

The Advance

Newsletter of CUNY
Contingents Unite

VOTE NO!

Proposed PSC Contract Deepens Inequality – Yet Again

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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From 92% Strike Authorization to – a New Sellout

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That warning has come to pass.

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

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

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

VOTE "NO" ON THE PROPOSED CONTRACT!

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

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

Write the CCU at cunycontingents@gmail.com Labor donated