

**For a  
class-struggle  
strategy  
in the fight to  
end adjunct  
poverty...**



**...and defeat CUNY's  
divide-and-conquer  
labor system**

**Bulletin on CCU perspectives  
and the  
fight for "7K"**



April 2019  
cunycontingents@gmail.com  
cunycontingents.wordpress.com

*Labor donated*

This bulletin is intended to contribute to discussion of perspectives advanced by CUNY Contingents Unite (CCU) in the struggle against the City University of New York's "two-tier" (in reality multi-tier) labor system. It consists of materials posted to the CCU listserv in February and March 2019. (Largely written in a personal capacity, they have been minimally edited for publication.) A central theme is the campaign for a minimum starting salary of \$7,000 per three-credit course for adjuncts, which has been taken up as an official demand of the Professional Staff Congress (CUNY faculty/staff union) in current contract negotiations. For more about the origins, goals and struggles of CUNY Contingents Unite, see [cunycontingents.wordpress.com](http://cunycontingents.wordpress.com), or write [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com). (Cover photo: CSEW)

\* \* \* \* \*

## **PART 1**

### **CCU Perspectives, the Special PSC Delegate Assembly Meeting, and "7K or Strike"**

10 February 2019

Dear CUNY contingents,

The PSC held a special Delegate Assembly at the union hall yesterday to discuss the 7K campaign. Members of the union leadership reported on the executive council's plans for next steps. Floor discussion on this was followed by campus breakout groups and then a report-back. Though turnout was substantial, it was not enough for a quorum, so resolutions were not entertained.

In lieu of an extensive report, I'll just note for now that CCU activists put forward the following proposal, which we distributed and spoke for:

"That the union call a march and rally for \$7K, to be held next month; that it intensively build this both on the campuses and through outreach to NYC labor, immigrant-rights, student and community organizations."

This is connected to the perspective for winning the 7K fight, outlined in several issues of the CCU newsletter, available on line here: [cunycontingents.wordpress.com](http://cunycontingents.wordpress.com)

To write the CCU, send your email to [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com)

In struggle,

Sándor John

---

14 February 2019

Dear CCU activists and friends:

I wanted to follow up on last Sunday's short post about the special PSC Delegate Assembly (DA) held the previous day (February 9). As reported in that message, CUNY Contingents Unite activists



At union protest, November 2015.

(Photo: opencuny.org)

distributed our proposal at the meeting, and spoke in favor of it during floor discussion. The CCU proposal was: “That the union call a march and rally for \$7K, to be held next month; that it intensively build this both on the campuses and through outreach to NYC labor, immigrant-rights, student and community organizations.”

There is more to be said about this proposal and how it fits into our overall perspectives, how it was received at the DA meeting, and other aspects of the discussion there. These notes seek to address some of those topics, but are not intended as a complete report on the meeting (nor are they made in any official capacity). I have linked a number of related items, for those seeking further information on the topics, as well as on the CCU’s own views and activities. I’m also hoping these notes will help generate material for upcoming issues of the CUNY Contingents Unite newsletter, *The Advance*. Speaking of which: If you’d like to help with writing, producing and/or distributing the newsletter, please write off-line to [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com).

***The CCU, 7K and the fight to eliminate the “two-tier” system:*** CUNY Contingents Unite was founded in September 2008, by adjuncts, HEOs and other PSC members who had led a campaign to “Vote No” on that year’s contract. Like others before and since, the 2008 contract not only continued, but actually *deepened* the intolerable inequalities of CUNY’s “two-tier” (actually multi-tier) labor system. This pattern set the stage for the present crisis of adjunct poverty, fueled by university bosses’ insatiable thirst for ever-growing “adjunctification,” on the basis of pay and conditions unlivable and intolerable for the contingent majority.

The formation of the CCU, coming out of adjuncts’ campaign to reject the sellout contract of 2008, was announced in the first issue of our newsletter, *The Advance* (November 2008). [Note: this and other items referred to in this bulletin are reproduced at the end, in Appendix II, in the order in which they are first mentioned in the text.]

Over a decade later, the “Statement of Purpose” published in that first issue of the newsletter remains strikingly pertinent, stating that the fight over the contract approved in September 2008 had

made clear yet again that “even when the PSC leadership formally declares adjunct issues a priority, this is repeatedly sacrificed in the face of administration intransigence.” Given that “contingent academic staff need stronger representation,” we outlined the need for what we called “a ‘functional entity’ within the PSC but not limited by present organizational structures.” In conclusion, we declared:

“It is our conviction that all faculty, full- and part-time, must stand together to build a strong PSC, in conjunction with other campus worker unions and the students, in order to ***defeat the Taylor Law and other weapons used against labor, defend public higher education and eliminate the two-tier academic labor system***” (emphasis added).

The goals and tasks laid out then are more urgent than ever today. This is no exaggeration, as can be seen from facts and figures in official materials vetted by the union leadership, with the PSC website ([psc-cuny.org/7K](http://psc-cuny.org/7K)) reporting that since 2000, “the number of adjuncts teaching at CUNY has almost doubled”; as of Fall 2017, “CUNY employed more than 15,000 adjunct faculty” compared to 7,500 “full-time” faculty. (A summary of figures, plus charts, is provided in the union’s official “Facts About CUNY Adjuncts” handout, in Appendix II.) Meanwhile, as the PSC website observes, the City University continues to pay adjuncts “a shamefully low wage” to “do the majority of its teaching.”

Facing unending and growing inequality, poverty pay, job instability and lousy work conditions, with crucial benefits lacking but disrespect and overwork more abundant than ever, years of struggle gave rise to the “7K” demand in 2014, and then its formal adoption by the union as part of the “bargaining agenda” in 2017. (In the second part of these notes I will discuss how this happened.) Today, “7K or Strike” has become an important banner of struggle.

To hammer out a strategy and tactics to ***win*** this struggle requires a systematic and serious evaluation of the social forces confronting each other in such a fight, the obstacles to be overcome, and how to build up the power and organization we need to do this. These tasks, in turn, can only be addressed through the fullest discussion and debate, that is, within the framework provided through the exercise of workers democracy.

Our proposal at the special meeting of the PSC Delegate Assembly on February 9 was based on this perspective. The following are some observations from and about the discussion there.

\* \* \* \* \*

***Uniting adjuncts and HEOs:*** One of the most important comments during floor discussion at the DA was made by a HEO from the Grad Center, who stressed that 7K is part of the broader fight to overcome the vast inequalities in pay and conditions separating different tiers of the CUNY workforce. [Note: HEO stands for Higher Education Officer, the job title of many CUNY administrative employees.] She made a powerful case for how winning a minimum of \$7,000 per 3-credit course for adjuncts is a burning question not for adjuncts alone, but specifically for HEOs, together with the rest of the union. (Here and elsewhere below I have had to paraphrase somewhat, since I don’t always have speakers’ exact words.)

Winning 7K for adjuncts, she pointed out, would be a big boost for HEOs’ own crucial needs and demands. Conversely, letting the divisive inequalities of CUNY’s labor system continue to grow and fester would pose real dangers to the union and all of us in it. It is not enough to preach unity, it is necessary to put it into practice, in the fight against those inequalities. She also expanded on a point that a number of others were making: When it comes to tackling the issue of adjuncts’ abysmally low pay,

“gradualism” won’t work: significant improvement on this front really does require a “leap,” and this must be stated frankly. Tackling the adjunct pay crisis cannot be postponed yet again; it is essential for building, strengthening and uniting the union.

This message was a welcome one for CCU activists and friends at the meeting. It is the kind of forthright approach we need much more of in this union. Part of the problem we have faced for a long time is that each contract signed by the leadership has in deeds (despite sentiments expressed to the contrary) capitulated to management’s divide-and-conquer tactics, by increasing inequalities between job sectors and further entrenching the multi-tier labor system. Those structural inequalities then keep getting reflected within the union itself (and the consciousness of many of its members). Only if those on the bottom of that labor system raise hell – persistently and in ways that are well-thought-out, effective, and above all based on the principles of solidarity between *all* union members and all the workers and oppressed – only then can things really start to shift.

***Adjuncts need to be well-informed about the struggles and demands of HEOs and all our union sisters and brothers:*** Most adjunct activists have seen ways in which CUNY’s divide-and-conquer labor system too often gets reflected in the outlook of some (OK, quite a few) of those in its upper tiers. After all, that’s a key part of how structural inequalities keep themselves going. This is an important obstacle to the fight for 7K, which *all* conscious unionists – “part”- and “full-time” faculty, HEOs, CLTs and others – must work together to overcome.

But the fact is that CUNY also keeps us divided through the ways in which tier, job-title and craft distinctions are, as well, often reflected among those on the bottom levels of this structure, within our union, and between sectors represented by different unions.<sup>1\*</sup> For example, as we said at the DA, many adjuncts (even some involved in organizing work) do not really know what HEOs (or CLTs, CLIP, CAs and other titles) do, or in some cases even what the letters stand for.<sup>2</sup> [*CLT = College Laboratory Technician; CLIP = CUNY Language Immersion Program teachers; CA = College Assistant.*] This needs to be overcome, particularly since it’s long been the case that the higher you look in the academic strata, the whiter it gets; whereas HEOs are the PSC sector with the highest proportion of African American and Latino union members.

So, as the classic question goes, “Who will educate the educators?” Well, *la lucha educa* (“struggle educates”), as the Puerto Rican teachers’ strike slogan goes. (See below.) As we keep seeing, our struggle for 7K demands systematic work to overcome the academic, craft-union-style and job-title divisions that stand in the way. This succinct explanation of what HEOs are, what they do, and some of the specific issues they face, can be a useful item in that effort: “Building Solidarity Across CUNY,” *The Advance*, February 2010 (see Appendix II).

***Undergrads and Our “No Tuition” Demand:*** A number of speakers from the floor at the DA emphasized the need to connect the fight for 7K with the concerns, needs and struggles of CUNY undergrads. The fact that this needs to happen much more clearly, systematically and widely than has been the case so far is a crucial point that we seek to highlight. In line with this, CCU activist Gordon (Lehman & GC) and I enthusiastically backed one of the comments made early on during the discussion: that linking up with CUNY undergrads must include fighting to restore the *tuition-free* status that CUNY had from its inception in 1847 through 1976.

---

\* Notes to Part 1 are on pages 11-12 of this bulletin.

Together with restoring open admissions, the demand for *no tuition* has always been a key part of the CCU's program (in contrast to tepid "freeze" tuition pleas à la NYPIRG et al.).

Linking this and "7K or Strike" together, as part of a real perspective for mass militant action bringing in the power of NYC's working class and oppressed, is vital to uniting with CUNY's 274,000 students, in a common struggle in which their enthusiasm, creativity and determination can be engaged, in a fight for the vital needs and demands of us all. But like all other aspects of laying the groundwork for a victorious mass struggle, especially if it means a strike, this is not going to just happen: it must be discussed, planned, put into practice, prepared and organized.

*"7K has to become a real 'cause' for us all"*: This was a vivid way of putting things, voiced by another union member during the discussion period at the DA, connecting with points about linking up with undergrads. For 7K to win, they argued, it needs to become "a real *cause*" not just for adjuncts "but for us all," not just in our union, but for "students and their families, and people in many communities."

This brings us back to the point that to prepare the way for actually winning 7K, we need to have a clear assessment of what forces will face off in this fight, all the more so when discussing the need for a strike that would be "illegal" according to New York State's vicious Taylor Law.

Against us are powerful opponents: the capitalist rulers and their hand-picked Board of Trustees and administration, their courts and repressive apparatus, and their politicians, who – Democrats and Republicans alike – have repeatedly enforced the Taylor Law against public-employee strikes. Appeals that they "do the right thing" or be "fair"; cloying Valentine's Day appeals to "show CUNY some love"; or other kinds of empty, liberal/reformist happy talk won't cut it. To the contrary, smoothing over the real clash of class interests, this kind of thing can only politically disarm, delude and disorient the union ranks. The same goes for poorly-conceived individual or small-group symbolic actions or publicity stunts, sometimes presented as a stand-in for effective, mass-based militancy.

The CUNY Board of Trustees and their Wall Street godfathers don't care about, and won't be moved, by any of that. When it comes to upholding and enforcing their class interests, as we said at the DA: they don't play. They won't be budged by moral suasion appeals or flash-in-the-pan symbolic tactics when it comes to something so "big and expensive" as 15,000 adjuncts getting \$7K per course, which their kept media will doubtless rail at as a "whopping 100% raise" – despite the fact that it still would only begin to approach something akin to a living wage.<sup>3</sup>

To get them to disgorge some of the millions, billions and trillions they're sitting on will take much more than ostensibly clever mottos, memes and jingles about love, fairness, "investing" in CUNY, and so forth. Again, it is a question of power. This reality cannot be evaded by those serious about a strike. Without telling it like it is, on this and other fronts, we will never convince the majority of the union, let alone others, and of CUNY students and their families, to join us in struggle. They have a lot at stake and can't afford to mess around, and neither can we.

For the union bureaucracy, the real obstacles that do exist serve as fuel for arguments against actually preparing for a strike to win 7K. *For those committed to fighting to win 7K*, it is necessary to systematically explain that a solid, massive, militant and well-prepared strike *can* win, even when up

against a vicious anti-strike law repeatedly applied by the courts and cops under both bosses' parties, if sufficient mass power is mobilized from *our* side.

***So where do we get the power to win?***

Adjuncts certainly can't do it on it our own. Winning over tenured/tenure track faculty, HEOs and other sectors is necessary and crucial – if there is to be a strike, it must be of the whole union – but not sufficient: we also need to win over our fellow CUNY employees who are members of DC 37 (clerical, maintenance, janitorial, etc.), of UNITE HERE (cafeteria workers), and of other unions, thousands of whom work at the City University. If there is a strike, we will need to ***shut CUNY down***. If you can't or won't do that, you lose. To do that, you need mass picket lines that no one crosses.



At December 2017 PSC contract march and rally. (Photo: CCU)

And that, at a huge university where we face the Taylor Law, requires solid, active backing from the rest of city labor, on those picket lines. It requires telling the truth that New York's capitalist rulers can get along for quite some time without lectures and exams being given and papers graded – but the center of finance capital ***can't*** get along without the transport and communications, power and sanitation, warehouse, food, tourism, healthcare, construction (like the 10,000 "Count Me In" protesters who took over Seventh Avenue last year) and other sectors with the power to shut the city down.

These are some of the reasons why it's imperative for us to see and state clearly that a strike must break through economistic, craft-union-style barriers that separate "our" fight as adjuncts from other job titles, "our" 7K demand from the burning needs of our sisters and brothers throughout the university, and "our" fight at CUNY from the rest of labor and the oppressed.

***Thus, uniting with the power of NYC's workers and oppressed is ABC practical sense and necessity for any serious strike strategy.*** Without this basic sense of class forces as part of a perspective for "7K or Strike" grounded in social reality, this powerful and important slogan would be denatured, emptied out and boiled down to little more than hot air and play-acting. The first step in mobilizing the workers power needed to win is to recognize this – organizing, starting now, with an eye both to key unionized sectors and the vast sectors of immigrant workers, largely still not unionized, whose super-exploited labor keeps this city running in a thousand ways; with youth fed up with racist oppression (like what we just saw at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, and so many others with increasingly urgent and pressing reasons to join together in an upheaval breaking down divisions between those "inside" and "outside" CUNY.

So we need to tell it like it is on this topic too. The basic perspective outlined above continues to be ignored, dismissed or resisted, in practice, by the official union bureaucracy. Why? Above all because it clashes with their obeisance to the Democrats, especially of the so-called "progressive" ilk. (As the New Caucus leadership boasted back in 2013, the PSC was the first public-employee union to endorse Bill de Blasio for mayor.) Yet not only adherents of the leadership's standpoint, but some of those critical or oppositional toward it, also view the fight from a narrow, inwardly-looking perspective, which can only serve to confine it within bounds that would, if maintained, lead to defeat. This too is among the

obstacles that need to be overcome by those seeking to hammer out an effective strategy, a process in which forthright debate and discussion of contrasting views is always essential.

***The proposal we put forward at the recent Delegate Assembly comes from the class-struggle orientation sketched out above.*** As noted, it calls for the union to have a mass march and rally for 7K, and “intensively build this both on the campuses and through outreach to NYC labor, immigrant-rights, student and community organizations.” This could be done in March (as initially suggested), or in April. The point is to do it. After the opening reports from PSC President Barbara Bowen and other officers, Gordon and I spoke for this from the floor, and sought opportunities to engage people in discussion during the break-out session. Some serious union activists from a number of campuses (including but not limited to adjuncts) liked what we were arguing for, and/or were interested in talking about it more.

However, approaches based on one or another kind of “moral suasion” of the powers that be, lobbying, symbolic “civil disobedience” instead of real mass struggle, or poorly conceived individual or small-group actions cut off from real social power, still unfortunately predominate among all too many; again, not only those adhering to the leadership’s stance but also many who are critical of or opposed to it. So CCUers and others oriented to class struggle have our work cut out for us, to patiently explain and win serious activists to a perspective for winning through systematically-prepared and organized, large-scale, militant, disciplined and effective class struggle.

\* \* \* \* \*

***Grade-ins and other campus actions:*** At the DA, Gordon and I also spoke in support of well-thought-out and organized campus protest actions like grade-ins, teach-ins, and other tactics that can help spread the word, especially among students, and build support. From everything we have seen and heard about the Brooklyn College grade-in, it was an important example of this for 7K supporters, that should be spread to other campuses (as seems to be happening).

\* \* \* \* \*

***Picket lines mean don’t cross, period; and why this is so important for us right now:*** Gordon and I both spoke on this topic, as it came up both at the DA and in recent adjunct meetings. Campus protests with signs that are not part of a strike and not intended to stop people from entering struck facilities should be called protests, not pickets. Thus at the DA, we very strongly urged that upcoming campus actions be called protests, protest actions or any other accurate name, not “picket lines,” or “pickets” or “informational pickets.” An “informational picket” is an oxymoron, and using such terms can only weaken and ultimately defeat labor action. The principle that picket lines mean don’t cross is a fundamental conquest of labor solidarity, crystallizing the experience of strikes – both those won and those lost at a terrible cost – going back well over a century, that built the union movement in this country. This most basic principle of labor struggle is terribly undermined by the “informational picket” term, made up by union bureaucrats to justify the very policies and sellouts that led the union movement to one disastrous defeat after another, reducing it to a shadow of its former size and power.

This is very far from a “semantic” question. We saw this recently in the Los Angeles teachers strike, where the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) union leadership instructed members not to stop people crossing the strike picket lines. Result: the schools stayed open. Again, as Gordon emphasized at the DA: ***If we go on strike at CUNY, we will need to shut CUNY down. To do so, we will need solid, real, massive picket lines that no one crosses.*** Going on strike is a collective action, which once decided upon must be enforced: no one goes in, it’s not an individual decision. To lay the groundwork for that,



everyone needs to understand that if there is a picket line, it must not be crossed, whereas the “informational picket line” business teaches the opposite, that it’s supposedly OK to do so.

When that happens, strikes lose, as was the case with the 2005 NYU strike and so many others. Indeed, that was one of the points the CCU made in its founding statement back in 2008, drawing lessons from the previous years’ “New York City strikes by graduate student staff at Columbia University and New York University [that] have been broken by hard-line administrations because they were not backed by other faculty and campus workers, even in different locals of the same union.”<sup>4</sup>

The point on picket lines is so straightforward that it was literally in the *New York Times* crossword puzzle this past Sunday, February 10: 35 down: “Picket line crosser.” Four letters. Correct answer: scab. With so many unions at CUNY, calling something a “picket” when it isn’t can encourage scabbing on other unions’ strikes. What if AFSCME, representing office, maintenance and cleaning workers, goes on strike and sets up picket lines? Then *everyone* must stay out, including faculty, students and other workers. Picket lines mean don’t cross. Otherwise, if campus life just goes on, the strike loses. And that would be the case for us if we go on strike and people have learned that picket lines are just “informational.” Moreover, talking about “informational picket lines” can seriously disorient, alienate and endanger unionists rightly imbued with the understanding of what real pickets mean, and even set some up for being disciplined or fired.

For all these reasons, we have earnestly asked, requested and urged, including at the DA, that campus protest actions, including those with signs, be called by their right name, and not “informational pickets.”

**At right: B&H Photo warehouse workers protest, NYC, October 2015. CCU activists helped bring out CUNY students and adjuncts to help build this intensive campaign by militant immigrant workers. (Photo: CSEW)**

\* \* \* \* \*

A second part of these notes will include more on the origin of the 7K demand; the implications of the Taylor Law that not only bans public-employee





Striking NYC school bus drivers and matrons march across Brooklyn Bridge, February 2013. (Photo: Michael Fleshman)

strikes but even advocating or “encouraging” them; on lessons of the last contract campaign (2010-2016), including the mass union meeting at Cooper Union and the strike authorization vote of 2016; and on why we have been forced to withdraw from the upcoming “CUNY-Wide ‘7K or Strike’ Conference,” which we initiated last November, as we would not agree to the outright ban on leftist literature that has now been imposed there. [See Appendix I.]

***La lucha educa:*** I think that this great motto, mentioned earlier, is a good place to wind up for now. I first heard it during the massive, militant and enormously inspiring strike of the Puerto Rican Teachers Federation (FMPR) in 2008.

This was an “illegal” strike going up Puerto Rico’s Law 45, known there as the “slave labor law.” Like New York State’s Taylor Law, it was set up to outlaw strikes and work stoppages; in fact, even voting for a strike was against Law 45. When I went to Puerto Rico in February 2008 to report on the strike and help build international solidarity with the FMPR, I’d never seen anything like it. I tried to bring some of what I’d seen and learned there into the collective process of forming the CCU seven months later. I had been involved in quite a few strikes over the years, including as a phone worker in Oakland during our bitter nationwide strike of 1983, when my friends and fellow Militant Action Caucus members, former Black Panther Lauren Mozee and Ray Palmiero, were arrested, fired and framed up on felony charges for defending the picket line against a racist scab.

But the FMPR strike was something else: a mass eruption of militancy and joyous, determined rebellion impossible to forget. It was very well organized, and it was incredibly courageous, reflecting a whole heritage of resistance and struggle against colonial oppression. Still, the obstacles were formidable, and the results were mixed, very far from a decisive victory. The main reason for this was

that the rest of the labor movement left the militant FMPR teachers to stand alone against the strike-breaking colonial government.

Today in the U.S., the ongoing wave of teachers strikes (Arizona, Colorado, Los Angeles, North Carolina, Oklahoma, West Virginia...) not only shows the willingness of education workers to struggle, but provides crucial experience, both positive and negative, that must be studied and – as genuine solidarity demands – critically assimilated. To choose one big example: the massive, powerful strike in Los Angeles, bringing in parents, community members and students as well as teachers, could and should have led to a major victory; but saddled with a class-collaborationist leadership and lacking membership control through elected strike committees, it ended with the union tops ramming through a sellout contract.<sup>5</sup> This contradiction can't be ignored; not just in the UTLA but throughout the union movement, it has to be resolved through building a class-struggle leadership.

I think it is very important that in our present struggle we collectively learn from education strikes not just here in the U.S. but internationally, like that 2008 strike of the Puerto Rican teachers; those of militant education workers in Brazil, in Mexico, particularly in Oaxaca; and elsewhere. This experience also includes large-scale university student strikes, such as those at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) in 2010 and 2018; in Quebec in 2012; and at the National University of Mexico (UNAM, my alma mater), where students together with campus workers occupied the huge “University City” for 10 months in 1999-2000, and, with the aid of “workers defense guards” from Mexico’s City’s electrical power workers union, defeated the attempt – ordered by the World Bank – to impose tuition.<sup>6</sup>

The lessons of all this broad experience are there for us to learn and use. The last thing we can afford to do would be to think that we can go it alone. Who will educate the educators? This is something we must do ourselves, but not on our own; *en la lucha*, inseparably from the struggle of all the exploited and oppressed, if we really want to win – which we must.

– Sándor John, 14 February 2019

---

1. As we've often noted, all university workers should be in one big university workers union, but that's a broader discussion.

2. For reasons discussed here and in our special newsletter issue on uniting HEO and adjunct struggles (*The Advance*, February 2010, in Appendix II), the term “HEO” is not always as familiar as it should be in adjunct organizing meetings. A “glossary of CUNYisms and other useful terms,” which lists and explains acronyms, employment classifications, bargaining units and unions at CUNY, may be found on line at [baruch.cuny.edu/hr/GlossaryofCUNYTerms.htm](http://baruch.cuny.edu/hr/GlossaryofCUNYTerms.htm)

3. The “MLA Recommendation on Minimum Per-Course Compensation for Part-Time Faculty Members” (May 2018, on line at [mla.org](http://mla.org)) now actually calls for a minimum of \$10,900 for a standard 3-credit-hour semester course. That would be a 240% increase from \$3,200. What this proves is not that our demand for \$7K is “nuts,” “unrealistic” or anything of the kind, but that expecting us to continue living on **29%** of the recommended *minimum* is nuts, unrealistic and intolerable. And don't even try telling us the money isn't there, in the world center of finance capital, with the ruling class rolling in dough. As for calculating what such unrealistic expectations mean in light of the cost of living in New York City, “fuggedaboutit.” (Actually don't, but people much better at math should take this on, and probably have.)

4. See *The Advance*, November 2008, in Appendix II. On the spirited, inspiring, but ultimately defeated NYU strike (November 2005-May 2006), and its relevance to CUNY, the “picket-line question” and other crucial topics, I recommend this leaflet that some of us distributed over the course of many days and weeks there: “NYU & CUNY: Strike to Win! (November 2015, on line at [internationalist.org/nyucunystriketowin0511.html](http://internationalist.org/nyucunystriketowin0511.html)). The strike is also the subject of this useful collection edited by Monika Krause, Andrew Ross and others: *The University Against Itself: The NYU Strike and the Future of the Academic Workplace* (Temple University Press: 2008).

5. See “Powerful L.A. Teachers Strike Was Betrayed in Settlement” (24 January) on Class Struggle Education Workers site ([edworkersunite.blogspot.com](http://edworkersunite.blogspot.com)).

6. “*La lucha educa*”: For those who would like to read more on some of these struggles, I’ll take the liberty of suggesting some first-hand reports and analysis written by myself and others associated with Class Struggle Education Workers and the CUNY Internationalist Clubs:

On the massive Puerto Rican teacher and student strikes of 2008-2012, see, at [internationalist.org](http://internationalist.org): “Tens of Thousands March in Puerto Rico on Eve of Teachers Strike” (February 2008); “Strike Challenged Slave Labor Law... Puerto Rican Teachers: Unbought and Unbowed” (June 2008); statement of solidarity from CUNY titled “Victory to University of Puerto Rico Student Strike!” (April 2010); “Puerto Rico: Beatings at the Sheraton” (May 2010); “First-Round Student Victory in University of Puerto Rico Strike” (June 2010). On the 2018 University of Puerto Rico strike, see Yari R.’s “University of Puerto Rico Students, Faculty and Workers Under Siege” (January 2018).

On Mexico and Brazil, see, at [edworkersunite.blogspot.com](http://edworkersunite.blogspot.com): “Message from Ayotzinapa Parents to CUNY Speak-Out Against Racist Repression” (August 2015); UFT activist Marjorie S.’s “Teachers Struggle in Oaxaca” (August 2015); and at [internationalist.org](http://internationalist.org): on the massacre at Nochixtlán, Oaxaca, “Mexican Teachers Strike Braves Murderous Repression” (June 2016); “Tri-National Day of Solidarity with Mexican and Brazilian Teachers” (August 2016); and “Brazil Teachers Strike Again for Freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal” (May 2008). I have many more such items on education struggles in Brazil, Mexico (including a full-length pamphlet on the 1999-2000 strike), Quebec and elsewhere. If you would like me to send you some of them, please write me off-line.

---

## PART 2

### Where the 7K Demand Came From and What It Means

3 March 2019

Dear CUNY contingents:

After some unavoidable delays, below is a second posting of some notes on CUNY Contingents Unite perspectives and the “7K” demand, arising from issues raised at last month’s special PSC Delegate Assembly on the union’s contract campaign. (The first part of these notes was posted on February 14.)

This part begins with discussion of an exchange with the union leadership at that February 9 DA meeting, regarding the relation between the 7K demand, how it emerged, and the long-standing general call for adjunct “equity.”

\* \* \* \* \*

**“Equity” + \$2.75 will get you 1 ride on the MTA, or: How the 7K demand arose.** The need for specific demands concretely advancing the struggle against adjunct poverty, instead of generalities about “equity,” was the background for the CCU initiating the fight for 7K in 2014.

The topic came up at last month’s special union Delegate Assembly, when PSC President Barbara Bowen rebuked CCUer Gordon Barnes (Lehman & GC) from the podium for implying that the PSC leadership had not *always* been for the 7K demand, since they have always been for adjunct “equity,” and ... 7K is equity. QED.

Well, no. “Equity” has no precise meaning. Oxforddictionaries.com defines it as “the quality of being fair and impartial.” That sounds nice, but you can’t pay your rent or buy your Metrocard with it. Thus, it is quite different from demands like “equal pay for equal work,” or “parity” (defined as equivalence). Particularly when it comes to contract negotiations, clear and precise language is crucial. I raised a “point of information,” asking that sister Bowen explain how the 7K demand was formulated, and came to be adopted by the union, but this was dismissed.

Yet systematic discussion on how to win the 7K demand needs to take into account the process through which it arose, gained support and was finally formally adopted by the union.

The 7K demand arose after years of organizing and struggle *by adjuncts* against low pay and two-tier labor – efforts carried out by a range of activists, currents and groupings within the adjunct milieu. Then in 2014, New Paltz SUNY unionists, members of United University Professions, launched a national campaign for \$5,000 minimum pay per 3-credit course for adjuncts. The CCU brought this to CUNY, where adjuncts then marched for the demand on May Day 2014. (See *The Advance*, May 2014, in Appendix II.) Then came the joint CCU/Adjunct Project CUNY-wide campaign that gathered 800 signatures for the demand.

And *then* came the August 2014 international Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) conference, where as a result of discussion of the experience of adjunct struggles in Canada, Mexico and across the U.S., we raised the bottom-line demand to a minimum of \$7,000 starting pay per 3-credit course. In a process described in the CCU newsletter (see *The Advance*, October 2017, in Appendix II), the 7K demand was launched when our resolution was overwhelmingly approved at that COCAL conference in August 2014.

The resolution resolved to endorse the call for

“achieving or surpassing a MINIMUM starting salary of at least \$7K per 3-credit course (or its equivalent) for all contingent academic employees in the U.S., combined with real job security and a seniority system; that this objective, despite being modest, is long overdue and needs to be implemented now, and that we support the struggle for this to be achieved in current contract negotiations.”

(It specified “in the U.S.” because in Canada some contingent academic employees had already surpassed the equivalent of 7K.)

This new demand, formulated in the slogan of **“7K minimum per course plus real job security for all adjuncts,”** was then systematically explained, publicized, popularized, pushed and fought for by

adjunct activists in fliers, newsletters, speeches, placards and posters throughout CUNY, and at all manner of meetings, marches, speak-outs and marches (like the September 2014 union rally pictured in *The Advance*, October 2017, in Appendix II).

It then took three *more* years of organizing and struggle for the union to actually formally adopt 7K as part of the official “PSC bargaining agenda” (available on line at [psc-cuny.org/contract/2017-psc-bargaining-agenda](http://psc-cuny.org/contract/2017-psc-bargaining-agenda)) in October 2017. Its inclusion in the current bargaining agenda was a step forward, which came from adjuncts raising hell, not vague and timeless generalities about “equity” or “fairness” (as if such a thing could even exist under capitalism anyway). *This* is the real history of the demand, and that history needs to be learned from, not obscured or ignored.

Getting the demand adopted by the union was an important step – but now the point is to organize and build the power needed to *win it*.

***The Taylor Law:*** This brings us to the Taylor Law, which CCU members also addressed at the special union DA last month. It is the vicious anti-labor New York State law that bans strikes and job actions by public employees such as ourselves – and even anything that would “cause, instigate, encourage, or condone” such a strike.

We brought this up to emphasize that to be able to go up against such a law and win, a real strategy for “7K or Strike” has to be based on bringing out the power of NYC workers and uniting massively with those throughout the city ground down by low pay, job insecurity and racist repression.

After the Taylor Law was brought up in floor discussion, President Bowen indicated that the union leadership wants to work with legislators to reform it by removing the parts explicitly banning strikes. A similar orientation was recently adopted by the New York State Nurses Association.

These are variants of New York State labor tops’ long-standing outlook regarding this law, seeing it as largely positive, reflecting what we’ve described as a “devil’s bargain” subordinating labor to the bosses’ state (and the Democratic and Republican parties that have not hesitated to use that law against labor), in “return” for “measures making it easier to bring in new membership sectors, collect dues, and ‘stabilize’ labor relations” (“The Taylor Law: What It Is and How to Smash It,” *The Advance*, April 2018, in Appendix II.)

We cannot win by playing by the bosses’ rules, and the strike ban won’t be lobbied away. You only have the rights you take and establish by struggle, and you can only hang on to them by exercising them. Labor gains its rights by using its class power to seize them and defeat the obstacles to using them. The ban must be broken and the Taylor Law smashed.

The point that this can only be done through powerful class struggle is a crucial focus of what the CCU has put forward over the years, and I think this message really is a crucial one today. Part of what this means, as we have noted, is explaining this point concretely: that New York’s capitalist rulers can get along for quite some time without us grading papers, but the center of finance capital can’t get along without the transport and communications, power and sanitation, warehouse, food, tourism, healthcare and other sectors with the power to shut it all down. So uniting with that power, together with large numbers of students and the oppressed throughout the city and beyond, is what’s needed when it comes to facing down and ripping up the Taylor Law. See the in-depth discussion of the Taylor Law in the above-mentioned special issue of the CCU newsletter (*The Advance*, April 2018, in Appendix II).

Meanwhile, as we have in the past, we continue to *break the ban* that the Taylor Law lays down on saying, writing and doing things to advocate, “instigate,” encourage or condone such an “illegal” strike. We do this in conversations, talks, teach-ins, speeches, and crucially in printed fliers, newsletters, pamphlets and papers. Anti-democratic bans like this are meant to be defied and broken, and again, we win and keep our rights by exercising them. Even in our own union’s hall, the union leadership has made it clear more than once that it did not like us handing out fliers (or even putting them on tables and chairs), and has sometimes even tried to prohibit this for us and others.

During last month’s DA, we handed out our fliers for “7K for Strike,” and in our comments during floor discussion we stressed the importance of such materials. That was both to highlight that workers democracy is a crucial tool for winning, and because we were facing the outright ban on all “leftist” printed matter that had, seemingly out of the blue, been imposed on the CUNY-Wide “7K or Strike” Conference.

Since lobbying capitalist politicians with talk of equity and fairness won’t get us 7K, there’s little doubt that labor militancy and actions condemned as too “radical” by the powers that be – like building toward a strike banned as “illegal” by the odious Taylor Law – is needed to get it. Yet such radical calls and militant labor actions have always been initiated and fought for by reds, going back to the 1877 labor upheaval, the strikes of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), the sit-down strikes of the 1930s and virtually everything else that actually built the unions in this country. It would thus seem more than apparent that censorship of militant, radical and leftist views is completely counterposed to organizing the kind of militant and radical action needed to win 7K. So needless to say, we could not go along with such a ban, least of all at a CUNY organizing conference, or the precedent it would set; and we were forced to withdraw from the event, which we had initiated last November. People asked us about this topic at the February 9 special DA meeting; some materials on it were included in a prior posting [see Appendix I]; and some of the background will arise in a broader context in a subsequent post.

***Oakland teachers strike:*** Meanwhile, a new experience of struggle has occurred in the Oakland teachers strike. Having lived for a long time, worked and been on strike in Oakland (though not as a teacher), I followed this closely, and I think many lessons can be learned from the teachers strike there. Like the one in Los Angeles, the Oakland strike was inspiring and enormously important in showing the will to struggle of education workers across the country, together with the active support they got from students, parents and community members.

But real solidarity has nothing in common with empty cheerleading or the fashion of calling everything a victory regardless of the real outcome. The fact is that the Oakland school strike was sold out, as was the one in L.A., by a leadership far more committed to conciliating the Democrats than winning what teachers and students need. So speaking of militant and leftist labor literature, I’d like to recommend two items about the Oakland strike on the Class Struggle Education Workers site. (I am doing so in a personal capacity, and they do not necessarily reflect the views of the CCU as such.) See: [edworkersunite.blogspot.com/2019/02/mobilize-bay-area-workers-to-win.html](http://edworkersunite.blogspot.com/2019/02/mobilize-bay-area-workers-to-win.html) and [edworkersunite.blogspot.com/2019/03/oakland-teachers-deal-stinks-vote-it.html](http://edworkersunite.blogspot.com/2019/03/oakland-teachers-deal-stinks-vote-it.html)

Though the contract ending the Oakland strike wound up being approved, 42% voted against it. Many are looking for answers on what happened and how to go forward. We here in New York need to learn from this too.

– SJ, 3 March 2019

CCU statement, 27 March 2019

## **The Taylor Law and the outrageous censorship of “7K or Strike” posters at John Jay College**

Since its foundation, CUNY Contingents Unite has called for defeating and ripping up New York State’s Taylor Law, through effective class-struggle action bringing in key sectors of NYC’s powerful working class.

This viciously anti-labor law bans strikes and job actions by public employees, including the workforce of the City University of New York. Not only that, the law says we are banned from things that would “cause, instigate, encourage, or condone such a strike” – something we advocate all the time, in virtually every issue of the CCU newsletter, in CCU fliers, placards at marches and rallies, speeches, etc. (See “The Taylor Law: What It Is and How to Smash It,” *The Advance*, April 2018 [in Appendix II].)

The law’s grotesquely anti-democratic ban on strike advocacy was invoked back in September 2005, in the midst of the years-long union contract battle going on at that time, when CUNY’s General Counsel Frederick P. Schaffer sent out an email message to all of us, stressing: “The Taylor Law provides sanctions against public employees who engage in a strike and against employee organizations that cause, instigate, encourage and/or condone a strike against a public employer.” He added: “The public employer [CUNY] may take disciplinary action, including termination of employment, against striking employees.” (Three months later, the law was used against striking MTA workers.)

Frederick “Strike Ban” Schaffer retired from CUNY in December 2016. In yet another example of the thoroughly bipartisan nature of anti-labor repression, he was thereupon appointed by Mayor Bill de Blasio as chairman of the city’s Campaign Finance Board.

Now, John Jay College has literally **banned** signs advocating that a strike be organized if the vital 7K demand is not met.

How is the administration “justifying” this ban? By citing the Taylor Law’s blatantly unconstitutional prohibition on advocating public-employee strikes.

After campus security at John Jay recently tore down a bunch of signs on 7K, the campus Director of Public Safety sent out an email on March 20 about the incident.

The key part of that email states that the administration’s “labor designee” told campus security that because a sign posted on campus had “advocated for a strike by faculty members, he advised all of those signs should be removed as they were in violation of the ‘Taylor Law.’ As such, the officers were told that if they were to come across these signs during their routine patrols, they should be removed.” (An excerpt from the law was attached to the memo, which also stated that signs not calling for a strike would not be torn down; went on about how “we are strong advocates for Freedom of Speech,” etc.)

This is a fresh and vivid example of why the Taylor Law must be smashed. *John Jay’s anti-labor, anti-democratic and unconstitutional censorship, banning material that “advocates for a strike by faculty members,” is an attack on the rights of us all. It must be denounced, opposed, challenged and reversed!*



## PART 3

### Learning from the experience of the 2010-16 contract campaign

29 March 2019

Dear CUNY contingents:

This is the last installment of notes on CCU perspectives, written in a personal capacity, two parts of which have been posted previously. We recently posted about the ban that John Jay College has declared on “7K or Strike” posters, which the college administration’s “labor designee” has justified by citing the Taylor Law’s prohibition on inciting, condoning, encouraging (etc.) strikes by public employees in New York State. [See box on previous page.] All of us at CUNY should hold the top university brass at CUNY Central responsible for this outrageous ban, and demand that this blatant attack on the democratic rights of us all be reversed immediately.

As noted in that and other postings, CUNY Contingents Unite newsletters, placards, fliers and other materials have long been advocating, encouraging, condoning, etc., the systematic and serious preparation of just such a strike at CUNY that the Taylor Law bans. That has been the case not just in this union contract fight but in the last PSC contract campaign, in which management dragged everything out for six years (2010-2016) without a new contract.

Let’s take a look at the experience of that 2010-16 contract campaign.

**1,400 signatures for our demands, and the struggle at the November 2010 DA:** The CCU went into that campaign in 2010 having gathered, in a common effort with the Adjunct Project, 1,400 signatures for our demands. Fifty adjuncts took them to the November 2010 union Delegate Assembly, where we fought for them to be adopted. Our serious, militant and persistent arguments resulted in a quarter of the delegates in the DA – favored terrain for the union bureaucracy and under its very close control – voting for our demands. (See report in *The Advance*, February 2011, in Appendix II.)

Nevertheless, at that DA meeting, the New Caucus PSC leadership rushed through its contract agenda, in which a real fight for significant adjunct gains was buried by vague calls for “equity.”

Over the subsequent years, as the contract fight dragged on, we continued to organize, agitate and mobilize for our demands, as part of the overall fight against adjunct poverty and for an end to CUNY’s horrendous “two-tier” labor system. While management sought to wear everyone out and let sentiment build (especially among the upper levels of the workforce) for some kind of settlement with some kind of raise, persistent organizing by adjuncts and other union activists opposed to the divide-and-conquer labor system got an increasing echo among the PSC membership.

**The November 2015 PSC mass meeting, attended by almost 1,000 union members:** After years of no new contract and no raise or improvement in intolerable conditions, union members were fed up, and the leadership was feeling more than a little heat. On 19 November 2015, the PSC held a **mass meeting of nearly 1,000 members, in preparation for a strike authorization vote, the first held by the union since 1973.**



At left: PSC mass meeting at Cooper Union, November 2015.  
(Photo: Dave Sanders)

The union leadership saw this both as a pressure tactic on management, and as a way to show the ranks that it was “doing something,” and actually escalating the contract campaign. While their intention was not to build for an actual strike, the authorization vote – for a strike that would be “illegal” if called – was an important moment for serious activists.

This meant showing in practice that we class-struggle oppositions are against the sell-out bureaucracy but are the most hard-core in standing *for* the union, against the Taylor Law; and that we stand *for* a real strike with the power –

built up both inside and “outside” CUNY – to break and defeat the ban on advocating and waging such a strike. It meant standing against the Democratic and Republican politicians whose job is to enforce the anti-labor law, as they had against the Transport Workers Union in the 2005 MTA strike. And – as we always seek to underline – it meant standing *for* bringing out massive numbers of undergrads and uniting with the decisive power of workers and the oppressed throughout the city, to shut things down, rip up the Taylor Law, and win.

We put out a special issue of the *CCU Advance* and handed it out to just about everyone who came to that November 2015 meeting. It highlighted our overall strategic outlook for the struggle, together with tactical measures to put this into effect. As a headline in that issue stated: “**Strike authorization? Absolutely! But it’s crucial that we actually prepare for a strike.**” The newsletter sought to explain concretely what that would mean. I think it is worth looking back at it, to see what we advocated in that hot situation. (See *The Advance*, November 2015 issue, in Appendix II.)

It’s also worth looking back at what happened at and after that November 2015 union mass meeting. Filling Cooper Union’s famous Great Hall, hundreds of those attending chanted enthusiastically, with many joining chants in which we called for an actual strike. Among the most enthusiastic were not only groups of adjuncts, but of some other sectors such as HEOs and CLIP teachers. The vital need for adjuncts to link up with the rest of the union ranks, and the opportunity to do so, was palpable.

As always, at this mass meeting the leadership worked to keep things under tight control, with filibustering speeches followed by an absurdly short discussion period and one-minute limits on speakers from the floor.

Resolutions – such as the one I put forward for the meeting to elect a strike preparation committee then and there – were simply ignored by the leadership. In contrast, determined and thoughtful members at the meeting were more than open to solid, serious proposals for mass militant action.

**What happened in the 2016 strike authorization vote:** The Cooper Union meeting was a prelude to, and part of building toward, the official union strike authorization vote.

It is important to review this experience as well. As noted, the CCU unambiguously, strongly and immediately called to vote “*Yes*” in the 2016 union strike authorization vote. Emphasizing the need to actually prepare for a real and effective strike, at the same time we warned of the union leadership

settling for a contract that, far from meeting the needs of those on the bottom of the labor system (adjuncts, HEOs, CLTs, Continuing Ed and others), would actually increase the inequalities. All of this was rooted in a *class* orientation and strategy, based on the history and lessons of working-class struggles, both those that have won and those that have been defeated.

But in putting forward this conception, we were not in a vacuum. For one thing, we had to answer adherents of the union’s New Caucus leadership who argued that criticizing it was “going against the union” or weakening the struggle. In response, we reiterated that the union does not equal the union bureaucracy; that the union is us, the members; that union democracy means real debate and discussion, including telling hard truths about real problems; and that the people on the bottom of the labor system know that there are acute problems in the union, and with contracts that keep widening the structural inequalities, and won’t come out to engage and change things on the basis of denying reality.

We also had to face some long-time adjuncts who had become so embittered that they argued against voting “yes” for strike authorization. In a few cases, some even threatened to “not strike,” given how bad things were for adjuncts. Needless to say, we emphasized the need for everyone to stand opposed to threats to scab on a strike.

As for how to vote in the official union strike authorization balloting, the CCU’s unambiguous call to vote “yes” stood counterposed to a bloc of some adjunct activists who decided to play games with this issue, refusing to call forthrightly for a “yes” vote.

When that vote was finally held in May 2016, **92% voted “Yes.”** This was very important. Among other things, it indicated that the ranks of the union were motivated and energized by the chance to vote in favor of authorizing a strike. Conversely, if the vote had *not* been in favor of authorizing a strike, it would have been a very big defeat for us all.

At right: Sticker from May 2016.



While the massive May 2016 vote in favor of strike authorization was still far from a strike actually being prepared and called, it remains a real reference point for struggle today, especially in light of the Taylor Law.

Today, virtually everyone in the adjunct organizing milieu retrospectively refers to the 92% “Yes” vote in the 2016 union strike authorization as an important reference point at CUNY. But at the time, as described above, the CCU had to wage a real political struggle in favor of voting “Yes.”

The need for what we have described as a militant, savvy and serious approach, based on understanding the distinction between the union and the labor bureaucracy, together with the need to go beyond the campuses to bring out the class power needed to win – all of this is underlined by the experience of the 2010-16 contract campaign. The strike authorization vote was an important test of orientation and outlook toward the union, the Taylor Law and the broader class struggle.

\* \* \* \* \*

In contrast, among those playing games with the question of the 2016 strike authorization vote were the leaders of a grouping of grad students that had come together under the name “CUNY Struggle.” They were instrumental in generating a separate “adjunct pledge” (billed on line as a pledge for an “adjunct strike”), which ignored the demands of non-instructional and blue-collar sectors, said nothing about the Taylor Law, but did state that “there’s no reason for adjuncts to strike” under prevailing conditions in the union.

We pointed out that this was a huge gift to management (and also to the union bureaucracy, which would use it to discredit adjunct oppositionists). Far from furthering the key needs and demands of adjuncts, its actual effect would be to reinforce the obstacles to achieving them. We were answered with smears – for example, that we were an “authoritarian sect” and so forth – drawn from the recipe-book of liberal anti-communism.

In March 2016, a CUNY organizing meeting with the unfortunate name of “People’s Assembly” was held at the Graduate Center, with the participation of a significant number of adjunct and student activists. At this assembly we put forward a resolution calling on all PSC members to unambiguously vote “yes” in the official union strike authorization vote. By this point we had essentially won the argument, and the motion passed by a virtually unanimous vote.

**Anti-communism and the ivory-tower worldview vs. workers democracy and class struggle:** In the aftermath of the controversy over the strike authorization vote, some from CUNY Struggle sheepishly averred that the CCU’s position on this hotly contested issue had been correct after all. A number of us thought they might have learned something from the experience, but that was not the case.

The anti-communist baiting (an age-old weapon used against class struggle) was revived when we called for activists to forthrightly oppose some embittered adjuncts’ threats to try to decertify the union, take it before the Public Employees Relations Board (PERB – the New York State agency responsible for enforcing the Taylor Law), and again in subsequent episodes. Meanwhile, though CUNY Struggle leaders were working at Hunter College, the grouping consistently ignored and boycotted actions supporting the struggles of janitorial, maintenance and cafeteria workers there. This was consistent with the aggressively middle-class academic social outlook that encourages adjuncts to pursue “their own” struggle in self-referential insularity – which means *losing*. (No doubt it also reflected petty factionalism, given that CCU activists, together with students from the Internationalist Club, were heavily involved in organizing support for these campus workers’ struggles.) [See, for example, in Appendix II: materials on the February 2016 Hunter protests against Governor Cuomo’s exclusion of CUNY workers from \$15 minimum wage; and *The Advance*, April 2018 and September-October 2018 issues.]

People sometimes ask why there are different adjunct organizing groups at CUNY. As in most kinds of organizing that involve significant challenges, obstacles and stakes, there are contrasting and sometimes counterposed strategies, outlooks and perspectives. Under conditions of workers democracy, these can and should be debated in order to clarify the issues and chart a way forward. One of the biggest obstacles in organizing on university campuses is the ivory-tower, academic-centered worldview encouraged in academia. Not infrequently, this is accompanied, when academics seek to organize themselves for collective goals, by animus against “outside” forces and agitators.

This outlook reproduces important aspects of bourgeois ideology, reflecting capitalist society’s division between manual and mental labor. This, in turn, overlaps (very notably at CUNY) with multi-tiered hierarchies of social status within the academic population itself. That is even more the case when it comes to academics’ relations with non-academic sectors, in which job title divisions strikingly overlap with racial/ethnic and gender oppression, immigration status, etc.

No struggle by adjuncts can win without taking this on and overcoming the insularity that capitalist academia encourages among education professionals who – though presently downwardly mobile and often driven into penury – are nonetheless awarded a much higher social status than those who clean the floors, change the light bulbs, do the typing and filing, cook and serve the food, etc. To even begin to overcome such obstacles is not possible without the hard work of assimilating and consistently practicing the principles of real working-class solidarity and the fight to bring the power of the

multiracial working class, including its crucial immigrant component, into the struggle to uproot all forms of oppression.

\* \* \* \* \*

In contrast, recent developments have given a stark object lesson of what happens when “organizing” work is carried out on a basis that disdains clear principles gained through the hard-won experience of the workers movement, and lacks any real orientation to the working class that makes this city run. The principle of workers democracy, for honest debate to hammer out a strategy to win, is, moreover, counterposed to the kind of unprincipled factionalism whose guideline is that anything goes in the service of “getting” those who dare to disagree.

As John Jay College’s ban on “7K or Strike” signs vividly exemplifies, censorship of CUNY activists’ materials is an attack on the rights of us all.

Yet as noted on this list, an outright *ban on leftist literature* was imposed on the “7K or Strike” organizing conference held in early March (a conference we had originally initiated and intensively built). Previous postings have stated that we would discuss this topic in more depth, and this is a relevant context in which to do so. When, at a February 1 “Adjuncts for 7K” meeting devoted largely to conference plans, a motion was voted to uphold the right of all in the left and labor movement to express their views at the conference, including through their literature, CUNY Struggle, joined by a few other red-literature-ban enthusiasts, found itself defeated in the vote. It went on to push hard for embracing and imposing the literature ban anyway.

The means to achieve this end were as flagrant as they were absurd from the standpoint of the most basic practices of labor-movement democracy. When the ban was then imposed on (against) the conference, the CCU and others unwilling to go along with this censorship, and the terrible precedent it would set for organizing at CUNY, were forced to withdraw from the conference. (Chances are this result was sought from the outset by the ban’s promoters, who promptly and falsely claimed that we had withdrawn “from the campaign” for 7K, which we initiated back in 2014.)

Pushing through the anti-communist ban on leftist literature was connected to narrowing and denaturing the conference. As a now safely leftist-literature-free zone, it would better serve as a venue for liberal happy talk avoiding serious discussion of strategy; of how to overcome the real obstacles faced in the struggle and what happens (e.g. in the NYU strike) when that is not achieved; evasion of the question of the Democratic Party; promotion of illusions that the Taylor Law is little more than a paper tiger; etc. It was to be walled off from the hard but essential debates needed for working out a serious strategy to mobilize the union ranks and CUNY students, linked with the power of the city’s working class, oppressed and immigrant communities, in order to be able to confront and defeat CUNY’s hard-line management, the city and state bosses that stand behind them, and their Taylor Law, in order to win.

What does the embrace of (and in the case of CUNY Struggle and bloc partners, gleeful enthusiasm for) such bans, censorship and prohibitions show? Selling out the rights of CUNY adjuncts and undergrads for a pittance – a “nice space” to hold a conference – is the action of union bureaucrats in training. Yet more than that was displayed by reactions to those who challenged or questioned the ban on leftist literature, notably the seven immigrant workers signing a letter on behalf of *Trabajadores Inmigrantes Clasistas* that explained, on the basis of their own experience and struggles, why they could not accept being censored at the conference, which they had previously agreed to attend and speak at.

Wielding social attitudes and methods that are inimical to working-class democracy, struggle and class consciousness, “CUNY Struggle” is an aggressively anti-communist, middle-class liberal organization. What that means in the fight for 7K is reinforcing practices, illusions and outlooks that

stand in the way of achieving the class-struggle mobilization needed to *win* the 7K demand in conjunction with those of the rest of the CUNY workforce, and workers and oppressed throughout NYC.

**Declaration of “impasse” and sell-out contract:** Returning to the events of 2016, in January of that year, CUNY’s General Counsel Frederick “Taylor Law” Schaffer issued a “notification of impasse” in the contract negotiations with the union. This was filed with PERB, which then appointed a government mediator in the negotiations.

As we warned, the final outcome after six years without a contract was that the union bureaucracy presented a sell-out contract that actually increased the inequalities between the tiers in CUNY’s divide-and-conquer labor system.

The CCU called to vote “**No**” when that contract came to a vote by the membership in June 2016, as discussed in the special “Vote No” issue of the CCU newsletter issued at that time. (See *The Advance*, June 2016, in Appendix II.)

\* \* \* \* \*

### Summing up

These notes began last month with a discussion of the CCU’s proposal at the February 9 special union Delegate Assembly. That proposal called for the union to organize a mass march and rally for 7K, and “intensively build this both on the campuses and through outreach to NYC labor, immigrant-rights, student and community organizations.”

The initial proposal was for this march and rally to be held in April. The union leadership said it planned some kind of mass action in April; and at the February 9 DA, CCU activists said this could and should be the proposed mass march and rally for 7K.

That proposal stands today. It is connected to our entire perspective for uniting the fight for 7K at CUNY with the broader class struggle in New York and beyond, bringing in massive numbers of undergrads, uniting with powerful sectors of the working class and oppressed in a genuine upheaval against poverty pay, job insecurity, racist repression, anti-immigrant attacks and the onslaught on public education.

This is the kind of power needed to take on and defeat the arrogant trustees, CUNY administration and Taylor Law enforcers, Democrat and Republican alike, in order to *win* 7K and other urgent demands of our common cause and struggles.

– SJ, 29 March 2019

## Appendix I. Background on withdrawal from “CUNY-Wide ‘7K or Strike’ Conference”

*The following was posted on the CUNY Contingents Unite listserv on February 18.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear CUNY contingents:

Last Friday’s posting (February 15) of the first part of some notes on the recent PSC Delegate Assembly, CCU perspectives and “7K or Strike” noted that we have been forced to withdraw from the upcoming “CUNY-Wide ‘7K or Strike’ Conference,” which we initiated last fall and built for intensively over subsequent months, due to the imposition of censorship (a ban on leftist literature) on the conference; and that how this development occurred would be addressed in the second part of those notes. Meanwhile I am forwarding an email from last Tuesday, with some background materials on this topic. – Sándor

\*\*\*\*\*

**From:** Sándor John

**Sent:** Tuesday, February 12, 2019 9:04 AM

**Subject:** Response to ban on leftist literature at CUNY conference - Letter from Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas & background materials

To: Colleagues and friends who have expressed interest and concern regarding this topic  
Re: Developments of recent days regarding the “CUNY-Wide ‘7K or Strike’ Conference and Organizing Day”

After a note in which I seek to summarize crucial background, I am forwarding you, below, the English translation of a letter sent last Friday by Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas (TIC), in response to the imposition of a blanket ban on leftist literature at the upcoming CUNY “7K or Strike” conference. The original letter in Spanish follows the translation.

After the TIC letter, I have added two background items, for those who may not have seen them: the powerful Feb. 4 posting by Hunter undergrad Kaitlan Russell and the Feb. 5 statement, titled “CUNY-Wide Conference Wrecked by Anti-Red Ban,” from Gordon Barnes and myself (CUNY Contingents Unite and Class Struggle Education Workers) together with Yari Rodríguez and Kaitlan Russell (CUNY Internationalist Clubs).

Note on background: “7K” refers to the demand that adjuncts receive minimum starting pay of \$7,000 per 3-credit course. After a long campaign initiated in 2014 by CUNY Contingents Unite (CCU), 7K was adopted by the PSC-CUNY faculty union for current contract negotiations. The planned “CUNY-wide conference” was also initiated by CCU members, in late November, to “build, deepen and broaden support” for the “7K or Strike” slogan. This slogan was the theme of resolutions passed last spring and fall, through common efforts by a wide range of adjunct activists, at several campus union chapters. The conference was originally designed for discussion, debate and organizing focusing on “linking up with undergrads; lessons from education workers’ strikes, labor, and immigrant-worker struggles in NYC and beyond; and how to overcome obstacles posed by New York State’s Taylor Law and CUNY’s multi-tier labor system, in order to build the kind of power and unity needed to win.”

These goals for the conference are still cited on the official event page [on Facebook]. However, starting at the end of January and culminating last Monday [February 4], a drive to impose outright censorship on the event has cut short, hemmed in and blocked the effort to move forward at the

conference in pursuit of these goals so crucial for actually winning the 7K demand. Though space had been obtained at the CUNY Grad Center, a de facto red ban was imposed through insistence that the event instead be held at a venue (People’s Forum) where, we were suddenly informed in a January 30 email, distributing “outside” fliers and literature was prohibited, and anyone doing so would be “removed from the space by staff immediately.” After a motion was passed at the Adjuncts for 7K organizing meeting held two days later, to uphold the right to put forward one’s views at the conference, including through literature, the prohibition was reiterated and amplified via text message on February 2: “We do not allow for left political formations to distribute their newspapers or literature in our space regardless of where they fall on the left spectrum.” The contradiction between this and the previously approved motion to uphold workers democracy was “resolved” on February 4 through an instant on-line “vote to amend” it into its opposite (using procedures for making amendments in meetings found on the Oregon School Board Association website). Once this went through, those committed to workers democracy were effectively faced with an ultimatum to renounce it and accept censorship, at which point we withdrew from the conference, while continuing to struggle and organize for “7K.”

Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas had been invited to give a presentation at the conference, an invitation they accepted as far back as December. Their planned presentation was subsequently incorporated into the scheduled panel on “Shared Struggle: Other Unions and Immigrant Worker Organizing.” After being informed that a ban on all leftist literature had been imposed on the conference and all those attending it (information not communicated to the TIC or any of its members by those now in charge of the conference, who have not contacted them), the TIC responded with the following letter. If you would like me to send you further background or information, please let me know.

– Sándor  
12 February 2019

\*\*\*\*\*

**Translation of letter from Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas**

**From:** Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas  
**Sent:** Sunday, February 10, 2019 9:23 PM  
**To:** 7korstrike@gmail.com  
**Subject:** Letter from the TIC to the organizers of the “CUNY-wide 7K or strike conference”

This is a translation of the letter in Spanish that Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas (TIC) sent to the email 7korstrike@gmail.com on Friday, February 8. (Despite our request, we have not gotten any confirmation that it was received or any response to the letter by this time.)

From Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas to the organizers of “CUNY-wide 7K or strike conference.” This letter to you was discussed and approved at our meeting tonight. We request that you confirm to us that you have received this. A translation will be sent to you soon.

\* \* \*

To those in charge of the “CUNY-wide 7K or strike conference and organizing day”:

We are writing to you because we have found out that the conditions of our scheduled presentation and participation at this conference have changed, given that now it is required that we accept and abide



by a rule that specifically prohibits the left from distributing, selling or even “putting on tables” any type of literature, on pain of being “immediately removed” from the space where the conference will be held.

When we were invited to participate in the conference, we were very glad to accept, because we know that the struggle of the adjunct professors of CUNY, who are badly paid and are lacking job security, is connected in a thousand ways with the hopes of our own sons and daughters, and of so many immigrant families, of receiving an education that is worthy of them. We have gone to many CUNY marches to give our support and connect our struggles together. So when we accepted the invitation, we never imagined that this would mean accepting this kind of condition of exclusion.

The program of our organization and its very name, Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas, show that we are a “left formation.” Our word and our program, our activities and our opinions, these we make known through printed materials as well as in presentations, speeches, etc. At this time that is the case of our fliers and our pamphlet being prepared on the struggle of the taxi workers, the ones about our demand for full citizenship rights, and about solidarity with the Mexican teachers, with the Haitian immigrants, with Ayotzinapa, and also with the new campaign of the women laundry workers.

We have never seen this kind of prohibition at the conferences and events we have participated in, notably at CUNY, which have always welcomed us fraternally and without conditions. Obviously, no such thing was demanded of us in March of last year at the “Conference in Defense of Immigrants and Muslims” that was held in the CUNY Graduate Center, where those speaking for the TIC were our compañeras the domestic workers Margarita and Rocío and the taxi worker Lucio, sharing the table with Mahoma López of the Laundry Workers Center, who is widely known in the workers’ movement for his role leading the Hot and Crusty/Bröd Kitchen struggle. At that conference, we placed our fliers on a table, we gave out copies of them, and we invited people to become acquainted with them.

So how can we now accept being required to surrender the rights of workers’ democracy, for ourselves or for any other formation in the labor and left movement? These are some of the only rights we have in this society, which excludes us as pariahs, calling us illegals and criminals, and deprives us of almost every form of expression because it wants to suffocate and silence our rebeldía (=rebelliousness or rebellion) against this exploiting system. Almost all the founders of our organization have been repressed, discriminated against, or thrown out of their jobs for not obeying unjust rules and prohibitions, when we try to organize unions, workers’ committees, protests against wage theft, against sexual abuse, etc. (things which require distributing fliers where it is “forbidden” to do so).

A labor movement conference is almost the only “space” in this society where we would assume the norm to be that these rights are respected, not violated. We do not accept violating the principle of workers’ solidarity. As workers with consciousness and dignity we do not give up our rights, nor those of anyone else – not to anyone, much less to you.

*“Ni ilegales, ni criminales, somos obreros internacionales”*,

Charlie M., TIC, student at Hostos Community College from 2006 to 2011; fired (from Hot & Crusty restaurant) for being vice president of the Hot & Crusty Workers Association, 2012

Antonio E., TIC, dismissed from Vegetable Garden restaurant when it closed in reprisal for the formation of a workers’ committee, 1996

Lucio, TIC, taxi worker

Rocío, TIC, house cleaning worker

Margarita, TIC, house cleaning worker, fired after asking for higher pay  
Daniel, TIC, taxi worker  
Lizette, TIC, fired after asking for payment of back wages in a NY laundry

February 8, 2019

P.S. Comment by Rocío: It is ironic that people from a casa de estudios (=educational institution) would carry out this ban.

---

Spanish original of the TIC letter:

**From:** Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas  
**Sent:** Friday, February 8, 2019 11:11 PM  
**To:** 7korstrike@gmail.com  
**Subject:** Carta del TIC a organizadores de la conferencia de la CUNY, \$7K o huelga

From Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas to the organizers of “CUNY-wide 7K or strike conference.” This letter to you was discussed and approved at our meeting tonight. We request that you confirm to us that you have received this. A translation will be sent to you soon.

\* \* \*

A las y los encargados de la “CUNY-wide 7K or strike conference and organizing day”:

Les escribimos por habernos enterado de que las condiciones de nuestra programada presentación y participación en dicha conferencia han cambiado, puesto que ahora se exige aceptar y acatar una regla que prohíbe explícitamente a toda la izquierda repartir, vender o incluso “poner en las mesas” cualquier tipo de literatura, so pena de ser “sacados inmediatamente” del espacio donde se realiza la conferencia.

Cuando se nos invitó a participar en la conferencia, aceptamos con mucho gusto a sabiendas de que la lucha de los profesores de asignatura, mal pagados y carentes de estabilidad laboral, en la CUNY se conecta de mil maneras con las esperanzas de nuestros propios hijos e hijas, y de tantas familias inmigrantes, de recibir una educación digna. Hemos ido a muchas marchas de la CUNY para brindar nuestro apoyo y vincular nuestras luchas. Así que al aceptar la invitación nunca nos imaginábamos que implicaría aceptar semejante condición excluyente.

El programa de nuestra organización y su propio nombre, Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas, manifiestan que somos una “formación de izquierda”. Divulgamos nuestra palabra y programa, nuestras actividades y opiniones mediante material impreso así como en las ponencias, discursos, etc. Es el caso en este momento de nuestros volantes y folleto en preparación sobre la lucha de los taxistas, sobre nuestra exigencia de plenos derechos de ciudadanía, la solidaridad con los maestros mexicanos, con los inmigrantes haitianos, con Ayotzinapa o también con la nueva campaña de trabajadoras de las lavanderías.

Nunca hemos visto semejante prohibición en las conferencias y eventos en los que hemos participado, notablemente en la CUNY, que siempre nos han acogido fraternalmente y sin condiciones. Obviamente no nos exigieron semejante cosa en marzo del año pasado en la “Conference in Defense of

Immigrants and Muslims” realizada en el CUNY Graduate Center, en la que hablaron por el TIC nuestras compañeras las trabajadoras domésticas Margarita y Rocío y el taxista Lucio, compartiendo la mesa con Mahoma López del Laundry Workers Center, ampliamente conocido en el movimiento obrero por su papel dirigente en la lucha de Hot and Crusty/Brod Kitchen. En esa conferencia colocamos nuestros volantes en una mesa, repartimos ejemplares e invitamos a la gente a conocerlos.

¿Cómo aceptar entonces que se nos exija entregar los derechos de la democracia obrera, para nosotros o para cualquier otra formación del movimiento obrero y de izquierda? Es de los pocos derechos que tenemos en esta sociedad, que nos excluye como parias, tachándonos de ilegales y criminales y que nos priva de casi todas las formas de expresión porque quiere sofocar y callar nuestra rebeldía contra este sistema explotador. Casi todos nuestros fundadores han sido reprimidos, discriminados o sacados de sus trabajos por no obedecer reglas y prohibiciones injustas, cuando tratamos de organizar sindicatos, comités obreros, protestas contra el robo de salario, el abuso sexual, etc. (cosas que exigen repartir volantes donde está “prohibido” hacerlo).

Una conferencia del movimiento sindical es casi el único “espacio” en esta sociedad donde se supone que la norma es respetar estos derechos, no violarlos. No aceptamos violar el principio de la solidaridad obrera. Los trabajadores conscientes y con dignidad no entregamos nuestros derechos, ni los de los demás – a nadie, mucho menos a ustedes.

“Ni ilegales, ni criminales, somos obreros internacionales”,

Charlie M., TIC, estudiante de Hostos Community College, 2006 a 2011; despedido por ser vicepresidente del sindicato Hot & Crusty Workers Association, 2012

Antonio E., TIC, cesado cuando el restaurante Vegetable Garden cerró en represalia por la formación de un comité obrero, 1996

Lucio, TIC, taxista

Rocío, TIC, trabajadora de limpieza de casas

Margarita, TIC, trabajadora de limpieza de casas, cesada cuando pidió un aumento salarial

Daniel, TIC, taxista

Lizette, TIC, despedida después de pedir el pago de salario atrasado en una lavandería de NY

8 de febrero de 2019

P.D. Comentario de Rocío: Es irónico que gente de una casa de estudios haga esta prohibición.

\* \* \*

**Additional materials added to this email for reference (SJ, Feb. 11):**

(1) Letter from Kaitlan Russell to Adjuncts for 7K Organizing Group listserv (4 February 2019)

Kaitlan Russell

Mon 2/4/2019 10:55 AM

adjuncts-for-7k-organizing-group@googlegroups.com

As an undergrad activist new to this list, I see a lot of talk about democracy, respect, rights,

solidarity, unity, etc., but when it comes to putting the words into practice, a big contradiction. (And no, pointing that out, is not “railing.”)

Last Friday, at the meeting where I attended and spoke, two motions were passed. One was to “uphold the right of all in the labor and left movement to put forward their views, including by distributing or selling literature,” at the conference. The prompt for this was the push to move the event to a location where the “#1 rule” was reported as “no groups outside of \$7kos can pass out fliers, put them on the tables or sell newspapers,” and that anyone who did so would be “removed from the space by staff immediately.”

Some argued it was just making “drama” to think this would apply to us or other leftists, saying the policy was actually about protecting people against possible right-wing attackers. Some also said that if the policy were against leftists they would also be for going against such a ban. Quickly another motion was passed, to have the event at The People’s Forum. Don’t worry or make a fuss, it’ll all be fine, we were told.

Yet, then it was officially confirmed that this Forum has a policy (which many people on this list apparently support) to “not allow for left political formations to distribute their newspapers or literature in our space.” So if the conference is to be held there, the motion we passed on Friday to defend the right to distribute literature is just made null and void. Neat trick, I wonder where it comes from. It strikes me as the kind of hypocrisy as when the PSC leadership tried to stop Sara (who was also in attendance at last Friday’s meeting) from distributing a flier at an event about immigrant rights held inside the union hall. Maybe that sort of outlook has rubbed off (though I don’t think they went so far as to refer to us in ways I’ve read here). Funny, I thought we students were supposed to stand up for our rights (and those of others), not bow down to them being taken away (despite a motion passed to uphold them) just because “that’s just how it is now.”

Kaitlan Russell  
Hunter College  
Member of the CUNY Internationalist Club

\*\*\*\*\*

[Note: The only response to Kaitlan's letter was to launch, a few hours later, an on-line “vote to amend” the motion upholding the right to distribute literature passed at the previous week’s meeting. Carried out on the “Adjuncts for 7K Organizing” Google group, using a procedure for changing a motion (at a meeting, not online) taken from the Oregon School Board Association website, that “vote to amend” is described in further detail in the statement reproduced below. – SJ, 11 February 2019.]

\*\*\*\*\*

(2) Statement, “CUNY-Wide Conference Wrecked by Anti-Red Ban,” sent to Adjuncts for 7K Organizing Group list, 5 February 2019

Last Friday, February 1, the meeting of “7K or Strike” activists sponsoring the CUNY-Wide Conference and Organizing Day voted a motion “to uphold the right of all in the labor and left movement to put forward their views, including by distributing or selling literature.” Yesterday, February 4, a farcical online “vote to amend” the motion was held to insert an exception clause enabling decisions to “abide by” policies “which may contradict this principle,” if judged convenient at the time. As one of the supporters of this maneuver accurately stated, the motion was not a vote on a venue. To vote “yes” meant agreeing that this entire principle as stated (the right to *put forward your views*,

*including by distributing literature*) could and would now be canceled out at the CUNY-Wide Conference. Signing on to such a “red ban” is a destructive and profoundly unprincipled action that will come back to haunt those of you who claim to be socialists, communists, or indeed leftists of any kind.

Look at what was approved. The “#1 rule” that is now to be applied, against distributing “outside” groups’ fliers, putting them on tables or selling newspapers, states that anyone doing so would be immediately “removed.” This rule was made “as clear as possible” in a text late Saturday night: “We do not allow for left political formations to distribute their newspapers or literature in our space regardless of where they fall on the left spectrum.” Please note: this rule applies not only to “the Internationalists,” against whom a hate-filled red-baiting slander campaign has been whipped up on this list, it applies to the entire left. In opposing and refusing to sign on to such a ban, we are not only defending our own rights, but those of *all*. Do not be surprised when in the future, moves are made to enforce just such a ban in CUNY facilities as well.

To set the record straight once again after the most recent claims, the vote at last Friday’s meeting to uphold the principle of workers democracy at the conference came *before* the vote on venue. As for the idea that upholding that principle was part of some kind of sinister scheme or “bureaucratic trick” to hide a priori opposition to holding the event at The People’s Forum, this is an outright fabrication, as easily shown by the written record.

What was the purpose of the CUNY-Wide “7K or Strike” Conference and Organizing Day to be? As stated in the official description: to help “build, broaden, and deepen support” including through discussion and debate on “linking up with undergrads; lessons from education workers’ strikes, labor, and immigrant-worker struggles in NYC and beyond; and how to overcome obstacles posed by New York State’s Taylor Law and CUNY’s multi-tier labor system, in order to build the kind of power and unity needed to win.” Not by coincidence, this was drafted by those of us who proposed and intensively built for the conference from the beginning, and in fact initiated the fight for 7K way back in 2014, and who are now labeled “wreckers” for refusing to submit to an anti-communist gag order.

Free discussion and organizing on the Conference topics (which are, as S.T. notes [in a posting to the list], eminently political) is clearly incompatible with censoring undergrads, unionists, immigrant-worker organizers and anyone else who wants to share their views and experiences through leftist fliers or papers, and agreeing to having them “removed” from the conference space if they do so. To those who have freely made the choice to sign on to such a ban, “voting yes” to accept it: stop trying to push the responsibility for that choice onto the staff of The People’s Forum – it is you who have made that decision. And now that you have signed onto making the conference a no-leftist-literature zone, you will doubtless be expected to enforce this, which some of you will evidently do with considerable glee.

What you have now done is establish a dangerous and shameful new precedent for activism at the City University: a “CUNY-wide” event where the free expression of leftist views, including through leftist literature, is *prohibited*. All of us will now be faced with where that leads. Recall CUNY leftists’ “Struggle for Free Speech at CCNY, 1931-42,” and that the stage was set for the infamous red-baiting witch-hunt Rapp-Coudert Committee\* by a decade of persecution of leftist faculty at City College, particularly those who lacked tenure, over distributing leftist leaflets and newspapers like the *Teacher-Worker*, or just being faculty advisors to student groups that violated such bans, while liberal and even supposed socialist professors went along with the bans because they were directed at communists.\*\* That is the pre-history to the red purges in academia from the late 1940s to the 1960s.

Have you really learned nothing from the whole history of McCarthyism? Or, even before that, of so-called “Communists” embracing the Smith Act when applied to “Trotskyist wreckers,” setting the stage for it to be applied just a few years later to the CP itself?

In all the decades of CUNY activism, has there *ever* been an organizing conference held on the basis of applying such a ban on leftist literature? Not in the 1969 struggles that won Open Admissions; not in the Fight to Save Hostos; not in the mass upheaval against budget cuts; not in the fight to stop the trustees’ “expressive conduct” policy restricting free speech; not in the campaigns against militarization of CUNY – *never!* How dare you disgrace this proud history of struggle at CUNY – led by an entire spectrum of leftists and radicals – by insisting on adherence to an infamous anti-red literature ban, smearing those who uphold the principles of those fights as “unprincipled wreckers,” and falsely claiming that it is *we* who seek problems at the conference we initiated.

And to think that those pushing hardest to make us all complicit in besmirching that history of struggle have the nerve to call themselves “CUNY Struggle”! What you are struggling to do, with ever-shifting arguments, assurances, claims and pretexts, is to uphold an anti-communist ban, each new day launching new red-baiting smears and slanders against those who know that for genuine communists, *anti-red bans are, and always have been, meant to be broken!*

So no, we will not help you in such an endeavor, which “busts up” the entire purpose of the conference, nor will we fall into the trap of being smeared as causing some kind of incident, “disrespecting the space,” or any other such thing that would be used by the enemies of us all to discredit and harm the struggle for 7K. Since the CUNY-Wide Conference has been transformed into its opposite and a precedent for exclusion of leftists at CUNY, we hereby withdraw from what has become an anti-communist conclave as we continue the struggle for adjuncts’ rights.

The whole odious structure of tiered academic labor in this decaying capitalist system depends on the relegation of contingent faculty and staff to the hell of poverty wages without job security. To overcome that will require precisely the revolutionary perspective of a *class* mobilization, uniting teachers and students with powerful sectors of the workers and oppressed inside and “outside” the university, that your ban stands in the way of.

Signed,

Gordon Barnes and Sándor John  
CUNY Contingents Unite and Class Struggle Education Workers

Yari Rodríguez and Kaitlan Russell  
CUNY Internationalist Clubs

\*See “The Struggle for Free Speech at CCCNY, 1931-42,”  
[virtualny.ashp.cuny.edu/gutter/panels/panel15.html](http://virtualny.ashp.cuny.edu/gutter/panels/panel15.html)

\*\*See Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (Oxford: 1986).

## **Appendix II. Newsletters and other items referred to in the text of this bulletin.**

See the following pages.

Note: The materials reprinted here appear not in chronological order, but, for ease of reference, in the order that they are first mentioned in the text of this bulletin.

# The Advance

The Monthly Newsletter of  
CUNY Contingents Unite

## CUNY Contingents Unite!

### CUNY Contingents Unite

#### Speaking for contingent faculty and all "part-time" academic staff in the Professional Staff Congress and the City University of New York

The struggle over the latest contract has made it clear that contingent academic staff need stronger representation. We need a unit that brings together contingent academic workers, while continuing to participate fully in the Professional Staff Congress (PSC). We have formed CUNY Contingents Unite as a body to include adjunct faculty, graduate student employees, Continuing Education and other "part-time" academic staff at the City University of New York and as a "functional entity" within the PSC but not limited by present organizational structures. "Part-time" employees constitute more than half of the CUNY faculty and teach more than half the courses, but are denied resources, decent pay, job security and dignity, while having tenuous health care at best.

We seek to defend the rights and improve conditions for contingent academic workers together with full-time faculty, other campus workers and students. CUNY management will not budge unless faced with the determined opposition of CUNY faculty, staff and students united around a common goal of ending the two-tier academic labor system that undermines public higher education. Adjuncts, graduate students and other "part-timers" are the majority of those represented by the PSC (57% according to a recent analysis), but our voices are seldom heeded. In part, this reflects the fact that although we have distinct interests in common, we are divided into campus

chapters and no common body speaks on our behalf. Moreover, even when the PSC leadership formally declares adjunct issues a priority, this is repeatedly sacrificed in the face of administration intransigence.

Functional units extending across chapter lines exist in several unions. In New York City, the United Federation of Teachers is organized on the basis of school chapters, but the UFT leadership has created functional units for some job categories with special interests that can only be addressed system-wide. These units meet periodically to address their issues. The difference in the PSC is that contingent academic staff are the majority, and the initiative to form a unit representing our needs comes from us. CUNY Contingents Unite will seek to bring contingent academic staff together as a functional unit within the PSC, while including those who have not (yet) joined the union which represents the workforce. A close relation with CUNY's students, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, is crucial to our work and perspectives.

Various organizational forms have been tried in organizing contingent academic labor, including graduate student unions and separate unions of adjuncts and teaching assistants. In some places, notable gains have been made. Some universities pay more than double the rate per course paid by CUNY and some have secured seniority rights and job protection for contingent faculty. In California, there is a legislative initiative to eliminate the two-tier academic labor system. However, these gains need to be much more widespread. The courts have not been favorable to graduate student

unionization, and in New York City strikes by graduate student staff at Columbia University and New York University have been broken by hard-line administrations because they were not backed by other faculty and campus workers, even in different locals of the same union. It is our conviction that all faculty, full- and part-time, must stand together to build a strong PSC, in conjunction with other campus worker unions and the students, in order to defeat the Taylor Law and other weapons used against labor, defend public higher education and eliminate the two-tier academic labor system. In opposing the two-tier academic labor system, attention must be given to promoting sectors traditionally subjected to discrimination and exclusion, notably women and minorities.

Representing 22,000 academic and administrative employees in the largest urban public university in the United States (with approximately 235,000 students enrolled in degree programs, and over 200,000 in a variety of Continuing, Adult and Professional Ed Programs), we have the potential to mobilize real power if we unite with the organized workers movement and all working people, immigrants and minorities who together make up the vast majority in this city. (Cont.)

### The next CUNY Contingents

**Unite** meeting will be held

Friday November 21st at

4pm, room 5409 CUNY

Graduate Center, 365 5th

Avenue (at 34th Street)

All Are Welcome



# CUNY Contingents Protest Paterson's Budget Cuts

As part of a billion dollars in cuts against programs for poor and working people (health care, Medicaid, HIV awareness, etc.), Governor Paterson and the legislature ordered more than \$50 million in cuts to the CUNY budget in August. These cuts will target student services, research, library, "external and public" and "general institutional" services and disproportionately place the burden for the economic crisis upon the backs of the working-class students who attend CUNY, not to mention the thousands of adjuncts and part-time faculty that teach at CUNY. Indeed, department chairs at Hunter and Queens have already begun to send ominous e-mails to their adjunct faculty explaining that, because of the cuts, some adjuncts may be "disadvantaged" as it were. For example, the Hunter College Department of Political Science sent a memo to adjunct faculty stating: "The uncertain state budget situation is likely to have an impact on our adjunct budget in future semesters. At this point, we have been directed to cut the adjunct budget by 5% for spring 2009." While Chancellor Goldstein gets a \$55,000 raise, the administration "balances" the budget on

the backs of the adjunct faculty and CUNY students.

In anticipation of these cuts and in a show of anger and dissatisfaction with Paterson's disregard for the University's future, CUNY Contingents Unite and other CUNY groups, including the Graduate Center Adjunct Project and the CUNY Student Union, took to the streets on September 22<sup>nd</sup> to protest Paterson's cuts as well as the deepening inequality between full timers and part-timers that is at least in part generated by the chronic underfunding of CUNY.

The protesters, who numbered close to 75, began their action outside the Graduate Center on 34th street and then marched to the Governor's Third Avenue offices, chanting "Education is a right, stop the budget cuts" and "Poverty wages make me sick." After the protest a list of demands was signed by all in attendance and then presented to the Governor's aides.

\*\*\*\*\*

***How are the budget cuts affecting you or your department? Send your stories and comments to CUNY Contingents Unite***

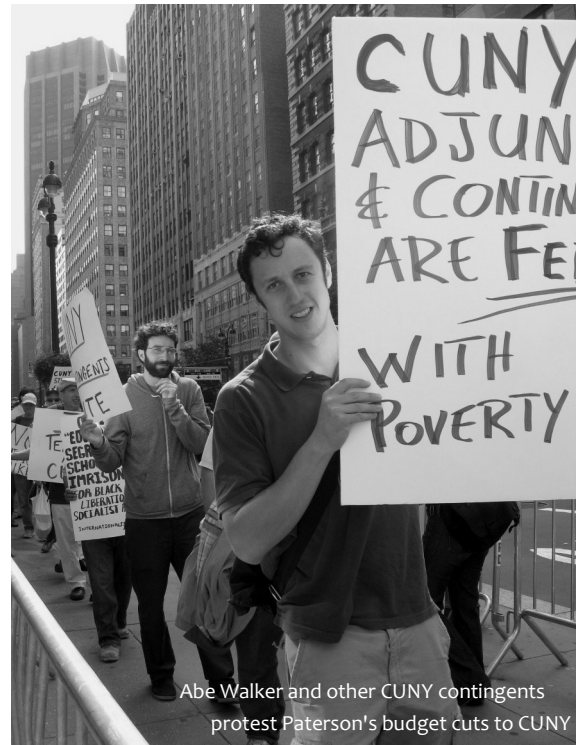
## **CCU Statement of Purpose (Continued from Page 1)**

In the recent struggle over the contract, we brought unprecedented attention to the deepening inequality of CUNY's labor system, while raising important issues of union democracy. The effect has been to energize adjuncts, graduate students and others to fight for equality and dignity. The struggle has

in fact only begun. Among our key tasks will be developing a basic program, actions and initiatives aimed at winning gains for contingent employees in the areas of job security, pay equity, health care, and working conditions. CUNY Contingents Unite will be a vehicle to mobilize large numbers of con-

tingent academic workers, to strengthen our voice and to work with full-time faculty and staff toward eliminating the two-tier academic labor system.

[Adopted 12 Sept. 2008. This document will be open to further development in line with the work, tasks and growth of the CCU.]



Abe Walker and other CUNY contingents protest Paterson's budget cuts to CUNY

## **Get Involved! Join the CCU!**

E-mail: [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com)  
Or contact your campus representative

**Baruch College:** Stan Wine  
[stanwine@nyc.rr.com](mailto:stanwine@nyc.rr.com)

**BMCC:** Shirley Rausher  
[srausher@nyc.rr.com](mailto:srausher@nyc.rr.com)

**Brooklyn College:** Tom Smith  
[bccunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:bccunycontingents@gmail.com)

**Center For Worker Ed:** James Hoff  
[jhoff@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:jhoff@gc.cuny.edu)

**City Tech:** Shirley Frank  
[srfwriter@aol.com](mailto:srfwriter@aol.com)

**Hunter College:** Sándor John  
[s\\_an@msn.com](mailto:s_an@msn.com)

**John Jay:** Howard Pflanzner  
[hpflanzner@yahoo.com](mailto:hpflanzner@yahoo.com)

**Medgar Evers:** Nancy Thompson  
[nlewisthompson@optonline.net](mailto:nlewisthompson@optonline.net)

**Queens:** Abe Walker  
[awalker2@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:awalker2@gc.cuny.edu)

**Queensborough :** Carl Lindskoog  
[cskoog79@yahoo.com](mailto:cskoog79@yahoo.com)

**York:** Eric Mendelsohn  
[engtutor@earthlink.net](mailto:engtutor@earthlink.net)

# The Facts about CUNY Adjuncts: Why an Increase in Adjunct Pay to \$7000 per Course is Essential for Student Success

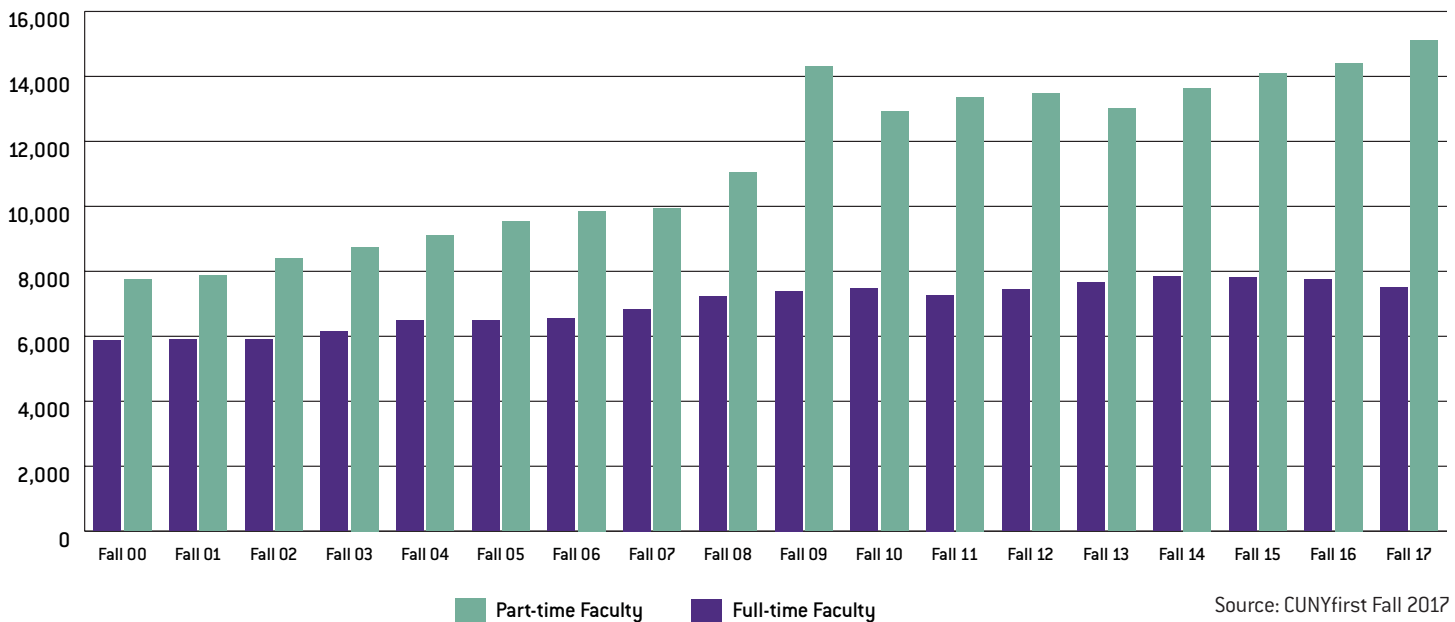
**ADJUNCT FACULTY** do the majority of teaching at CUNY. Public investment in CUNY has failed to keep pace with enrollment growth and inflation, leaving the University without the resources to hire the needed full-time faculty. Since 2000, the number of adjuncts teaching at CUNY has almost doubled.

**The starting pay for CUNY adjuncts is currently \$3200 per course, or as low as \$20,000 per year.** Near-poverty pay for the majority of CUNY faculty should not be tolerated

in New York State. It is unfair to adjuncts and unfair to CUNY students. **A university staffed largely by part-time, contingent, underpaid faculty cannot provide the support students need in order to succeed and graduate.**

The Professional Staff Congress is seeking an increase in adjunct pay to \$7000 per course. While adjunct pay is collectively bargained, the current low pay is largely the result of NYS policy decisions on investment in CUNY. Solving the adjunct pay crisis will require public investment.

**CUNY Faculty Employment**



**CUNY relies on adjuncts for the majority of undergraduate teaching, yet pays adjuncts a near-poverty wage.**

- In Fall 2017, CUNY employed more than 15,000 adjunct faculty and only 7500 full-time faculty.
- The current starting pay for an adjunct lecturer teaching a 3-credit course is \$3200.
- The average pay for an adjunct lecturer teaching a 3-credit course is \$3500.
- The annual pay for the average adjunct lecturer teaching a full load of 8 courses would be \$28,000.
- The average annual pay for a *full-time* lecturer teaching 8 courses is \$74,000.



## **Raising adjunct pay is essential to enabling CUNY to increase student retention and graduation rates.**

- A recent study by the Center for Community College Student Engagement shows that over-reliance on adjunct instructors is a barrier to college completion, especially for vulnerable students.
- In some departments, entry-level courses are taught almost exclusively by adjuncts.
- Because of their low pay, many CUNY adjuncts race from one college to another in order to assemble enough courses to earn a minimal income—leaving them little time to mentor students.
- Many adjuncts are forced to find additional part-time employment, some working as many as three jobs, again diminishing their ability to spend time with students.
- While the PSC has negotiated partial payment for office hours for eligible adjuncts, most receive no pay to meet with students individually.
- A growing body of research—as well as the experience of CUNY’s celebrated ASAP program—shows that time spent individually with faculty and advisors is a key element in student success.
- Raising adjunct pay to \$7000 per course would relieve the financial pressures on adjuncts, allow them to spend more time with students, and contribute to raising college completion rates.

## **It is a myth that all adjuncts have other full-time jobs and use their adjunct income as supplemental pay.**

- More than 2000 CUNY adjuncts earn their entire income cobbling together a series of courses at different CUNY campuses. These adjuncts typically earn between \$20,000 and \$32,000 per a year.
- Some adjuncts have been working at CUNY for more than 20 years, often teaching pivotal entry-level courses.
- Almost all CUNY adjuncts have advanced academic degrees; many hold PhDs.
- In recent years, some CUNY adjuncts have reported having to rely on public assistance because their pay is so low.
- Starting pay per course for adjuncts at Rutgers is \$5200; at the University of Connecticut it is \$4700—in contrast to \$3200 at CUNY.
- Why do CUNY adjuncts stay, despite the low pay and job insecurity? Adjuncts are among CUNY’s most dedicated teachers. Many choose to stay because they have an intellectual and moral commitment to CUNY’s mission.

## **Public investment in CUNY has not kept pace with enrollment growth or inflation; low-paid adjuncts have, in effect, subsidized New York State.**

- Since 2000, undergraduate student enrollment at CUNY has grown by 45 percent, or 75,600 students—the equivalent of the number of students at Baruch and Hunter Colleges combined.
- New York State investment has not kept pace. Adjusted for inflation, NYS funding per FTE student at CUNY senior colleges has been cut by 18 percent since 2008.
- CUNY has filled the gap in public investment by increasing tuition and replacing full-time faculty with low-paid part-time faculty—adjuncts.
- Every year since 2006, adjuncts have provided the majority of undergraduate instruction at CUNY.

CUNY adjuncts deserve fair pay. PSC and CUNY, supported by New York State and New York City, have made important gains for adjuncts in the past. By working together to raise adjunct pay to \$7000 a course, we believe we can make New York a leader in progressive values, fair pay for working people and investment in student success.

# The Advance

Newsletter of  
CUNY Contingents Unite

## Building Solidarity Across CUNY

By Douglas Medina and Ajamu Sankofa

PART ONE

Higher Education Officers, also known as “HEOs,” are part of the labor force that makes CUNY work: HEOs contribute their administrative expertise to make sure students succeed in and out of their classes, while supporting the work of other administrative staff and faculty. As important as their jobs are at CUNY, HEOs are a vulnerable and “invisible” segment of the workforce. Subject to no explicit opportunities for job advancement, they possess some—but are not guaranteed—job security, and in many cases they are the victims of “bullying” and institutional racism in the workplace. Often, faculty, students and other administrative support staff don’t know much about the struggles HEOs face—and this is one of the barriers to building solidarity among the different segments of labor at CUNY. The HEO struggle is ultimately a struggle to build a better, stronger CUNY that will live up to what is supposed to be its mission to educate the poor, people of color and working-class students in general in New York City, who would otherwise not have access to a higher education.

Many HEOs struggle on a daily basis to gain the dignity and respect they deserve. As a core group of administrative workers numbering approximately 3,215 across CUNY campuses, HEOs are not much different than other segments of the CUNY workforce. In fact, their vulnerability is similar to that of Adjunct Instructors, graduate students, and Continuing Education Teachers, among other contingent workers at CUNY. This point is worth remembering, as our union, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), organizes to negotiate our contract, which expires in October 2010. It is also worth remembering that a source of strength in the bargaining power of any union lies in its ability to identify and fully address the diverse needs of its rank and file members while remaining conscious and alert to the fact

For the full, footnoted version of this article, see the CCU blog: [cunycontingents.wordpress.com](http://cunycontingents.wordpress.com)

that an attack by management on any one segment of the bargaining unit is an attack on *all* within the union.

### Some Relevant Facts & Figures

As CUNY administrative workers, individuals hired as HEOs are assigned one of four distinct job titles, as decreed by the Board of Trustees in September of 1966.

They are:

- a) Assistant to Higher Education Officer
- b) Higher Education Assistant
- c) Higher Education Associate
- d) Higher Education Officer

With Higher Education Officers as the highest title obtainable within the HEO series and the Assistant to Higher Education Officer being the lowest, it is important to note that there is no contractual provision for allowing Assistant to Higher Education Officers to be promoted to a higher rank, and this severely limits a HEO’s earning power. In other words, once a HEO reaches the highest salary step within their title, they cannot move beyond it, except through reclassification, which is difficult to obtain, or by leaving CUNY to find another job with higher pay.

And as a recent *Clarion* article finds, “The higher up one goes in the hierarchy of job titles – in terms of pay, prestige, authority and job security – the whiter the composition of the workforce.” Based on 2008 figures released by the University Office of Compliance and Diversity Programs, there were a total of 3,215 individuals classified as Higher Education Officers at CUNY. Of these, 1,526 were classified as Higher Education Officers (679, the highest rank) and Higher Education Associates (847, the second highest rank) – which also include “Substitutes,” 16 and 26, respectively – two of the highest-ranking HEO titles at CUNY. These two titles fall into the salary scale ranging from \$68,803 to \$116,364 for Officers and \$55,602 to \$96,635 for Associates. Within these titles, 685 Officers were classified as a “federally protected group” (Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic/Latino, Asian-Pacific, and American-Indian/Alaskan Native) and 841 were classified as “white” (691) and “Italian American” (150).

*Continued on reverse...*

### DID YOU KNOW...

During the Fall 2009 semester, an adjunct in a Hunter College social sciences department was assigned to teach one 3-credit section to which other sections were added, eventually totaling 171 students! The college would pay a full-timer a jumbo class rate (or more) for this...but the adjunct was just paid for one section. Meanwhile, adjunct courses are being cancelled.

That’s how bad our situation is getting at CUNY. Want to do something about it? Join the CCU! CUNY Contingents Unite needs your input and participation. If you or your colleagues are facing class cancellations, layoffs (“non-reappointment”), job harassment, etc., let us know.

**Meanwhile, union contract negotiations with CUNY are fast approaching!** It is crucial that those of us on the bottom of CUNY’s labor system (in which “part-timers” are the majority of teaching staff) organize and voice our demands. Significant improvements in pay, job security and benefits require a real fight against the two-tier labor system.

The next **CUNY Contingents Unite** meeting will be held on Friday, February 26 at 4pm, in Room 5409, CUNY Graduate Center  
365 5th Avenue  
(at 34th Street)  
*Please attend!*

Continued from front page

The majority of HEOs, however, fall within the two lowest salary ranks: 1,689 (including "Substitute" titles) fall under the title of Assistant to Higher Education Officer and Higher Education Assistant, which have salary scales between \$35,576 to \$70,465 for Assistant to HEO and between \$42,873 to \$81,645 for Higher Education Assistants. Of these, 1,072 were classified as members of a federally protected group.

This means that about one-third of the HEOs who were classified as members of a federally protected group at CUNY are in the lowest-paid rank, and only 685, or about 21 percent, are in the highest titles. The disparity is ever more clear, however, when you look at the highest HEO rank within the series: 269 belong under the federally protected group category while 410 are white and Italian-American. This means that only about 8 percent of the total number of HEOs who reach the top HEO salary step and title are classified as Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic/Latino, Asian Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaskan Native.

#### Clear Racial Disparities

Based on these statistics, there are clear racial disparities that are perpetuated by the fact that HEO title series are not promotional series. The lowest HEO salary ranks are mainly populated by people of color, while the best-paying positions are held by whites. Clearly, HEOs from all ethnic and racial backgrounds should have equal access to be promoted within HEO ranks. This can and will happen when HEOs, together with faculty, students, and other workers, organize to fight for specific, obtainable goals, such as achieving promotional HEO titles at CUNY. This will require that we, as HEOs, organize to achieve long- and short-term goals that will include fighting for promotional titles and fighting against workplace "bullying" and institutional racism, something many of our brothers and sisters struggle with on a daily basis.

"Workplace bullying" has been found to be four times as prevalent as illegal discriminatory harassment. Labor unionists must take a strong stand against the practices that employers use to bully workers, including the many forms of hostile, offensive and intimidating behavior that are used to silence and demean us. Measures aimed at

providing legal protections from workplace bullying are being developed now in many states.

We should support all real efforts to protect workers against such bullying, and, especially, to ensure that the bosses cannot use any anti-bullying law against the bossed. The harm is the physical and/or psychological trauma caused by simply going to or being in that workplace. The harm caused by workplace bullying is further exacerbated by institutional racism at CUNY. This oppression is crushing and we must organize to ensure that we end these abuses in any form that they take.

Given the context of our labor conditions and daily struggles, we believe that it is time for us to organize, not only to beat back any potential management proposals in the upcoming contract negotiations that will aim to further decimate the gains of CUNY workers, but also to build pillars of solidarity that include HEOs, CLTs, Adjunct Instructors, full-time faculty, Continuing Education Teachers, DC 37 union members, as well as other workers across CUNY and beyond. In order to build and sustain solidarity across the rank and file, we need to move outside and beyond our own sense of isolation in our offices and our campuses and begin to listen to what our colleagues have to say about their working conditions.

We need to share our own stories through existing networks within and across campuses. We must create and sustain relationships with fellow workers. And we must diligently work to strategize and prepare action to defend our brothers and sisters whenever any one segment of the different PSC units is under threat. As we do this we will be gaining the capacity to take on those seemingly more intractable systemic issues related to promotional titles for HEOs, workplace bullying and institutional racism.

As we engage in short- and long-term struggles, we must bear in mind that any kind of political education and movement building requires us to find common struggles, to build solidarity networks that are based on trust, and to establish an ability to mobilize effectively at a moment's notice to fight against the political and management forces that are always seeking to destroy the integrity of worker solidarity. And just as important, significant solidarity among HEOs, faculty, both part-time and full-time, graduate and undergraduate students, among others, will require a major struggle to shift the terms of debate from "modernizing" CUNY to a historically grounded debate that puts forward open admissions and free tuition, along with job security and salary parity for all workers at CUNY.

*To be continued.*

## Gov. Paterson is demanding massive new cuts to CUNY Join with the CCU at the March 4 Day of Action Defend public education! No budget cuts, no tuition hikes, no layoffs!

**When: Tuesday, March 4, 4:00 p.m.**

**Where: Gov. Paterson's NYC offices  
Third Av. between 40<sup>th</sup> & 41<sup>st</sup>, then join  
march to MTA headquarters.**

### Defend Hunter Childhood Learning Center – Drop all charges against Agustin Castro

Activists defending parents' right to education have called for "packing the courtroom" at a hearing on the Hunter administration's attempt to cut space and services for the Childhood Learning Center.

Thursday, Feb 11, 2:30 p.m. at NY State Supreme Court, 60 Centre St., Rm. 422. Meanwhile, Hunter student Agustin Castro still faces charges from his arrest at a Dec. 21st protest in defense of the Center.

#### Join the CCUI

E-mail: [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com)

Or contact your campus representative

**Baruch:** Douglas Medina/Box J-306  
[dmedina@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:dmedina@gc.cuny.edu)

**BCC:** Celia Braxton/Comm. Arts & Sciences  
[bronxccu@gmail.com](mailto:bronxccu@gmail.com)

**BMCC:** Mike Vozick /Science  
[mvoz@post.com](mailto:mvoz@post.com)

**Center for Worker Ed:** Mike Vozick/Science  
[mvoz@post.com](mailto:mvoz@post.com)

**Hostos:** Tom Smith/Behavioral & Social Sciences  
[tsmith1958@optionline.net](mailto:tsmith1958@optionline.net)

**Hunter College:** Sándor John /History  
[s\\_an@msn.com](mailto:s_an@msn.com)

**John Jay:** Howard Pflanzler/Comm. & Theatre  
[hpflanzler@yahoo.com](mailto:hpflanzler@yahoo.com)

**Lehman College:** Arto Artinian/Political Science  
[artinian@fastmail.fm](mailto:artinian@fastmail.fm)

**Medgar Evers:** Nancy Thompson  
[nlewisthompson@optonline.net](mailto:nlewisthompson@optonline.net)

**Queens:** Abe Walker/Sociology  
[awalker2@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:awalker2@gc.cuny.edu)

**Queensborough :** Carl Lindskoog/WAC-English  
[cskoog79@yahoo.com](mailto:cskoog79@yahoo.com)

No contact person at your campus?

Email [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com) to get involved!

#### CCU Membership Drive

CUNY Contingents Unite is growing! We plan to increase our organized presence on campuses in preparation for the crucial, upcoming contract struggle. A contract survey is underway. For this and other materials, visit: [cunycontingents.wordpress.com](http://cunycontingents.wordpress.com)

# *The Advance*

**Newsletter of CUNY  
Contingents Unite**

## ***Adjuncts to March on May Day Demanding: \$5K Minimum Per Course***

***We Need to Win This at CUNY!***

On May 1st, adjuncts and other contingent employees from universities around the country will join May Day rallies and marches on the international workers' day, demanding: "Increase the starting salary for a three-credit semester course to a minimum of \$5,000 for all instructors in higher education." Initiated by activists at SUNY New Paltz, the "May Day \$5K" campaign also calls for job security, health care, decent working conditions, and to institute longer contracts to help protect academic freedom for contingent instructors.

Here at the City University of New York, the Professional Staff Congress has endorsed the May Day \$5K campaign, and is calling on members to rally and march in support of this demand in the NYC May Day demonstration. The union website ([psc-cuny.org](http://psc-cuny.org)) features a special flier for the occasion.

**All out for May Day and the \$5K demand!** As outspoken advocates for the contingent majority at the City University, activists from CUNY Contingents Unite (CCU) will be front and center to build the \$5K contingent on May Day. Now is the time for every adjunct, teaching fellow, TA and other contingent employee to get involved in the fight against the intolerable, increasing inequality plaguing CUNY – and universities throughout the country. The CCU has proposed that all contingent activists at CUNY undertake a joint effort to mobilize for the \$5K demand at this year's May Day march.

That CUNY's faculty/staff union is calling to march for \$5K on May Day reflects the clamor adjunct activists have raised, since the last contract in particular, for real action against the two-tier labor system. At the April PSC Delegate Assembly, a CCU spokesman made the point: The union must do more than put the \$5K demand on placards for May 1st. It must commit itself now to *making the \$5K minimum*

*per course a bottom-line demand for the current contract negotiations.*

Speaking with *The Advance*, Peter Brown, president of the United University Professions chapter at SUNY New Paltz, said the idea for the \$5K campaign arose from "frustration that [college administrators] saw no need to pay adjuncts more" than \$3K per course since some other institutions were paying even less. (Meanwhile, University of California adjunct pay can range between \$7K to \$9K per course.) With management playing divide-and-conquer, and teacher-bashing rampant, he added, we're seeing "the Wal-Martization of public higher education." As CCU members often point out, preventing CUNY management from turning the City University into "Wal-Mart U" requires a head-on fight against the system of two-tier labor, linking up with burgeoning struggles by low-wage workers in fast food and other industries, together with powerful unionized sectors of city labor – and the hundreds of thousands of CUNY students whose education is on the line.

The demand for a \$5K minimum starting salary per course helps point in the right direction for such a struggle. While maintaining the CCU's independent standpoint, and though the formulation of some demands may differ, the call for a minimum of \$5,000 per course is more than consistent with CUNY Contingent Unite's long-standing call for a raise of \$30 per credit hour. To march for it is necessary but not sufficient. The \$5K minimum per course needs to be **won** at CUNY. The time to fight for that is now.

**MAY DAY 2014 – NYC RALLY**  
**CUNY contingents: Join the fight for \$5K**  
 Meet at 4:30, southwest corner of  
 Broadway and Chambers Street

## As We Were Saying (About Obscene Inequality)

In the last issue of *The Advance*, we reported on “the spate of recent coverage in major news media highlighting just how bad the situation is” for adjuncts and other contingent academic employees. (See “Inequality This Obscene Can’t Remain Academia’s Dirty Little Secret,” *The Advance*, March-April 2014). With starting pay below \$3,000 per three-credit course, some of the most dedicated and hard-working educators around find it impossible to make ends meet...let alone in a city known for its high, and rising, cost of living. Lest these disparities slip off the radar screen, the CUNY Grad Center kept the story going (inadvertently, no doubt) by hiring economist Paul Krugman to teach one seminar per year for \$225,000.

Following exhortations to do the math, we got out the old calculator and verified: Yes, Virginia, that really is 75 times the \$3K average that CUNY adjuncts make per course. While favoring the obscenest possible paychecks for CEOs and golden parachutes galore, free marketeers couldn’t resist the temptation to score points against the liberal Keynesian economist and Nobel Prize winner. In an on-line commentary written from a pointedly different standpoint, Grad Center adjunct activist Sean Kennedy observed that despite constant claims of a “lack of money” for public ed, “there is always money to be had, at CUNY as elsewhere, whether it’s to hire a celebrity prof or to build a \$350 million ‘world-class’ science center.”

Is there a Nobel Prize for Inequality Promotion? CUNY management might just win it.

### Join the CCU!

Monthly meetings are held at the CUNY Graduate Center, usually on the last Friday of the month, from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m.

Upcoming meetings:

Friday, April 25, Room 5489

Friday, May 30, Room 5489

E-mail: [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com)

Or contact your campus representative:

**Baruch:** Douglas Medina/Box J-306/dmedina@gc.cuny.edu  
**BMCC:** Tom Smith/Social Science/thomasmith436@comcast.net

**Hunter College:** Sándor John/History/s\_an@msn.com

**John Jay:** Holly Clarke/Public Mgt. Economics /clarkeh@ao.com

**Medgar Evers:** Nancy Thompson/  
nlewisthompson@optonline.net

**Queens:** Abe Walker/Sociology/awalker@qc.cuny.edu

Labor donated

## TAs keep up the query:

### “What’s up with this working for free business?”

As noted in previous issues of *The Advance*, CUNY Contingents Unite initiated a campaign against the widespread practice of not paying teaching assistants for significant parts of the work they find themselves required to perform. Our campaign to stop this abuse continues. A hearing on “Step 3” (arbitration) of the grievance against this practice at Hunter is still pending.

**Solidarity:** CUNY students and adjuncts joined an April 19 rally in support of immigrant restaurant workers in the Bronx, who launched a campaign against wage theft, harassment and discrimination they say is rampant at the Liberato Restaurant on 183rd Street...

Two of the student activists arrested in protests against the militarization of CUNY still have charges against them pending; their court appearance is scheduled for April 28 at 100 Centre Street. Defenders of the basic right to protest have demanded that all charges be dropped now...

Painters’ Union activist Wyatt McMinn, arrested in Vancouver, WA at a protest against attempts to push through union-busting “right-to-work” laws in the Pacific Northwest, is scheduled to go on trial on May 29. Activists from many unions on the West Coast and beyond are calling his case a crucial one for basic labor rights. More in our next issue.

**Did you know?** With “adjunctification” of universities growing non-stop, there are an estimated one million adjuncts in the U.S. As of 2009, 75.5% of faculty members and instructors were “employed in contingent positions, off the tenure track” (*Higher Education Advocate*, Sept. 2012). Here at CUNY, there are about 13,000 “non-tenure-track” faculty out of a total teaching force of approximately 20,000.

To help build the fight for \$5K on May Day and beyond, contact the CCU on your campus:

### Our 4 Demands for the Union Contract Struggle

- 1) Minimum three-year contracts for adjuncts, with documented reasons for non-reappointment and a system of seniority.
- 2) Wage increase of \$30 per credit hour for adjuncts; equivalent for grad fellows and other contingents. Step raises every year.
- 3) Comprehensive employer-paid health insurance on par with municipal workers for all contingent employees.
- 4) Promotional series, real job security and due process for HEOs.

# *The Advance* Newsletter of CUNY Contingents Unite

## Fighting to Win the Struggle for \$7K *Two-Tier Labor Must Go!*

Fifteen months ago, the leadership of our union, the Professional Staff Congress, pushed through a contract that, we wrote at the time, “continues and deepens the pattern of previous contracts: increasing the monstrous inequalities of CUNY’s two-tier labor system.” Far from addressing **adjunct poverty**, “the unbearable situation is slated to continue”; far from moving in the direction of equal pay for equal work, “the immense gap in pay and benefits” would “grow wider” (“Vote No!” *The Advance*, June 2016.) This contract is expiring soon. “Contingent” CUNY employees are saying loud and clear that we do **not** intend to see more of the same.

In particular, the **demand for “7K”** (a minimum starting salary of \$7,000 per 3-credit course), with real job security – a call that goes back to the intensive campaign of 2014 described on page 2 – is picking up steam. Let’s be clear: we are not proposing, suggesting, requesting or hoping that this be taken under consideration: we are **demanding that the union make this a bottom-line point in the contract fight that’s about to begin**. This can only mean a real struggle, on several fronts. Among them:

– Protests and demonstrations should not only continue, but bring in large numbers of **undergrads from across the CUNY system**. This means connecting the push for 7K to the fight for no tuition, for open admissions, and against the racist and anti-immigrant repression that targets large numbers of CUNY students and their families.

– **Chapters of the PSC** must be won to formally and officially signing on to the 7K demand now.

– Adjuncts need to link up with **HEOs, CLTs and other sectors** of the PSC, fighting the two-tier system’s divide-and-conquer logic all down the line. This is also key to winning active support from as many tenured/tenure-track faculty as possible.

– It’s crucial to mobilize together with **campus workers** who are mainly members of DC37, UNITE-HERE and other unions. This was seen in our campaign last year against Cuomo’s exclusion of CUNY workers from the \$15 minimum wage he announced SUNY workers would get.

– A real fight would inevitably come up against the New York State **Taylor Law**, which “prohibits” not only strikes but **any** work action by public employees. Both the Democratic and Republican parties of capital enforce it. To break and rip up this anti-labor law, what’s needed is power: working-class power in alliance with all the oppressed.

The entire labor movement is under attack. Yet increasing numbers want to fight. 40,000 Verizon workers went on strike last year. Spectrum cable workers have been on strike for six months. Immigrant workers in NYC wage inspiring, courageous organizing drives. In August, shortly after Charlottesville, West Coast longshore workers voted to use their power to shut down a fascist provocation in San Francisco. In an editorial on adjunct poverty three years ago, *The Advance* stressed: “It is power...not moral suasion, that can bring real victories.” Let’s bring it to bear in the fight for 7K and to **dismantle the two-tier system**.





**Needed to win: mass mobilization bringing in large numbers of undergrads together with campus workers, key sectors of city labor, immigrants, oppressed communities.** 2014: National campaign for \$5K minimum per course, with 800 signatures at CUNY, set stage for adoption of CCU's motion for \$7K demand at international Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor conference that summer. Left: May Day 2014 protest. Right: CCU/Adjunct Project posters for \$7K at September 2014 PSC rally.

## International Adjunct Conference Calls for \$7K

In 2014, CUNY Contingents Unite initiated a united-front campaign against adjunct poverty pay. Almost 800 signatures of CUNY faculty and staff had been gathered for the demand that “5K” be a bottom-line demand in current union contract negotiations at the City University. This was based on the nationwide “5K” demand that began at SUNY New Paltz and was adopted by adjunct groups and unions around the country. In August 2014, we brought a resolution to the international Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor conference, where strong arguments were made for this to be changed to 7K in line with the Modern Language Association minimum figure; this is reflected in the resolution which was enthusiastically adopted there. We reproduce it below.

### **SUPPORTING U.S. CALL FOR \$7,000 MINIMUM PER 3-CREDIT COURSE, A SENIORITY SYSTEM, AND REAL JOB SECURITY FOR ALL CONTINGENT FACULTY**

Whereas, the two-tier system of academic labor, in which there is a much-diminished population of tenure line (permanent) faculty and a large and growing population of long-term and shorter-term contingent faculty, is producing untenable economic hardship and intolerable working conditions that reflect escalating attacks on education, labor rights and students, and

Whereas, we seek full equality and the dismantling of the tiered labor system and support real advances

toward this goal (such as a significant pro rata increase in pay); seniority rights and job security, and

Whereas, the crisis of contingent labor has highlighted the need for parity, with real job security and a seniority system, and

Whereas, this crisis has brought a call in the U.S. for achieving or surpassing a MINIMUM starting salary of at least \$7,000 (“7K”) per 3-credit course (or its equivalent) (the minimum salary endorsed by the Modern Language Association [MLA]), with real job security and a seniority system, which, while still far from parity, would be a significant advance for many contingent faculty, and a call with similar intent has been endorsed by several higher education unions in New York State, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT),\* therefore, be it

RESOLVED that COCAL XI endorses the call in the U.S. for achieving or surpassing a MINIMUM starting salary of at least \$7K per 3-credit course (or its equivalent) for all contingent academic employees in the U.S., combined with real job security and a seniority system; that this objective, despite being modest, is long overdue and needs to be implemented now, and that we support the struggle for this to be achieved in current contract negotiations.

\* The NEA, the AFT, and several New York State higher education unions have endorsed the Mayday \$5K (or a similar) proposal.

## *Is There Such a Thing as a “Just Contract”?*

# 7K and Job Security Must Be Part of the Fight to Demolish the Two-Tier Labor System

This issue of *The Advance* focuses on the fight for “7K,” with real job security for all CUNY’s contingent employees and a seniority system; some considerations on how to push this struggle forward; and a little about its history. The struggle against adjunct poverty is not postponable. We cannot allow the demand to be relegated yet again to “somewhere over the rainbow,” or to wither like an eternal dream deferred.

In this short opinion piece I would like to argue the following:

First: We face powerful enemies in this fight, so only by mobilizing a *greater* power will it be possible to win. That means a class-struggle orientation, bringing in powerful sectors of the city’s multiracial working class in alliance with large numbers of CUNY undergrads, immigrants, and oppressed communities. This is doubly important given the Taylor Law’s “illegalization” of strikes by public employees.

Second: The two-tier system can never be made “just” or “fair.” The burning, urgent demand for 7K must be fought for as part of the struggle to dismantle and demolish the entire two-tier labor system. That will not be accomplished within the framework of “normal” labor-management negotiations (even if these were made less bureaucratic on the labor side). It can only happen as part of a major upheaval against the whole set-up through which the hand-picked representatives of the ruling class lord it over everyone who works and studies at CUNY.

Third: As we have just about all seen for ourselves, the union bureaucracy is a central obstacle to the struggle. For them, the time is never right for a real attack on the two-tier system. Adjuncts are supposed to adjust their expectations eternally to the logic and framework set by that system. If we don’t, then all too often we’re treated like ingrate no-goodniks who should sit down, shut up and wait for better times. Meanwhile, the bureaucrats endlessly aver, better

times will come only through more of their eternal subjugation to the Democratic Party that administers the Taylor Law in NY State, racist “broken windows” in NYC, and paved the way for Trump. Forget about it.

Lastly: In a sharp struggle, political clarity is crucial. And here I would like to challenge slogans about a “just” or “fair” contract, “the contract you deserve,” etc. It’s no accident that the labor bureaucracy – and management – use the language of “fair” and “just” contracts. The whole framework is false; to put it another way, it’s the ideology of capitalism itself.

Any contract negotiation consists of haggling over the price of labor power – and those of us who depend on a paycheck to survive have little choice, so long as this social system continues. So yes, unless we can do this “bargaining” collectively, we’re pretty much helpless. Some contracts are better, or worse, than others. But there’s nothing fair or just about the bargain.

So why does the labor bureaucracy go on about fair and just contracts? Because its social function is to serve as “mediators” of labor’s struggle with capital. It sees that as natural and eternal. It is this social role that leads to its eternal sellouts.

Not for nothing did Karl Marx call “A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work” a “*conservative motto*,” in his classic *Wages, Price and Profit* (1865). While fighting for higher wages and better conditions, he argued, the working class should “instead inscribe on [its] banner the *revolutionary* watchword: ‘Abolition of the wages system’” – that is, of capitalism.

**Why does this matter now?** It matters because a strategy for winning needs to be genuinely radical, that is, to get to the root of the problem. James P. Cannon put it like this in a classic article from the ‘30s: a struggle between labor and capital is “decided by power; ‘justice’ has nothing to do with it. The workers will not have justice until they take over the world.” And our chance of winning this particular battle depends on placing it squarely in that context. – *Sándor*

# *The Advance* Newsletter of CUNY Contingents Unite

## The Taylor Law: What It Is and How to Smash It

### \$7K or Strike!

In mid-March, CUNY management finally came to the table to formally start negotiations for a new contract with our union, the Professional Staff Congress. Key for the “contingent majority” at CUNY is the demand for “\$7K” – a minimum of \$7,000 per three-credit course for adjuncts – and real job security. Current poverty pay for adjuncts averages around \$3,500 per course.

The formal adoption of the \$7K demand by the PSC is an important step – but it must be put into practice, and that means *fighting to win it*. In previous issues of this newsletter, CUNY Contingents Unite has discussed what this would mean. The union’s adoption of the \$7K demand is a result of years-long efforts by adjunct activists, going back to the campaign the CCU initiated in 2014. Unable to live on CUNY’s poverty pay, adjuncts and other “contingent” employees were fed up with the ever-increasing inequalities enshrined in, and *deepened* by, each successive contract agreed to by the leadership of the union. We stressed that the \$7K demand must be “*a bottom-line point in the*



At December 4, 2017 union contract campaign march.

“*a bottom-line point in the*

### Vote “YES” on the “\$7K or Strike” Resolution in the GC PSC Chapter

CUNY Contingents Unite urges all members of the Graduate Center PSC chapter to vote “Yes” on the resolution supporting the call for the union to go on strike if CUNY management does not agree to the demand for a minimum of \$7K per course. As we argued in the last issue of *The Advance*, it is crucial to get PSC chapters on record for this demand. All those fighting to end adjunct poverty should back the resolution for the GC chapter, which is to come up for a vote at its April 26 meeting. This or similar initiatives should be spread to chapters throughout CUNY.

**contract fight.**” What would a real fight to win this demand require? Up against powerful opponents, arguments about justice, equity and the obvious rightness of our case for \$7K would not bring victory. It’s a question of **power**.

Thus, we argued that winning requires “bring[ing] in **large numbers of undergrads from across the CUNY system** ... connecting the push for 7K to the fight for no tuition, for open admissions, and against the racist and anti-immigrant repression that targets large numbers of CUNY students and their families.” It requires actively “link[ing] up with **HEOs, CLTs and other sectors** of the PSC, fighting the two-tier system’s divide-and-conquer logic all down the line.” It requires mobilizing “together with **campus workers** who are mainly members of DC37, UNITE-HERE and other unions.” And it requires rejecting the ivory-tower outlook imbued by academia, and actually connecting up with the power and struggles of the working class and oppressed throughout the city and beyond. This is especially crucial given that a real fight for \$7K “would inevitably come up against the New York State **Taylor Law**.” (See “Fighting to Win the Struggle for \$7K,” *The Advance*, October 2017.)

Instead, the union leadership’s primary strategy for \$7K presently centers on lobbying state represent-

atives in Albany on April 24. The history of labor struggle shows that lobbying Democratic politicians falls flat on its face as a strategy, failing to mobilize labor’s power in the quest to win crucial demands.

At the December 4, 2017 contract campaign march called by the PSC, a contingent of CCU and student activists led militant chants of “7K or Strike!” and “Smash the Taylor Law!” After the march reached Baruch College, where CUNY’s Board of Trustees was meeting, the contingent led a large part of the crowd in chanting the “7K or Strike” slogan. The union leadership was clearly unsettled by the chant, which cuts against the strategy of requesting elected officials to “do the right thing.” Moreover, the anti-strike Taylor Law is administered by both the Democratic and Republican parties. This was shown in the 2005 NYC transit workers strike, when Republican mayor Michael Bloomberg worked with Democratic state attorney general Eliot Spitzer to jail the striking union’s president and impose heavy fines and penalties on the union and its members.

#### **A Weapon in Bosses’ Anti-Labor Arsenal**

New York is one of 24 states with laws “illegalizing” public employee strikes. New York State’s Taylor Law grew out of a previous anti-strike law, the Condon-Wadlin Act, which failed to prevent the victorious



Part of the CCU and student contingent at December 4, 2017 PSC contract campaign rally outside Baruch.

transit workers strike of 1966. In that historic battle, jailed strike leader Mike Quill famously declared: “The judge can drop dead in his black robes. I don’t care if I rot in jail. I will not call off the strike.” Hanging tough, the workers brought the city to a standstill – and won.

The very next year, the ruling class rolled out the Taylor Law as a new and improved weapon against public employee strikes. Section 210, “Prohibition of Strikes,” begins: “No public employee or employee organization shall engage in a strike, and no public employee or employee organization shall cause, instigate, encourage, or condone a strike.” It further states: “For the purpose of [the law], an employee who is absent from work without permission, or who abstains wholly or in part from the performance of his duties in his normal manner without permission, on the date or dates when a strike occurs, shall be presumed to have engaged in such strike on such date or dates.”

Yet labor leaders have essentially made a devil’s bargain regarding the Taylor Law, often arguing that it’s not so bad after all as it contains provisions making it easier to bring in new membership sectors, collect dues and “stabilize” labor relations. Additionally, the 1982 Triborough Amendment to the Taylor Law mandates public employers to maintain the terms of expired contracts until new ones are negotiated. Thus, when CUNY contract negotiations continued for years without a settlement, the old contract remained in effect, as pressure built to sign something, anything.

By buckling under to the prohibition of public workers’ most fundamental weapon – the strike – the labor officialdom helped cement the subjugation of the working class to the capitalist state, reinforcing this with loyal political subordination of labor to the bosses’ Democratic Party.

At CUNY, the Taylor Law helps back up the grotesque two-tier labor system, which management uses to divide and conquer us all. The truth is there is no way to dismantle that system within the boss-dictated “rules of the game,” in which the Taylor Law looms large. The fight for \$7K, and to do away with the adjunct poverty that is the foundation for two-tier labor, cannot be won within the framework of “regular” trade unionism, or simply at the bargaining table.

### **What West Virginia Teachers Taught**

The labor movement has been electrified by the teachers strike in West Virginia. It’s a state whose supreme court declared “Public employees have no right to strike” in 1990, after a Democratic attorney general asked it to declare illegal “any strike or concerted work

stoppage by the public teachers of this state.” After a revolt inside the union led to the strike, the state’s rulers faced the prospect of jailing 30,000 teachers – and decided not to try. The WV teachers won a real (though still limited) victory – not least because they showed you can wage an “illegal” strike and win. This example has helped helping inspire walkouts and struggles in Oklahoma, Kentucky and Arizona, as the impact continues to spread.

Here in New York, to take on the Taylor Law is a serious proposition. It requires the will to wage a hard struggle. It requires a real study of the history and lessons of past struggles. It requires in-depth organization, preparation, and systematic winning over of large numbers of adjuncts and others throughout the bottom tiers of CUNY’s labor system. This can lay the basis for gaining significant numbers of those further up in the scale to helping win the fight. Winning requires serious, principled and savvy work in the union, without being bound by its bureaucratic structures, while firmly rejecting anti-union schemes or reliance on the bosses’ politicians and government. A winning strategy means working to build class-struggle leadership.

As some West Virginia teachers pointed out, unions themselves used to be illegal. The way you win the right to strike is by striking, and doing so with enough power to prevail. To defeat and smash the Taylor Law, we need to connect with the power of those who make this city run. The ruling class can go a long time without college essays being graded. It can’t go without construction, phone service, subways and buses, taxis, restaurants, domestic workers and the rest of the multiracial, largely immigrant working class.

Pie in the sky? Hardly. Thousands of construction workers are rallying against union-busting at Hudson Yards. Spectrum workers have been on strike for over a year. Verizon workers have struck repeatedly in recent years. NYC taxi workers are up in arms against the destruction of their livelihood. Immigrant restaurant and warehouse workers have waged inspiring struggles from the Hot and Crusty bakery to B&H Photo. Subway and bus workers – and riders! – are fed up with the predations of the MTA. The daughters and sons of this working class are the quarter million students at CUNY.

Adjuncts can’t win \$7K on our own. But we can win it. It requires a full-on upheaval at CUNY, spilling well beyond the university, helping bring out the power of the workers and oppressed against the lords of capital who run roughshod over us all. It’s about time.

## **Sinister “Signature” Program at Baruch CIA Out of CUNY, Now!**

In August 2017, the Central Intelligence Agency issued a press release announcing that CUNY’s Baruch College is the most recent campus to pilot the Agency’s “Signature Schools Program.” The Baruch deal – the latest episode in the drive to militarize CUNY – came nearly a year after the CIA launched the program at the University of New Mexico. The University of Illinois-Chicago has also signed on.

The CIA PR statement quoted Baruch president Mitchel Wallerstein: “I am certain that in the years to come, the CIA-Baruch Signature School Program will provide our students with numerous, exciting career options both in the US and abroad.”

What does this new partnership actually mean? Just take a look at the whole history of the CIA. It means that the notorious spy agency is seeking to exploit CUNY students’ and faculty members’ different national and ethnic backgrounds to more effectively infiltrate, spy on, torture and murder those deemed to stand in the way of racist U.S. imperialism. Making Baruch a staging ground for the CIA simultaneously poses an acute danger to students, faculty and workers at Baruch and throughout CUNY, many of whose families come from countries and populations targeted by the spy agency and other repressive forces.

Baruch faculty became aware of the administration’s nefarious alliance with “The Company” over winter break, and discussed it at a meeting in February 2018. Opposition has also grown in the Baruch chapter of the PSC, and among other activists. In March, the CUNY Struggle group, based at the Graduate Center, published excerpts from the CIA-Baruch “Memorandum of Understanding” on its website. This includes plans to “conduct on-campus interviews; information sessions; workshops; simulations; and networking activities” with student and professional organizations.

It is inconceivable that Baruch would have made this deal without involvement from the very top of the CUNY administration and Board of Trustees. Meanwhile, the CIA boasts that it has already been carrying out recruitment at CUNY. All files on this must be opened up and published now!

Defending our university from the CIA incursion is a vital task in solidarity with working and oppressed people around the world, and in defense of the rights of us all here at CUNY. The PSC needs to take a clear and unambiguous stand against this latest attempt to make CUNY a “war college.” Students, faculty and workers need to carry out massive protest and exposure, demanding: CIA (and all spy, police and other repressive agencies) **Out of CUNY, Now!**

## **“CUNY Food Workers Complain of Poor Conditions and Low Wages” – NYT**

It’s not news to cafeteria and other food workers at CUNY, but recently the *New York Times* (28 March) ran an article quoting workers at Kingsborough, Queens, City Tech and other CUNY campuses about the poverty wages and lousy working conditions they face. Everyone at CUNY should be aware of this situation. Active solidarity with the food workers is also connected to the issues facing the low-paid “contingent majority” of CUNY faculty, together with students, staff and other campus workers.

Naturally, CUNY tries to offload responsibility for what happens in its cafeterias onto the food-service companies it subcontracts. These ruthless firms super-exploit the largely African American, Latino and women workers whose underpaid labor in dangerous and often unsanitary conditions brings more profit to the owners.

On January 31, a protest of 60 workers, students and labor activists was carried out in the LaGuardia Community College cafeteria, in support of workers employed by the MBJ company there. Among the issues raised was MBJ management using one of the dirtiest tricks in the bosses’ books: trying to intimidate workers seeking to unionize by demanding that undocumented brothers and sisters provide Social Security numbers.

At Hunter College, the AVI Foodsystems company that runs food service on campus has announced that it plans to leave by the beginning of Fall 2018. Which other company will take its place is apparently not yet decided. CUNY activists should recall the fight Hunter cafeteria workers – who are members of UNITE HERE Local 100 – carried out in 2009 to stop AVI’s assault on their health benefits.

Back in 2009 the CCU helped bring out students and faculty to support the Hunter cafeteria workers. Large, loud protests, together with signatures from a thousand students and faculty, and plans to escalate the struggle, eventually forced the company to back down on its attempt to slash healthcare.

That campaign set the stage for more solidarity. Unlike activists hemmed in by the ivory-tower outlook, Hunter cafeteria workers sent representatives to support immigrant workers’ organizing drives at the Hot and Crusty bakery/restaurant, Bröd Kitchen and elsewhere. It’s a little taste of the potential power of NYC’s multiracial working class – the power we all need to win.

***Support the cafeteria workers!***

# The Advance

Newsletter of  
CUNY Contingents Unite

## Fighting to Defend Our Jobs

During the last months, troubling reports of impending layoffs of adjuncts started coming out of various campuses of the City University of New York. An early warning occurred when adjuncts in the City College English Department were told to expect no more than one class apiece. Soon, across CUNY, adjuncts were losing jobs, courses, income... For quite a few, this means losing health insurance – bringing home the point that maintaining health benefits in the face of threatened layoffs is a crucial demand for CUNY contingents.

Among the most alarming situations developed at Baruch College, where adjuncts alerted the CCU regarding impending course consolidations and layoffs. What emerged was an administration plan to push new “jumbo” classes, upping the workload (speedup) while putting large numbers of adjunct jobs on the chopping block. The CCU reached out to the campus chapter of our union, the Professional Staff Congress, as well as full-time faculty and students opposed to this attack on the quality of education.

Our organizing efforts led to a series of four meetings at Baruch that included adjuncts, full-time faculty (including two department chairs), the PSC chapter chair as well as the vice-chair of the CUNY-wide College Lab Technicians chapter.

The Baruch administration clearly intended to offload its budgetary

constraints onto the backs of contingent faculty. The plan from the Provost’s office was to create jumbo classes in a number of required lower-level liberal arts courses. In a glaring case, it was proposed that class sizes in the English Department’s “Great Works” program be increased from a maximum of 34 students per course to a new limit of 110! This increase would have led directly to large-scale adjunct layoffs, since many such courses are taught by contingent faculty.

Crucially in the struggle, a number of full-time faculty spoke out against this degradation of academic life, faculty working conditions and student learning conditions. Notably, Sociology-Anthropology chair Glenn Petersen wrote an open letter to the Baruch administration stating that his department “opposes and will not cooperate” with the jumbo class/adjunct layoff plan.

As a result of the intensive organizing, the administration has now partially retreated. For example, the

“jumbo” assault on the “Great Works” program has reportedly been halted, at least for the next two semesters. However, it looks likely that class sizes in some courses will be increased from 28 to 31 students and that fewer sections of ENG 2150 will be offered. Moreover, the adjunct budget in total will likely be cut. All this illustrates that while our organizing efforts helped save a number of jobs, the situation is far from resolved.

Baruch PSC chair Peter Hitchcock noted that his chapter has formally requested, to no avail so far, to see the Baruch “all funds budget.” CCU members emphasized the importance of raising the demand to “Open the Books!” This met with enthusiasm at the meetings, which unanimously agreed to publicize this demand. Faculty, students and staff have to see the books, verify and inspect the numbers. As one clerical worker told us, administrators “know nothing about education,” but those involved with its real workings of education can and will unveil the real story (like the ongoing search for a new \$165,000 bigwig at Baruch!). Don’t let your job be next on the chopping block; join us!

### Our 4 Demands for the Union Contract Struggle

- 1) **Minimum three-year contracts for adjuncts, with documented reasons for non-reappointment and a system of seniority.**
- 2) **Wage increase of \$30 per credit hour for adjuncts; equivalent for grad fellows and other contingent titles. Step raises every year.**
- 3) **Comprehensive employer-paid health insurance on par with municipal workers for all contingent employees.**
- 4) **Promotional series, real job security and due process for HEOs.**

# CUNY Contingents

## Won't Take "No" as an Answer To Our Demands

Last November 4, the Professional Staff Congress held a special Delegate Assembly to vote on the official "bargaining agenda" released by the union leadership the previous night. Over 50 activists from CUNY Contingents Unite (CCU) and the Adjunct Project (AP) – joined by many other guests and observers – came to the meeting to fight for our *four demands for the union contract struggle*. (See box on p. 1.)

Wearing the distinctive orange shirts created by the AP, we presented **1,400 signatures** in support of our demands, which were gathered in weeks of intensive work on CUNY campuses. Speaking from the floor, union delegates who are members of the CCU, joined by full-time allies, called for an adequate number of days to be allotted to analyze, discuss and debate the leadership's proposal. Instead, a vote was pushed through at the meeting, approving the official agenda – but not before we put up our four demands for an official vote. Despite intense pressure, approximately a quarter of the delegates voted in favor.

Though the contract demands promoted by the union leadership were approved by the assembly, our mobilization resulted in most of the discussion focusing on the situation of adjuncts and other contingent CUNY workers, together with the need to overcome the two-tier labor system. We reiterate what we said on November 4: the "official" bargaining agenda does not meet our needs, and does not represent the kind of drive against the two-tier labor system that all of us who work and study at CUNY so urgently need.

This is a crucial fight. Today, we are suffering the effects of the last contract settlement, which not only left the two-tier system intact but actually *increased* its inequalities.

Thus, *a luta continua* ("the struggle continues") is no empty phrase for us today. The CCU must continue to mobi-

lize, organize and educate for our 4 contract demands.

CUNY's contingent workers won't take "No" for an answer to our demands. The defense of our rights is more urgent than ever in the face of the aggressive anti-worker stance of the new Cuomo administration in Albany.

## Academic Freedom Under Attack

It's not so often that CUNY adjuncts wind up in the *New York Times*, but on January 28 the political purge of a Brooklyn College adjunct made the "paper of record."

Scheduled to teach a seminar on Middle East politics, Kristofer Petersen-Overton had his appointment rescinded days after a Brooklyn assemblyman wrote the administration to denounce the supposedly "slanted" political content of the instructor's writings, which this politician deemed too critical of Israel.

You could hardly ask for a clearer example of how **adjuncts' lack of job security is an academic freedom issue**. It's not the first time CUNY academics have been given the Joe McCarthy treatment, but there is an ominous upswing in such attacks. Brooklyn College English prof Moustafa Bayoumi was targeted after the undergrad writing program decided to use his book *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America*. Now Grad Center distinguished Poli Sci professor Frances Fox-Piven has been receiving death threats after being demonized by Glenn Beck.

Speaking of intimidation, **at Medgar Evers College**, "non-reappointment" letters were given to a number of professors in class, in front of their students – by security guards. Located in the largest African American neighborhood in the

United States, MEC has – in the words of one historian – long been given "second-class treatment" by CUNY Central.

Now the administration of President William Pollard has taken a series of measures that have aroused the indignation of many faculty at the campus, leading to a vote of "no confidence."

At meetings on the crisis, CCU representatives heard faculty members describe what they characterized as "disrespect and contempt" toward their initiatives, events and programs, as well as campus governance. A center initiated by formerly incarcerated students was closed down, with personal computers seized.

Remarkably at a campus named for the civil rights leader murdered in Mississippi, the provost reportedly derided bringing to campus a press that publishes books by "activist" scholars. (The reference was to South End Press, which publishes works by bell hooks, Manning Marable, Cornel West and others.)

**Defending our colleagues throughout CUNY – "part-time" and full-time alike – is crucial to the rights of us all.**

Join the CCU!

E-mail: [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com)

Or contact your campus representative

**Baruch:** Douglas Medina/Box J-306  
[dmedina@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:dmedina@gc.cuny.edu)

**BCC:** Celia Braxton/Comm. Arts & Sciences  
[bronxccu@gmail.com](mailto:bronxccu@gmail.com)

**BMCC:** Mike Vozick/Science  
[mvoz@post.com](mailto:mvoz@post.com)

**Center for Worker Ed:** Mike Vozick/Science  
[mvoz@post.com](mailto:mvoz@post.com)

**Hunter College:** Sándor John/History  
[s\\_an@msn.com](mailto:s_an@msn.com)

**John Jay:** Howard Pflanzler/Comm. & Theatre  
[hpflanzler@yahoo.com](mailto:hpflanzler@yahoo.com)

**Lehman College:** Arto Artinian/Political Science  
[artinian@fastmail.fm](mailto:artinian@fastmail.fm)

**Medgar Evers:** Nancy Thompson  
[nlewisthompson@optonline.net](mailto:nlewisthompson@optonline.net)

**Queens:** Abe Walker/Sociology  
[awalker2@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:awalker2@gc.cuny.edu)

**Queensborough:** Carl Lindskoog/WAC-English  
[cskoog79@yahoo.com](mailto:cskoog79@yahoo.com)

No contact person at your campus?

Email [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com) to get involved!

Labor donated



# *The Advance*

Newsletter of **CUNY  
Contingents Unite**

## ***To Defeat CUNY Management Requires a Head-On Fight Against the Two-Tier Labor System***

**Strike authorization? Absolutely!  
But it's crucial that we actually prepare for a strike**

The Professional Staff Congress has called a mass meeting for Thursday, November 19, as part of the announced “escalation” of the struggle for a contract. The PSC has been without a contract since 2010; the 25,000 City University of New York faculty and staff represented by the union have not had a raise since October 2009. CUNY management delivered a new slap in the face to us all on November 4, with its “offer” of 0 (zero) percent for 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and then a total of 6% that would actually be a **pay cut** because of inflation.

For the “contingent majority” at the bottom of CUNY’s deeply destructive two-tier labor system, this situation is doubly unendurable. We cannot live on the poverty wages that adjuncts, grad students, Continuing Ed and other “part-time” faculty receive. We cannot live with the unending insecurity of employment, the lack of seniority, the lack or precarious nature of basic benefits, not to mention the constant disrespect and disregard for us and our work. Nor can we keep silent in the face of management’s ongoing refusal to resolve the most urgent demands of HEOs and other sectors ground underfoot by a Board of Trustees of education privatizers, bankers and real-estate speculators, and a chancellor whose \$670,000 salary, \$19,500/month rent and other mega-perks are paid by CUNY while we can barely afford a monthly Metrocard.

***CUNY contingent faculty and staff are fed up. We cannot and will not wait another three, six or however many years for a real fight against these intolerable conditions.*** We will not be diverted or pieced off by attempts to create a new tier of “long-time” adjuncts facing new forms of job

### **Our 4 Demands for the Union Contract Struggle (approved by the CCU in 2010)**

- 1) **Minimum three-year contracts for adjuncts, with documented reasons for non-reappointment and a system of seniority.**
- 2) **Wage increase of \$30 per credit hour for adjuncts; equivalent for grad fellows and other contingents. Step raises every year.**
- 3) **Comprehensive employer-paid health insurance on par with municipal workers for all contingent employees.**
- 4) **Promotional series, real job security and due process for HEOs.**

insecurity. We demand real job security for all adjuncts. Many are having courses slashed, due in part to Pathways (despite – who could forget? – the contingent majority being blatantly denied the right to vote on it). Nor can we be muffled by the mantra that the union leadership “saved health insurance for adjuncts” (i.e., for those already eligible, and constantly vulnerable, under the restrictive requirements).

**We demand significant improvements in the situation of the contingent majority, not someday, not maybe next time – but in this contract.** If once again, the “part-timers” – many of whom devote their lives to providing education to CUNY students – get trampled, the union’s ability even to hold the line against further management attacks will be at risk.

Given the experience of the last contract, which deepened inequality, CUNY Contingents Unite (CCU), together with the Adjunct Project, gathered over 1,400 signatures supporting our four demands for this contract struggle (see box). At last year’s international Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor conference, our resolution was overwhelmingly passed, for “achieving or surpassing a MINIMUM starting salary of at least \$7K per 3-credit course (or its equivalent) for all contingent academic employees in the U.S., combined with real job security and a seniority system; that this objective, despite being modest, is long overdue and needs to be implemented now, and that we support the struggle for this to be achieved in current contract negotiations.”

The need for a real fight is palpable, and a significant number of union members have come out to recent actions. So have maintenance, office and other workers from DC37, as well as hospital, Con Ed and other unionists. The union leadership says Democratic governor Cuomo holds key cards in the stacked poker game where it’s our livelihood at stake. So what are we going to do about this?

One of the main topics at the November 19 mass meeting is supposed to be plans for a strike authorization vote. So let’s have this vote already. **And everyone should vote “Yes!”** – all the more so those on the bottom of CUNY’s labor system. For such a vote to be real and have teeth, we need **real preparations for a strike** – even more so given the Taylor Law. A **strike preparation committee should be elected** at the mass meeting, its members responsible to and recallable by the union ranks.

To win requires an upheaval against inequality, waged by those on the bottom of the labor force, joined by their full-time colleagues, bringing out the power of the city’s working class and oppressed, together with CUNY students facing endless tuition hikes, racist police repression and economic hardship. So let’s make it loud and clear: **You cannot win against CUNY management without striking a real blow against its divide-and-conquer, two-tier system, the keystone of its domination. That means a real fight NOW against poverty wages, job insecurity and intolerable inequality for the contingent majority.**

### **Join the CCU!**

**Meetings are held at the CUNY Graduate Center, usually on the last Friday of the month, from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m.**

**E-mail: [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com)**

*Labor donated*

Courses being cut in your department? Pathways or CUNYFirst wreaking havoc? Adjunct layoffs? Budget cuts? Late pay? TAs not being paid for some of the hours they’re required to work? Terrible conditions for Continuing Ed, CLIP, HEOs, CLTs or other work groups? Inroads against academic freedom and student rights?

These are some of the problems many of us have been facing. Let us know what’s happening on your campus!

Write the CCU at [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com)

## **Cuomo Says Workers Will Get \$15 Minimum Wage at SUNY – But Not at CUNY!**

# **\$15 Minimum Must Be Applied at CUNY Now**

Last month, Governor Cuomo announced an executive action to raise the minimum wage for workers at the State University of New York to \$15. However, his plan **excludes CUNY workers from the \$15 minimum**. Thousands of workers at CUNY make less than \$15 an hour, This includes many on the state payroll, working in clerical and research positions, as computer programmers, receptionists, library, lab and building assistants, etc. And what about workers who make less than \$15 at food-service and other contractors? CUNY colleges brought in those contractors, sharing responsibility for those wage rates too.

It's really a slap in the face to say SUNY will get a \$15 minimum but CUNY workers won't. Why are we being singled out for this exclusion? We can't survive on poverty pay. And as anyone paying rent and other bills in NYC knows, even \$15/hour doesn't match the cost of living.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, CUNY management refuses to provide even the most urgently needed raise and conditions for adjuncts and others. Declaring an "impasse" in contract negotiations, they're trying to get the state to dictate a terrible contract.

**We invite workers affected by this situation, students, adjuncts, other faculty and staff who support the struggle, to come to an outdoor meeting and press conference to talk about this and demand that at least \$15 an hour be the minimum now for all CUNY workers.**

**TODAY!**

**WEDS., FEB. 10, 3:30 PM**

**Outside Hunter West bldg,  
68th & Lexington**

Preliminary list: CUNY Contingents Unite/Hunter; workers from several parts of the Hunter workforce; rank-and-file members of DC37 and other unions; Jeremy Glick, English Dept., Hunter PSC chapter chair; Internationalist Club; Class Struggle Education Workers.

*For more information:* [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com)

*Labor donated*



<sup>1</sup> An MIT study found that a worker supporting a child (such as a single mother) in Manhattan need at least \$27.44 per hour just to cover food, rent, transportation, child care and other basic necessities. And that presumes the person is working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year (i.e., no vacation), which many are not, at least not at one job. See <http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/36061>

# At Hunter Rally, Workers and Students Demand: \$15 Minimum Must Be Applied at CUNY Now!

On Wednesday, February 10th, the plaza in front of Hunter College's West building rang with chants from workers and students demanding "15 dollars at CUNY now," "15 now, we can't wait, nothing to negotiate" and "Cuomo: stop attacking CUNY workers." The rally was sparked by Governor Cuomo's announcement of plans to raise the minimum wage to \$15 for workers at SUNY – but not at CUNY. At the protest, workers voiced outrage at this blatant exclusion of CUNY from the \$15 minimum.

Contingents of janitorial, maintenance, and cafeteria workers were the rally's core. The demand: that at least \$15 an hour be the minimum now for all CUNY workers. Adjuncts joined in, demanding an end to poverty pay. College and office assistants, and other job groups, were represented with passionate speeches and boldly lettered signs. Students explained why "the workers' fight is our fight too." Tuition, the cost of living and economic hardships make it hard just to stay in school.

"It's really a slap in the face to say SUNY workers will get a \$15 minimum but CUNY workers won't," rally organizers said. Speakers called to unite all workers, at CUNY, SUNY and everywhere, against this latest divide-and-conquer scheme. Even \$15 an hour comes nowhere near to matching the cost of living in NYC, protestors noted. Anyone paying bills and rent in this city knows that. As for CUNY chancellor Milliken, his rent is \$19,500 a month, but he doesn't pay it – we do, together with all his other perks and his salary of \$675,000 (that is, about \$325 an hour).

Meanwhile it's six years and ticking with no raise or new contract for the workforce at the City University of New York. While refusing to provide even the most urgently needed raise and conditions, the CUNY tops declared a so-called "impasse" in negotiations. At the rally, CUNY workers and students made it clear we're fed up.

The protest was initiated by CUNY Contingents Unite activists at Hunter. It was heavily built by rank-and-file members of campus unions (DC37, UNITE HERE, PSC), together with Class Struggle Education Workers and the Hunter Internationalist Club, which worked hard distributing fliers and bringing students out to support the workers' cause. "Union power – workers' power" was one of the most popular chants. The rally was endorsed by Hunter PSC chapter chair Jeremy Glick, and joined by Fitz Reid, president of DC 37 Local 768 (health care employees), Hot and Crusty Workers Association president Mahoma López, and others. Mahoma was recently fired from his job at Bröd Kitchen,



formerly Hot and Crusty, as part of a union-busting drive at the bakery on 63rd and 2nd, just seven blocks from Hunter.

CUNY pays thousands of its workers less than \$15 an hour. This includes large numbers who are on the state payroll. It's a long list, including many in job categories like building, custodial, lab and library assistants, college assistants and CUNY office assistants, computer programmers, receptionists, and many others. CUNY is also responsible for wages at food-service and other contractors on its campuses, many of whose workers also make less than \$15/hour.

Speakers from CUNY Contingents Unite (CCU) urged bringing together workers from all the different job categories and all the different unions in a common struggle, and led chants of "Workers yes, bosses no, poverty wages have got to go." Activists also called for ripping up the hated Taylor Law, which makes it "illegal" for New York State employees to



exercise our right to strike. Given management's aggressive stance against those who work and study at the City University, CCU members helped form an "Adjunct/Worker/Student Committee in Favor of a Strike at CUNY" last semester. It calls to vote "Yes" in the strike authorization vote announced by the PSC faculty/staff union, and to actually prepare a strike. A struggle of this kind means bringing out the power of NYC labor, and addressing key issues facing CUNY students, whose massive participation would be crucial.

"This Is Not a Photo Op for Politicians," read one placard. Cuomo, CUNY management & Co. are obviously playing political games with our livelihood, so it's important to face the political issues, said Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW) speakers, addressing the fact that Cuomo was elected on the Democratic and "Working Families" tickets. One noted that "fake promises and real attacks on the working class and oppressed" come not just from the Democrat Cuomo but from the whole system run by his Democratic and Republican colleagues – from de Blasio's City Hall and City Council to the state legislature in Albany up to Obama's White House and those who seek to fill it next. CSEW speakers called for the unions to quit snuggling up to the bosses' politicians and unchain the **power** of New York City's multiracial working class, together with students and youth, immigrants and oppressed communities.

Following the February 10 rally, energized participants said they want to build on its success and plan further events. As one of the rank-and-file members of DC 37 emphasized, you can't change the situation unless you're willing to join with others and take a stand. Nobody's going to do it for us. It's up to the workers to use our own power to win what we need. A minimum wage of at least \$15 an hour now for all CUNY employees is just a start in that fight.

**SUPPORT BRÖD KITCHEN WORKERS AGAINST BOSSES' UNION-BUSTING DRIVE!**

A little over three years ago, unionists and students at Hunter College helped immigrant workers win an important victory for us all, at the Hot and Crusty bakery/restaurant. After a 55-day picket, the Hot and Crusty workers won a ground-breaking contract, including a union hiring hall. This victory (shown in the award-winning documentary *The Hand That Feeds*) sparked the current victorious unionization campaign at B&H Photo. But owners of the company, now called Bröd, recently launched an all-out campaign to break the union. Threatening to close the 63rd St. restaurant unless the union is decertified, they opened a non-union outlet on West 4th near NYU and fired union president Mahoma López and two other union members. An injury to one is an injury to all! **Rally to support Bröd workers Friday, Feb. 19, 5 PM, 31 West 4th St.**

12 February 2016 – Labor donated  
CUNY Contingents Unite/Hunter  
& Class Struggle Education Workers  
For more information, write:  
cunycontingents@gmail.com



# MEETING & DISCUSSION

## Join us to discuss next steps, and how to bring these issues together: “\$15 minimum must be applied at CUNY now” and “Adjuncts and the CUNY contract struggle”



Earlier this month, workers and students gathered in front of the Hunter West building to protest Gov. Cuomo’s exclusion of CUNY workers from his plan to raise the minimum wage to \$15 for workers at SUNY. Janitorial, maintenance, cafeteria and other workers came out to demand that at least \$15 an hour be the minimum wage for all CUNY workers, now. Thousands of workers at CUNY make less than that, and as we all know even \$15 an hour is far from enough to live on in this city. “This is not a photo op for the politicians,” organizers said, calling for bringing out the power of NYC’s working class.

Meanwhile, CUNY management is hard-lining against urgently needed raises and conditions for adjuncts and others, condemning us to poverty pay. Declaring an “impasse” in contract negotiations, management is trying to get the state to dictate a terrible contract. Last semester, adjunct and student activists formed an “Adjunct/Worker/Student Committee in Favor of a Strike at CUNY.” What are the next steps for us in these struggles, how can we bring them together, and what are some of the underlying issues? Campus workers, adjuncts and students do not get together enough to discuss these topics. It’s high time that we do so. Join us at the meeting, and bring coworkers and classmates!



## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2:00-4:00 PM THOMAS HUNTER 305B

Helping to build this event are: CUNY Contingents Unite/Hunter; workers from several parts of the Hunter workforce; rank-and-file members of DC37 and other unions; Internationalist Club; Class Struggle Education Workers.

For more information: [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com)

Labor donated

# *The Advance* Newsletter of CUNY Contingents Unite

## “7K OR STRIKE”

### •Next Steps •What It Means (and Doesn't)

The central issue in the current CUNY contract campaign is the fight for “7K”: a minimum starting salary of \$7,000 per three-credit course for adjuncts. Some significant steps forward have been made. Getting our union, the Professional Staff Congress, to adopt 7K formally as a demand for these contract negotiations was the outcome of years of struggle, as discussed in recent issues of *The Advance*. As debates continue over what this means in practice, it's important to emphasize again that making the demand real means actually *fighting to win it*.

How? Not by imagining we can convince the CUNY tops, the governor, mayor *et al.* to “be on our side,” or win them over through moral suasion. The coterie calling the shots at CUNY, hand-picked and backed by politicians of both big capitalist parties, holds the anti-labor Taylor Law over our heads. (See “The Taylor Law: What It Is and How to Smash It” on [cunycontingents.wordpress.com](http://cunycontingents.wordpress.com).) A strategy to win the fight for 7K can only be based on mobilizing *power*. That means CUNY's “contingent majority” together with the rest of the union members, large numbers of students throughout CUNY, and key sectors of NYC's multiracial working class that keeps this city running and has the power to shut it down.

The rising call for “7K or Strike” is of great importance in this context. Last April, a meeting of the PSC's Graduate Center chapter, attended by over 100 members, overwhelmingly approved a resolution to “support going on strike” if CUNY management doesn't agree to 7K. This too was a real step forward. A key next step is to *pass the “7K or Strike” resolution in more PSC chapters*. Again, management will not give us what we need just because it's right, or pitched as “fair” – they care nothing for all that. Power is what counts. The strike weapon is and always has been key to labor's power.

As such it has to be approached in a serious, organized and savvy way. For an effective strike to be organized at CUNY, mass support would need to be built, both throughout the university workforce and student body and among the oppressed and working-class population, whose daughters and sons go



to school here. Systematic efforts to overcome the effects of the two-tier system within the PSC itself are essential to defeating management's divide-and-conquer tactics. Building support from members of other unions at CUNY (DC37, UNITE HERE, the various trades, etc.) is crucial too. And as the CCU has always emphasized, a well-thought-out, class-struggle approach to taking on the Taylor Law is essential.

This is some of what "7K or Strike" means from our standpoint. That brings us to what it doesn't mean. This is important since a number of arguments have been raised (at GC and Hunter chapter meetings and elsewhere) that too often fall in the zone between misinformation and "straw man" arguments.

The purpose of passing "7K or Strike" resolutions in union chapters is to continue building the momentum of this crucial call. Obviously a chapter passing such a resolution does not mean that it thereby *calls* a strike, any more than the GC chapter did. Nor does it mean suddenly going on strike with no preparation. Nor does it mean ignoring tenured faculty. (Experience shows that when those on the bottom of the labor system really raise hell, more sectors of those further up the ladder start to heed and side with them.)

What it does mean is building support and laying the groundwork for a struggle that can win. We have to fight for the union as a whole to put it into practice as part of an all-out fight against adjunct poverty. We cannot wait another 3, 6, 12 or infinity years for that to happen. We cannot live with poverty wages any longer. ***So to all our union sisters and brothers: The time is now. Join us in raising the call: 7K or Strike!***

### **FORDHAM: ADJUNCTS GAIN CONTRACT FOR UP TO \$8K PER COURSE**

In mid-July of this year, Fordham University adjuncts approved their first union contract. This followed the vote of 800 instructors to unionize, in July 2017, and an intensive contract campaign that was launched in February. The drive sought to win at least \$7,000 per course, up from \$4,000, and end the two-class cap placed on adjuncts.

What they actually won included some significant advances, though these are unevenly distributed. "For most adjunct faculty," states their union, "pay will rise between 67% to 90%, with a majority of adjuncts receiving between \$7,000 and \$8,000 by the third year of the contract, depending on how long they have taught at Fordham" (Fordham Faculty United/SEIU website). For those with 6+ years worked, pay will rise to 8K/class over the course of the three-year contract.

Those with three to six years of employment will see pay per course rise from 6.4K to 7.6K over the course of the contract. Yet the starting rate for new Fordham adjuncts under the new contract is 4.2K per course (just a \$200 bump from the prior rate), rising to 5.4K by the third year. (Raises for "full-time," non-tenure-track faculty at Fordham, also covered by the contract, are a whole other story. Two-tier labor is alive and kicking.) Classes are no longer capped at two per adjunct; they are now capped at three to four. A big shortfall of the contract is that Fordham adjuncts still don't get any health benefits.

Yet the fact that Fordham adjuncts are gaining up to 8K/course is bound to catch the eye of CUNY adjuncts still stuck getting less than half that amount. It should help fuel our fight against adjunct poverty here at the largest urban public university in the U.S.

### **HUNTER COLLEGE: SUPPORT BUILDS FOR CAFETERIA WORKERS**

Our last issue reported on widespread problems facing food workers at CUNY. This included the statement by the company running the Hunter College cafeteria, AVI Foodsystems, that it planned to leave by the beginning of Fall 2018. Then things got worse. AVI completely shut down the cafeteria and faculty/staff dining room at the end of the Spring semester. All the workers – some of whom have been there for decades – were thrown out of their jobs.

At the beginning of Fall, the Hunter administration put up a sign saying "Coming Soon: A New & Improved Cafeteria!" while not stating what this would entail. They've kept stringing the workers on, bringing them in for individual interviews, while keeping mum about what company (if any) would be taking over, when, under what conditions, etc.

CCU members have worked closely with Hunter cafeteria workers (who are members of UNITE HERE Local 100) on many occasions, going back to the 2009 campaign that defeated AVI's attempt to cut their health benefits.

Shortly before this issue of *The Advance* went to press, a petition was launched at a meeting sponsored by the Hunter Internationalist Club and attended by a large delegation of cafeteria workers. As it states: "*The cafeteria workers need their jobs back; Hunter students, faculty and campus workers need the cafeteria and dining room back. Let's join together to tell the Hunter administration: no union-busting, no more stalling, bring the cafeteria/dining room and the unionized workers back now!*"

To get a copy of the petition and help build support, contact us at [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com).



# *The Advance*

Newsletter of CUNY  
Contingents Unite

## **VOTE NO!**

### ***Proposed PSC Contract Deepens Inequality – Yet Again***

CUNY Contingents Unite calls for a resounding vote of “No!” on the proposed contract announced on June 16 by the leadership of the Professional Staff Congress. On the most burning questions facing the union membership, the proposed settlement continues and deepens the pattern of previous contracts: increasing the monstrous inequalities of CUNY’s two-tier labor system.

Far from addressing **adjunct poverty**, the unbearable situation is slated to continue under the proposed settlement terms. Far from moving – even minimally – in the direction of equal pay for equal work, the **immense gap in pay and benefits** would not only continue, it would grow wider.

The announced wage increase would be applied across the board, with no structural change in how contingent faculty are paid. The announced raise of 10.41% compounded over seven years is *sub-minimal* for all the union membership. As many have noted, it amounts to less than half the reported inflation rate. Given skyrocketing rents and food costs in NYC, it’s not hard to do the math on what that means. Yet even more crucially, CUNY’s two-tier labor system gives that across-the-board figure a further, differential effect. That is to **widen** yet again the chasm between so-called “part-time” (contingent) faculty, making as little as \$21,000/year working full time at roughly \$3K per course, and “full-timers” paid three, four, five or more times as much.

As for the vital issue of **job security**, huge swathes of contingent faculty are left in the lurch outright. The PSC leadership has rejected any real fight against the job insecurity that plagues the contingent workforce as a whole: adjuncts, CLIP, CUNY Start, teaching fellows and others. Instead, the leadership trumpets the plan to create **new tiers** within that workforce. And for the proposed new tier of (some) long-time adjuncts, the planned structure for multi-year contracts is hedged with new dangers.

Adjuncts will continue to have not even a simulacrum of job security until and unless they manage to accumulate several years on the job in the same department of a college. Yet as we all know, innumerable adjuncts live an itinerant existence traveling between campuses trying to get enough hours to barely scrape by (and qualify for health coverage). And what of those who would be covered by the announced “pilot program”? If as of the 2016-17 academic year you’ve been teaching at least 6 contact hours per semester in the same department for 14 out of the last **18 semesters**, you get a two-year appointment. And for all the rest who don’t have those seven to nine years? Forget about it. Subsequently, adjuncts who manage to teach six contact hours for **10 semesters** in the same department “will be **considered** for a three-year appointment” after a “comprehensive review”... Layer upon layer of additional inequality.

The contract announcement states that CUNY management has agreed to “a shared goal of reducing the annual undergraduate teaching contact hour workload for full-time classroom teaching members of the instructional staff by 3 teaching contact hours.” While this vague promise still does not resolve long-standing workload issues for “full-time” faculty, here too the disparity with “part-time” faculty is striking. Even the modest call for adjuncts to get one office hour per course (rather than the current maximum of one paid office hour per week) was not addressed. For the HEO sector, a “discretionary” differential for “excellence...or increased responsibilities,” but still no real due process, job security, promotional series...

Over the past six years, we have fought for the CCU’s four contract demands (see box) signed by 1,400 union members. In May 2014, the PSC proclaimed its endorsement of the nationwide campaign for a minimum of \$5K per course. In light of the MLA’s call for \$7K, the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor’s 2014 conference – hosted and heavily built by the PSC – overwhelmingly passed the CCU’s resolution for “achieving or surpassing a MINIMUM starting salary of at least \$7K per 3-credit course...combined with real job security and a seniority system,” which “is long overdue and needs to be implemented now,” further stating “that we support the struggle for this to be achieved in current contract negotiations.”

But again, what the proposed contract settlement means is that instead of even moving in the direction of basic equality, we are faced with more inequality. This is what the PSC leadership calls a “strong, imaginative contract”? *Imaginative* would be a very diplomatic term for **that** claim.

Continued on page 2

## From 92% Strike Authorization to – a New Sellout

In the six years since the last contract expired, PSC members have come out to one march and rally after another against the arrogant CUNY bosses. Faced with management's intransigence, and growing impatience in the ranks, the union leadership called for a strike authorization vote. The CCU militantly campaigned in favor of voting "Yes." As we wrote last November: "Strike authorization? Absolutely! But it's crucial that we actually prepare for a strike." Opposing those so disoriented by the two-tier system that they claimed one could fight it by refusing to vote "Yes" on strike authorization, we initiated an Adjunct/Worker/Student Committee in Favor of a Strike at CUNY. The CCU also worked closely with rank-and-file members of DC 37, cafeteria workers and students to organize a vibrant protest against Gov. Cuomo's exclusion of CUNY from the \$15 minimum wage he proclaimed for SUNY.

Last month, when the PSC held the strike authorization vote, 92% voted in favor. This was an important declaration by a union membership in this city and state at this time, especially in light of New York State's vicious Taylor Law prohibiting strike job actions by public employees. The need – and opportunity – to join in class struggle were highlighted by the strike of 39,000 Verizon workers, the victorious unionization drive by immigrant B&H Photo workers, and internationally by the upheaval against anti-labor laws in France and the militant teachers strike that is braving murderous repression in Mexico.

"We are still living in a moment of enforced austerity for public workers," PSC President Barbara Bowen wrote when announcing (and justifying) the proposed contract, "but I believe that the advances we achieved on many fronts in this contract make it worthy of our collective fight." To the contrary – this proposed contract, by deepening inequalities in the workforce, runs counter to the needs of all those who defiantly voted "Yes" to strike authorization in the face of CUNY management, CUNY-hater Cuomo et al. By further entrenching the division those inequalities create – and proposing to create new tiers – the proposed contract weakens both "full-" and "part-time" union members, and the union as a whole.

A week before the PSC announced "Contract!", DC 37 announced its own tentative settlement (also for 10.41% over seven years) for the 10,000 CUNY workers it represents. Certainly there is the PSC leadership's desire to push the whole thing through ASAP – like during the summer – and some members' wish to just finally get it over with. But what's going on here goes beyond that, and beyond the regular arm-twisting from the powers that be. Democratic politicians – from De Blasio and Cuomo up to Obama and Clinton – want to get all their ducks in a row before the next phase of campaigning. Swimming against that stream is not on the agenda of union leaderships seeking to keep what they call their "seat at the table." The contingent majority cannot live from the meager crumbs dropped from that table. This rotten contract proposal is the latest product of that set-up.

As the CCU stated in our bulletin for the November 2015 mass union meeting in Cooper Union:

"For the 'contingent majority' at the bottom of CUNY's deeply destructive two-tier labor system, [the] situation is doubly unendurable. We cannot live on the poverty wages that adjuncts, grad students, Continuing Ed and other 'part-time' faculty receive. We cannot live with the unending insecurity of employment, the lack of seniority, the lack or precarious nature of basic benefits, not to mention the constant disrespect and disregard for us and our work...."

**"CUNY contingent faculty and staff are fed up. We cannot and will not wait another three, six or however many years for a real fight against these intolerable conditions.** We will not be diverted or pieced off by attempts to create a new tier of 'long-time' adjuncts facing new forms of job insecurity...."

**"We demand significant improvements in the situation of the contingent majority, not someday, not maybe next time – but in this contract.** If once again, the 'part-timers' – many of whom devote their lives to providing education to CUNY students – get trampled, the union's ability even to hold the line against further management attacks will be at risk."

That warning has come to pass.

As the PSC leadership moves to push through yet another divisive, inequality-deepening contract, we revive our 2008 demand that the union immediately establish, a Contract Discussion Bulletin open to all union members, to debate the issues that affect us all. We call to vote "No" and open the way for united struggle against the two-tier labor system.

**"No" to yet another, further entrenchment of CUNY's two-tier labor system – "No" to more years of poverty pay**

**"No" to CUNY's contingent majority being condemned to more years of job insecurity**

**VOTE "NO" ON THE PROPOSED CONTRACT!**

### Our 4 Demands for the Union Contract Struggle (approved by the CCU in 2010)

- 1) **Minimum three-year contracts for adjuncts, with documented reasons for non-reappointment and a system of seniority.**
- 2) **Wage increase of \$30 per credit hour for adjuncts; equivalent for grad fellows and other contingents. Step raises every year.**
- 3) **Comprehensive employer-paid health insurance on par with municipal workers for all contingent employees.**
- 4) **Promotional series, real job security and due process for HEOs.**

Write the CCU at [cunycontingents@gmail.com](mailto:cunycontingents@gmail.com) Labor donated