



The Chief Leader/Michel Prang

A MAJOR FINANCIAL COMMITMENT: Vita Rabinowitz, an official at the City University of New York, told City Council Members Dec. 10 that the university was dedicated to the Murphy Institute, but didn't yet have the resources or bandwidth to establish it as a separate school.

Pressed for Stand-Alone Labor School

Despite Union Tributes, CUNY Not Ready to Make 'Murphy' Independent

By DAN ROSENBLUM

City University of New York officials last week discounted proposals to establish a stand-alone labor-studies school in the near future, but said they would continue to nurture the Murphy Institute, which emphasizes worker education.

Union leaders urged the university to reconsider that stance during a Dec. 10 joint hearing by the City Council's Civil Service and Labor and Higher Education Committees. But Vita Rabinowitz, the Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost, said CUNY was focused on other major initiatives such as settling an overdue contract with its staffers and the recent opening of the School of Medicine under a tight budget.

Points to Potential Cost

"It's a major financial commitment, Council Members," she said, noting that it would need significant funding to set up the new school. "We would almost certainly need to hire more faculty and we would need to hire the infrastructure for registration, admissions, financial aid and the like."

CUNY Vice Chancellor for Budget and Finance Matthew Sapienza said there would be significant recurring costs as the senior colleges struggled to fill a \$51-million funding gap.

The Murphy Institute, which has 52 full-time and adjunct faculty members, receives \$6.9 million from CUNY—and additional revenue from the city, state and student tuition—and enrolls about 1,200 graduate and undergraduate students in degree and certificate programs. The school, which was established at Queens College in 1984, reorganized as a multi-campus institute a decade ago

under the School of Professional Studies, and has been a springboard for union leaders and rank-and-file city employees.

Some of those leaders and 42 Council Members in a letter urged the Board of Trustees to reorganize the workers' institute as an independent college within CUNY. The university established a task force to review how it could best realign those programs, which recommended against a stand-alone school in September, citing limited enrollment and funding challenges.

CUNY officials said they accepted some of the recommendations, such as hiring more labor-studies academics, and wanted to develop the Murphy Institute, which Ms. Rabinowitz called "a remarkable interdisciplinary intellectual center."

Not There Yet

"That makes Murphy special, but they did not feel it had reached the stage of development that would merit school status at this time," she said. She also questioned the school's hypothetical role in relation to similar programs at other CUNY schools.

The proposed School of Labor and Urban Studies would be composed of two academic departments and two institutes covering labor studies, urban affairs and worker education.

Higher Education Committee Chair Inez Barron said the university should prioritize developing the school and boosting underrepresented minority students.

Anthony Wells, the president of Local 371 of District Council 37 said the Murphy Institute has "served the labor movement as well

Continued on Page 13

Continued from Page 9

as the broader community extremely well" and advanced progressive causes.

"This labor school would provide opportunities for people to enter into not just civil service, not just on the union side, but would create a pool of professionals to improve the relationships between the unions and management to improve the services they are providing this city in the public sector or the private sector," said Mr. Wells, who sits on the school's Labor Advisory Board.

Unions Fund Scholarship

Local 371 established a scholarship fund for union members enrolled in the Murphy Institute and unions have successfully lobbied state legislators to increase Albany's funding share in the school. Arthur Cheliotos, president of Communications Workers of

America Local 1180, said unions raised money for diversity scholarships.

He called the Murphy Institute a beacon for union members to attain degrees, but said it was still vulnerable to budget cuts. "But, with a higher profile, a stable funding base and greater autonomy, in short as a school within CUNY, Murphy will be empowered to take the next leap, ready and able to offer new academic and workforce-development programs that target a broader and more representative population," he told the Council.

The union leader, who chairs the school's Labor Advisory Board, said that society needed critical thinkers who understand the value of the labor movement and that CUNY should acknowledge the unions' role in advocating for social and economic justice. "There seems to be a lack on the part of the university of a commitment to institutionalize the labor movement as part of the university," he said.



The Chief Leader/Michel Prang

NEED TO CEMENT UNIONS' FREEDOM: Anthony Wells, the president of District Council 37 Local 371, told the City Council that creating a School of Labor and Urban Studies would help guarantee funding and bolster worker-education programs at CUNY. Mr. Wells and Communications Workers of America Local 1180 President Arthur Cheliotos, to his left, sit on the institute's Labor Advisory Board.