

A response to an Open Letter from Professional Staff Congress leaders on “\$7K or Strike!”

March 31, 2019



As members of the \$7K or Strike Campaign (which includes City University of New York [CUNY] adjuncts, tenure-track/tenured faculty, HEOs, CLTs, students, and other NYC union members) we are deeply disappointed by the March 21, 2019 letter signed by PSC Principal Officers Barbara Bowen, Andrea Vásquez, Sharon Persinger, and Nivedita Majumdar, which has misinformed our fellow union members about our work.

The letter claims that we are a small group of union members who have intentionally attempted to represent ourselves as union leadership, and who claim that “\$7K or Strike” is the union’s official position. None of that is true. \$7K or Strike is a movement that reaches out to PSC members, students, and New York City communities to inform them about the need to make the \$7K per class demand non-negotiable. We have used a public conference, multiple campus grade-ins, tabling, office visits, chapter meetings, one-on-one dialogues, picket line solidarity with other NYC unions, and coalition meetings to build solidarity to achieve the robust contract that all PSC members deserve.

During this campaign, we have clearly and respectfully distinguished ourselves from the PSC leadership, in large part because we have a different strategic vision for how to win a solid contract. While the leadership has sought to mobilize the contract struggle from the top down, we believe that only a rank-and-file upsurge of participation - galvanized by the clear \$7K or Strike demand - can build a fighting union. Furthermore, during this campaign, we have always set our primary sights on

who our real adversaries are: CUNY management and the city and state government, who have all refused to allocate the funds necessary to transform our university.

The Open Letter's suggestion that PSC members have been confused or alienated by the \$7K or Strike campaign is deeply insulting to the hundreds of members across all titles who - knowing full well that \$7K or Strike is not yet the official position of the entire union - have signed pledge cards calling on the leadership to hold a strike authorization vote, signed solidarity letters in support of striking to win \$7K, and voted for resolutions stating the same. We hope the PSC leadership recognizes that the \$7K or Strike Campaign is complementary to its efforts and urge them to seize on the momentum that we have co-created.

Our campaign does this work as much to attain secure, safe, and respected labor practices as to protect the right to quality affordable education for our students who experience tuition increases with no investment in the university system's infrastructure and staff. Our campaign has generated solidarity from hundreds of students across the CUNY system who have signed a letter supporting the \$7K or Strike demand.

Our members have taken active roles in the PSC, leading efforts to increase PSC membership, while attending and voting at PSC Delegate Assemblies, Committee of Adjuncts and Part-Timers meetings, and PSC campaigns, press conferences, and rallies to show that our union must be united to end the rampant exploitation of our adjunct faculty and improve the lives of all of those who work and study at CUNY. We would expect leadership to be overjoyed to see such committed organizers dedicating our free time to building union power.

Resolutions and statements in support of \$7K or Strike have passed at ten PSC chapters and counting, at meetings - historically sparsely attended - that have drawn large numbers of newly-activated members. The Open Letter's accusations are a clear attempt to silence that democratic endorsement. The letter uses the language of "subterfuge" to foment the very kinds of divisions it purports to overcome, and to alienate those of us committed to drawing on, if necessary, the most effective form of direct action available to organized labor movements.

We have called for a PSC Town Hall to discuss and debate the merits of various approaches, which the leadership has refused to host. Meanwhile, the bargaining team in its recent counter-proposal to CUNY management has conceded the clear demand for \$7K with no input from the membership.

The groundbreaking teachers' strikes in Chicago, LA, Oakland, West Virginia, and elsewhere, which won game-changing gains for students, families, and workers alike, took years to build. As rank-and-file union members, we believe that we are overdue to build toward a strike. The bargaining team can't flip a switch overnight. The Open Letter states we need to wait for leadership's signal to organize for a strike. They forget that the rank-and-file can't afford to wait. If we want to win transformative demands for all job titles and for our students, then we need to prepare and have those conversations now. It is not because we take the risks of a strike lightly that we have undertaken this campaign; it is because we know there is hard work ahead for us to win these entwined gains.

The PSC leadership's decision to pit the \$7K or Strike Campaign - rank-and-file union organizers across titles - against the rest of the union callously disregards our precarious economic situation. It is a cynical attempt to demolish the bridges of solidarity that we members have built.

We invite all PSC members who support the \$7K or Strike Campaign to sign pledge cards, sign the solidarity letter, and pass \$7K or Strike resolutions in your chapters. We also urge you to attend the April 18 PSC Delegate Assembly wearing red to show our collective

impact in transforming this contract campaign. Who speaks for the union? All of us. The rank and file. Let us act together. A diversity of voices strengthens our union.

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