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# CUNY Adjunct Alert

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Produced by *CUNY Adjuncts Unite!*

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## Boris...Not Good Enough

The December 1998 *Clarion*, our union's monthly newspaper, finds First Vice President Richard Boris "pursuing adjuncts' interests." Boris presents a comforting view--to full-timers--of what the PSC has done for adjuncts. One problem: it ranges from misleading to untrue. After rambling on for a couple of paragraphs about "solidarity" and "unified vision," and lamely excusing CUNY's overuse of part-time labor as "not simply a CUNY invention," Boris cites the policies of our parent union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which govern the affairs of affiliates like the PSC: "[they should] renew their commitment to organize and represent part-time and other non-tenure track faculty and negotiate contracts that improve salary [and] benefits, and establish seniority as a means for job security and increase[d] opportunities for full-time tenure-track appointment." Boris's conclusion: "*These resolutions articulate what has always been PSC policy.*" Huh?

Clearly the practices of the union contradict this. The PSC does not inform new adjunct hires of its existence, much less invite them to join, or issue them registration cards. Most egregiously, it does not make campus by campus recruitment efforts. In fact, individual chapters don't even have guidelines for recruiting on their campuses.

Boris lists the contract provisions for adjuncts as if they were good. He writes that adjuncts "have access to research grants, travel funds, employer-paid health insurance, scheduled increments and promotions." The truth is many adjuncts don't know they have access to these benefits, and the union inadequately informs them. The health insurance available to adjuncts, after they've waited the probationary year, is far inferior to full-timers'. It lacks dental coverage, is too expensive for family coverage, and doesn't include disability insurance. There are only five increments on the adjunct salary ladder and four on the adjunct assistant professor ladder, compared with the 15 or 16 full-timers receive. If PSC policy is to "negotiate contracts that improve salary and benefits," why have there been no increments added to adjunct schedules? Why the across-the-board percentage salary increases that only widen the gaps between the ranks, rather than a more equitable bottom-loaded increase?

Boris proudly notes that "[i]n the new contract PSC negotiators have distributed \$2 million to the adjunct health benefits account." What he conveniently fails to mention is that this \$2 million doesn't go into that account until the year 2000, that the account is already millions in the red and running an enormous annual deficit.

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### Sock it to Schmidt

The Schmidt Commission, appointed by Mayor Giuliani to evaluate CUNY, is holding two more public hearings, on February 3 and 10 (see calendar). Dr. Benno Schmidt, former president of Yale University, who chairs the group, is CEO of a private educational contractor, and, like all the members of the commission, is a proponent of privatization of education.

*CAU!* opposes privatization because we believe that all high school graduates have the right to a college education, and since many of us are remedial teachers, we know that reading and writing courses are more successful when linked with content courses. We know we do a good job of helping our students bring their skills up to college level and see no reason to segregate and thereby stigmatize remedial students in separate or private schools, and so further impede their college careers.

If privatization becomes a reality students who need remediation might receive vouchers, as Mayor Giuliani has suggested, to buy their remedial programs wherever they

like. One result would be that programs would focus heavily on getting them to pass tests. Another would be that CUNY would offer less remediation as private educators like Kaplan and the Princeton Review attracted the students who chose not to attend CUNY. Such programs pay tutors less than half what adjuncts earn at CUNY, so they provide a powerful way for employers to lower our pay and weaken our efforts to unionize.

Your testimony on the issues of class size, office hours, pay, your experiences teaching at CUNY, the CUNY mission, and remediation in general is important. The Commission should hear that education at CUNY can be improved by paying part-timers more and treating them better. To testify go to the hearing (early!) and sign up. Or send a written statement to CAU!

**Benefit Party Alert!** Come to "Cocktails & Conversations II: Eat, Drink, Dance & Chat" on Friday, March 5th to benefit *CAU!* Party starts at 6pm. \$5 plus cash bar. Location: To Be Announced.

### **Boris on Adjuncts cont'd**

Boris touts adjuncts' "access to limited leave, tuition remission and pension plans," and points out their "right to due notice of appointment; they may be appointed annually rather than by semester, and they receive full pay if a course is canceled after teaching has begun." Again, it's the conspicuously absent details regarding tuition remission that matter. The \$1 million set aside for "partial tuition remission" in the new contract doesn't become available until the year 2000, in the final semester of the contract, and it is not clear how that money will be distributed. The existing tuition remission policy provides for one course-worth per semester only after an adjunct has been teaching in the same job title in the same department of the same campus for ten consecutive semesters. Considering the mobility (geographic and titular) of CUNY's part-time faculty, it's hard to believe that more than a token few are ever eligible for this benefit. Despite exhaustive investigation, *CAU!* could find no adjuncts who had received even a semester of paid leave. Adjuncts are frequently hired and fired at the last minute (often later), partly in to order to prevent management from having to pay in full for a canceled class, and to prevent fired adjuncts from collecting unemployment insurance. The standard adjunct reappointment is contingent on enrollment and funding, meaning that adjuncts get no promise that they will even have the job offered them.

Boris writes that "[s]eniority measures have also been introduced: part-timers need not be observed or evaluated annually after a probationary period; and those with remedial or ESL experience must be given priority access to jobs if CUNY restructures their programs." It is true that observation isn't required after ten consecutive semesters in the same job title in the same department, but adjuncts may be observed at the request of their chairs, and often are, year after year. Moreover, these "seniority measures" are in no way used as a "means for job security" or "opportunities for full-time tenure-track appointment."

Boris talks about the "firm commitment of PSC negotiators to the interests of the part-timers." Yet pay for office hours disappeared from the table when management quoted an inflated price for it. A serious fight might have won a partial gain, perhaps using funds from those applied to lump sum payments. Moreover, many of these negotiators, including Boris, are among those who reject enforcement of the contractual stipulation of agency fee for adjuncts, effectively keeping the majority of the faculty disenfranchised and under-represented.

Boris begins and ends his fictional pursuit of our interests with the common justification of the raw deal adjuncts get: it's better than at most colleges. Of course, this is management's argument; when our own union uses it, it is outrageous and divisive. Moreover, it fails to take into consideration the unique realities of CUNY: significantly higher cost of living than almost anywhere else, distance between campuses, demographic makeup of the adjunct pool, etc. Besides, other adjuncts, such as the musicians at The New School, and teachers at Mass/Boston have recently won significantly better contracts.

Adjuncts find it galling to have the PSC talk of the need for solidarity when it suggests--in both word and

deed--that our needs are secondary to those of full-timers. We're all for an inclusive union. That's why *CAU!* is recruiting adjuncts and campaigning for a referendum that would bring larger numbers of adjuncts into the union. While Boris thinks "[m]ore can never be enough to meet all our demands," we feel a larger union, strengthened by the memberships of adjuncts, will have more bargaining power in Albany, and increase the size of the pie the PSC is able to bring back to share among its members. "Academic values must predominate." We agree. With our large numbers of PhD's, and our many years of teaching experience, we add enormously to the education our students get. If we didn't have to spread ourselves so thin we could raise even higher the value of a CUNY education.

## **Come to the Next Meeting of *CUNY Adjuncts Unite!* Friday, Jan. 8th @ 3pm Room 400 25 W 43rd St**

next Friday meetings: Feb. 5, Feb. 26, Mar. 26

### **Calendar of Upcoming Events**

- Feb 3 2pm:** Schmidt Commission Hearing (NYC Tech)
- Feb 10 2pm:** Schmidt Commission Hearing (Queens College)
- Feb 16 4pm:** Board of Trustees Hearing (535 E 80th St)
- Feb 18 7:15pm:** PSC Delegate Assembly (GSUC Aud)
- Feb 22 4:30pm:** Board of Trustees Mtg (535 E 80th St)
- Mar 1 1pm:** Referendum Press Conference (25 W 43rd St)
- Mar 2 3pm:** Faculty, Staff & Admin. Open Mtg (535 E 80th St)

**Referendum Alert!** Be sure to get all the signatures you collected to *CAU!* by February 26! On Monday, March 1 we will hold a press conference when we deliver the petitions to the PSC. Until then, *keep collecting!*

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