

LABOR IN BRIEF

Teaching Kaplan to 'speak union'

Nearly 100 English as a Second Language teachers at Kaplan International teaching centers in New York City voted to unionize last year, with union supporters carrying two-thirds of the vote. Serious contract negotiations got under way with Kaplan last November, but the teachers are still without a union contract.

"Progress is real slow at each negotiation," said Paul George Hlava, who has taught ESL classes at Kaplan for the past four years.

The vote last year marked the first time teachers at Kaplan International, a private language school that teaches English language courses to students from around the world, voted to join a union. Union members intend to be persistent about teaching management to "speak union."

'Carwasheros' tell boss to clean up his act

Workers at the Webster & 'Rico Pobre' car washes in the Bronx walked off their jobs September 28, to protest ongoing harassment and retaliation against union supporters. Joined by members of New York Communities for Change (NYCC), Make the Road NY and the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU), the "carwasheros" demanded that owner John Lage put a stop to the harassment and address their health and safety concerns.

During the walkout and protest, workers and their community allies handed out flyers urging motorists to take their business elsewhere. The walkout happened "because we are tired of the tyranny and abuse from management," said Ernesto Salazar, 39. "We are demanding that Lage sit with the union and negotiate a fair contract that will protect our rights."

Taxi workers' leader wins AFL-CIO post

Bhairavi Desai, executive director of New York City's Taxi Workers' Alliance (TWA), was elected to the national AFL-CIO's Executive Council in September. The National Taxi Workers Alliance, which New York City's TWA helped to found, became the 57th affiliate of the AFL-CIO in 2011.

Taxi drivers in New York and elsewhere are legally classed as independent contractors. They are not covered under federal labor legislation, and Desai's election to the AFL-CIO leadership was a first for any representative of a non-traditional workers' organization.

To win basic gains for taxi drivers, "we had demonstrations, work stoppages, and strikes," Desai said after her election. "And that sense of militancy – we need to set that ablaze throughout all the industries in our country."

Petraeus protesters attacked

by PETER HOGNESS

The controversy that erupted this summer over CUNY's decision to hire former General David Petraeus as a visiting professor continued with his arrival at Macaulay Honors College this fall. In one of a series of demonstrations in September and October, students peacefully protesting outside Macaulay on September 17 were punched repeatedly by police, and six activists were arrested. The protests have drawn national attention, and organizers vow that they will continue.

The PSC, while not an organizer of the demonstrations, has strongly condemned the use of violence against nonviolent activists and has affirmed their right to protest.

ONGOING CONTROVERSY

This summer the website Gawker.com published internal e-mails showing that prior to any faculty input, former CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein offered Gen. Petraeus a \$200,000 salary for a position teaching a single seminar at Macaulay. In the wave of criticism that followed, the proposed salary was reduced to \$150,000, and Gen. Petraeus eventually said he would accept just \$1 a year. His lawyer said Petraeus hoped this would "remove money as a point of controversy."

But even at a reduced salary, the controversy over CUNY's hiring of Petraeus showed no signs of dying down. The general's seminar, "Are We on the Threshold of the North American Decade?" was greeted with a picket line outside Macaulay on September 9, the first day of the class. The demonstration was sponsored by the Ad Hoc Committee Against the Militarization of CUNY and other organizations.

"CUNY Must Not Be a War College" and "Petraeus Out of CUNY" were among the signs protesters carried. Leaflets argued that Petraeus was guilty of war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, cited articles in *The New York Times* and the UK's *Guardian* that described

Upcoming pre-retirement conferences

REGISTRATION for this semester's PSC Pre-Retirement Conference filled up quickly; this continues to be a popular event with PSC members. "This conference is a wonderful opportunity for our members five years or less from retirement to learn how to better plan for their health and pension benefits in retirement," said PSC Coordinator for Pension and Health Benefits Jared Herst. If you were not able to sign up for the union's Pre-Retirement Conference this fall, be sure to sign up for a future session; there will be one in Spring 2014 and one in Fall 2014. Signing up for the PSC's weekly e-mail newsletter, "This Week in the PSC," is an easy way to get informed when registration dates for these conferences are announced. (See psc-cuny.org/form/sign-me-week-e-newsletter.)

Videos of police violence go viral



NYPD officers repeatedly struck CUNY students at a peaceful September 17 demonstration outside the Macaulay Honors College protesting CUNY's hiring of former CIA Director David Petraeus. Six activists were arrested, including several who were filmed being beaten by the police.

killing of civilians and torture by forces under Petraeus's command, and said his appointment "should be rescinded."

A smaller group of demonstrators confronted Petraeus on the sidewalk, chanting and yelling that he was a "murderer" and "war criminal." A video of the episode, during which Petraeus did not respond to the shouts and kept walking straight ahead, soon drew more than 300,000 views on YouTube, and national media coverage followed. Many pundits expressed outrage that Petraeus was treated with such disrespect and accused the students of "harassment."

'WAR CRIMINAL'

A statement from Macaulay Dean Ann Kirschner declared that "dialog within the academic setting [must] always be conducted civilly." The Executive Committee of CUNY's University Faculty Senate went further, sharply criticizing the tone of the protests. "Because they disagree with Professor Petraeus's views, these demonstrators intend to deprive him of his ability to teach," it said. "Members of the university community must have the opportunity to express alternate views, but in a manner that does not violate academic freedom." (See tinyurl.com/UFS-Exec-Petraeus.)

That drew swift dissent from within the ranks of the UFS, with a flurry of comments on its blog (tinyurl.com/UFS-Petraeus-Discuss). "I thought organized protest was a legitimate form of free speech in a democratic society – so what's the problem?" wrote Roberto Visani, associate professor of art at John Jay, in one response. Jen Gaboury, associate director of Hunter's program in women's and gender studies, asked, "How [do] political protests on

city sidewalks or common spaces on our campuses impair a faculty member's ability to teach?"

Things escalated during a demonstration on September 17, outside a fundraiser at Macaulay that featured Petraeus and Mayor Michael Bloomberg. As protesters marched in a picket line on the sidewalk, police pushed them back from the street entrance to Macaulay and set up metal barricades blocking it off. Protesters then marched partly in the street, and a few minutes later police moved suddenly to arrest several people. Videos of the incident show repeated police assaults on demonstrators without apparent provocation.

In one video, a student is held to the ground by three uniformed officers. Though the student is lying still and not resisting, a plainclothes officer, wearing a striped hoodie and a NYPD handgun holstered at his belt, can be seen repeatedly striking the student fast and hard in his exposed midriff (tinyurl.com/Petraeus-NYPD-Punch). In a second video, another student is surrounded by more than a dozen police officers and held down against the hood of a car. At least two officers repeatedly punch the student in the head as he holds up his arms to protect his face (tinyurl.com/Petraeus-NYPD-Hit-Hood).

"One of the most brutal things I saw was that five police officers slammed a Queens College student face down on the pavement across the street from Macaulay, put their knees on his back, and he was then repeatedly kned in the back," said Hunter student Michael Brian.

The six arrested activists were charged with riot, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. To date, no police officers have faced charges.

The PSC Delegate Assembly condemned the police action at its meeting on September 19. "We deplore the use of violence and brutal tactics against CUNY students and faculty who were peacefully protesting outside the college," the DA resolution said. "We affirm the right of students, faculty and staff to engage in peaceful protest against actions of the City University of New York." The union called

for charges against those arrested to be dropped, and urged a formal investigation of the police use of force.

In his Fox News show on September 23, Bill O'Reilly called for the firing of one of the protest organizers, Sándor John, an adjunct associate professor of history at Hunter. "Professor John does not have tenure. New Yorkers pay his salary," said Fox correspondent Jesse Watters. "But the university...refuses to take disciplinary action against the professor." O'Reilly was incredulous, saying "The school...they're tolerating this! They should have fired this guy!"

UNDETERRED

John told *Clarion* that while he has received a lot of hate mail, the call for his dismissal seems to have no traction. "It actually backfired," he said. "A lot of students, faculty and fellow union activists reacted strongly against the attempt to whip up a campaign for me to be fired for expressing my views."

Petraeus's class has been moved from Macaulay to a building on West 57th Street, but the protests have shown no signs of dying down. On October 16, a CUNY fundraising gala with Petraeus at John Jay College drew a robust demonstration, and organizers said it would not be the last.

Dave Sanders