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## A LETTER FROM BARBARA BOWEN

April 2009

Dear PSC Colleague,

I'm writing as the New Caucus candidate for re-election as president of the PSC. I am seeking the honor and the challenge of serving as your union president for another three years. While I hadn't planned to write another personal letter about the election, I feel it's important to speak to you directly and honestly, above the noise of the election.

There is a real political choice in this election, and I think the only serious choice is the New Caucus. The New Caucus has a record, a strategy and a political analysis. We do not have to rely on accusations and empty promises. I am writing to ask you to vote on the basis of the facts.

Most of us don't expect people to lie. We assume that when someone sends a printed message with what appears to be information, the sender has taken pains to make sure it is true. Not so the CUNY Alliance. They do not scruple to circulate lies if they think it will help them to win votes. With zero experience either negotiating a contract or leading a union, they are apparently hoping that a barrage of accusations—regardless of whether the accusations are true—will conceal their lack of substance and their real politics.

### THE TRUTH ABOUT PROMISES

The truth is that the New Caucus has delivered on salaries—for example, the top professor salary step will show a 34% increase by the end of this contract, and the bottom CLT step an increase of 45%. Those are substantial economic gains. But we have gone beyond salaries to deliver a whole array of new benefits that lift the quality of our professional lives: well-paid sabbaticals, junior faculty released time, paid office hours for adjuncts, paid parental leave, 200 new full-time lines for former part-timers, professional development funds, and more. We were able to succeed because we built the political leverage of the membership: it was political leverage that forced CUNY to drop its demand to remove department chairs from the union, and political leverage that won the 6% increases to the top salary steps this October. Of course there are things we have not yet achieved, and of course all of us feel acutely that salaries and working conditions at CUNY must be further improved. But the way to achieve that is to do the hard work of organizing for greater power—not to make irresponsible promises without a plan for achieving them.

It's clear that the CUNY Alliance has no record. Just as disturbing, however, is that they have no strategy for doing as well as—let alone better than—the New Caucus. One of their recent missives promises that they will “negotiate” everything from large salary increases to reduced teaching loads. (They also announce that they will negotiate provisions the New Caucus leadership has already won—such as increased annual leave for counseling faculty.) The critical question, however, is how. For all their chatter, the CUNY Alliance is silent about strategy. The gains they promise would cost at least two or three times the value of any contract won by any New York union. Making extravagant promises without a strategy, especially in this economic climate, is irresponsible—if not worse.

In the seven years he was an elected member of the union's Delegate Assembly, CUNY Alliance candidate Fred Brodzinski never attended once, in 67 sessions. He never participated in the strategy discussions that produced our contract gains and never joined in the analysis of the obstacles we have faced. He has never won a single gain for colleagues on his campus. He was defeated two-to-one in the election for leadership of the higher education officer chapter. He offers no basis for trusting him with your future.

In 2000, when I first ran for union leadership, I had spent five years as the union chapter chair at Queens College. I had been a leader in the successful fight against retrenchment at Queens in the 1990s, fought and won the battle over increasing our teaching load, and ended the practice of failing to pay adjuncts on time. Steve London had been a chapter chair at Brooklyn College even longer before he ran for union-wide office and had a similar record of accomplishment. The New Caucus did not seek your vote and your trust until we have proven ourselves union leaders. Brodzinski asks you to vote for him on the basis of fantasy.

### THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CONTRACT

Failing to offer a strategy, Brodzinski and the CUNY Alliance have resorted to lies. Theirs is the familiar strategy of “the big lie”—tell a lie so blatant and so often that no one will doubt that it's true. That practice alone should discredit them, especially in an academic community. They constantly repeat the mantra that our salary increases have not kept up with inflation, when they know that is false. Their recent missive about our salaries comes up with a figure below inflation because it omits both the September 2007 increase and the October 2008 increase. You can make the numbers say anything if you are willing to lie.

I would welcome honest debate about what the PSC has and has not been able to achieve in our contracts. But what CUNY Alliance offers is not honest debate. We should build on the heightened interest in the union generated by this election and begin a union-wide conversation on strategy, but a conversation based on facts, not lies.

I do not plan to refute every one of the CUNY Alliance's lies and distortions here; I just ask you to go to the public record. You will find that CUNY Alliance has distorted the truth on everything from Welfare Fund benefits to my expenses. For instance, it is an outright lie that the New Caucus "has eliminated benefits for spouses of deceased members": the Welfare Fund's policy on spouses of deceased members has not changed since 1989. It is also a lie that we "hid" the state of the Welfare Fund from the membership. The exact opposite is true. We conducted a series of public meetings across the campuses to discuss the Fund's finances and wrote about them repeatedly in *Clarion* articles. CUNY Alliance's accusations on stipends, expenses and other subjects are equally unfounded.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT POLITICS

The New Caucus leadership stands for public investment in institutions that serve the public. All of our work is based on the belief that a public university with CUNY's historic mission should be a great university, not one constantly strapped for funds—and that our own working conditions as faculty and staff should be supportive of our work. As recently as last week, we saw the results of the New Caucus leadership's work: in a grueling year for the New York State budget, the PSC agenda of progressive tax reform (in coalition with many other unions) was enacted; CUNY was excluded from Governor Paterson's announcement of 8,900 layoffs of State workers, and millions of dollars in proposed cuts to CUNY were reversed. That record is testimony to years of patient analysis and organizing.

In contrast, Fred Brodzinski, who heads the CUNY Alliance slate, does not mention in his many campaign emails that he is an activist in the Republican Party and an avowed opponent of public investment. "The mission of the Republican Party is to promote, preserve, and protect individual liberty, free enterprise and limited government," states the website of the Hamilton Township Republican Committee, of which Brodzinski is president. PSC members are entitled to participate in political activities, but I think you are entitled to know what CUNY Alliance stands for. At a time when the PSC under New Caucus leadership has devoted every resource it can to increasing public investment in CUNY and preserving CUNY jobs, Brodzinski espouses "limited government." That is exactly the agenda that plunged CUNY into decades of poverty.

## POLITICAL CHOICE

I am sure you will continue to get CUNY Alliance emails until the vote is counted, and that they will contain the familiar mixture of the big lie about our record, empty promises about their own candidacy, and "revelations" about the other candidates and me. Check their accusations against the record. When you do, I think you will share my sense that people who are willing to be dishonest to get your vote are not people you should trust with union leadership.

I do not expect to write to you again as a candidate in this election, because the current moment is perhaps the most important in a generation for the State and City budgets. During this period I have been testifying at City Hall, advocating for CUNY in Albany, meeting with the governor's office to press for more federal stimulus funds for public higher education, participating in budget hearings on the campuses, and working with our representatives in Washington to maximize federal stimulus funding for public colleges and universities. In short, I have been doing and will continue to do the work of the union president. I feel that is the only principled thing to do, especially in this economic moment.

I am proud of what we have been able to accomplish together, under New Caucus union leadership. The PSC has grown exponentially in effectiveness and influence and success. We have raised members' expectations of their union, and that's a great thing. We have much more to accomplish, and I would like to do it with you. I ask you to repudiate the dishonest politics of the CUNY Alliance and show your support for transparency, integrity and principled leadership—for the New Caucus.

In solidarity,

**Barbara Bowen**

