
CUNY

at the

CROSSROADS

a history of the mess we're in
and how to get out of it

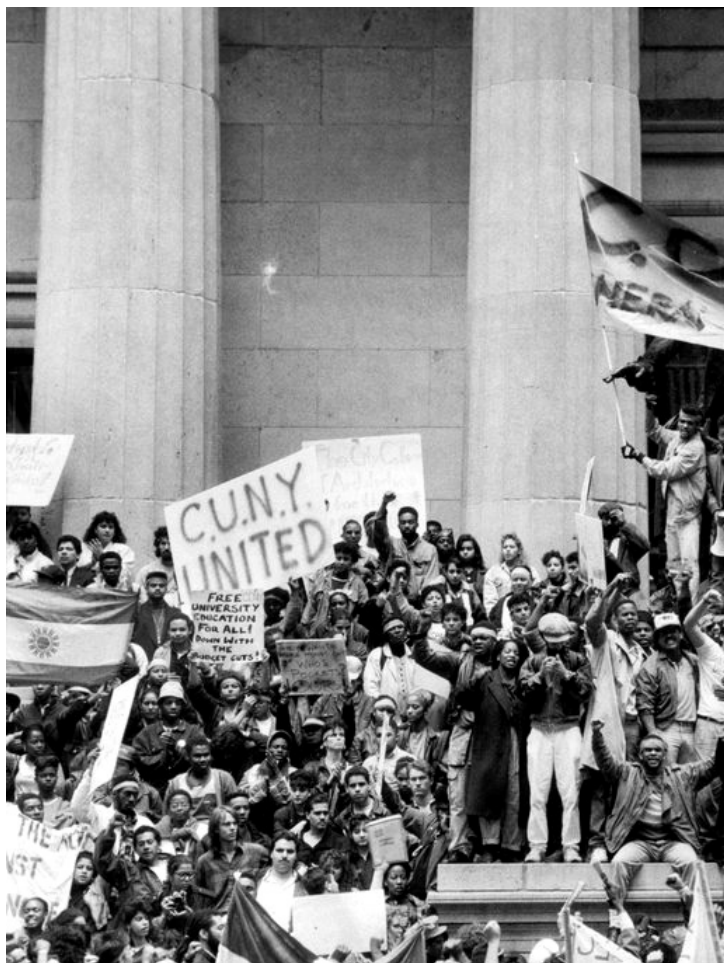
by

CUNY STRUGGLE

CUNY at the Crossroads

a history of the mess we're in
and how to get out of it

CUNY Struggle



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I. Back to School, Fall 2016

We wrote this guide for students, faculty and non-academic workers at CUNY, who often enter the university without receiving any information about its history or the issues it faces and end up, well, disoriented. The guide is intended as a remedy to this widely shared feeling at CUNY.

Our hope is to disseminate knowledge about CUNY's past and the struggles it faces today. People often express astonishment at the state of affairs around here, and there is a tendency to blame whoever is most visible: inefficient department bureaucracies, overworked adjuncts, self-preserving union leaders. We aim to show that the chronic underfunding of CUNY has its roots in important changes in our society, including a shift away from public services, the marketization of higher education, the casualization of labor and the structural problems faced by unions in this climate.

Part II discusses how the state shifted its focus from providing services to curbing spending to satisfy its creditors. Part III is about how this affects labor and how this weakens worker power

(collective bargaining). Part IV shows the strong tradition of resistance and struggle at CUNY, and Part V links the defunding of public higher education with the expansion of policing (of bodies, of speech) that is necessary to repress resistance and enforce austerity. Part VI shows a way forward: building worker and student power.

II. What Do We Mean When We Say 'Austerity'?

To understand where we're at today, you have to go back to World War II. When that war ended, the United States was the strongest country in the world. Many of its old competitors lay in ruins, but the US emerged with the strongest economy, the most powerful military, and the most advanced technology in the world. It felt like the US could afford anything it wanted at this point, and one of the things it could afford was a massively-expanded system of public higher education. The CUNY you know today had its start during this period.

After the Second World War, the number of college students in the US shot up dramatically. In 1950, for ex-

ample, there were around 2,600,000 students attending college in the US, but by 1970, that number had risen to 8,000,000! In other words, the population of the US rose by around a quarter during this period, but the number of people attending college nearly quadrupled. Why did so many people suddenly start going to college?

One reason was that the national government wanted to avoid the widespread unemployment and social chaos that followed World War I. In 1944, Congress passed the GI Bill, which promised a free college education to anyone who had served in the military during World War II. Millions of people went to college on the GI Bill, and institutions of higher education expanded to absorb the influx. Another reason had to do with changes in the kinds of jobs becoming available in the US. Policymakers believed that work in the US was shifting away from manufacturing, where people usually learn their skills on the job, and towards jobs that require skills that are usually taught in school, like reading, writing, computer abilities, and interpersonal skills. Job training would now take place on campus instead of in a factory. A third reason had to do with the Cold War, or the international competition between the US and the Soviet Union for influence over other parts of the world. Competition with the Soviets caused US policymakers to pour money into higher education in the hope that it would produce better technology that could be used to pump up the economy and build better weapons.

All of these things meant that schools would expand, and it meant that higher education wouldn't just be a privilege for a tiny elite, as it had been in

the past. States like New York and California began to open up dozens of new public colleges, some of the traditional four-year variety and others, called community colleges, that granted degrees after just two years. In New York, this expansion resulted in the creation of a state university system, SUNY, in 1948, and in 1961 of CUNY, which united New York City's existing public colleges with many new ones, like City Tech, Bronx Community, Queensborough, BMCC, Kingsborough, John Jay, York, Baruch, Hostos, Lehman, and Medgar Evers. But this expansion still wasn't enough to accommodate all the people, including increasing numbers of African Americans and Puerto Ricans then migrating to New York, who wished to enter the colleges and secure their futures. Well into the 1960s, many of the public colleges remained virtually all white.

During the 1960s, policymakers began to consider opening up the university further to low-income students and people of color. Their motivations were twofold. First, they realized that since deindustrialization had begun sweeping the region, African Americans and Puerto Ricans were not going to have access to the same kinds of manufacturing jobs as previous generations of newcomers, and would have to be trained in the schools for new kinds of occupations. Second, they feared the consequences of failing to provide a path to employment for black and brown people forced into racial ghettos with underfunded schools and few opportunities. American society in general was bubbling with discontent in the 1960s, and young people especially seemed unwilling to tolerate the racial discrimination that was and is such a



central feature of American society. If something wasn't done to provide at least the hope of access to jobs and higher education, the struggle might turn more radical and further disrupt the status quo.

In 1968, the Board of Higher Education, which controlled CUNY, announced something they called "100% Open Admissions," which would guarantee every New York City high school graduate access to at least some form of higher education. However, the Board proposed to track students into one of three categories, depending on their performance in high school. The top 25% of students would get to go to the senior colleges, where they would receive what is traditionally understood to be a college education. The next 40% or so would be assigned to a community college. The remaining one-third or so of students would be steered into vocational education, or trade school, and would have no opportunity to pursue higher education in the normal sense of

that word. In this way, the Board proposed to replicate within CUNY the divisions that already existed in the city's racially-segregated public school system, where students in minority neighborhoods faced larger class sizes, less experienced teachers, and crumbling, inadequate facilities. Confronted with these obstacles, many students dropped out, and the ones who stayed were less well-prepared for college-level work than their white counterparts, who enjoyed significant advantages. Under the Board's proposed system, low-income students of color would effectively be punished for the poor quality of the schools they were forced to attend as youngsters. Under this plan, CUNY would be "open," but there would be more than one CUNY, and the parts would be different and unequal.

Many students had a different idea of what "open" should mean, and at the end of the 1960s, they organized to demand access to the kind of education they desired, not the kind of educa-

tion the Board had decided was good enough for them. In 1969, a group of black and Puerto Rican students at City College presented the administration there with five demands: that the racial composition of the entering class reflect the racial composition of the city's high schools, that a school for Black and Puerto Rican Studies be established, that students be consulted on who was hired to run the school's programs for black and Puerto Rican students, that the school host additional orientation events for black and Puerto Rican students, and that education majors who would go on to teach in city schools be required to take classes in black and Puerto Rican history and learn a small amount of Spanish. When the administration failed to respond, at least a hundred students occupied the school. Two months later, over a thousand City College students occupied the school again, forcing it to close temporarily. Students across the CUNY system responded by protesting and occupying their own campuses in an effort to end what were effectively racist admissions policies. Many faculty members and a significant number of white students participated in these occupations as well because they believed that everyone deserved the right to a full and meaningful education and that a person's skin color shouldn't be an obstacle to that.

What does it mean to occupy the school? Physically, it meant that students and their allies stayed in the school, sometimes right in the administrators' offices, and refused to leave until their demands were taken seriously. They had tried all the normal ways to be heard and no one was listening. They had to take more dramatic steps. This was a time

when people all over the country were thinking bigger, thinking deeper, and wondering what it would actually take to achieve even simple-sounding goals like equality of opportunity for all people. At CUNY it took the united power of thousands of people of all different races and ethnicities to unify their voices and act for a common purpose. That's what it usually takes for ordinary people without money or political power to be heard. All they had was their bodies and their minds, so that is what they used. And they were fighting for their future. They agreed with administrators that education was important, but they had their own ideas about why and what that education should look like. They demanded a say in who would be educated and how. They demanded that education be about people and what they want, instead of about administrators who do whatever politicians and employers tell them to do. And by occupying the school, they signaled that the university is public and belonged to them. "Public" means "shared" and "common." In other words, they were challenging the university to live up to its name and become a democratic institution, where everyone is given a chance, everyone is taken seriously, and everyone is given the respect they deserve as human beings.

The occupations worked. Three out of the four senior colleges were totally closed and protests were breaking out at the community colleges. Administrators were faced with a student takeover of the schools and were forced to listen. They had to find a way to open up the schools to those they had previously been willing to ignore. But it wasn't just a matter of tinkering with the racial makeup of next year's incoming class. For one, if they guaran-

teed 50% of seats to black and brown students, but kept the total number of students the same, it would mean denying an education to thousands of white students. This was not only unfair but politically impossible. The only solution was to change the nature of the university as a whole—to let everyone in and make access to higher education something close to universal.

Second, opening up the university meant letting in a different kind of student. By opening the university to the poor, the disadvantaged, and the excluded, the university became a place where a vastly-expanded set of life experiences and social perspectives came into contact with one another. It was messy and uncomfortable but in the end made the university more closely resemble the society we actually live in, and made it a place where different people, ideas, and experiences come together and give rise to even newer ideas. It's interesting to think how the struggle of black and Puerto Rican students to gain access to higher education ended up promoting everyone's ability to realize that goal, or how what might have looked like just a quantitative change—adding a bunch of new students—actually meant a qualitative change in what kind of place the university had to be. Sometimes we forget that these are the kinds of things that happen in the course of active struggles, when time and events seem to move faster than anyone had expected.

Open admissions was a victory for both the groups previously excluded from higher education and for the idea that a public university should be truly public. But winning the policy was only the beginning. As soon as the schools began to accept all applicants,

opponents of the idea began to attack it from a different direction. First, they argued that to raise the money needed to help educate tens of thousands of new students, the city and state should pass the costs onto those very same low-income students—in other words, that the schools should charge tuition. This would have been a big shift because no New York City public college had charged tuition to full-time students since the first one was opened in 1847. Charging tuition makes public universities less public—it individualizes the cost of educating a society's young people and allows the wealthy to isolate themselves and refuse to participate in that process. People like Nelson Rockefeller, the governor of New York, had been trying to make CUNY charge tuition since the early 1960s, but too many people were committed to the idea that everyone deserves an education whether their families can pay or not, and he never got his way. What Rockefeller did instead was to try and starve CUNY by freezing its share of the state budget. This set the pattern for the way open admissions would be defeated—refuse to provide resources, wait for problems to arise, and then point to those problems as evidence that universal, free public education can never work.

One of the main reasons politicians expanded CUNY in the first place was that they thought the economy was changing. And it did, but not like they thought it would. The time period we've been talking about so far—roughly the 1940s, 50s, and 60s—was a very prosperous one for the US. But beginning in the early 1970s, all that began to change. The countries damaged by World War II gradually caught up


to the US and began to compete economically. Business profits went way down and companies started attacking their workers to try and save on labor costs. Economic recessions and financial crises, like the one that occurred in 2008, became more common and more severe. Governments started to run out of money and began to cut social programs. The types of jobs available in the US did change, but the new jobs generally paid worse than the older ones and were less secure. This is the world we are living in today—people work harder than they used to, for less money, and they are asked to pay as individuals for many things that used to be funded out of the collective wealth of our society.

These changes in the economy hit New York City pretty bad. The city was losing jobs fast because manufacturers were leaving to find cheaper labor elsewhere. When that happened people began to depend more on city services to help them get by. But the city wasn't getting as many tax dollars as it used to and so it had to borrow. Eventually the banks got nervous and refused to continue lending money to the city. The city asked the federal government for help but it was controlled at that time by a group of right-wing politicians who opposed the very idea of free public higher education and the other public services that made it possible for a non-wealthy person to live comfortably in New York. Indeed, many of them wanted to make an example out of New York City so that no other city would try and provide those things for its citizens. The US Treasury Secretary at the time told Congress that New York should be punished for daring to allow such things as free public higher education. The city's newspapers in-

FINAL **DAILY NEWS** **15¢**
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER
NEW YORK, N.Y. (APRIL 10, 1974) Edition: Morning No. 1024

FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD

Vows He'll Veto Any Bail-Out



**Abe, Carey
Rip Stand**

**Stocks Skid,
Dow Down 12**

Three pages of action begin on page 7. Full text of Ford's speech on page 10.

Executive, Ford gave his message at Washington's National Press Center.

terpreted this message correctly—this is when the Daily News published its famous headline: “FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD”.

In the end the city had to go to New York State for help, and the state stepped in, but on one condition—that the city get rid of many of its public services and start making ordinary people pay more for the things they needed, like food, housing, transportation, and education. To do this, they had to replace the city's elected officials with an unelected control board composed of bankers and state officials, who ordered mass firings of city workers, the end of rent control, big increases in transit fare, and the imposition of tuition at CUNY. The idea was that for a city to succeed in this new, difficult economic era, the wealthy must be satisfied above all, or else they may take their money and put it somewhere else. Above all, they must not be asked to contribute, via taxes, to public services that improve the lives of the majority. The name for this idea is

“austerity.” Austerity comes from the ancient Greek word *austērós*, meaning “bitter” or “harsh.” It is the idea that the lives of ordinary people must be bitter and harsh in order for a society to survive economically.

The era of austerity hit both CUNY and New York City really hard, and we are still living in it. What it meant at CUNY was that the school was forced to pass on the costs of educating students to the students themselves in the form of constantly-rising tuition. At the same time, the school tried to save money by reducing the quality of the education it offered, increasing class sizes and eliminating programs designed to help underprivileged students adjust to college-level academic work. It also began to attack its workers to try and save money, just like businesses did. CUNY classes used to be taught mainly by full-time professors who were paid enough to live on, but the school took advantage of the increasingly desperate economic conditions to switch to using part-time professors called adjuncts, who are paid shockingly little and can be fired at the drop of a hat. Eventually, because of the budget cuts, the school gave up entirely on the idea of public education in its real sense, and the four-year colleges ended their open admissions program in 2000. This meant that CUNY once again became a place that accepted the inequalities already existing in our society instead of challenging them.

It’s important to understand what austerity means and to be skeptical of those who argue for it. A good example is Felix Rohatyn, a banker who was given control of the city’s budget during the crisis of the 1970s. His goal was to cut enough services so that investment

banks like the one he worked for would feel confident that they could again make a profit by lending to the city. Rohatyn tried to convince New Yorkers that he would act fairly. He said that his goal was to make New Yorkers “share the pain” of the bad economy. But what did that really mean? When Rohatyn said people should “share the pain,” he didn’t really mean himself or people like him, who have good connections, who never worry about making rent, who take cabs anywhere they want, and who know they will send their kids to the best colleges, no matter how expensive. He meant the people who already had nothing, like the black and brown students who demonstrated, using only their bodies and their minds, to force CUNY to open up so that they and tens of thousands of others could realize their dreams of an education geared to what they wanted, and not what a banker, politician, or university administrator decided was good enough for them. And this is why austerity is a political issue. It is basically a contest over who is going to pay for the costs of an economic slowdown—the rich, who can afford it, or the poor, who can’t?

Rohatyn said we must all share the pain, but it’s a big stretch to think there is a “we” in a society characterized by inequalities as large as the ones that exist in the US. The idea that the richest investment banker in New York and a young person of color from Jamaica, the Bronx or East New York have anything meaningful in common is a sick joke designed to get those people to agree that they should suffer even more in order to pay to fix an economy they didn’t break. Cuts to public services like CUNY are at bottom attacks on the ability of the poor and the less fortu-

New York needs MORE college-trained people

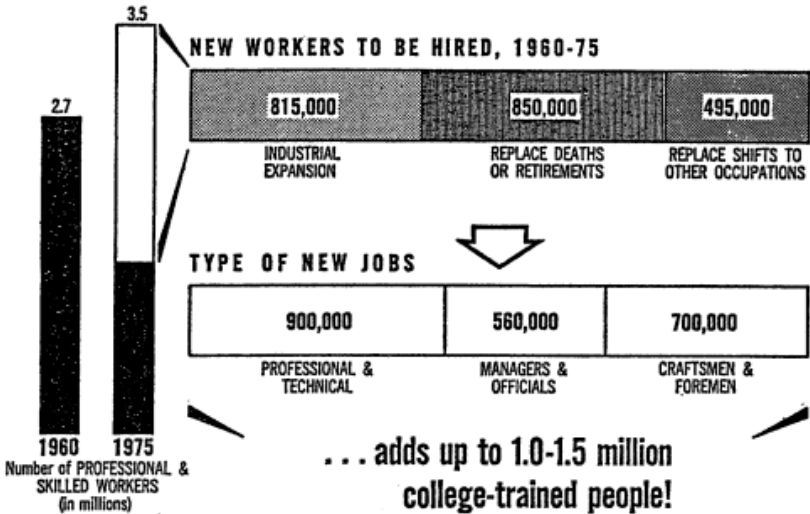


Image from Heald Report on Higher Education (1960)

nate to realize their goals and become the people they want to be. Austerity is the idea that the poor matter less and that democracy is a cute idea but ultimately pretty silly.

This becomes clear when you begin to think about the role of public services in a capitalist society. Whatever you think about capitalist societies, it is undeniable that they tend to generate economic inequality—a situation in which a few people have a lot of economic power and most people have very little. In this way capitalist societies, even ones that have some democratic features, such as elections, are also undemocratic because they tend to concentrate power in the hands of a small minority. Throughout American history, there have been conflicts between political democracy—the ideas of majority rule and the political power of ordinary people—and economic wealth, which gives its owners immense power over large numbers of people. In

many ways the principles of political democracy actually threaten the power of money. After all, if the majority of people have virtually nothing, it makes sense that they would use their votes to try and establish a fairer society. This is one reason the wealthy have tried to restrict voting at various times throughout American history. The period of the founding of the country, the “Gilded Age” of the late-nineteenth century, the Jim Crow South, and the gerrymandering that is commonplace today are all good examples of this. The conflict between these two ideas, and the feeling that no amount of voting can match the power of money, is also one of the reasons so few people bother to vote in the United States, and why American politicians are so unpopular with ordinary people.

The battle over public services is one example of the conflict between democracy and wealth. Public services are one way of softening the inequality

that is an inherent feature of capitalist societies. They do this because they are a form of wealth redistribution, albeit one that is indirect and that sometimes doesn't call itself that. The case for public services is similar to the one that underlies a progressive income tax, which has been a feature of American law for over one hundred years now.

The idea is simple. Instead of making the majority of people spend nearly everything they have to get the basic things in life—food, housing, education—the burden is shared across an entire society, and people who have an immense amount of money are asked to give up a portion of it, usually through taxes and never so much that they can't live comfortably, to support what the majority of their fellow citizens feel is a worthwhile goal. In this way public services tip the scale in favor of democracy—they take power away from the wealthy and give it to ordinary people. When you look at it this way, it is not hard to understand why the wealthy generally oppose public services. They gain nothing from them because they can already afford everything they need—rich people generally don't bother with the subway, for instance—and they resent being asked to help other people who didn't enjoy the same advantages as them. It also wounds their sense of pride because it implies that they became wealthy not solely through their own abilities, but because of the contributions of many people, like their employees, who now don't get to enjoy the benefits.

And so when economic problems occur, the wealthy often claim it can be solved by taking away what little poor people already have. It's not really a solution and there is little evidence that

austerity works, even from a purely economic standpoint. What many people who advocate austerity won't tell you is that they too understand it is not really a solution to the crisis—it's simply what they have wanted all along and a crisis that leaves the rest of us vulnerable and scared is a good moment to flex their economic muscle and get their way.

In some ways austerity represents an idea that is as old as capitalism—the idea that there are only individuals, that no one has an obligation to consider the well-being of anyone else, and that what people get in life is precisely what they have earned—no more, no less. But in this day and age it also represents the notion that the poor should pay for the sins of the rich, that public higher education is a luxury we cannot afford, and that CUNY students really aren't worth educating, at least not in the way that their wealthier counterparts are. For the sake of democracy, for the sake of our own well-being, and for the sake of being able to control our lives and get what we want, we have to fight this dark, miserable vision and insist that we have dignity, that we all matter, and that we should be in charge.

III. Teaching in a Gig Economy

The forces that have shaped CUNY over the past 40 years, remaking it from a public institution with a mandate to provide higher education to New York City students into a bottom-line oriented 'business' committed to diversity over inclusion also wrought havoc on its labor force. Though faculty at CUNY are part of a single bargaining unit, represented by the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), they are divid-

ed into two tiers separated by a wide and ever-widening gulf. At the top are highly paid professors with job security. This tier ranges from celebrity appointments, such as Paul Krugman, who makes just over a quarter of a million dollars a year working at the Graduate Center, to the associate professors at senior or community colleges, who receive yearly salaries of 60-120k in tenured or full-time positions.

The bottom tier is made up of adjunct, also referred to misleadingly as “part-time,” faculty. Adjuncts are paid per course at the dismal rate of \$3,300 per 3 credit course. In a best case scenario where an adjunct works three 3-credit courses in both the fall and spring semesters, and two 3-credit courses during the summer, the take-home pay would be \$26,000. This is a fraction of the remuneration tenured professors receive for equivalent work. But full-time adjunct employment for is hard to come by. Adjuncts, most of whom work on a single-semester contract basis, must struggle every 4 months to patch together enough credit-hours to pay the rent. This means that every semester, they start from scratch, applying to teach courses and waiting to hear whether they will received the assignment. Job insecurity is compounded by a PSC-enforced regulation, known as the 9-6 rule, which prevents part-time faculty from working more than 9 credit-hours at one campus and 6 credit-hours at another campus per semester. The 9-6 rule makes it impossible for adjuncts to work full-time without commuting to at least two locations. Working on two different campuses makes it logistically nightmarish to be assigned a full courseload every semester. Not surprisingly, scheduling conflicts are not

rare. Nor is it rare that classes are cancelled at the last minute (with no compensation to the adjunct) because of low enrolment. CUNY management would gladly repeal the 9-6 rule, which would make it marginally easier for adjuncts to piece together full-time work, but the PSC that has repeatedly upheld it, arguing it protects against the “adjunctification” of faculty, since it is designed to keep adjuncts in auxiliary, part-time positions. Bringing on adjuncts as part-time, temporary workers was supposed to inject flexibility into the workforce without sacrificing the job security and benefits that full-time faculty enjoy. The reality, however, is that faculty has long been composed majoritarily of adjuncts, and that large numbers of adjuncts are in fact not part-timers, but work full-time in extremely precarious conditions.

Why are the working conditions of adjuncts so dismal? The first reason is tied to the broader structural changes that have wrenched public education since the fiscal crisis of 1975, discussed earlier. In the wake of the crisis, CUNY became a target for cuts. And it became a target after every economic slowdown that followed. But these cuts have not affected all CUNY employees equally. High-level administrators—who play a pivotal role in allocating the budget—have seen their salaries rise in the past 40 years. For example, the chancellor of CUNY makes over \$600,000 in salary and lives in a luxury apartment paid for by the university. Other high ranking administrators (deans, provosts, etc.) also frequently receive six-figure salaries. Meanwhile, non-academic support staff (custodial, cafeteria workers, etc.) have seen their wages grow more slowly than inflation. The average salaries of full-time, tenured faculty (leaving

out a handful of superstar hires, who are lured with generous contracts) have also tracked slightly below inflation. More egregiously, adjuncts, who in the 1970s were paid ~\$1,500 per course, which, adjusted for inflation, amounts to approximately \$7,500 in 2016 dollars, today make \$3,300, meaning their wages in 2016 are only 44% of what they were 40 years ago in real terms.

What is behind this glaring inequality? One explanation of it is that the cuts were pursued in the name of privatization. In other words, policy-makers today no longer believe that the costs of public education should be shared across society. Rather, students are made responsible for footing their own bill, and the institution itself has been forced to replace public funds with private donations. And the world of fundraising is a cutthroat one. US universities compete ferociously for top administrators who are tasked with fundraising. Thus, the CUNY Board of Trustees has come to believe that it needs to shell out big bucks in order to hire a chancellor who will signal to private donors that he or she is willing to make the tough decisions to keep the institution afloat in an era of austerity, and therefore entice donations from wealthy New Yorkers, it is necessary to shell out the big bucks. This borrows from the private sector in that it is the exact same logic that permeates the board of directors in every large company: the belief that CEOs—or in this case, the chancellor and top CUNY executives—have a very difficult, and very important role, to keep costs low and to increase revenues (or donations). Therefore, they must deserve enormous compensation. The fact that top administrators at CUNY receive such dispro-

portionate salaries is both a cause and a symptom of the underfunding of public higher education.

Thus, the primary mandate of American universities has shifted away from teaching per se, and toward the business of attracting students and donor money. At private universities this is evident in the focus placed on the kinds of services students associate with a typical college education, i.e. lavish grounds and buildings, extracurriculars, luxury housing, gyms, sports teams, etc. While at CUNY some money has been poured into projects geared toward boosting prestige, and therefore fundraising—think of the new law school and the new science center—the main focus has been on cutting costs. Ask any student at CUNY and they will be quick to tell you that their rising tuition has not been accompanied with a rise in student services. In fact it has gone hand in hand with the degradation of the infrastructure (rodents and roaches are not uncommon sights on many campuses), increased class sizes, and cutbacks in library, counseling and advising services. It has also been accompanied by increased adjunctification of the labor force. An ongoing question for our consideration is where exactly does money go at CUNY. The recent case of alleged corruption at City College is only the latest example of the lack of transparency at CUNY and just goes to show that the public university is no longer public in any meaningful way, and is a further reason why we need to fight for democratic control over it.

It might be a good time to briefly address what is not driving adjunctification. The explanation that most frequently comes up during the course of a conversation about precarity in

academic labor is that there are simply too many people pursuing PhDs. The PhD oversupply argument strikes at something deeply ingrained in our times: that there is no inherent value in higher education other than what it can fetch on the open market, and that those who choose to pursue a PhD despite undesirable hiring prospects are unsavvy fools who deserve what comes to them. But the truth is that the supposed “oversupply” of PhDs has taken place at the same time as the number of undergraduates has surged. Thus, we should have seen the increase in college students go hand in hand with the creation of more full-time professor positions. Instead, what happened was the turn to flexible labor. As we described previously, at places like CUNY where post-WWII influx of the students happened suddenly, adjuncts were hired as a stopgap measure. But once casualized (read: cheap and expendable) labor was introduced into the workforce, it was hard for bottom-line oriented administrators to give it up. And administrators at other universities took note of this cost-cutting strategy, and were quick to replace many full-time positions with part-time, temporary adjunct ones. Even at very affluent private universities, adjuncts are now the majority of faculty (in New York City this is the case at NYU and Columbia). Thus, adjunctification did not come about from “the market”; top administrators turned to flexible labor in a calculated, deliberate attempt to cut costs at a time when faculty hires were increasing because of rising undergraduate enrolment. Labor casualisation is of course not unique to the university: nearly every profession (doctors, lawyers, accountants, graphic designers, you name it) is suffering

a similar fate. And consider the widespread tech-fueled trend of “disrupting” industries (think of Uber, Airbnb, etc.) by replacing secure jobs with precarious, freelance positions without insurance or benefits. The situation of adjuncts within the university is parallel to that of workers all over.

Adjuncts and collective bargaining

Historically, workers have formed unions to resist the degradation of their working conditions and to secure gains. Adjuncts (and graduate students) at many private universities are not unionized, but a recent National Labor Relations Bureau (NLRB) ruling will likely change this in the coming months and years. However, at CUNY adjuncts and graduate assistants are part of the union that also represents full-timers and other academic and non-academic workers, the PSC. Why, then, are CUNY adjuncts the least paid in the Tri-state area?

The explanation lies in the effect contingency has on the ability of adjuncts to mobilize within a collective bargaining unit that also includes full-time faculty. It also has to do with the failure of the bargaining unit to secure gains commensurate with inflation for any of its members. In other words, the union representing faculty has not been able to secure contracted raises that keep up with inflation (or the cost of living, i.e. the increase in the amount of money needed to buy essential goods and services such as rent, groceries, etc.), and it has placed the brunt of this failure on adjuncts.

The inflow of adjuncts to the ranks of the professoriate that had occurred in the early 1970s provided a strategy for cuts in the wake of the fiscal cri-

sis. By employing “part-time” adjuncts rather than full-time, tenured professors, CUNY management could expect to pay less for labor. This expansion of adjunct hiring went largely unchallenged by the union representing CUNY faculty. The Professional Staff Congress, formed in 1972, had gone into the fiscal crisis politically weak, and emerged from it even weaker. The PSC was created by the merger of two adversarial groups, one which favored full-timers and the other, adjuncts. The faction representing full-timers emerged victorious, and the union focused on protecting the rights and benefits of full-timers. Thus, the PSC failed to win job security or a seniority system for adjuncts, and in contract after contract (including the most recent one), it enacted across the board raises, which increased the divide between adjunct and full-time remuneration.

The key to understanding how this happened is to grasp the role of adjuncts within organized labor. Because adjuncts are by definition isolated and precarious workers, the PSC has always followed a strategy of selling out adjuncts during bargaining as a concession to management that allows them to obtain modest gains for a shrinking pool of full-timers who are more active in the union and disproportionately represented in its leadership. Tellingly, less than half of adjuncts are card-carrying members of the PSC, the rest are only fee payers, which means they cannot vote in contract ratification votes, PSC elections, etc. The current leadership, The New Caucus, came to power in 2000 with the promise of enfranchising adjuncts and ending the two-tier divide. However, despite some modest gains (overemphasized

by the union leadership, especially the claim of adjunct healthcare, which existed before 2000), the PSC continues to disenfranchise adjuncts in its decisionmaking bodies and sell them out in the contracts. In the newest contract, which has come after 6 years without one, the membership (which skews toward full-timers) ratified flat-rate wage increases, which mean the highest paid and the lowest paid members of the PSC all get 10.41%. So-called progressives in the PSC who would never support a flat tax have no problem with supporting a flat rate increase in wages, which increases the gap between full-time and adjunct pay.

By sidelining adjuncts, the PSC has also forfeited the ability to mobilize the power necessary to secure sweeping gains for anyone in the bargaining unit. To be able to satisfy its base—full-timers—the PSC must necessarily follow a defensive strategy: in order to guard against the further erosion of full-time benefits, it must eschew any serious hopes of improving conditions for adjuncts. Afterall, if adjuncts gained pay parity, what would distinguish them from full-timers? And if adjuncts were acknowledged as full-time workers by the union and management, the glaring pay inequality would likely be used to further devalue the salaries of full-timers. To say the least, it’s a sticky situation. But what the PSC fails to realize is that by mobilizing mass numbers of adjuncts as well as full-timers and other workers it represents, it could wield enough power to reshape the university, to hand back governance to faculty, and to imagine higher education as a social good that should not be dependent on precarious labor nor subservient to the bottom-line.

IV. Policing CUNY & "Expressive Conduct"

CUNY campuses are guarded and patrolled by a force of over 600 so-called "peace officers". This force includes foot and bike patrols, a K9 unit, and the elite Civil Disturbance Response Unit (SAFE) responsible for monitoring and policing protest activity. CUNY cops are issued bulletproof vests as if their job is dangerous, even though their department has experienced one fatality in its entire existence, when a BMCC building collapsed on 9/11. Like the NYPD, these officers have the power to surveil and arrest, and also like the NYPD, they have the power to violently limit the free assembly of activists, and to generally brutalize and harass powerless people with seemingly no repercussions. And as the NYPD's racialized and anti-poor policing elicits its increasing public outcry, we must connect this issue to the policing of the CUNY system.

On November 21st, 2011 at Baruch College, CUNY cops teamed up with the NYPD to beat and arrest CUNY student activists who were protesting against austerity at CUNY. The students were attempting to enter a Board of Trustees meeting to confront this unelected body about its ongoing economic attack against the students and workers of the CUNY system. In response, the CUNY cops shoved and clubbed them, and their colleagues in the NYPD hauled 15 students away on phony charges. The brutality of CUNY security and their collaboration with the NYPD was denounced widely by students and faculty, but there were no consequences for these officers or the administrators who told them what to

do, and in the past five years nothing has changed.

In October 2013, City College abruptly shuttered its Morales/Shakur Center, a hub of student political activity that had been won in a militant 1989 student campaign against tuition hikes and racial and economic injustice at CUNY. When activists protested the theft of this hard-won asset of the student movement, CUNY peace officers again teamed up with the NYPD to brutalize, and this time to pepper-spray the student activists, charging one alumni for endangering his small child—by having her present when the cops decided to get violent! In response CUNY administration did not distance themselves from the violence of the CUNY and NYPD cops. Instead, they doubled down, and charged two student organizers with plotting to incite a riot—a month after the protest! The two students were suspended, and nearly expelled. This kind of harassment proves that CUNY and NYPD cops target activists with the explicit approval of CUNY administration.

According to the 1992 Memorandum of Understanding between CUNY and the NYPD, cops from the NYPD are only allowed to enter CUNY campuses for non-emergency reasons when explicitly summoned by the university. However CUNY cops have maintained a cozy relationship with the NYPD that makes this agreement unnecessary. And the strength of this weak agreement was tested on November 30th, 2011, a NYPD cop wandered onto the campus of College of Staten Island without being summoned to use the bathroom. In the process he harassed cafeteria worker Corey Holmes for petty drug possession, and attempted

a botched arrest that resulted in the man's death by cardiac arrest. CUNY took no action for this breach of the Memorandum.

Likewise CUNY has been silent on the well-documented surveillance and attempted entrapment of Muslim students at Brooklyn College (and we can only imagine elsewhere) by the NYPD, revealed in January of 2016. If CUNY administration authorized this deplorable campaign of harassment, it should come clean and face the consequences for this disgusting violation of academic freedom and basic human decency. But since the administration insists this operation was conducted without its knowledge, the least they can do is denounce the NYPD for this breach of the Memorandum. But of course this denunciation is yet to come. Whether legally or illegally, the CUNY and NYPD police are increasingly bound up in the same citywide strategy to criminalize daily life for people of color, surveil and entrap law abiding Muslims, and violently suppress political activism.

These exceptional cases have grabbed headlines and have been denounced by many students and faculty in the CUNY system. However what is less publicized is the gradual militarization of CUNY, which reveals itself in these stories, but happens mundanely every day. Over the past decade security turnstiles have popped up at the entrances to CUNY campuses, or else security has begun strictly demanding ID for access to campus, and has made access to CUNY by non-students increasingly difficult. CUNY cops patrol the hallways, their radios audible from classrooms where students, many of whom are harassed and brutalized by

the police in their neighborhoods, are trying to learn.

When students and staff attempt to use CUNY's expansive, "public" facilities for gatherings, they are strictly regulated by a bureaucratic process that only the most powerful, established and savvy members of the CUNY community have a chance of navigating. Student groups at many campuses are only allowed to hold meetings during "club hours", while space sits empty and unused the rest of the time in a city where indoor assembly space available for working class people has been all but eliminated. And for student groups to even exist in the first place, they must secure a faculty member to sign off on their group, who then becomes subject to professional pressure if the group takes an unpopular political position, such as solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Spontaneous congregations of any kind will result in peace officers being called in to disperse students.

Student activism throughout CUNY's history, including many groups with strong leadership by working class New Yorkers of color, has stood up to the elitism and racism of the CUNY administration, demanding free education for all, diverse curriculum and hiring, higher wages for CUNY faculty, and better facilities for all. Many in the CUNY community underestimate how much of a threat activism represents to the ruling elite of the system, because they don't know this history. But CUNY administration knows it all too well, and as soon as a CUNY activist begins handing out flyers, or hold a small meeting or protest on CUNY campuses, they are aggressively surveilled, and sometimes threatened to cease what is perfectly



legal activity, nevermind activity which should be welcomed and encouraged in institutions of learning.

Recently the CUNY administration has gone on the offensive to codify this harassment into official policy backed by the police. In June 2016, CUNY introduced a policy on "Expressive Conduct" which made virtually all forms of political expression, assembly, and protest in the CUNY system subject to the discretion of administration, which reserves the right to decide when and where this activity should occur, if it allows it to occur at all. Administration was only trying to make official the type of policing they've been doing for years, but unfortunately for them, by putting it all down on paper and trying to make it policy, they created a scandal which is years overdue. After a well-organized campaign led by students and faculty that mobilized widespread opposition to the policy, the Board of Trustees backed down, announcing it would indefinitely postpone its vote on

the policy.

The primary context for this policy push is a national campaign to vilify one of CUNY's most active and dedicated student groups, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), which according to its website "organizes college students to combat Arab propaganda on campuses from coast to coast", has lead a high profile media and political campaign to kick SJP out of CUNY. The ZOA crafted elaborate charges of "anti-semitism" against SJP, comprised mostly of individual incidents of inflammatory language, most of which cannot be verified and otherwise have no clear connection to the group. The ZOA's claims inspired dozens of New York State lawmakers to threaten CUNY to withhold already dwindling funds from the system should SJP continue to enjoy its legitimate status as a student organization. Anti-semitism is of course the socialism of fools, an idiotic and deadly



Students protest the closing of the Morales/Shakur Center at City College, 2013

historical scourge which must be eradicated. But criticism of the state of Israel is not anti-semitism. To treat it as such is as intellectually dishonest as it is politically dangerous, and CUNY has created a despicable precedent by which further budget cuts and political repression can be justified by the principles of anti-racism.

But the case of SJP is not an exception, only the most extreme example of a university environment hostile to student activism and especially distrustful of politically aware students of color. The outrage generated by the Expressive Conduct policy needs to also be directed at the repressive way CUNY is policed on a day to day basis, and has been for years. Working class New Yorkers, especially those of color, live in a daily crisis of rising cost of living and stagnating wages, when work can be found at all. The government is no longer willing to pay money for public services, and instead of making citizens complicit by helping them meet basic

needs, relies instead on the police and the jail system intimidating and disciplining poor people, or else driving them out of the city altogether. This reality of daily life for the working class people of color who make up a majority of CUNY's student body is being replicated on CUNY campuses, where the rollback of services, rising tuition, and the general gutting of the institution is being managed by police who make sure students know their place.

The NYPD and CUNY cops have forfeited all claims to protecting and serving working class New Yorkers. We must kick the "peace" officers off campus and end CUNY's cozy relationship with the NYPD. While we stand up in the streets for the value of black and brown lives, and against the school to prison pipeline, we must not stand idly by while the fortunate survivors of that pipeline are policed at CUNY the same way they were in high school or in the streets. And to demand the end of campus policing does not mean we

demand chaos, or to put the most vulnerable members of the CUNY community at risk—historically speaking, that has been the cops' job. Instead, we must build strong social and political ties, capable of developing and enforcing shared community standards, and practicing the principles of restorative justice. At present, the policing of CUNY makes this impossible.

V. CUNY's Proud History of Resistance

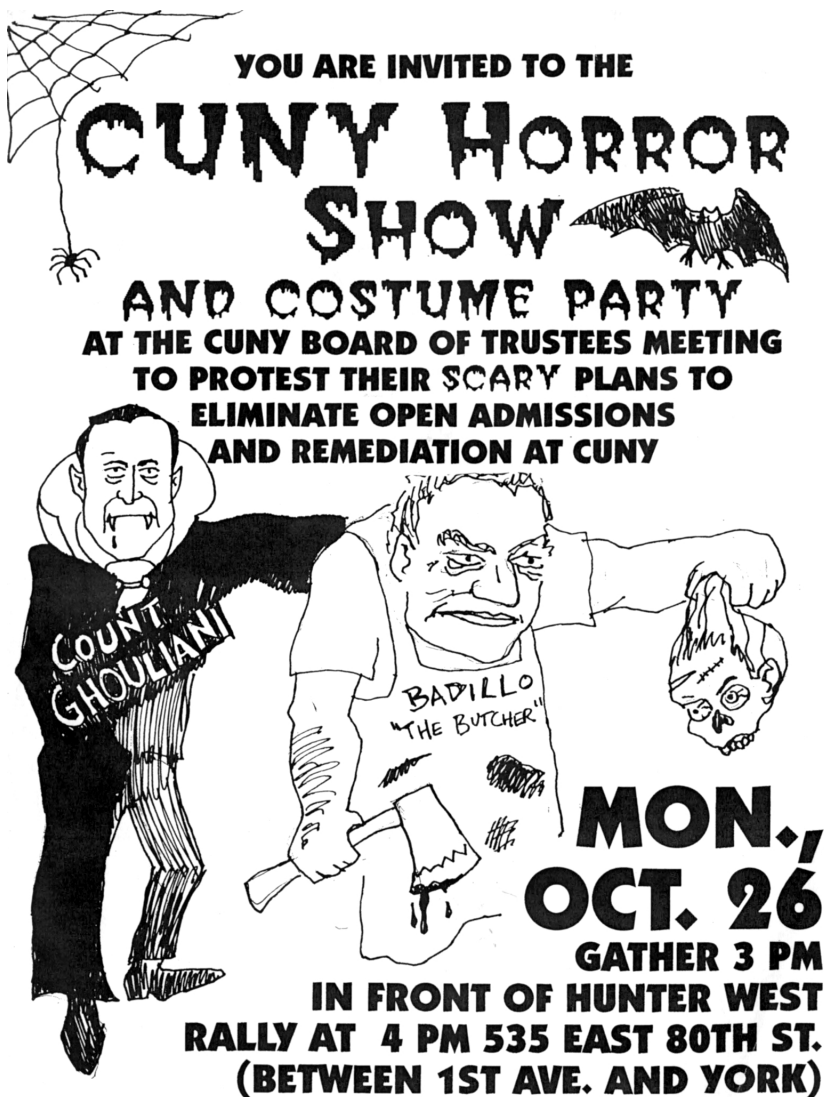
The CUNY system has been a hotbed for political activism throughout its existence. For the past fifty years, the hardest fought battles have been over access to CUNY for working class New Yorkers, especially people of color. While we touched on parts of this story above, it is important to re-emphasize this history and its importance to the battle against austerity at CUNY. Over the years, significant gains in inclusion and basic services for working class New Yorkers have been made by students when they have broken with the reliance on Democratic politicians, student governing bodies, and the dead ends of "respectability politics" and law-abiding protest. But absent a strong social movement capable of taking direct action and breaking the law, against a climate of increasing repression of student activism, and amidst the onslaught of austerity in the CUNY system, many of these gains have been reversed or are currently under attack.

CUNY has historically been affordable for working class students, and free for many but not all students. After the student-led backlash of the late 60s, CUNY was briefly free for all students, but this was quickly reversed

and replaced with a more complex system of grants, and unfortunately, regular tuition hikes. At the dawn of the Civil Rights movement the CUNY system was almost entirely white. In 1965, pressure from radical black and brown New Yorkers forced Harlem's City College to adopt the Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) program, geared toward supporting the entry of a small selection of black and brown New Yorkers into the CUNY system. The first incoming class of SEEK students was a little over 100. But the political climate in the United States was moving much faster than the glacial pace of university diversity initiatives.

The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King on April 4, 1968 spurred violent riots in over 100 US cities, including looting and arson in Harlem, in the greatest week of civil unrest the nation had seen in over a century. Later that year, a group of mostly black students in the communist-affiliated W.E.B. Du Bois Society of City College published a petition demanding that future freshman classes reflect the demographics of New York City public schools, cost of living funding for low income students of color, democratic control of City College, the expansion of the SEEK program and more college options for students of color, and black and Puerto Rican specific curriculum. Not only were these demands not met, but Governor Rockefeller proposed to gut the existing SEEK program, along with 20% of CUNY's entire budget.

The students response matched the militancy displayed in US streets for the better part of the decade: in February, the office of City College's president was briefly occupied by black and



Student satirical flyer (1997)

brown students demanding control over admissions, and more diversity in admissions and curriculum. There was a subsequent flurry of student organizing on campus. When Rockefeller's proposal passed later in the semester, meaning the devastation of SEEK and deep cuts to CUNY's entire budget, things moved very quickly. City

College's president resigned, joined by a number of department chairs, in protest. Inspired in part by this dramatic show of solidarity from faculty, the black and brown students who had spearheaded this campaign were joined by many white students in a strike and occupation campaign that took over buildings and brought classes to a halt

at City College, and catalyzed a more general CUNY movement against Rockefeller's plan.

These students broke the law, scuffled with the police, took actions that put themselves and their classmates at risk, and even set portions of City College on fire. Despite the predictable backlash from racists, conservatives, and lovers of peaceful and law abiding protest, students all over the CUNY system and even in New York's public high schools rallied to their defense, as the movement spread to Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. The CUNY administration was scared out of its mind. These students had been told the same thing we're told today: there was simply no money for their education. But suddenly, with part of CUNY literally on fire and the whole system teetering on the point of insurrection, the money was quickly found, not only to meet the demands of the student activists, but to open CUNY admissions to all New Yorkers with an 80% average or better, in a policy called Open Admissions.

Open admissions would redefine the meaning of public education in New York City. It opened the doors of CUNY to traditionally marginalized students educated in underfunded high schools and hailing from underdeveloped, over-policed neighborhoods. This necessitated not only a complex web of remedial education, to make up for the failings of the underfunded New York City high school system and the debilitating effects of life in racialized poverty, but also many many more faculty and education workers, to handle the influx of students, and new facilities were opened, like Hostos Community College in the Bronx, catering specifically to an influx of students who

couldn't have dreamed of attending CUNY a few short years prior. In short, the student activists who dreamed big at City College had won more than they could have hoped for.

Unfortunately, this was true only for a short time—until the offensive against these gains began, and was not met with the same level of militancy that had won them in the first place. It is not an overstatement to say that the past four decades of class struggle at CUNY have been conducted in the shadow of this wave of strikes and occupations, with student groups fighting to hold onto and expand the victories of 1969, and CUNY administration, city, and state officials doing their best to dismantle these gains and make sure nothing like this ever happens again. Student organizers graduate or drop out, faculty radicals become weighted down with administrative tasks, and the US and international political climate heats and cools. But the ruling class is always working, uninterrupted, with a long view and unlimited resources.

As we've already mentioned, the Fiscal Crisis of 1974 allowed for a coup by New York City's richest business interests, who effectively took control of the city government under the Emergency Financial Control Board, and commenced a program of gutting public services for working class New Yorkers which continues to this day. In 1976 Hostos Community College, which had been created by the movement of 1969, was saved from closure by a 20 day occupation supported by a coalition of Bronx community groups and students from across the CUNY system.

However that same year the CUNY movement was unable to prevent the

imposition of CUNY's first ever tuition, despite thousands of students flooding the streets outside City Hall in protest. During the 1980s what happened in New York City after 1975 — the restructuring of working class life characterized by the withdrawal of public services, the defeat of organized labor, and the growth of aggressive policing to handle a population once placated by public services and well paying employment — took place on a national, and international scale. And to be clear, sixteen years of Democratic presidents and countless Democrats at the city and state level in New York have not reversed this trend one bit; in fact, Clinton and Obama have proven to be some of its most cold-hearted executors, and we can expect much of the same from another Clinton.

In 1989, a massive strike and occupation wave swept CUNY in response to the first Governor Cuomo's proposal for tuition hikes and cuts to services. Beginning at Hunter, occupations spread to Queensborough, La Guardia, Staten Island, BMCC, and eight other CUNY campuses. CUNY students amplified the effects of these occupations with a series of unpermitted protests and marches. The occupation tactic became a generalized form of protest. For example, when in May of 1990 a popular Latino professor at John Jay was denied tenure, an occupation was quickly mounted. However the CUNY administration, justifiably shaken by this massive and militant student movement, became increasingly comfortable calling in the NYPD to violently evict demonstrators, pursuing academic penalties against student activists, and perhaps most damagingly, pitting uninvolved students against the

occupation movement. The latter happened most publicly at BMCC in April of 1991, when the PR savvy administration dismantled a popular student occupation by fomenting anti-protest feeling among a group of nursing students who had been told they would be forced to miss their licensing exam if the occupation continued.

The strike and occupation wave of 1989-91 won a considerable cut in the proposed tuition hike, and the restoration of a portion of the funds to be slashed from CUNY. But it did not reverse the trend of tuition hikes paired with budget cuts. There have been periodic flashes of direct action in the CUNY system since 1991, especially around the Student Liberation Action Movement (SLAM), who helped coordinate a 20,000 strong march against budget cuts in 1995 and worked throughout its existence to build leadership and plan direct action by students of color. More recently this spirit emerged around the 2013 closure of the Morales/Shakur Center, one of the gains of the 1989 movement. Further, the PSC's carefully stage-managed direct action campaign leading up to the last contract (the same deal reached by DC-37, a union that undertook none of these actions) with the dubious strategy of mass arrests coordinated in advance with the NYPD nonetheless demonstrated a critical mass of radical workers and students willing to take direct action against austerity. Despite these glimmers of hope, the CUNY movement remains promising, yet severely fragmented. Amidst many encouraging campaigns and a panoply of political groups in the system, a meaningful opposition current to the imposition of austerity has yet to coalesce, even as

SLAM!

STUDENT MEETING

Gov. Pataki has just proposed a \$400 a year tuition increase and a reduction of state aid to CUNY's poorest students. This would raise CUNY's tuition to \$3,600 a year. This is on top of the \$750 tuition increase in 1995. Come to a Brooklyn College SLAM! meeting to build a broad-based student movement to fight the budget cuts. SLAM! is an open and democratic coalition of students committed to stopping the budget cuts.



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SLAM student meeting flyer (1997)

budget cuts paired with tuition hikes have become the new normal. We can look to the coming PSC contract campaign as an opportunity to further push for united opposition, but we must move beyond the top-down control the PSC leadership exercises over these expressions of CUNY radicalism, and must challenge the PSC to practice real,

long-term solidarity with students, not just convenient rhetoric that only brings us into the streets when the union needs something from the rest of CUNY.

Today we face many obstacles unknown in the past, especially a heightened climate of repression amidst unprecedented insecurity about the future (though this much is as true of CUNY

as it is everywhere else). And the high turnover of student activists, job instability of adjuncts, and the undeniable contentment that prosperity brings to many radical full-time faculty, have combined to create a situation in which the ranks of hardcore CUNY organizers turn over every few years, while the administration, and city and state government have been able to pursue a long-term strategy with remarkable success over decades. But this does not make building a mass movement at CUNY impossible. It only means we must be clear-eyed about the obstacles we face in order to think strategically about the best way out of the present mess we're in, using past victories to guide us, and adapting past strategies to the present moment. The need for common struggle is as urgent as ever!

VI. CUNY Struggle

Founded in 2015, CUNY Struggle is a nonsectarian network of undergraduates, graduate student workers, adjuncts, full-timers, and other rank-and-file members of the PSC. We have joined our organizing efforts with the aim of reinvigorating the movement at CUNY along the lines advanced above, and building a movement capable of going on the offensive against austerity in New York City and beyond.

In the past year we've organized a popular assembly that brought together over 100 people. During that assembly, we came up with demands we think everyone can agree on, and that we hope to pursue in the coming year. For example, we demand a fair contract and the end of the two-tier system that divides "full-time" from adjunct faculty—labels we reject because they capture

little of what faculty actually do in their jobs and denigrate the contribution of the so-called "adjuncts" who teach more than half of all CUNY classes. A fair contract would mean equal pay for adjuncts, who currently are paid \$3,300 per course, a fraction of what full-timers receive. The membership of the PSC just accepted a one-year contract that does neither. It did not challenge the "budgetary constraints" of the state and it accepted an across-the-board percentage increase, which widens the gap between adjunct and full-time faculty. This year, we want to work to build worker power so that in the next bargaining round (which will take place at the end of the school year), we can stand united for a fair contract.

We also want a free and open CUNY, so that all students in New York City can get access to quality higher education. This requires undoing the budget cuts that have plagued CUNY since the 1970s and reimagining education as a social good instead of as a business with a bottom-line to respect.

To get there, we need to convince people this is the only way forward. This means talking to people from all over CUNY, undoing the kind of received wisdom that justifies austerity, meeting with student and faculty leaders, organizing actions that raise awareness of the issues faced by CUNY — all to ultimately convince a critical mass that things can be changed for the better.

And this will only be the beginning. Join us this year, and let a friend know what's going on at CUNY!

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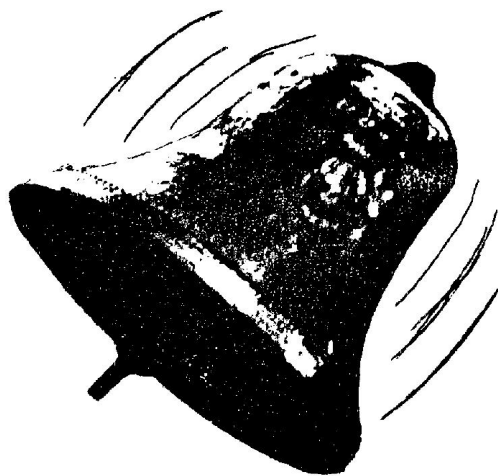
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Students protest tuition hikes at Baruch, 2011

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