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DOCTORAL STUDENTS' COUNCIL PRODUCT

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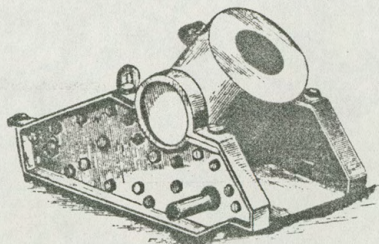
MERRY CHRISTMAS MR. POLISHOOK

In the September 28, 1983 issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education, Irwin H. Polishook, president of The Professional Staff Congress, congratulated CUNY on its measure in putting forth a mandate for retrenchment (dated May 1983) in case of budgetary exigencies. "These procedures," he said, "do not cancel out the possibility of retrenchment, but they do safeguard against an abuse of potential emergency." In another article, published in the PSC Clarion, it was reported that the publication of the CUNY document, "Guidelines and Procedures for Discontinuance of Instructional Staff Personnel Mandated by Financial Exigency," was responsible for the AAUP lifting their censure of CUNY's retrenchment procedures. And, around the same time, an article in The New York News reported that Chancellor Murphy hoped that CUNY would not need to invoke the retrenchment mandate.

Despite all these precautionary measures in good faith, CUNY does not practice what it preaches.

On September 1, 1983, nineteen Graduate Assistant A's of the Queens College English Department received letters stating that, "because of budgetary constraints, it has been deemed necessary to the College administration that all but two of our Graduate Assistant lines be wiped out." This letter, reappointing them as adjuncts, preempts their signed contracts as Graduate Assistant A's dated July 12, 1983, as well as their reappointment papers dated April 15, 1983. In base terms, they are doing the exact same job, with the same schedule, for almost \$3800 a year less salary. The administration has allowed three arguments to prevail. First, these "translated" adjuncts "should be grateful they have jobs." Second, as a "result of a state audit several years ago, the Budget Office cut supposedly 'empty' lines. These lines belonged, in fact, to faculty on leave who were replaced by adjuncts who do not 'fill' a line. The legislature restored the cuts, but the Budget Office has refused to release the funds, and the impasse has persisted for two years. Until

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recently the short-fall was made up by CUNY, but they stopped doing so this year. Faced with the need to cut 71 lines the College administration decided to convert Graduate Fellows to Adjuncts in the English Department, eliminating ten lines. In the meantime, the State has imposed added cuts of 46 lines." And, the final argument for cutting the graduate assistantships and "translating" them to adjuncts is that these people are affected the least.

Only Queens College chose to retrench by cutting graduate assistantships and only the English Department was affected this way.

Because graduate assistants have yearly contracts, CUNY considers them full-time employees, with contracts renewable up to three years. The Mandate specifies that the retrenchment decision be made by an ad hoc committee, that full-time faculty be given six months notice, and that the letter of notification be sent by certified mail. These nineteen graduate assistants were notified of their contract loss one week before classes began, not by certified mail, and with no prior indication that this would occur. The graduate assistants presented a grievance through the PSC based on the Retrenchment mandate. The grievance has been denied at the first step. Lola Locker, designee for President Cohn, argued that the cutbacks (117 lines!) do not qualify as retrenchment and, therefore, the CUNY guidelines do not apply. Her rebuttal also defined the \$3800 a year salary loss as a "disadvantage." These semantic games are unconscionable. The immediate financial hardships imposed by this irresponsible decision seem negligible in comparison to the devastation on the morale of the department. The trend which this signifies is nothing less than the continuing deterioration of society's commitment to educating citizens. In the past, graduate assistantships reflected the university's commitment to supporting and educating qualified people in all disciplines for teaching and pursuing excellence in scholarship. Assistantships were

reserved for those graduate students who demonstrated excellence in teaching. Assistantships are defined by the PSC contract as financial aid "similar to the undergraduate work-study financial aid plan." The elimination of assistantships indicates that the university's commitment no longer seems to exist. The primary concern of state and city governments as well as college administrations appears to be balancing a budget regardless of its disastrous short or long term consequences which, like the tumbling dominoes, affects the teachers, students, quality of education, and society.

The emphasis on balancing a budget via total disregard for the professionals or the profession is demonstrated by the national trend wherein part-time faculty is increasing and, in some cases, outnumbering full-time faculty. Utilizing part-time faculty does, indeed save the university considerable amounts of money. But, at what price? Part-time faculty receive less than poverty pay and none of the benefits normally owed to a person engaged in comparable, respected positions outside academia. Most adjuncts across the nation teach a class load one half to two thirds of a full-time's load and receive one fourth of a full-timer's salary. The part-time faculty's pay averages \$5000 a year. They receive no job security, no pension benefits, no health plan. The full-time faculty, in many instances, do not consider part-time instructors as colleagues, equal in status, worthy to share their academic expertise. Part-timers are alienated not only from dreams of the future but even in their daily reality. Part-timers work loyally for a department that is not loyal to them. They are expected to maintain the highest excellence in teaching while, at the same time, expected to be "grateful for having a job." Being an adjunct has always been one of the traditional ways to rise in the ranks of academia; this is no longer true. Once an adjunct, always an adjunct.

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Paradoxically, almost all part-time faculty teach the required and prerequisite courses, the very courses which influence students' decisions to continue in that discipline. The part-timers carry the responsibility for training students in the basics upon which they rely through four years of college, for is not the basic freshman curriculum concerned with learning how to learn? The challenge in academia for part-timers is transformed into a responsibility without commensurate remuneration.

If the academic world continues to perpetuate this trend of faculty expendibility, the truly qualified excellent instructors may opt to choose careers outside academia where their skills and expertise are appreciated and rewarded accordingly. This would be a tragic situation because now, more than ever before, excellent and committed teachers in all fields, but especially the humanities, are needed to curtail the manufacture of students who are more interested in degrees qualifying them for careers rather than an education qualifying them for life.

[Note: On November 22, we retained an attorney, Jerry Tauber, to represent us in this grievance against Queens College.]

P. E. Zaccardo
Halima A. Bunnell



NON-REPRESENTATION OR DECERTIFICATION?

All grad students employed in CUNY in part time teaching or research position-whether as adjuncts, fellows or grad assistants-are 'represented' by the faculty union- the Professional Staff Congress. This may come as news to some of you: virtually no effort is made by 'our union' to inform us of our 'rights and benefits.' The reason for this is clear: our status assures us no rights and provides few benefits. Grad students and all part-time employees suffer from a kind of 'internal exile,' locked into a situation in which we are non-represented, and, it seems, resented.

This situation was illustrated at Queens College recently, when half of the Graduate Assistants 'A' appointed for 1983-84 were mysteriously rescinded in September, three months after the contracts had been signed. These students were forced to fall back on adjunct jobs, with a substantial loss of income. When they filed grievances with the P.S.C. they were told, in short, that nothing could be done for them.

In October, several G.S.U. members met with the President of the Professional Staff Congress, Irving Polishook in an effort to discuss some of the many grievances and inadequacies which we wanted addressed. The possibility of a separate local for part-time employees/adjuncts was raised. On all questions Polishook remained inflexible and completely unresponsive.

Independent adjunct unions have recently been organized in Oregon, California, Wisconsin, and elsewhere. SUNY grad students are now successfully completing the unionization process. Adjuncts at Nassau Community College recently won a strike, and significant improvements in working conditions. Many of us in the G.S.U. have concluded that the only alternative to P.S.C. non-representation is decertification.

Graduate Student Union
1433 East 102nd Street
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11236

The Graduate Student's Union is having its next general meeting on Monday, December 19th, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. in the Eighth Floor Lounge. We will discuss:

1. election of a steering committee;
2. report on meetings with lawyers and the P.S.C.;
3. the projected membership and decertification campaign.

Anyone who can't attend can drop a line to:

Graduate Student's Union
1433 East 102nd Street
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11236

The G.S.U. is for you!



DSA PRESENTS :
DECEMBER 15 7:00-9:00 pm
THE REINDUSTRIALIZATION DEBATE:
CAPITAL AND LABOR RESPONSE TO
THE CRISIS. ROBERT LEKACHMAN,
AUTHOR OF GREED IS NOT ENOUGH.

ROOM 207 CUNY GRADUATE CENTER.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE
CONTACT BANJO AT 228-9763.