

# LAUNCHING A PSC UNION DRIVE AT THE GSUC

BY ERIC MARSHALL

IT IS NO LONGER news that the protracted national attack on higher education has sunk so low as to question even the purpose, validity, and (pardon the expression) the return-on-investment of post-secondary education. Nor is it news that the state and local governments of New York have proposed additional draconian budget cuts for 1996-97 on top of the already debilitating cuts of 1995-96. And again, it is not news that among the hardest hit by these cuts is the CUNY grad student/ adjunct. What may be news to some of you, however—good news, it is hoped—is that there is now an activist organization at the GSUC openly advocating on behalf of this unorganized, disenfranchised, shamefully exploited segment of the CUNY labor force.

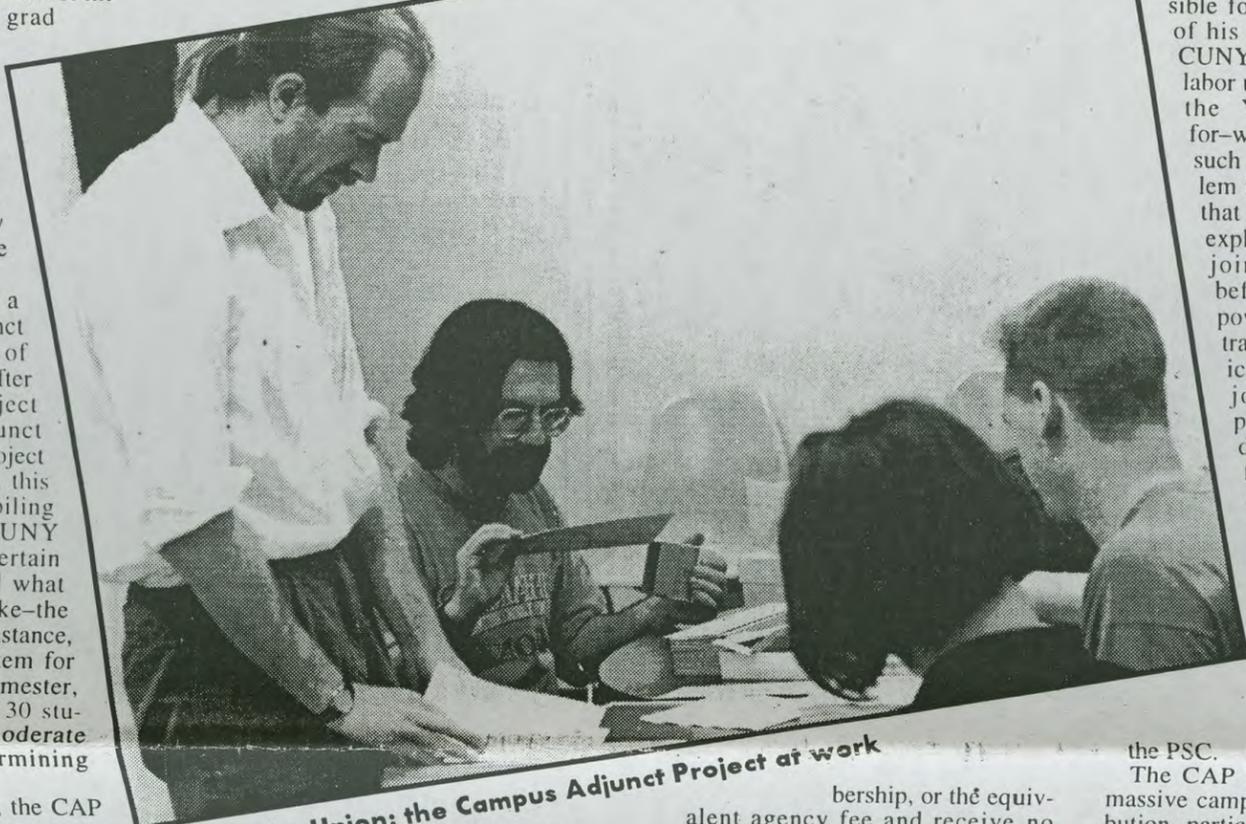
In January, after a year and a half of operation, The Adjunct Organizing Project (AOP) of the DSC—to be known hereafter as the CUNY Adjunct Project (CAP)—hired longtime adjunct advocate Vinny Tirelli as Project Director. Since its inception, this organization has been compiling an active database of CUNY adjuncts in an effort to ascertain who and where we are, and what our professional lives are like—the typical CUNY adjunct, for instance, has been teaching in the system for 5.5 years, at 6 credits per semester, has an average class size of 30 students, and indicates only moderate degree of influence in determining what classes s/he will teach.

More importantly, however, the CAP was created to disseminate relevant professional information to the nearly 9000 adjuncts throughout the CUNY system. For example, did you know that, currently full-time CUNY graduate students who work on a part-time basis at any City University unit are exempt from coverage under the Social Security Act and should not have Social Security Tax withheld from their paychecks (1993-95 GSUC Bulletin, p.44)?

Unfortunately it is the case that few, if any, payroll departments at the campuses check to see if an adjunct is a current GSUC student, and therefore rarely, if ever, do they offer this option, which will save the typical adjunct \$350-\$750 per year. So go check those old W2 forms. If you have had Social Security Tax withheld from your CUNY adjunct income, and would like to reclaim that money, pick up and file the simple 1040X "Amended U.S. Individual Income Tax Return" form (available at

## STUDENT STRUGGLES...

RON WINLEY



Building the Union: the Campus Adjunct Project at work

the CAP office, BM11). Included with your request should be a copy of the relevant W2 forms, and a letter from the Registrar's office stating that you were a full-time student at the GSUC during the year in question. The statute of limitations for adjusting back tax returns is three years.

Of course, our union, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), should be informing us of rights and privileges such as this. But they don't. In fact, over the past several years the present PSC leadership (known as CUUC), has not only acquiesced to a great extent to governmental budget cuts, and succumbed to pedagogically indefensible edicts from 80th Street, but has also made clear their disinterest in CUNY's adjunct labor force. Where the union maintains an agency shop for full-timers (they all must pay either union dues and receive full mem-

bership, or the equivalent agency fee and receive no membership) they do not maintain such a system for part-timers. As a result, the overwhelming majority of full-timers are PSC members, and the overwhelming majority of part-timers are not. Far from surprising, however, this tactic is consistent with the way that labor unions have shot themselves in their collective foot over the past thirty years. Their strategy of catering to the upper levels of the bargaining unit at the expense of the lower, and their attempt to enforce the divisive two-tier system which diminishes internal resistance even while it erodes the overall strength of the union, is typical of what has caused the decline of labor in America. We join, this stops.

If the recent activities at Yale University have taught us anything, it is that the interests of full and part-time faculties are inseparably linked. Attempts to divorce the two faculty constituencies will have disastrous effects.

The Shame of New Haven served only to highlight the precarious balance in which full and part-time faculties co-exist, and the devastating schism that can open up between them if allowed.

A situation such as this could probably not occur at CUNY—the adjunct labor

force is far too big, and far too heavily relied upon, and, unlike the Yale TA, the CUNY adjunct is fully respon-

sible for the teaching and grading of his or her students. Also the CUNY adjunct has a recognized labor union—this is, after all, what the Yale TA was fighting for—which could not afford to let such a fiasco occur. Our problem is not no union but a union that abuses, and condones the exploitation of us. We have to join and change the union before we can have any real power to reverse the administration's (and the PSC's) policy of sacrificing full-time jobs to part-time ones—a practice which ultimately destroys the educational foundation of the university, as it overtaxes the undercompensated powerless workforce. A valuable lesson must be learned from our colleagues at Yale. We must take proactive measures to strengthen the part-timer position within both CUNY and

the PSC.

The CAP is currently engaged in a massive campaign of information distribution, particularly as it pertains to the PSC and the upcoming contract vote. We encourage all adjuncts to join the PSC immediately, and let your voice be heard. Vote on the contract. Next year the union leadership comes up for election. We can no longer afford the old fashioned, ineffective service model of labor unionism. Vote for a new activist union that will openly, faithfully, and energetically defend your rights, your job, your college and your university. Vote for a new union characterized by communication, discussion, and interaction; one committed to a coalition between full and part-time faculties and the disparate factions around CUNY; one which centralizes part-timer concerns and involving part-timers in the decision-making processes; and one dedicated to progressive, activist thinking, and to the protection of the affordable, quality CUNY education.

Join the PSC. Make our numbers count.

THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS (PSC) labor contract, under which all CUNY adjuncts work, expired on January 31, 1996. Negotiations are in progress for the new three-year contract which will be voted on by all union members later this spring. The CAP was requested to provide the New Caucus with a list of part-timer demands to be considered for inclusion in this new labor agreement.

The following is a slightly revised draft of that list—feel free to send comments to the CAP:

✓ PSC must enforce article 4.2 of the most recent contract, the maintenance of an agency shop, and check-off option, for all members of the collective bargaining unit, including all part-timers. This would come in conjunction with a reduction in part-timer dues from the current \$133.20/year to a more reasonable rate, perhaps

around \$40 or \$50/year.

✓ Part-timers must receive wages pro-rated to the relevant full-timer salary scale, based on the appropriate step on the contractual salary charts and the number of courses taught. This rate should not be less than one-ninth of the full-time annual salary per course taught.

✓ Part-timers must be vested in the health insurance program immediately upon commencement of employment.

✓ PSC must guarantee a one year participation continuation option for health coverage to all part-timers after the cessation of teaching duties.

✓ Graduate Assistants A, B, and C and all GTP's should follow the adjunct lecturer eligibility requirement guidelines for participation in

the health insurance program.

✓ Part-timers must receive one-year appointments, except when engaged for the express purpose of filling a one-semester sabbatical-leave slot.

✓ Teaching limitations, in terms of number of courses and/or credits taught, must be removed or established on par with the full-timers.

✓ Part-timers must be guaranteed equal access (in policy and practice) to travel and research funds at the campuses.

✓ Part-timers must be fairly compensated for all administrative responsibilities.

✓ Part-timers must receive consideration for release/reassigned time.

✓ PSC must engage in active efforts

to protect the professoriate, such as the insistence that money designated for full-time lines not be used to hire additional part-timers.

✓ PSC must maintain an active part-time faculty list at all times.

✓ Current part-timers must have employment priority over retirees who opt to assume part-time duties, as is their prerogative.

✓ Part-timers must be guaranteed office space sufficient to store course materials, make phone calls, and meet privately with students. Furthermore, minimally acceptable standards must be established and codified for the sharing of office space.

✓ Non-reappointment schedule guidelines, as stipulated by article 10.1.a.3 of the most recent contract, must be strictly enforced.—E.M.