the state legislature for the flag to be removed. Still, the receptionist routed her call to someone else in the governor's office who took note of Hunter's opposition. For Hunter, whose mother hails from Georgia and whose grandfather suffered Jim Crow in South Carolina, that wasn't enough.

"When I hung up the phone I was thinking, 'So a million people could call and nothing is going to happen,'" Hunter told *Clarion*, which led her to ask, "What can I do?"

What she did was write a petition. Her inner editor told her what she constantly tells her journalism students at Hunter College: "Keep it simple, stupid." So she wrote a few direct sentences, published the petition via MoveOn.org, posted it on social media and went about her day.

## A SIMPLE PETITION

The petition simply read, "Symbols of hate and division have no place in our government. It's time to stand up for what's right and take down the Confederate flag!" The petition collected more than half a million signatures. As the effort gained media attention, pressure mounted on lawmakers. Five days after the massacre, Governor Nikki Haley called for removing the flag from the grounds of the state capitol. "A hundred and fifty years after the end of the Civil War, the time has come," Haley said at a press conference, passing the flag's fate to the state legislature where, weeks later, by a two-thirds majority in both chambers, re-



Karen Hunter speaks in front of the South Carolina Statehouse prior to delivering signed petitions to lawmakers, calling for the flag's removal from the capitol grounds.

moval of the flag from statehouse grounds was approved. By the end of July 10, the day the flag came down, Hunter's petition bore 572,439 signatures.

## ESCALATING PRESSURE

In the weeks following the Charleston church shooting, businesses including Walmart and eBay banned the sale of Confederate flags and related items. Ac-

tivist Bree Newsome scaled the 30-foot statehouse pole and brought the flag down with her as an act of protest. Jenny Horne, a Republican state lawmaker, gave an impassioned speech to her colleagues to remove the "symbol of hate," while everyday people from Gaston, South Carolina, to Loganville, Georgia, to Elysburg, Pennsylvania, signed the petition to take down the flag. Three days before the flag came

## She felt compelled to do something

### Clarion SEPTEMBER 2015

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down, Hunter and other activists holding boxes of her signed petition delivered them to Governor Haley's office.

As host of "The Karen Hunter Show," a two-hour-long radio program on SiriusXM's Urban View channel, Hunter offered a platform for the developing debate over the Southern battle standard.

Hunter refers to her show as an "action show," not a talk show. "I've always explored what's next, solutions and what we can do" as participants in civic life, Hunter told *Clarion*, from one of SiriusXM's conference rooms in Midtown Manhattan. She punctuated her points with taps on the table. "I didn't want to be the kind of shrill [commentator] that just railed on topics and did not bring people some hope [that they're] able to do something," she said.

## AN 'ACTION SHOW'

Hunter worked the Confederate flag topic on her show, inviting guests like Grady Brown, a South Carolina state representative and great-grandson of a Confederate soldier, and Bakari Sellers, a former South Carolina state lawmaker and son of a 1960s civil rights activist. Both wanted the flag removed. She also tweeted the names of state lawmakers who opposed the flag's removal and urged her listeners to reach out to them. Ultimately, those listeners helped bring the flag down. Once the petition had gathered a momentum of its own, Hunter told her listeners on a June 22 radio show, "This wasn't a Karen Hunter thing; it was a y'all thing."

Still, Hunter sees the removal of the Confederate flag as but a small step. "A petition isn't going to change a racist heart, but it did get the flag down," Hunter told her audience. "And that may not change a racist heart, but at least it sends a message to the people who live in this country that our lives do matter. And we shouldn't be disrespected."

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Hunter can get didactic on her show when she's imparting a truth that she's discovered or encouraging her listeners to make changes in their own personal lives. She conveys the same mix of life lessons and journalism in the classes she teaches at the college she coincidentally shares a name with. Her concrete goals are to have students master the lede, the opening sentence in a story. She wants students to be able to explain why a story matters, why it's newsworthy. But she also wants her students to get out of their cocoons and learn to connect with people, because it's through other people that they will find their stories and tell their stories. It's partly that connection to her audience, to her students and to others, she said, that led her to write the petition and to learn some things herself.

"It taught me that people are incredibly powerful when they come together and that there is strength in numbers," Hunter said. "Sometimes you can simply state a message and come together around it and change things."

Rainier Ehrhardt/Getty Images

## 14 YEARS OF PRINT &amp; PIXELS

## Headlines and deadlines

By PETER HOGNESS

I worked as editor of the PSC's newspaper *Clarion* from February of 2001 until my retirement this June. In that time, I edited 116 issues of the paper, and was glad to see it gain broad respect among PSC members and activists in other unions.

Some personal highlights – a grab bag of favorite moments, articles and interactions – follow below.

## REDESIGN

When I started as editor, the paper needed a thorough redesign. After considering several candidates, the union hired Canadian newspaper designer Tony Sutton, whose past clients ranged from the Toronto *Globe and Mail* to South Africa's National Union of Mineworkers. Tony's crisp, energetic design has served us well, and our award-winning production designer Margarita Aguilar has used it with flair.

## ANALYSIS

In addition to covering the news, *Clarion* tries to examine the story behind the news; we've aimed to provide analysis that helps union members understand the roots of the events around them. One such article looked closely at the history of CUNY tuition increases over the previous decade: It found that the accompanying cuts in public funding had left the University with less total revenue than before tuition was raised. Another article examined the claim that higher taxes on the rich will make them flee New York, and showed that this idea is unsupported by the data. In our September 2011 issue, a four-page special section on adjunct health care explained why the survival of this basic benefit was in danger, what had to be done to save it and why it was essential for the union, and the University, to do so. It took three years to win that campaign, thanks to union persistence that would not have been possible if members hadn't had a thorough understanding of the issue.

## POETRY

Mostly by poets at CUNY, but also by others. Often responding to injustice or common struggle, but not always. If someone were to ask me why a union newspaper would publish poetry, I'm not sure what I'd say beyond that it's always felt right to me – and that more newspapers, of all kinds, should think about doing so. I've let poetry drop out of the paper in the last couple of years, and I was glad to put poems into print again in our May 2015 issue.

## 9/11 &amp; SANDY

When disaster struck CUNY campuses, PSC members responded. *Clarion* covered their stories, reporting on how the 9/11 attack, and 12 years later a giant storm named Sandy, affected all at CUNY.

In 2001, faculty member Salar Abdoh (now at City College of New York) told us what it was like to be teaching across the street from the World Trade Center as its buildings were struck and began to burn. In Sandy's wake, York College's Eric Metcalf described how rising waters had flooded his basement and left his home without power or running water.



Amanda Magalhaes

Peter Hogness edited the union newspaper from 2001 to 2015.

We compiled the first list of CUNY employees killed when the WTC towers collapsed, seven people in all, and we described the lives they'd lived; we reported on the five members of the CUNY community who lost their lives when Sandy struck, and others who'd lost their homes. We covered how CUNY campuses were dealing with the massive impact of each event, with Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) hit the hardest both times. And we followed up with reports on how each of these events affected teaching, scholarship and activism throughout CUNY.

In the political backlash that followed 9/11, we examined how CUNY library faculty were affected by the Patriot Act's provisions for secret, warrantless surveillance of what library patrons are reading. We reported on a CUNY trustee's denunciation of an antiwar teach-in at City College as "seditious," and the PSC's defense of academic freedom in response. We reported the NYPD's detention of LaGuardia student Yasser Hussain, an immigrant from Pakistan, for taking photos of storefronts in Flushing for a class project in urban sociology. Hussain was held for five hours, unable to pick up his daughter from childcare or contact his family, while officers asked if he was related to Saddam Hussein.

As Sandy's floodwaters receded, we looked at how people at CUNY have been studying the problem of climate change and working to address it. From pitching a tent in the Arctic to studying the Greenland ice sheet to teaching a class on solar power systems at Bronx Community College, CUNY faculty and staff told us about their work and its heightened relevance to daily life in New York City. CUNY's response to Sandy included grassroots relief efforts by CUNY students, faculty and staff, as well as strong PSC participation in the People's Climate March last year; we covered these and more.

## Clarion's longtime editor retires

## YOUR CONTRACT RIGHTS

PSC members can't enforce their contract rights if they don't know what they are. From your right to have a union representative present at a disciplinary hearing to new contract provisions like paid parental leave, *Clarion* has understood that knowledge is power – and that a lack of knowledge can leave members powerless. Educating members on their rights is an ongoing process, and the union paper has been an important part of laying this foundation for a strong union.

## CUNY STUDENTS KILLED IN IRAQ

We chronicled the deaths of CUNY students killed in the war in Iraq. I wrote each of these six stories, and they were hard. Not wanting to add to an already impossible burden, I didn't contact their parents, sisters or brothers directly; instead, I reached out to a friend of the family and asked whether they might want to speak with me. Some family members did not, but others were glad to have the chance. The intensity of the resulting articles is hard to fit into a broad summary like this retrospective, but you can read one, about the life and death of BMCC student Hai Ming Hsia, online at [tinyurl.com/cuny-students-killed-in-iraq](http://tinyurl.com/cuny-students-killed-in-iraq).

## RACISM

*Clarion* has covered debate over the decline in black and Latino freshmen entering CUNY's "top tier" senior colleges, and has examined how race affects employment at CUNY. We've followed the national attacks in the courts on affirmative action in student admissions, and how the impact of the long-running recession has fallen hardest on workers of color. We've looked at how research by CUNY faculty became part of the successful lawsuit against the NYPD's stop-and-frisk program, and presented a range of voices on how the Black Lives Matter protests against police violence have made themselves felt in the classroom. While there is still room for improvement, the paper's coverage on this front has gotten stronger than in my first years as editor. Today, as official declarations of "color blindness" collide with growing protests against racial injustice, it's an especially important topic for consistent coverage in a union paper.

## MUCKRAKING

Ninfa Segarra, a member of the NYC Board of Education and a crony of then-Mayor Giuliani, was appointed in April 2000 as a vice president at the CUNY Research Foundation (RF). An interesting job title, since the RF had no president, nor any other vice presidents. Segarra's \$115,000-a-year salary came with an office at Baruch where she was almost never seen. When we filed a Freedom of Information Law request for her past work schedule, Segarra "refused to say how many hours a week she devoted to her CUNY job or list any concrete accomplishments from her 15-month tenure," as we told readers in December 2001. *Clarion's* reporting on what was essentially a no-show job was picked up by the *Daily News*, the *Post* and *Newsday*. By the end of December, Segarra had resigned from her CUNY "job" and been named by Giuliani to head the

NYC Police Museum – which coincidentally paid her \$115,000 a year.

Since then, *Clarion* has reported on Hunter College's acceptance of \$10,000 from Coach, Inc., in return for offering a course on how counterfeiting of luxury brands harms society. We covered how SUNY-Buffalo shuttered its "Shale Resources and Society Institute" after faculty charged that its programs were shaped by its corporate funders, energy companies intent on fracking in New York State. And we broke the news that Elsevier, one of the world's largest publishers of scientific journals, was funding efforts to stop action on climate change through its membership in the right-wing American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC (from which it has since resigned).

## WORTH 1,000 WORDS

Being *Clarion's* art director has been one of my favorite parts of the editor's job. Working with talented illustrators and creative photographers has been a pleasure; we've aimed to match text and image in a way that enhances both. (And I've been glad to work for a union that shares my aversion to the "grip-and-grin," the posed photos of top leadership that fill the pages of too many union publications.) We've also brought visual culture into the pages of *Clarion* with special features, like the one on the portfolio of silkscreen prints produced by Hunter's Center for Puerto Rican Studies for its 40th anniversary, or the excerpt from Seth Tobocman's comic book *Understanding the Crash*. Those visual features have been some of my favorite pieces in *Clarion*; looking back, I wish we'd done them more often.

## AWESOME ASSOCIATE EDITORS

In this article, I've most often used "we" when describing what *Clarion* has done. That's not the royal "we" – it just reflects the reality that a newspaper, as much as a film, is always the product of many hands and minds. I've been fortunate to work with outstanding associate editors – Tomio Geron, Dania Rajendra, John Tarleton and the paper's current associate editor, Shomial Ahmad – and they've been a central part of why *Clarion* has been named several times by the International Labor Communications Association as the nation's best local union newspaper.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Contributions from the PSC's elected leadership and from hundreds of PSC members have also been key to the paper's success. I've especially enjoyed seeing *Clarion's* Letters to the Editor section, which did not exist before I became editor, grow into an institution, a soapbox where members know they can have their say. For me it's consistently one of the most interesting parts of the paper, both to work on and to read.

I'd like to thank the hundreds of PSC members whose letters have kept page 2 lively. You can send your future letters to *Clarion's* new editor, Adele Stan, at [astan@pscmail.org](mailto:astan@pscmail.org). I'm glad to know I'm leaving the job of editor in such good hands.

I'll keep reading the letters column – but now I'll be doing so as a subscriber. I'm looking forward to it: Your letters will be the part of the paper that I read first.

A Q&A with Peter Hogness is at: [tinyurl.com/hogness](http://tinyurl.com/hogness).



## 15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

### Join the fight — with a click

Refuse to stand by while the quality of education for CUNY students is put at risk. Be a part of the campaign for your own contract. Join the battle as we step up the fight for fairness with a series of escalating actions, including Teach-Ins, Teach-Outs, leafleting and meetings on your campus. Unite

with your colleagues from across the CUNY system as we give Chancellor Milliken a wake-up call in Manhattan. Come to the union-wide meeting. Choose your spot and make your mark. How to stay apprised of plans as they evolve? It takes just minutes to sign up and say, "Count me in!" Go to: [tinyurl.com/escalate-psc](http://tinyurl.com/escalate-psc).

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### MASSACRED MINERS COMMEMORATED

# Remembering Marikana— and workers' struggles

By SHARON PERSINGER

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Three years ago, the land outside the Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana, South Africa, was the scene of brutal anti-worker violence when 34 striking miners were killed by police, in apparent collusion with the mine owners. It was a bitter turn for a nation emerging from apartheid, the racial segregation imposed by the white descendants of colonial rulers, and the new South Africa showed that the struggle for workers' rights and dignity had not been settled with the return of the nation to its people in 1994.

To commemorate the lives of the dozens who died in Marikana, and honor the 112 miners who sustained bullet wounds in the police attack — as well as the struggles of working people everywhere — the International Committee of PSC convened a rally outside the South African consulate in Manhattan's Murray Hill neighborhood on August 16, on the anniversary of the Marikana massacre.

A commission of inquiry, headed by retired judge Ian Farlam, was tasked by President Jacob Zuma with investigating the massacre, and conducted its proceedings in public for a total of 293 days, according to the Guardian. The resulting report contains material that is damning of police and the mining company, in addition to evidence that several individual miners committed acts of inexcusable violence.

Those who were cut down on August 16, 2012, were not among the violent protesters. Led by a rock driller known as Mambush, the miners were attempting to assemble on the land outside the shantytown where they lived when they were encircled by police, who shot them. The worst was reserved for Mambush, who took 14 bullets for being the leader of men doing the most dangerous of work in a fight for a decent wage.

The commission of inquiry delivered its final report to Zuma in March 2015; the president waited until June 26 to release it.

To PSC Treasurer Sharon Persinger, the incident at Marikana holds a special



Rallygoers outside the South African consulate surround the Rev. Herbert Daughtry of Brooklyn as he calls for justice for the slain workers of the Lonmin mine.

resonance. The granddaughter of a West Virginia coal miner, Persinger knows, firsthand, the difficulties faced by those who do the dangerous work of extracting riches from the earth. (See "Born to Organize," page 5.) Here, we present an adaptation of the remarks she delivered at the Remember Marikana! Rally.

I'm originally from West Virginia. I grew up in a community that had been a coal camp, surrounded by miners and, at that time, strongly unionized miners. So I want to make a connection between miners in the US and the workers who were slain at Marikana. When I started thinking about what I would say, I did just a little research to find that massacres of striking miners were once very common in the United States. Say the words Ludlow, Lattimer, the Columbine Mine, Anaconda Road and

the Battle of Blair Mountain, and those who know the history of US miners know that these references represent lives lost by hundreds of miners who were fighting

together for the right to a decent life. So I was led to think, why is this? Why did they risk so much? Well, miners have to work together; it's a very dangerous occupation. Whether you're underground or above, you're doing difficult work to wrest rock and minerals from the ground. It involves explosives and heavy equipment and roofs that could fall in on you. Miners were early to organize, and they organized for very basic things: a living wage, safe working conditions, health benefits for themselves and their retirees, the basics that all workers need to live. They understood they could win better working conditions only by working together with the solidarity of a union.

#### KEEPING SOLIDARITY

So they organize and they pressure and when they get nowhere, they go out on strike. Sometimes they win some things and sometimes they don't, and the police or the army gets called in and they shoot the striking miners.

Now for the connection to those of us here: Remember that you likely have a worker of this sort in your family history — I'm sure some of you do — you have a father or a mother who was a factory worker or a miner or a steel worker, and they organized for better pay and safe working conditions. That good job meant the realization of their desire that you, as their descendants, could get an education and didn't have to work in a mine or a factory or any of those places where you take your life in your hands every day when you go to work.

Remember that. Remember your connection to workers. Even if you're a high school teacher or a college professor, you're a worker and the child of workers, and I want you to keep that solidarity with them.

## New PSC secretary

Continued from page 5

there, it was only natural for her to seek out PSC meetings.

"I learned that we have one of the most progressive unions in the country, which was like, boy, did I luck out. What are the chances of that happening?" After finishing her doctoral degree, she was hired as an assistant professor at City Tech in 2004, where she worked until moving to John Jay in 2006. There she became a department representative to the chapter's executive committee,

and then became a member of the PSC Delegate Assembly the following year, before being elected to the chapter chair position in 2011.

While acknowledging that it is a particularly difficult political climate, Majumdar cautions progressives against being too impressed by the success enjoyed by the right and business interests in the recent past. "When the left wants to be populist and seriously organize, there is no one who can beat us," she says with a laugh.