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Another University is Possible: Academic Labor, the Ideology of Scarcity, and the Fight for Workplace Democracy

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If one can retain some hope, it is that in state institutions there still exist forces which, under the appearance of simply defending a vanishing order and the corresponding ‘privileges’, will in fact, to withstand the pressure, have to work to invent and construct a social order which is not governed solely by the pursuit of selfish interest and individual profit, and which makes room for collectives oriented towards rational pursuit of collectively defined and approved ends.
—Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance*

It was a hot autumn for academic labor in New York City. Before the fall 2005 semester even got under way, over 1,100 people gathered outside New York University’s main library to protest the university’s refusal to negotiate a second union contract for graduate employees. There was a lot riding on the NYU’s Graduate Student Organizing Committee’s (GSOC) campaign for a second contract, a fact that was confirmed by the presence of labor leaders and political figures such as AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, UNITE-HERE President Bruce Raynor, SUNY faculty union President William Scheuerman, and State Senator Thomas Duane. Less than one month after the GSOC demonstration, 1,200 members of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the union of the staff and faculty at the City University of New York, crowded into Cooper Union’s Great Hall in the largest mass meeting ever held by the organization. In a venue that hosted many meetings of the women’s suffrage movement, the birth of the NAACP, and the mass meeting to ratify GSOC’s first contract, PSC members rallied to protest against the refusal of city and state officials to offer the union a decent proposal for a new contract. Just as GSOC’s struggle drew solidarity from other local and national unions, so the PSC’s mass meeting was attended by leaders of important organizations such as the United Federation of Teachers and the Transit Workers’ Union, each of which was gripped in its own bitter contract battle. The anger and sense of determination that circulated at both the GSOC demonstration, which culminated in mass civil disobedience, and the PSC mass meeting, at which plans for a referendum to authorize a strike were laid out, set the tone for the heated struggles that unfolded over the rest of the academic year.

The GSOC campaign was not only an unmistakably pivotal battle for the labor movement as a whole; in addition, the issues were fairly clear. In 2004, the Republican-dominated National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) reversed a ruling made four years earlier to hold that graduate teaching and research assistants at private universities are not workers and that they are therefore not entitled to form unions. Under newly appointed president John Sexton, the NYU administration promptly availed itself of this ruling to lay siege to GSOC, extending a unilateral new contract offer that included many transparently union-busting concessions.¹ The conflict, in other words, hinged on whether the work performed by graduate students is wage labor, as the Clinton-era NLRB had held, or merely part of their education, as the Bush administration appointees decided. Of course, if graduate employees truly were simply apprentices rather than employees, they would do the bulk of their teaching in their particular areas of concentration. Instead, graduate student teachers at NYU and across the country tend to be used to meet the needs of the undergraduate curriculum, typically staffing general introductory courses rather than classes in their specialized disciplines. As Benjamin Johnson points out, the rhetoric of apprenticeship begs the question of why grad employees teach such a large percentage of core courses; the answer lies not in some beneficent medieval system of mentoring, but rather in the inexpensiveness, flexibility, and dedication of graduate employees.² Beyond this battle over the status of graduate employees, however, the NYU conflict raised issues of workplace democracy and human rights that cast an unflattering light on “freedom” in the contemporary U.S.: will the decision by a clear majority of workers to engage in collective bargaining with those who pay their salaries, the members of GSOC ask, be recognized by their employers and by the state?

At first glance, CUNY employees’ fight for a decent contract appeared – in contrast with the GSOC struggle - to be a relatively straightforward bread-and-butter issue. On 1 December 2004, eighteen months after the old contract expired, CUNY management made a financial offer whose parsimony stunned PSC negotiators. Not only did the proposed agreement offer no help for the union’s ailing health care plan; in addition, it included numerous concessionary demands as well as only one proposed salary increase, an insultingly low offer of 1.5% over the course of the new four-year contract. Although PSC members were initially galvanized by what the PSC bargaining team called an obscenely low salary offer, as the struggle for a new contract unfolded over the next year and a half it became apparent that the central issue was not simply one of inadequate pay. The PSC campaign for a just contract instead came to hinge on a far broader theme: “Another University Is Possible.” Key to this struggle was a push to reverse the creeping corporatization of CUNY. The campaign for a new contract saw PSC activists not only resist the erosion of autonomous governance and, with it, academic freedom within the university. The PSC developed a far broader strategy that pushed the union out into the public sphere through a challenge to the commodification of the knowledge commons. Since both adjunct instructors and graduate employees are part of the union, an important component of this strategy involved pressing CUNY administration to move part-timers towards tenure line status.³ The new contract set aside one hundred such adjunct conversion lines. While there are enduring tensions over the hyper-exploited condition of non-tenure line teachers, the union’s commitment to checking the slide towards an informal teaching force and to empowering those currently

teaching in non-tenure line positions is clear. On a more general plane, while working for a new contract, PSC activists fought to roll back the ideology of austerity that legitimates the dismantling of the public sector in New York, and, with it, the hopes and dreams of the city's poor and working-class majority. As PSC president Barbara Bowen repeatedly underlined, CUNY administrators' demeaning contract offer constituted an attack not simply on the conditions of academic workers, but also on "the future of every person in this city who relies on public higher education for a chance in life."⁴

In his recent history of neo-liberalism, David Harvey discusses the tendency for contemporary anti-systemic movements to split around struggles over what he calls, on the one hand, "expanded reproduction," in which the exploitation of wage labor is central, and, on the other, "accumulation by dispossession," which includes conflict over everything from the pillaging of peasant land to withdrawal of the state from all social obligations except law enforcement.⁵ Finding the organic link between these movements, Harvey concludes, is an urgent theoretical and practical task. By underlining the connection between democracy and collective bargaining, both the GSOC and the PSC contract campaigns sought to forge such an organic link between struggles over expanded reproduction and accumulation by dispossession. As I have outlined, the GSOC campaign hinged on fundamental questions of collective bargaining. Since other contributors to this special issue deal with the GSOC's struggle in detail, I will focus in what follows on the PSC's contract fight, which similarly extended far beyond simple fiscal issues. In order to explain the strategy adopted by the PSC over the last several years, I first explore the history of CUNY itself, focusing in particular on struggles waged over access to higher education in New York during the 1970s and on the subsequent transformation of the university's student body and teaching staff. From here, I explore the specific tactics and broader strategies adopted by the PSC during the latest contract fight, closing with some reflections on the implications of the union's victory for the next round of negotiation with CUNY and for academic labor struggles more generally.

Disputes over access to education have a long lineage in the United States. An 1830 article in a Philadelphia newspaper, entitled "Argument against Public Schools," held for example that only the wealthy should be allowed to acquire education since "the 'peasant' must labor during those hours of the day which his wealthy neighbor can give to the abstract culture of his mind; otherwise, the earth would not yield enough for the subsistence of all."⁶ Early in the twentieth century, advocates of education for women were impugned as destroying women's capacity for childbearing through overdeveloping their brains, while it took the 1954 Supreme Court *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision to dismantle the legal apparatus of educational apartheid in the United States.

In the late 1960s, the City University of New York played a pivotal role in challenging *de facto* forms of class- and race-based inequality in education. Since the founding of its first college in 1847, CUNY had held out the promise of upward mobility to generations of poor and working-class New Yorkers by offering a quality education free of charge. As the post-war baby boomer generation reached maturity and New York's employment base changed, CUNY struggled to expand access to hitherto underserved communities. Although the Board of Higher Education issued a revised master plan for CUNY in 1966 that called for admission of graduates of any high school program who were in the top half of their class, the expansion program was not adequately funded.⁷ In 1969, CUNY's admissions policy became the subject of criticism

by a coalition of students who held that the university discriminated against people of color and the poor. A sit-in by the Black and Puerto Rican Student Coalition at CUNY's City College in April of that year led the Board of Higher Education to initiate an open admissions program that entitled every graduate of a New York City high school to enroll in the city's most renowned senior college. As the nation's largest municipal university and the third largest system of public higher education – behind only the University of California and the State University of New York – CUNY policies carried tremendous symbolic weight. By combining an open admissions policy with free tuition, CUNY broke new ground in democratizing access to higher education in the United States.

As a consequence, CUNY quickly drew the attention of those behind the nascent right-wing counter-attack against the social movements of the day. The Nixon White House was particularly incensed by the anti-racist and peace activism emanating from U.S. campuses in the early 1970s. Nixon's vice president, Spiro Agnew, attacked open admissions as one of the principal means “by which unqualified students are being swept into college on the wave of the new socialism.”⁸ In 1970, Roger Freeman, an important advisor to Nixon on educational matters who was working at the time for California Governor Ronald Reagan's reelection campaign, clearly delineated the target of the conservative offensive: “We are in danger of producing an educated proletariat. That's dynamite! We have to be selective on who we allow to go through higher education.”⁹ While Governor Reagan was able to dismantle the University of California's policy of free tuition after his reelection in 1970, the campaign against CUNY was a far more protracted one.¹⁰

Indeed, it was not until the fiscal crisis of New York City itself in 1975 that conservatives, led by Nixon's successor Gerald Ford, were able to strike a decisive blow against CUNY. Faced with deepening fiscal difficulties, the Ford administration simply pulled the plug on federal funding of cities; as the famous headline had it: “Ford to New York: Drop Dead.” As the gap between revenues and outlays in the city's budget yawned ever greater, a cabal of bankers led by Citibank's Walter Wriston, who equated all forms of government intervention with communism, refused to roll over the city's debt and thereby pushed New York into bankruptcy.¹¹ In what was to become the model for the devastating structural adjustment programs administered around the world by the International Monetary Fund during the 1980s, the debt relief that followed New York's bankruptcy entailed the construction of new institutions of governance that laid first claim to all city tax revenues in order to pay off bondholders. Essential city services were thereby subordinated to the needs of wealthy investors, leading to wage freezes for municipal employees and to cutbacks in public employment and social provision. As David Harvey argues, this policy amounted to a coup by Wall Street against the democratically elected government of the city which was every bit as effective as the military coup that had established neoliberal policies in Chile earlier in the decade.¹² CUNY was a primary target in this attack on the city's social democratic institutions. President Ford himself announced that he would withhold federal aid from New York City until it eliminated policies of open admissions and free tuition at CUNY. To be financially responsible, Ford announced, New York must no longer be a city that “operates one of the largest universities in the world, free of tuition for any high school graduate, rich or poor, who wants to attend.”¹³ In 1976 CUNY terminated its 129-year

policy of free tuition and fired hundreds of young faculty members who had been recently hired to educate the fresh ranks of students resulting from open admissions.

In tandem with the fiscal attack on institutions such as CUNY, conservatives initiated a powerful ideological assault on the democratizing role of institutions of higher education in the U.S. In a memo to the Chamber of Commerce in 1971, future Nixon Supreme Court nominee Lewis Powell outlined a course of action to return college campuses to the corporate fold.¹⁴ Rather than advocating the kind of draconian government intervention in education that characterized the McCarthy era, Powell proposed that business interests should fund and direct a comprehensive propaganda campaign that would weaken the cultural influence of professors who had become critical of American culture during the Vietnam War era. In order to fortify pro-corporate sentiment on campuses, Powell recommended that big business finance social science and humanities scholars through autonomous institutions (which came to be known as ‘think tanks’), establish a network of scholars and media personalities capable of popularizing the research of these “independent” scholars, discreetly lobby university trustees and administrators about “imbalances” on their faculties, and urge university business schools to take a more prominent role in campus life.¹⁵

Powell’s recommendations were wildly successful. Over the last three decades, a bevy of conservative organizations such as the Hudson Institute, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Olin Foundation have bankrolled a virtually ceaseless onslaught of heavily promoted books, each of which claims in a more outraged tone to expose the depredations of campus multiculturalism, from Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* (1987), to Roger Kimball’s *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (1990), to former chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities Lynne Cheney’s *Telling the Truth: Why Our Culture and Our Country Have Stopped Making Sense and What We Can Do About It* (1995), to name just a few.¹⁶ While kicking up less of a stink than these culture warriors, institutions like the Business-Higher Education Forum had an even greater impact by recasting the university’s public mission as one of economic development.¹⁷ Established in 1978, the Forum helped popularize the now ubiquitous jargon of entrepreneurialism and “excellence,” stressing that the solution to funding cutbacks was not greater public revenue derived from steeper taxes on the rich, but rather an increase in private sources of university funding through the imposition of tuition and user fees on students, closer cooperation and contracts with business, royalties earned from publicly funded research, and the streamlining of university operations through downsizing and heightened productivity. In 1980, the U.S. Congress gave its seal of approval to this radically revamped vision of higher education with the Bayh-Dole Act, which gave birth to academic capitalism by allowing universities to patent federally funded research on a large scale.¹⁸ This legislation has pushed universities to shift from basic to applied research and to move undergraduate education toward a vocational model. Funds for the humanities as well as for other programs such as physics that promise no immediate pay off have been slashed dramatically. As Jennifer Washburn has documented in her recent book *University Inc.*, the result has been a sea-change in higher education that, unbeknown to most of the American public, has seriously compromised the public mission and autonomy of post-secondary institutions in the U.S.

To the chagrin of those who strove to make CUNY a paradigm of progressive education, CUNY has been in the vanguard of this trend towards academic capitalism. Given the relative weakness of funding for scientific research at CUNY, faculty and administrators have faced few of the rending conflicts of interest that have characterized cases such as the University of California-Berkeley's agreement with the Novartis corporation, a deal which saw a foreign-based multinational monopoly gain control over publicly financed research and development at Berkeley.¹⁹ The implementation of neoliberal ideology at CUNY far more closely resembles the programs of structural adjustment meted out by the IMF to the educational systems of debt-crippled developing nations over the last few decades than the forms of academic capitalism at play in more well-heeled institutions. As in many poor countries, where academic institutions have essentially become wards of the World Bank, CUNY has weathered draconian forms of state-mandated downsizing since the mid-1970s.²⁰ CUNY students have had to endure repeated tuition increases, as state aid dried up following "starve the beast" tax cuts passed by conservatives at federal and state levels during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the dismantling of the cutting-edge remediation programs set up to integrate non-traditional students into the university setting.²¹ The immiseration of students and the elevation of CEO-style university administrators go hand in hand. After receiving a whopping 40% pay increase funded through heightened faculty and staff productivity in late 2003, for example, CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein callously proposed two years later to establish annual tuition increases pegged to inflation for CUNY's working class student body.²² On the other side of the podium, a freeze on faculty hiring was implemented during the fiscal crisis that lasted for nearly twenty years, creating an unhealthy generation gap among faculty. Although CUNY's student population continued to expand as a university degree became a necessity for economic survival, a program encouraging full-time faculty to take early retirement further eroded the teaching staff. As a result, although CUNY has added the equivalent of a college and a half since the fiscal crisis, its full-time teaching staff is currently half what it was in 1975.²³

The shortfall in teaching staff was initially made up for through the rehiring of the many faculty members laid off during the fiscal crisis as part-time instructors and, subsequently, through employing some of the many talented post-baccalaureate degree holders who live and work in New York City as adjuncts.²⁴ Part-time academic workers currently teach between 50 and 60% of all CUNY courses.²⁵ Shockingly, these statistics are not highly exceptional; although underreporting by the Department of Education makes statistics notoriously uncertain, approximately 45% of courses are taught by part-timers on a national scale, making university teaching one of the most casualized and insecure of occupations in the nation.²⁶ Although CUNY may not be exceptional in this regard, as PSC president Barbara Bowen points out, a public institution of higher learning such as CUNY is under an obligation to demonstrate the best rather than the worst employment practices.²⁷ Why this turn to contingent labor? Employment of a contingent labor force obviously saves CUNY management money. But it also gives them tremendous power. Part-time teachers do not have the same rights to grievance procedures and due process in general as full-time faculty; although they can file grievances if their rights are violated and make use of union counselors in the process, they can only do so according to the relatively minimal rights afforded to them by the contract. As a result, while it would be an exaggeration to say that they can be hired and

fired virtually at will, their job security is certainly far less than that of full-time faculty. This insecurity doesn't just eat away at the academic freedom and general well being of part-timers. In addition, it catalyzes a climate of anxiety and fear that helps tame dissent even among those who are tenured and supposedly "secure." As the number of contingent faculty increases, the ability of the faculty as a whole to direct its own affairs diminishes and the basic character of institutional autonomy and collective self-governance erodes. For example, a recent survey of Hunter College faculty and staff by the American Association of University Professors concluded that fears of retaliation for dissenting views were more widespread among senior faculty than among their more junior colleagues.²⁸ While they are protected on an individual basis by tenure, senior faculty expressed concern over reprisals such as lost lines and slashed funding for adjunct positions that would affect the status of their departments should they challenge the management line on school policies. They also expressed concern over the general loss of administrators' respect for shared governance. This is clearly an issue throughout US academia. Indeed, one of the signal developments of the GSOC struggle at NYU was the formation of the group "Faculty Democracy" in reaction to the high-handed and dismissive behavior of President Sexton's administration not simply towards graduate employees but also in relation to the organs of university collective governance. Labor struggles among the most marginal sectors of the university are, in other words, increasingly highlighting the wholesale transformation of higher education and, with it, the erosion of the professoriate's traditional prerogatives of autonomy and self-governance.

CUNY management's contract proposal of December 2004 embodies precisely this vicious combination of austerity and control. Perhaps the most central component of management's drive to exert greater control over CUNY faculty was its demand that department chairs be removed from the union. Had this demand been successfully implemented, the faculty's ability to control its own affairs through democratic election of its own departmental executive officers would have been dramatically curtailed. Chairs would essentially have become minions of the administration. The precedent for such moves lies in the disastrous 1980 Supreme Court case *National Labor Relations Board v. Yeshiva University*, in which the court held that faculty at private institutions of higher education were not eligible to engage in collective bargaining because they engaged in cooperative relations with the administration through the mechanism of shared governance.²⁹ In addition to this divide-and-conquer strategy, CUNY management sought to advance its power over the faculty and staff through the elimination of significant due process protections, the reduction of annual leave, and the undermining of job security.³⁰

Probably most important in the campaign to corporatize CUNY, however, was management's insultingly low financial offer. Since CUNY continues to receive funding from the City and State of New York, this offer was clearly a political gambit connected to the policy of holding unions to minimal contracts.³¹ Prior to the CUNY management offer, District Council 37, New York's largest municipal union, had signed a disastrous contract that included substantial "productivity increases," i.e. concessions such as lower pay for newly hired employees. As each of the city's unions began negotiations for new contracts, this ideology of austerity became the benchmark for offers by the City. Of course, there was nothing particularly new about this ideology; as I have already

demonstrated, claims of fiscal crisis have been the central weapon in the municipal bosses' arsenal over the last thirty years. Such claims have repeatedly been used to bludgeon down working class claims to economic justice and to smooth the upward redistribution of wealth in the city. In contrast to 1975, however, in 2005 the city was not bankrupt; in fact, it was running a budget surplus of several billion dollars. It seems, in other words, that the ideology of austerity has become a part of elite and, increasingly, popular common sense, a taken-for-granted aspect of everyday life that no longer needs to be established through a Wall Street putsch. As a result, CUNY management negotiators apparently counted on public support when they argued that the PSC was asking for more than the City could afford to pay. This dogma of austerity was perhaps best expressed by the billionaire Mayor of New York, Mike Bloomberg, when he likened members of the Transit Workers Union to thugs for refusing to cave in to city demands that would have weakened workers' health plans, split senior and junior employees, and cut pay increases below the level of inflation.

The PSC's fight was therefore first and foremost an ideological one. In order to secure a just new contract, the union had to dismantle the ideology of austerity, pointing out its biases and presuppositions not just to fearful CUNY staff and faculty but also to CUNY students as well as to the public at large. In order to challenge austerity, union activists underlined that CUNY management's paltry offer was a form of attack on the educational commons. As an attack on a vital component of the public sphere, management's offer undermined the life chances of the working people, people of color, and new immigrants who make up the face of contemporary New York. This argument was not such a stretch given the character of comments such as those of Mayor Bloomberg, whose racially biased rhetoric implied that the TWU - a labor union composed largely of people of color - was trying to mug him by asking for a fair contract. As PSC President Barbara Bowen put it, "the austerity that's proposed is not just for labor. To undermine and underpay the workers in the public sector - whether in the public university, the fire department, the parks or the public schools - is ultimately to attack the people whose lives depend on the services the public sector offers... What the City can afford to pay is an issue of political choices, not natural forces, and a decision not to offer fair pay to public workers is a decision not to support the public that relies on our work."³² It should come as little surprise, in other words, that CUNY's budget was slashed just as the senior colleges were opened to the city's population of Black, Latino, and immigrant youths. The deteriorating conditions of CUNY employees reflect the lack of concern felt by the City's increasingly wealthy white elite for the multicultural, multicolored strivers who inhabit the city alongside them.³³

Bowen's powerful attack on the ideology of austerity in this editorial and in public addresses throughout the drawn-out contract campaign hardly arose from thin air. CUNY scholars such as the sociologist Frances Fox Piven, the economist William Tabb, and the geographer David Harvey have been at the forefront of critical analysis of neoliberal ideology and practice.³⁴ In addition, the PSC has adopted a social movement model that has led to the creation of committees whose remit extends far beyond simple fiscal issues to embrace activism on issues as varied as academic freedom, environmentalism, peace, and international affairs. Several years prior to Bowen's powerful rallying editorial in the union paper, for example, the PSC's International Committee organized a groundbreaking conference that drew scholar-activists from

Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. together to discuss gathering forms of resistance to the hemispheric assault on public education.³⁵ Furthermore, PSC activists were instrumental in the formation of Educators to Stop the War, a group whose conference in spring 2005 drew teachers from throughout the tri-state area and forcefully underlined the role of U.S. imperial expansionism in fostering a climate of insecurity, demagogic politics, and fiscal belt-tightening at home.³⁶

But the struggle to win a new contract did not simply involve winning over members of the public to the PSC's cause. In addition, many CUNY staff and faculty also had to be educated and mobilized. Despite the insulting nature of management's economic offer, significant numbers of CUNY personnel remained uninvolved with the union struggle for a just contract. Of course, the economic and social marginality of contingent faculty helps explain the difficulty in involving this group. The lack of motivation among many full-time faculty is more difficult to explain. As the Hunter College academic freedom survey perhaps demonstrates, some senior faculty who have ceased to be productive as scholars come to depend on members of the administration for their sense of professional entitlement, and are consequently highly vulnerable to administrative retaliation. I suspect, however, that an additional, more ineffable factor may be at play in the fight to mobilize CUNY faculty. For many academics who came of age before the wholesale casualization of the professoriate, the ideological allure of middle class professionalism is no doubt still quite strong. Aggressive involvement with the forms of collective action that characterize union activism is likely to strike such individuals as a potential threat rather than a welcome source of solidarity. As the electoral campaign against the PSC's current leadership during the winter of 2006 made clear, the union's militant struggle caused some fears about further depreciation in the social status and economic rewards of university teaching given the disrepute associated with unions in much contemporary popular culture. The PSC's response to this obstacle was to engage in a mass membership drive using a network of pickets to campaign on each CUNY campus. In addition to employing the union newspaper, *The Clarion*, and the affiliated union website to articulate the union's perspective to the membership, union leaders organized frequent raucous demonstrations outside negotiation venues. These twin tactics of member outreach and direct action culminated in the mass meeting in the Great Hall of Cooper Union. At this meeting, PSC leaders restated their fundamental themes concerning a fair contract as a form of social justice for CUNY employees and for the city's residents in general. In addition, however, PSC President Barbara Bowen outlined the leadership's intention to ask for authorization to undertake a job action should negotiations with CUNY management not move forward in a satisfactory manner. Such a decision to plan a strike recalled a similar move in 1973 that led to the creation of the PSC. Since the Taylor Law makes it illegal for public workers in New York State to go on strike, the Cooper Union meeting represented a powerful reminder of the union's history of defying authority as well as of the PSC's determination to confront the unjust use of state power against public workers head on. The atmosphere in the hall was electric, providing a powerful dose of collective indignation and determination that gave the negotiating team a morale boost and some additional leverage at the table while also helping to tide members through the harrowing months of negotiation that followed before a contract settlement was finally announced.

On 14 July 2006, leaders of District Council 37, the large municipal labor union in New York City, whose concessionary contract agreement began the cycle of austerity negotiations that the PSC challenged, reached a bargain for a new contract with City negotiators that included no “productivity increases.” It seems certain that the efforts of the PSC and other unions such as the TWU helped secure such a relatively generous agreement.³⁷ In fact, the PSC’s new contract included raises equal to those given to teachers in the SUNY system, significant funding for sabbaticals, additional funds for untenured faculty leave, and new lines to convert contingent faculty members into permanent members of staff. Just as significantly, the union beat back demands that department chairs be excluded from the union.³⁸ The union cannot, however, afford to rest on its laurels. The new contract was only delivered after a bitter internal election campaign in which the leadership who had engaged in a nearly four year-long campaign for a new contract was challenged by a group claiming that the PSC frittered away too much energy on extraneous social issues. The insurgent group waged a nasty but ultimately losing campaign using disinformation and fear, but they obviously tapped into some CUNY faculty’s fears that the social movement unionism of the current PSC leadership is a mistake. In addition to such internal dissension, the ideology of austerity mobilized by managerial elites against the union is likely to be a recurring feature of the political landscape, particularly given the U.S.’s massive international debt and the increasingly precarious economic situation of its middle class. While austerity budgets are thus likely to be used as a bludgeon against organizers for the foreseeable future, they also offer a potentially powerful focal point that activists may use to unite faculty union members around bread-and-butter issues as well as more sweeping struggles for social justice.³⁹ As the country edges towards recession at the beginning of a new cycle of contract negotiations, the PSC needs to extend and deepen rather than back away from its efforts to mobilize its own rank-and-file as well as the public in general against the ideology of austerity.

One of the principal weapons in future struggles must be greater solidarity with other unions. During the last round of negotiations, the City dealt with each municipal union on its own, leaving unions isolated and vulnerable at the negotiating table and in the public sphere. For example, the PSC was one of the few unions to send its members out in the bitter cold to the TWU picket lines during the winter Holiday season in 2005.⁴⁰ Since municipal unions once negotiated with the City as a block, this isolation is clearly a strategy that has been adopted in order to smash the power of union solidarity. Although the turnout of national leadership at PSC and GSOC demonstrations during the last academic year had an impact in raising morale and in terms of media exposure, it is far from clear that such solidarity was much more than symbolic. Despite the support of a powerful national union such as the UAW, for example, GSOC members found that NYU’s garbage was still being collected by members of other municipal unions months after the graduate employees went on strike. Similarly, although unions such as the American Federation of Teachers perhaps put some political pressure on Albany, this did not seem to constitute much of a threat to CUNY management, who held out against such pressure for nearly four years. GSOC and the PSC need to forge far stronger bonds with local and regional unions if they are to have significantly greater leverage.

The current leadership of the PSC seems to have recognized this need for heightened solidarity; in late June, the PSC website carried details of a new City wide

coalition of nineteen unions that will experiment with collective bargaining for the next six months. This bargaining coalition constitutes the first such initiative since the fiscal crisis of 1975 and will represent half New York's unionized workers.⁴¹ Perhaps even more significantly, the new bargaining coalition offers an example of the kind of integrated unionism that may begin to break through the shibboleths of middle class academic professionalism.⁴² Representing not simply professors, adjuncts, and university staff – as does the PSC – the new bargaining coalition unites sanitation workers, teachers, lawyers, health service employees, nurses and others. It remains to be seen whether the diverse interests and agendas of such a broad coalition can be harmonized at the bargaining table, but the coalition certainly represents an exciting collective endeavor. This coalition must not, however, deal exclusively with issues relating to members' salaries. The PSC's model of social movement unionism needs to be fortified and deepened within this coalition. Recognizing that moral suasion clearly no longer suffices to sway university managers in either public or private institutions, a recent initiative by the AFL-CIO's Voices at Work group sought to bring academic labor unions together to research practical tactical measures to place pressure on management during negotiations. Examples of such tactics include holding up university expansion plans through liaisons with unions in the construction trades.⁴³ The bargaining coalition of which the PSC is now a member must take advantage of such pressure tactics, while continuing to make the kind of powerful ideological arguments against austerity that characterized its last campaign.

In addition, however, the coalition must use its collective strength to tackle the role of the state in advancing neoliberal measures in general and academic capitalism in particular. In both the GSOC and PSC's campaigns, government legislation has worked to regulate and suppress labor while empowering corporations and university managers. In GSOC's case, of course, the ruling of the post-Bush NLRB constituted a sufficient but not necessary cause for the refusal of NYU's administration to negotiate a just new contract with the graduate employees. On April 27, 2006, GSOC members held a "convention" to re-announce majority support for the union, in the process underlining the hypocrisy of NYU's use of recent NLRB rulings to try to bust the union. Similarly, the PSC's attempts to pressure CUNY management to offer a fair settlement were hamstrung by the Taylor Law, which prohibits public employees from using the ultimate weapon of the worker: the withdrawal of her or his labor power. The PSC can do all it wants to challenge hegemonic neoliberal ideology and educate its members about the canard of austerity: without the ability to go on strike each new contract is, in essence, an act of *noblesse oblige* on the part of CUNY management. Gestures such as the Cooper Union mass meeting may help rouse the membership, but they are relatively insignificant in comparison with the kind of strike that paralyzed France last spring when the government sought to introduce new legislation making youths' jobs far more precarious. The new coalition of which the PSC is a part must bring concerted pressure to bear on New York legislators to repeal the Taylor Law. Collective bargaining and the option to go out on strike are human rights, and the state's legislation against such rights must be seen for what it is: a form of naked class warfare.

There is a great deal at stake in the outcome of the PSC and GSOC struggles for a new, non-corporate university. While CUNY may be far from the halcyon days of open admission, free tuition, and few contingent workers, the most recent contract struggle has

helped turn back the onslaught of academic capitalism for the time being. Although GSOC's campaign for recognition has been stymied by an administration that has taken shameful advantage of the reactionary appointments by President Bush to the NLRB, organizing campaigns by union members will not simply disappear. Efforts to organize academic workers are not only of crucial strategic significance, but, given the extreme exploitation to which such workers are subject, are not likely to evaporate as administrators at elite schools might wish. As PSC leaders repeatedly stressed, these struggles resonate far outside the walls of the ivory tower. For example, success for the GSOC is likely to give a powerful boost to the drive to unionize the U.S.'s burgeoning service sector in general. Such a success would demonstrate that employee organizing drives that challenge the social hierarchies distinguishing white from blue collar, mental from manual labor, and professor from graduate student, can be successful in the face of reactionary federal labor legislation. In addition, while these battles have significance for unions in New York City and for the labor movement as a whole in the United States, the efforts of GSOC and the PSC resonate far beyond this country's borders. Higher education is a business that currently averages \$2 trillion in global revenues. Global elites have been maneuvering feverishly for some time to turn post-secondary education into a "service" that can be traded across borders. Indeed, agreements such as NAFTA and the FTAA have already codified the commodification of higher education.⁴⁴ Throughout the developing world, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization are currently advancing the "American model" of academic capitalism as the paradigm capable of dealing with the inequalities of access introduced by years of structural adjustment. It is little exaggeration, then, to say that the whole world is watching what happens at institutions such as NYU, the University of California, and CUNY. Insurgent unions such as the GSOC and the PSC have an important role to play in challenging the global jargon of "excellence," and in replacing prisons and imperial warfare with social justice and the democratization of higher education.

Endnotes

¹ NYU's new contract offer included the demand for a grievance procedure without neutral third-party arbitration, reduced pay increases, a possible reduction in health care benefits, and elimination of the union shop.

² Benjamin Johnson, "The Drain-O of Higher Education: Casual Labor and University Teaching," in Benjamin Johnson, Patrick Kavanagh, and Kevin Mattson, eds., *Steal This University: The Rise of the Corporate University and the Academic Labor Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2003): 61-80.

³ All graduate fellowships other than those awarded purely on the basis of merit are covered by the PSC-CUNY collective bargaining agreement. My thanks to Penny Lewis for this clarification.

⁴ Barbara Bowen, "The Union Strikes Back," *Clarion* (Jan 2005): 11. Available online at <www.psc-cuny.org/ClarionJanuary05.pdf>.

⁵ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006): 203.

⁶ “An Argument Against Public Schools,” *Philadelphia National Gazette*, 10 July 1830; quoted in H. Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 113.

⁷ On the battle over open admissions, see the Newt Davidson Collective, *Crisis At CUNY* (New York: Newt Davidson Collective, 1974); David Lavin and David Hyllegard, *Changing the Odds: Open Admissions and the Life Chances of the Disadvantaged* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); and Sandra Shoiock Roff, Anthony Cucchiara, and Barbara Dunlap, *From the Free Academy to CUNY: Illustrating Public Higher Education in New York City, 1847-1997* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

⁸ Spiro Agnew, “Threat to Educational Standards,” speech at Republican fundraising dinner, Des Moines, Iowa, 14 April 1970; quoted in Franklin, 126.

⁹ “Professor Sees Peril in Education,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 30 October 1970; quoted in Franklin, 126.

¹⁰ Similar campaigns have been waged recently. For example, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has moved – unsuccessfully - to defund the UCLA Institute of Labor Relations. See Gary Blasi, “This Institute Survives and Even Thrives,” *UCLA Today* 25.2 (2004), <www.today.ucla.edu/2004/040928voices_institute.html>, accessed 8/1/06.

¹¹ Harvey, 45.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Speech by Gerald Ford at the National Press Club, 29 October 1975, reported in *New York Times*, 30 October 1975; quoted in Franklin, 127.

¹⁴ David A. Hollinger, “Money and Academic Freedom a Half-Century after McCarthyism: Universities Amid the Force Fields of Capital,” in Peggie J. Hollingsworth, ed., *Unfettered Expression: Freedom in American Intellectual Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 161-182.

¹⁵ Hollinger, 164.

¹⁶ For details on funding of the culture wars by right-wing organizations, see Jon Weiner, “The Olin Money Tree: Dollars for Neocon Scholars,” *Nation*, 1 January 1990, 12-14; Donald Lazere, “Political Correctness Left and Right,” *College English* 54 (March 1992), 79-88; Barbara Foley, “What’s at Stake in the Culture Wars,” *New England Quarterly* 68 (September 1995), 458-79, and Eric Alterman, “The ‘Right’ Books and Big Ideas,” *Nation*, 22 November 1999, 16-21. The latest salvo in the culture wars, of course, is the controversy over Columbia’s Middle East Studies program; see Russell Jacoby, “The New PC: Crybaby Conservatives,” *Nation* (4 April 2005), 11-16 and Beshara Doumani, ed. *Academic Freedom After September 11* (New York: Zone Books, 2006).

¹⁷ Carlos Torres and Daniel Schugurensky, “The Political Economy of Higher Education in the Era of Neoliberal Globalization: Latin American in Comparative Perspective,” *Higher Education* 43 (2002): 429-455.

¹⁸ For a full discussion of the Bayh-Dole Act, see Jennifer Washburn, *University, Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 59ff.

¹⁹ Washburn, 5.

²⁰ The most extreme examples of this loss of autonomy are in sub-Saharan Africa. For a discussion of resistance to World Bank-mandated programs of academic downsizing, see Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis, and Ousseina Alidou, eds., *A*

Thousand Flowers: Social Struggles Against Structural Adjustment in African Universities (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000).

²¹ For a discussion of CUNY's remediation programs, see William Crain, "The Battle for Social Justice at CUNY" *Encounter* 14.4 (2001).

²² On Chancellor Goldstein's nearly half million-dollar compensation package, see Ellen Balleien, "80th Street, presidents get generous raises," *Clarion* (Dec 2003), 3. On tuition hikes, see Hank Williams and Peter Hogness, "CUNY Board considers plan for annual tuition hikes," *Clarion* (Nov 2005), 4. Available online at <www.psc-cuny.org/ClarionNovember05.pdf>.

²³ According to PSC President Barbara Bowen, there were 11,600 faculty members at CUNY in 1975; today there are just under 6,000. Barbara Bowen, personal interview, 20 May 2005.

²⁴ Bowen, interview.

²⁵ Bowen, interview.

²⁶ Johnson, 62. Johnson notes that underreporting by the Department of Education makes it almost impossible to know the exact number of part-time university teachers in the nation.

²⁷ Bowen, interview.

²⁸ Peter Hogness, "Hunter Academic Freedom Survey: Results Show Concern Over Retaliation," *Clarion* (Summer 2006), 7. Available online at <www.psc-cuny.org/ClarionSummer06.pdf>. The report of the Hunter College Senate on perceptions of a climate of fear at the college is available online at www.hunter.cuny.edu/senate.

²⁹ For a summary history of the Yeshiva decision and some insight into the obstacles it creates for organizing campaigns, see Courtney Leatherman, "A Private College's Professors Try for a Unionization Breakthrough," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 47, 16 (2000), A12-15.

³⁰ Barbara Bowen, "The Union Strikes Back," *Clarion* (Jan 2005), 11. Available online at <www.psc-cuny.org/ClarionJanuary05.pdf>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Bowen, interview.

³⁴ In addition to the work already cited by David Harvey, see Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *The New Class War: Reagan's Attack on the Welfare State and Its Consequences* (New York: Pantheon, 1982) and William Tabb, *The Long Default: New York City and the Urban Fiscal Crisis* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982).

³⁵ The International Committee's booklet "Globalization, Privatization, War: In Defense of Public Education in the Americas" is available online at <www.psc-cuny.org/international.htm>.

³⁶ The Educators to Stop the War website, which is replete with useful pedagogical materials, is available online at <www.educatorstostopthewar.org>.

³⁷ For a discussion of the new DC 37 – from a notably pro-management perspective— see Steven Greenhouse, "Biggest New York Municipal Union Gets Contract," *New York Times* (14 July 2006).

³⁸ For a full summary of the new contract, see the *Clarion* (May 2006), 2; available online at

www.psc-cuny.org/ContractRatification06/ClarionContractMay06/pdf.

³⁹ I am indebted to Mike Palm for this sharp observation. Personal communication, June 27, 2006.

⁴⁰ Although the GSOC didn't organize pickets, at least a dozen members did use their Winter break to spend time at TWU picket sites, an experience which provoked self-reflection within the GSOC concerning issues of race and the union struggle. Mike Palm, personal communication, June 27, 2006.

⁴¹ For details concerning this pathbreaking new coalition, see www.psc-cuny.org/CoalitionBargaining.htm.

⁴² On such vertically integrated unionism, see Michael Denning, "Lineaments and Contradictions of the Neoliberal University System," Working Paper for "Breaking Down the Ivory Tower: The University in the Creation of Another World," World Social Forum, January 2005; available online at www.research.yale.edu/laborculture/documents/denning_lineaments_neoliberal_university.pdf.

⁴³ The battle against NYU's mega-dorm on East 12th street is an example of such strategic struggles. Mike Palm, Personal Communication, June 27, 2006.

⁴⁴ On NAFTA, FTAA, and the WTO, see Daniel Schugurensky and Adam Davidson-Harden, "From Córdoba to Washington: WTO/GATS and Latin American Education," *Globalisation, Societies, and Education* 1.3 (Nov 2003): 321-357.