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**7,500 DOWN; 200,000 TO GO:
ORGANIZING THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK**

In many ways the City University of New York (CUNY) is unique. As the largest urban public university in the country, its eighteen colleges, two medical schools, and law school are spread over all five boroughs of New York City. Its 12,000 professors teach over 200,000 students from virtually every ethnic, economic, and religious background imaginable. In many other ways, however, CUNY is quite common among institutions of higher education in the United States. Sixty percent of its faculty are part-timers, who teach more than half of the courses offered each semester in CUNY. Yet despite their relative strength in numbers, CUNY's part-time faculty, like part-timers everywhere else, have historically been underpaid and over-worked. But this, of course, is not news.

What is news, however, is that after nearly a decade of slow progress towards organizing themselves, CUNY's part-time faculty have finally begun to achieve some real successes. In this brief article, I shall describe some of those successes and the organizing strategies and principles which brought them about, and, by extension, suggest ways in which others may enjoy similar, and greater, successes.

To begin, it is important to understand the union structure under (and often against) which all organizing efforts in CUNY operate. The Professional Staff Congress (PSC) is the faculty labor union representing all CUNY faculty, full and part-time. However, the PSC has historically done little to improve the working conditions for part-timers, blithely witnessing the establishment and perpetuation of a widely disparate two-tier labor structure. Inevitably, therefore, part-timers have been reluctant to fork over their hard-earned wages for union dues. The PSC operates an agency shop only for the full-timers (i.e. full-timers pay either dues, and are members, or the near equivalent of dues as a fee to the union for acting as agent in negotiations, and are not members). Part-timers are left without incentive to join, and consequently the union is dominated by full-timers. So although part-timers comprise sixty percent of the CUNY teaching workforce, they represent only about ten percent of PSC membership. Similarly, while about ninety percent of full-timers at CUNY are union members, only about ten percent of part-timers have joined the PSC. That's the bad news.

The good news is that although the PSC has consistently refused to recruit part-timers, diligent activism within the ranks has recently begun to bear fruit. Not only are more part-timers joining the union, but more are taking active, vocal roles in union affairs. Having part-timers attend and speak out at union meetings has been invaluable in the consciousness-raising and general education of PSC delegates.

Important to these organizing and recruitment efforts, has been the formation and rapid growth of an

insurgent caucus within the union. This caucus has included part-timers in its governance and advisory structures and has engaged in a relatively wide-scale campaign of education of faculty, students, and the public to the issues concerning public higher education, including part-timer issues. However, while these efforts have been beneficial to part-timers, they are clearly not enough, especially within the highly politicized forum of academic labor unions. It would be most useful, at this stage, for the part-time faculty to form their own caucus. If this was done in conjunction with a massive registration campaign of part-timers into the union, this could potentially provide enough leverage to allow part-timers the single strongest voice in union affairs. The possible gains in working conditions from that kind of strategic position can only be imagined at this point.

Beyond involvement in union politics, many CUNY part-timers have managed to get themselves onto governance committees at various structural levels within the university, from the Board of Trustees to individual college departments. Having a direct voice and vote on these institutional committees has been extremely useful to furthering the cause of CUNY part-timers. Apart from educating the full-time members on the issues concerning part-timers—and make no mistake about it, they often just don't know—part-timers on these committees can (and do) influence policy. Part-timers, especially if they are going to be used in such large numbers, must have a role in the decision-making processes which effect their professional lives. The more part-timers on the more committees, the better.

Thus far, I have spoken only of organizing strategies within the existing institutional structures which are always dominated by full-timers. For any organizing efforts to be successful, however, part-timers must also (and probably first) organize from without those structures, and must do so on their own. Here too, though, there will be division. In CUNY, as in other universities, many of the part-time faculty come from the ranks of the institution's own graduate student body. Many, but not most. Most of CUNY's part-timers comprise the multifarious "other" category: retirees and other part-time workers, Masters Degree holders and other fulltime part-timers, et al, who teach as much as, and often more than, full-timers. It is a common misperception that these two groups, graduate students and the "others," have conflicting interests. In CUNY, this misperception had for many years slowed the organizing movements, as these groups failed to get together for any real joint activism. When that changed, so too did the pace and effectiveness of organizing activity.

This was an important lesson learned. Coalitions are an absolute necessity for any successful labor movement. As graduate students began to get together, forming graduate student organizations (GSOs) of various sorts, common interests began to emerge, and with them a sense of possibility and a spirit of activism. GSO-coalitions are an invaluable asset to the part-timer cause, at the institutional, regional, national, and international levels, and must be actively sought out and/or formed. And yet, as one of the largest GSO-coalitions, the MLA's Graduate Student Caucus, has learned, this meta-organization comes with certain caveats. Interdisciplinarity is an undeniable advantage; omnidisciplinarity, however, may be more complicated.

Perhaps even more important than these graduate student coalitions, however, have been those formed between graduate students and the aforementioned "others." One such organization is the nascent CUNY Adjuncts Unite! (CAU), formed last summer. Increasingly large monthly meetings, active committees producing both effective flyers and strategies, and an extraordinarily successful monthly newsletter, *_Adjunct Alert_*, have made CAU highly visible and productive in its very brief existence. Most importantly, CAU has been able to establish a formidable distribution team throughout the university that dispatches the newsletter and other communiques with remarkable haste, virtually eliminating the debilitating lagtime that often hinders organizing efforts. Its tell-it-like-it-is style, and growing numbers have made CAU a player in CUNY academic politics, and have engendered substantial sympathy from full-time faculty, whose own requests for the newsletter have increased circulation from about 4,000-5,000 for the first issue, to about 10,000 for the most recent. Without question, this full-timer sympathy will go a long way in future political activities and negotiations.

Now that CAU has laid the groundwork, there are many strategies being prepared or discussed, most of which tend toward grassroots organizing. The Second Annual National Congress of Part-time, Adjunct, GTA and Non-tenure Track Faculty Conference in April is one of at least three planned for New York this coming Spring. More such conferences will follow. Rallies and demonstrations are in the works for the Spring semester, as well. Newsletters, flyers and surveys will continue to be circulated throughout the university community. And newspaper articles and letters to the editors continue to be published.

What has become clear through all this is that amid the political activity that has gone on for the past several years, one large concerned body has remained mostly out of the loop. Where much effort and attention has been focused on organizing the 7,500 part-timers in CUNY—efforts, which, as I have suggested have been somewhat successful, and will continue—those 7,500 represent only the tip of what could prove to be an immense iceberg. It is my strong belief that the only way to achieve anything close to full success in these efforts is to bring on board the massive undergraduate student body. To begin with, they represent in CUNY over 200,000 voting-age citizens. When their immediate families and closest friends are thrown into the mix, we are looking at between 300,000 and 1,000,000 New Yorkers. Imagine the political leverage that could be generated if this group spoke as one against the perennial de- (and under-) funding of public higher education in New York, and in support of CUNY. And why shouldn't they? Their educations, their futures, and, as importantly, their money are tied to this battle. Our concerns are their concerns, and often vice versa. Yet most undergraduates (and their families) don't know this. CUNY adjuncts' current campaign to be paid for keeping office hours (as fulltime faculty are) is one example. It's time we began thinking in terms of a university community, where the concerns of one constituent group are the concerns of all. It's time we began to think in terms of the "political" or "activist" classroom, where our students are educated, if only superficially, in the relevant issues concerning their education. It's time student organizations, governance bodies, and publications were brought into the fray. After all, it is their fight too.

Individually we may take small steps forward—indeed, we already have. In coalitions we take leaps and make charges. But the forces we are up against will always be larger and stronger; they will attempt to wear us down over time, to take advantage of our relative transience, and defeat us through our attrition. Our perseverance and dedication, and the justice of our cause may be enough. But they may not. To be successful, ultimately, we must not only shape public opinion, we must engage it, and join with it. Public higher education and the public cannot be divorced from one another. And our greatest access to this public sits in front of us, more or less attentively, in groups twenty, forty, eighty, three hundred, every day. Our efforts to organize must not stop at the 7,500 part-timers to whom we have relatively easy access, and with whom we share so many common interests. We must reach beyond, to the 200,000 students whose developing minds and sensibilities we actively shape, and through them to their families, whose fortunes, finally, are inseparably linked to our own.

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