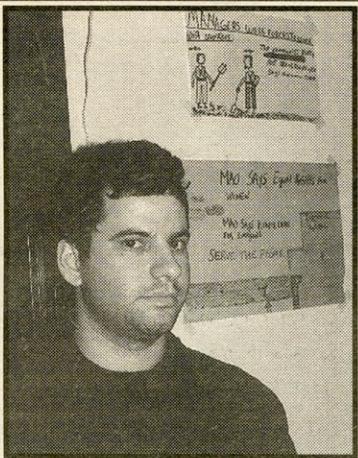


The Adjunct and the University

by Daniel Mozes

When I wrote a "Viewpoint" column for *New York Newsday*, this summer (8/26/94) about how adjunct labor is brutally exploited at the ultimate expense of the students of CUNY, I identified the main culprits, in order of importance, as the Government of the State of New York, the administration of CUNY at 80th Street, and the Professional Staff Congress, our union. But one of the several paragraphs cut from that editorial was one which assigns primary responsibility for the poor conditions of adjuncts to *the adjuncts themselves*. None of the three above institutions will care about the conditions of adjuncts unless its own interests become threatened. None of those bodies employ monsters (with the possible exception of the State): they have their own agendas and will only respond to political pressures raised by vocal groups. If adjuncts had followed Vincent Tirelli a few years back and formed their own union, maybe that smaller union might have been able to negotiate better than the present one does, or maybe not. But too few people responded to his attempt to decertify the PSC and start up the Part-Timer's Union to test the experiment (more on that history later). At least if adjuncts insisted upon becoming members of the PSC then maybe the Congress would push harder for them.



Daniel Mozes, Ph.D. Candidate, English

Fortunately, there is something that you can do right now as an adjunct. The Doctoral Students Council is currently trying to develop a mailing list of all the adjuncts in CUNY—none exists right now. You can help by getting such a list of part-time teachers of the department in which you teach. Contact Eric Marshall at the DSC office for more information.

The Trouble with Adjuncts: The Transients' Mentality

Adjuncts have been silent and inactive, however, for two main reasons. First, they are transients, most seeking to escape from graduate school or at least from adjunct employment as soon as possible. They usually do not identify themselves with their jobs. They see no point in spending energy improving their lot instead of spending energy getting out of it. Second, adjuncts are very often (with many exceptions) products of selective schooling and some bourgeois privilege, and are not accustomed to thinking of themselves as the downtrodden

masses. This impediment to self-consciousness is particularly damaging and may be what makes adjuncts use the first reason too much as a rationale for avoiding acting on their own behalf.

But adjuncts aren't in the middle class, whether they once were or not. (See Tracy Morgan's article "From Homecoming Queen to Welfare Queen," *Advocate*, 6(4), Sept., 1994 for a confessional account of the downward mobility many of us have experienced.) At the maximum amount of credit per semester, an adjunct teaching six courses per year at two CUNY schools can receive about \$12,000, plus health insurance if she's been teaching for three or more consecutive semesters. Most adjuncts teach fewer courses, and only one out of six get health insurance through their jobs as adjuncts.

The issue of the transience of adjuncts points to another inactive group that ought to have acted long ago to end exploitation of adjuncts: the full-time faculty of CUNY. More adjuncts means fewer full-timers, so that the remaining professors must all work harder to run their own departments. The increased committee work and advising that full-time professors must do because adjuncts cannot cut into the time they have to prepare for courses and to do scholarly research. Furthermore, full-timers know or ought to know that since adjuncts are transients, it is up to the full-timers to lead the way to reform and restoration of full-time lines. Full-timers live in their departments.

They are not transients. They control the PSC. They have no excuse for allowing the current state of affairs to exist.

This inaction on the part of all CUNY teachers may be seen as a trend of teachers in higher education across the country, and even as part of the sweeping cultural phenomenon that Bob Herbert decries in the recent *New York Times* Op-Ed piece "Workers Unite!" (9/14/94). But the specific actions of the three major players, the State, 80th Street, and the PSC, are all directly to blame for taking advantage of the teachers' apathy. It need not have happened that half of all teachers in CUNY are adjuncts. What follows is a brief history of the administration's role in causing the problem of over-reliance on exploited instructional labor. The State's role is folded into this history, since 80th Street is really (too much) an arm of the State. The story of how the Union has not done its job will have to wait for another issue.

A Procrustean Budget

On the surface, the CUNY administration does not seem to be burying its head in the sand about the financial or quality issues that face it. In *The Chancellor's 1994-95 Budget Request*, which is also like a State of the Union report, 80th Street identifies the problem unequivocally: "The greatest loss to the University during the years of budget erosion has been the reduction in full-time faculty. Since 1989, CUNY's full-time faculty ranks have

declined by 14%, which has forced colleges to rely more and more on part-time adjunct faculty to teach courses and advise students." The *Budget Request* says that about half of the courses are taught by adjuncts, and cites the American Council of Education's opinion that one quarter adjunct-taught courses is considered "excessive use" of part-timers.

The reason for this loss, the *Budget Request* claims, is the double-whammy of a 16% enrollment growth since 1989 alone plus a loss of \$200 million from 1990-1993 alone. Clearly, "the State and the City are investing less in CUNY's students today than they did twenty, ten, or even five years ago." The City doesn't even pay up what it promises to do: under the agreement Koch made that handed over CUNY to the state during the 70s budget crisis, the City is still supposed to pay for 1/3 of the budget of the Community Colleges. It has been shirking since Dinkins, paying only 22% of their costs, a loss of millions. The Administration of CUNY, (and in this case the Presidents of the Colleges and the Graduate Center on 42nd street too) are beginning to do what private colleges have always done: tap alumni and donors for support. CUNY graduates include some heavy hitting successful people, so this idea could have great potential, and deserves a full-press effort.

Unfortunately, however, these private monies are being used to bust the union by setting up special "grant" teaching jobs. The "grantees"

Continued on page 16

Letters

Open discussion would give the students the opportunity to inform themselves, and to make real choices, rather than plebiscites for those who have "served" already.

We can insure this open discussion also by working to build genuinely grassroots democracy at the department level. The DSC can help students build departmental associations, and publish newsletters, broadsides, hold meetings, or whatever, which at the very least permit candidates for DSC and these departmental associations to make known their stand on the issues. We can use the *Advocate* for the campaign statements of at-large candidates and to publicize departmental issues.

Robert, let's work together to build an *ad hoc* committee, to make the DSC participatory!

— Tom Smith, Political Science

Robert Hollander replies:

It is every writer's fondest wish to have serious readers. Tom Smith is as serious

a reader and political thinker as I could want, though evidently not as careful a reader of my own musings as I am.

We are together in thinking it preposterous to claim that the DSC is representative simply because it is elected. I thought I had made clear my view that elections never result in representation except in a cheap sense of the word 'representation.' The point of the article is, however, that I consider the whole issue of representation a red herring. It distracts from the proper focus for evaluating the DSC. That focus should be on the DSC's function, not its procedural constitution. The DSC is more about advocacy than about governance.

It is easy to forget that analogies between the DSC and real-world governing structures are as tenuous as analogies between the student body and society at large. The student body is not characterized so much by competing interest groups as by commonality of general interests. (Departmental interests — which do diverge widely — are in most cases not in competition with each other at the student level.) So when adminis-

trators claim that the DSC does not represent the students in its advocacy agenda, they can only be implying that students, because they have little time to advocate their interests, are therefore indifferent to their own interests. But that's just (in the strictly logical use of the word) absurd — one cannot lack interest in one's interests — and I am embarrassed at having had to devote an entire *Advocate* piece to saying so.

It is because there seems to be, for the most part, no competing agenda that I am suspicious of those who carp about the DSC's activities. What is it they don't like? free photocopying? health services? our attempt to extend building hours? or the journals we fund? the symposia we sponsor? Nothing here seems especially controversial to me. What controversy there is regards implementation of these good ideas. The ideas themselves are almost universally favored.

In any case, my qualms are not over democracy, but over our immature understanding of and expectations for it. Here Mr. Smith has either misread me or I have expressed myself very poorly

indeed. I disparage several aspects of electoral democracy, but none of the ones that Tom says I do.

I fully share with him his faith in ideals of true participatory democratic process. As for implementing participatory consensual democracy along, say, Habermasian lines, I readily admit that I do not think it possible at the Graduate Center for the general student body. I am less optimistic than Mr. Smith regarding the possibilities of politicization of students at a North American academic institution. It's not that I can't imagine an ideal speech situation here; I just can't imagine many interested speakers participating. This troubles me more than lack of interest in DSC elections.

Nevertheless I am sympathetic, as are all the members of the DSC, to the desire for election reform. This came up at the first two plenary sessions of the current DSC, and is an ongoing project which we will attempt to begin to resolve with this year's election. We welcome help and suggestions from all corners, including Tom's, who, by the way, I would not for a moment "lump" with anyone, least of all

with "the carpers."

Tom Smith replies:

I would like to reply substantively at a later date. But just now, I'd

like to mention that I'm in complete agreement with Robert on his original purpose, as he has discussed with me, and that is his objection toward the Administration's frequent use of the non-representativeness of the DSC as a red herring by which to undermine the DSC's opposition to the Administration's insensitivity to student concerns. I don't think that the DSC is representative, nor that it is impossible to make it democratic. But given the choice between having it around and doing without it entirely, I choose the former anytime. The Administration is far less sensitive to the students here and to the mission of CUNY. This has been shown time and time again by their utter capitulation to the draconian policies and philosophy of Chancellor Ann Reynolds, and the DSC's courageous resistance to this capitulation.

Union Raises Adjunct

Continued from 13

the question," opted not to recognize those with hands raised at the time, and the matter was put to a vote. Voice vote, that is. Despite the constitutional requirement of a "two-thirds majority... for the purpose of determining a dues schedule for the organization," the vague result of a voice vote was accepted in place of the more exact counting of hands or ballots. The motion had majority support—not surprising considering there are no part-timers on the Delegate Assembly—but that it was a full two-thirds majority was not clear. When asked about the appropriateness of an informal voice vote for such an important issue, Polishook remarked that he favors informality and that a show of hands would take too much time and would require an eligibility check of all voters. Fortunately his subtle ear can distinguish between the eligible and ineligible in a voice vote.

Support for the motion to increase part-timer dues was substantial. But I wonder how much input part-timers had in the formulation of this proposal. How many adjunct members were surveyed for their opinions? How many adjunct non-members were polled? How did your campus delegates vote on the issue? Or your campus chair, for that matter? Perhaps you should ask:

- Baruch:** Harold Greenberg
- Bronx CC:** Howard Harris
- Borough of Manhattan CC:**
Percy Lambert
- Brooklyn:** Steve London
- City:** Bernard Sohmer
- GSUC:** Bill Kornblum
- Hostos:** Peter Castillo
- Hunter:** Sara Aronson
- John Jay:** Haig Bohigian
- Kingsborough CC:** David Keller
- LaGuardia:** John Hyland
- Lehman:** Eugene Bucchioni
- Medgar Evers:** Joyce Siler
- New York Technical College:**
Gerald Grayson
- Queens:** Martin Kaplan
- Queens CC:** Fred Greenbaum
- Staten Island:** Mohamed Yousef
- York:** Richard Boris

Ask what is behind the PSC's apparent disinclination to swell its adjunct ranks. Ask why they do not actively seek to enroll us in the union. Ask why they place these "nominal" obstacles in the way of our joining? Ask why a union whose bargaining power would be significantly improved if its membership increased to 15,000 or more would assume such a lackadaisical

approach to attaining that increase. Ask why a union that could do so much to make your life better consistently exhibits little interest in doing so. And ask about the justification of the devious "If full-timers do, then part-timers must" way of thinking. Their dues were raised by some small percent. Must ours be raised by the same percent? Is there not a bottom line—a salary floor—below which such an argument ought not to venture? Are full-timers' costs of living higher than ours by that same percent?—for then, indeed, such a position might hold water.

Part of the blame for our union problems lies with us, the adjuncts, to be sure. Our absence at this special meeting was unfortunate. The insignificant adjunct presence in the union is likewise a shame. Together we can do something about it. Apathy has been costly. **V**

Adjuncts

Continued from 3

would really be contract consultants whose benefits are at the moment uncertain. The only way for the new grant program to be an improvement over what currently exists is for it to provide the \$16,000/year salary that was originally proposed for it. But that salary level does not appear to be in the current versions to the plan.

In any case, the *Budget Request* leaves out the facts which would show how the administration is a major cause of these problems. The current administration's policy has been to fund the CUNY campuses on the basis of how many students it has (or equivalents of full-time students). Thus each college, in order to get more funding, actively recruits students. That policy is thus good for access, but bad for the students, because the total CUNY pie has been getting smaller. Why encourage more students to come to a school you know is getting less money? One reason is to use the students as pawns to put pressure on Albany and City Hall. So far, the only people to feel that pressure have been the students themselves.

What the *Budget Request* also doesn't say is that the University chooses how to deploy its money. The issue of downsizing the University is complex, with enemies of CUNY lining up to do just that. But 80th Street's chosen path of exploitation clearly makes no sense. It is conceivable for the University, faced with vicious cuts and swelling enrollments, to have responded to the real crisis by turning students away and announcing that CUNY's mandate—to provide a quality education for anyone with a high-school diploma who shows up—has become impossible to fulfill. That, along with a mobilized student body, might have created political pressure sufficient to restore some of the cuts. Instead, 80th Street instituted two early retirement programs, effective freezes on hiring new assistant professors, and mass adjunct hirings, all of which solve the problem of providing quality education by sweeping it under the rug. The newest controversial plan by Chancellor, referred to obliquely in the *Budget Request* as each campus's "opportunity to collaborate with other CUNY colleges," calls for consolidation so that departments with small numbers of majors like, for example, Philosophy, wouldn't be offered at all at some schools. The plan has been resoundingly rejected by everyone other than the folks at the 80th Street address. Both the move to adjuncts and the consolidation plan compromise CUNY without really admitting that they

do so.

Organizing Effective Student Lobbying

The CUNY central administration, headed by the embattled Chancellor Ann Reynolds, makes a request to the State Legislature every year for more money. (Reynolds is embattled partly because of her income from outside of CUNY. This is a dramatic but basically symbolic issue that the press has spinelessly focussed on, drawing attention away from how the City and the State have tried to abandon CUNY.) 80th Street also lobbies the legislature—a baroque but nowadays commonplace example of one government agency lobbying another. The PSC also lobbies the legislature, but only through its larger union affiliates. Those affiliates, though very powerful, can only be peripherally concerned with the fate of its sub-group. They certainly aren't concerned with adjuncts who form a part of the PSC's responsibilities but who aren't represented in its ranks.

The CUNY administration and the Union say that they cooperate to lobby together more effectively for CUNY, but the above results condemn their efforts. The issue, perhaps, is lobbying strategy. To get a better sense of the effectiveness of the lobbying effort on CUNY's behalf, I spoke with Edward Sullivan, from Brooklyn and Chair of the Higher Education Committee in the State Assembly, whom several sources identified as CUNY's best friend in the State government. While respectful of the power of the teachers' unions (Sullivan said of them, "they're on my back all the time and rightly so"), he openly derided the administration's lobbying techniques: Sullivan says that the students should become a much bigger part of the lobbying—the focus, in fact. "CUNY students have numbers, but they aren't mobilized. They could scare politicians, but the administrators are sure that the student organizations are powerless. They [the administrators] muck around with those organizations. Twenty-five students sitting in a legislator's office are more powerful than the Chancellor [of CUNY]."

I asked Sullivan for his opinion regarding the reason why 80th Street and the union do not use the students and sometimes go out of their way to avoid them. Sullivan: "The students might become obstreperous and demand the change of some department, but that's tough." In other words, if the CUNY administration mobilized the student leaders and got them to be a part of a coordinated lobbying effort, they might have to listen to those student leaders' ideas about how

to improve education at CUNY. I repeated to Sullivan something that a union representative said to me: the PSC used to take busses of students and teachers up to Albany to lobby and protest, but, he claims, they became violent once and threw rocks. Sullivan: "The students broke a door once that might have cost \$400. That's not relevant. The students were more dramatic, but it was not the end of the world." But it was the end of student lobbying.

Without effective lobbying, CUNY is an easy victim for the budget axe of the Republicans in the State Senate and the Upstate and Long Island legislators who hate every dollar sent to the City. Kenneth P. Lavalle, chair of the Higher Ed Committee in the Senate, has never opposed budget cuts or tuition increases for CUNY. Mario Cuomo played a Bill Clinton for years by talking a good talk but doing nothing effective. He says he wants CUNY to be tuition-free. (as it once was before minorities and women started enrolling in large numbers), but he hasn't proposed such a thing to the legislature.

Where Things Stand

Thus the picture emerges in the background of the exploited adjunct. The players are an indifferent State and City, an administration engaged in an ineffective lobbying effort which uses students and teachers as pawns, unorganized and dismantled student organizations, an apathetic and self-deceiving workforce, and decisions, only now being redressed, to sacrifice educational quality in the name of the appearance of education. The Administrators of CUNY have had their backs to the financial wall for so long now that few of them remember any other situation. The State has increased their budget for CUNY this year, but not nearly enough to erase the cuts that have been made over the last ten years, not even considering the huge increases in enrollment.

Two CUNY professors of history, Blanch W. Cook and Sandi E. Cooper (Cooper is also head of the Faculty Senate) wrote in a recent *New York Times* Op-Ed piece, "The Trashing of CUNY" (8/8/94), that conservative journalists and others are attacking CUNY with hostility and spurious arguments (see also the responses in the *Times*, 8/15/94). That kind of counter-attack is sorely needed by CUNY, but so is an organizing effort that involves as much of the total CUNY population as possible. Only a grass-roots effort will impress anyone with the power to fund CUNY and return the University to a place where the teachers are professors. **V**

DSC Holiday Party

Thursday,

December 15

in the Student Center

Basement Mezzanine

6:00-10:00

Food, Drink, Music, and Dancing