



# the union news



the newsletter of GSEU and Local 2110/UAW

## Columbia's Health Plan?

For many of Columbia's graduate students, especially women, healthcare is a problem. Grad student Kim Jackson (not her real name), knows first hand. While enrolled in the university's health service, she began exhibiting familiar symptoms of thyroid disease, a con-



## Plan on Staying Healthy

dition that runs in her family. "I went to the Health Service four times, but they wouldn't run tests," said Jackson. "They just kept saying it was PMS, or I was

just getting old." At one point a doctor even told her, "You're not 22 anymore. These things are going to happen."

As weeks passed, Ms. Jackson suffered from chronic fatigue, drastic weight fluctua-

tions, and other symptoms. Finally on her fifth visit to Health Services a nurse practitioner intervened and referred her to an endocrinologist at Lenox Hill Hospital. There she was finally diagnosed with PCOS, Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, which if left untreated could develop into Type II Diabetes.

After repeated diagnoses, Kim ran into further difficulties.

"University health insurance wouldn't pay for the endocrinologist's tests unless they were done at St. Luke's Hospital, and the blood work had to be done at Health Services." This meant Ms. Jackson couldn't use the hospital near her home in Brooklyn. "If I wanted my insurance to pay for it, I had to go to St. Luke's."

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# TEMPORARY INSANITY: *Columbia's Abuse of Temp Workers*

It sounds like an old vaudeville routine: When is a worker not "really" a worker? Here at Columbia University, one answer is obvious: when she's an RA or TA.

But there's another possibility: when she is a clerical temp on the Morningside or Health Sciences campus.

Over the past few months, union members at Columbia have alerted Local 2110/UAW to a disturbing trend: the university is employing temporary workers to do work that properly should be covered by the Local 2110/UAW contract (and the contract of the Supporting Staff Association, Local 693, SEIU, which represents clerical, technical, and library staff on the Health Sciences campus.) These temporary workers are paid less than union members, have no job security, and receive none of the benefits that are guaranteed under the union contract, such as childcare, health care and education benefits.

Instead of promoting these workers to full-time jobs, the University is keeping them in temporary status far longer than the maximum time period permitted by the contract, paying

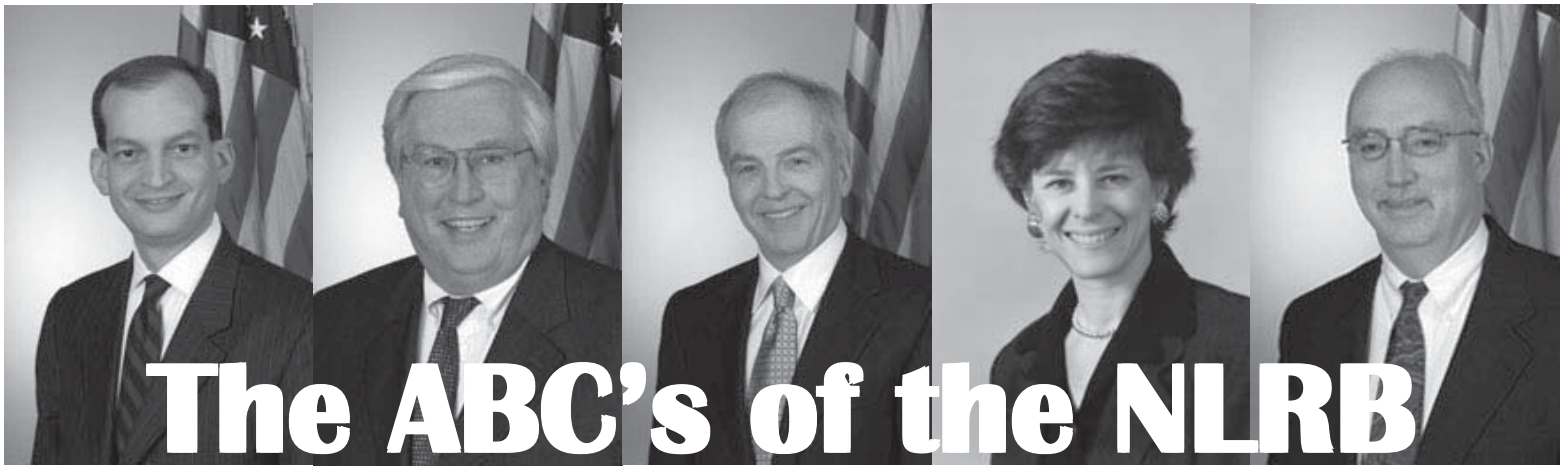
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# The ABC's of the NLRB

The initials NLRB have become very familiar at Columbia over the past year, but the National Labor Relations Board isn't necessarily the best-understood government agency.

The NLRB was established in 1935, in response to waves of struggle by American workers to form unions. The NLRB consists of five members, appointed by the president, who administer the National Labor Relations Act, the federal law that grants us the basic right to unionize. As Columbia teaching and research assistants, we've already exercised some of our rights under the act --when we voted in our union election last spring, and when we held the one-day strike in April.

The decision allowing NYU's graduate employees the right to form a union was upheld by a Labor Board that was appointed by President Clinton, and was majority democratic. Now, after two years in office, President Bush has finally appointed a new Board, one that is majority republican. And Columbia, despite its liberal facade, is clearly willing to take advantage of this opportunity by pursuing a costly appeal to have our election overturned and the ballots destroyed.

The new NLRB consists of three Republicans and two Democrats. The chair of the Board, Robert Battista, who served with the firm Butzel Long for over 35 years, is a well-known management lawyer from Detroit. Most recently, he was counsel for the Detroit Free Press during their now infamous dispute with the union there. Peter Schaumber, another Republican, has experience as a labor arbitrator and has worked for the U.S. Attorney's office. The third Republican, Alex Acosta, is a former attorney who worked under Ken Starr. Also a member of the right-wing Federalist Society, he

unsuccessfully argued before the Supreme Court that it was unconstitutional for the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate air quality. The two Democrats are Dennis Walsh and Wilma Liebman, the only members with any previous Labor Board experience.

According to John Gallagher of the Detroit Free Press, the new Republican members are "swinging the balance of power on the influential panel back toward business and away from unions." This has many within labor circles nervous, but it certainly doesn't change anyone's commitment to organizing.

Unfortunately, some such worries have already been proven justified. Ross Runkel, editor for Employment Law Memo, states, "The newly appointed Board has already started the process of reversing several policies that were put in place under the Clinton-appointed Board." Columbia is counting on the new conservative Board's pro-management bias in their attempt to overturn the NYU decision, the landmark case in which UAW-affiliated graduate employees at New York University won the legal right to organize for TAs at private universities across the country.

It remains to be seen how the new Board will treat the existing law granting RAs and TAs the protections of the NLRA, but there is still hope that the fate of nearly 2000 Columbia teaching and research assistants will be decided democratically. Even if the Republican-dominated NLRB grants Columbia's appeal, we can still win a union. We can pressure the university to recognize us voluntarily, as so many workers did before the NLRB came into existence, and as grad employees in the public sector continue to do when state laws are against them.

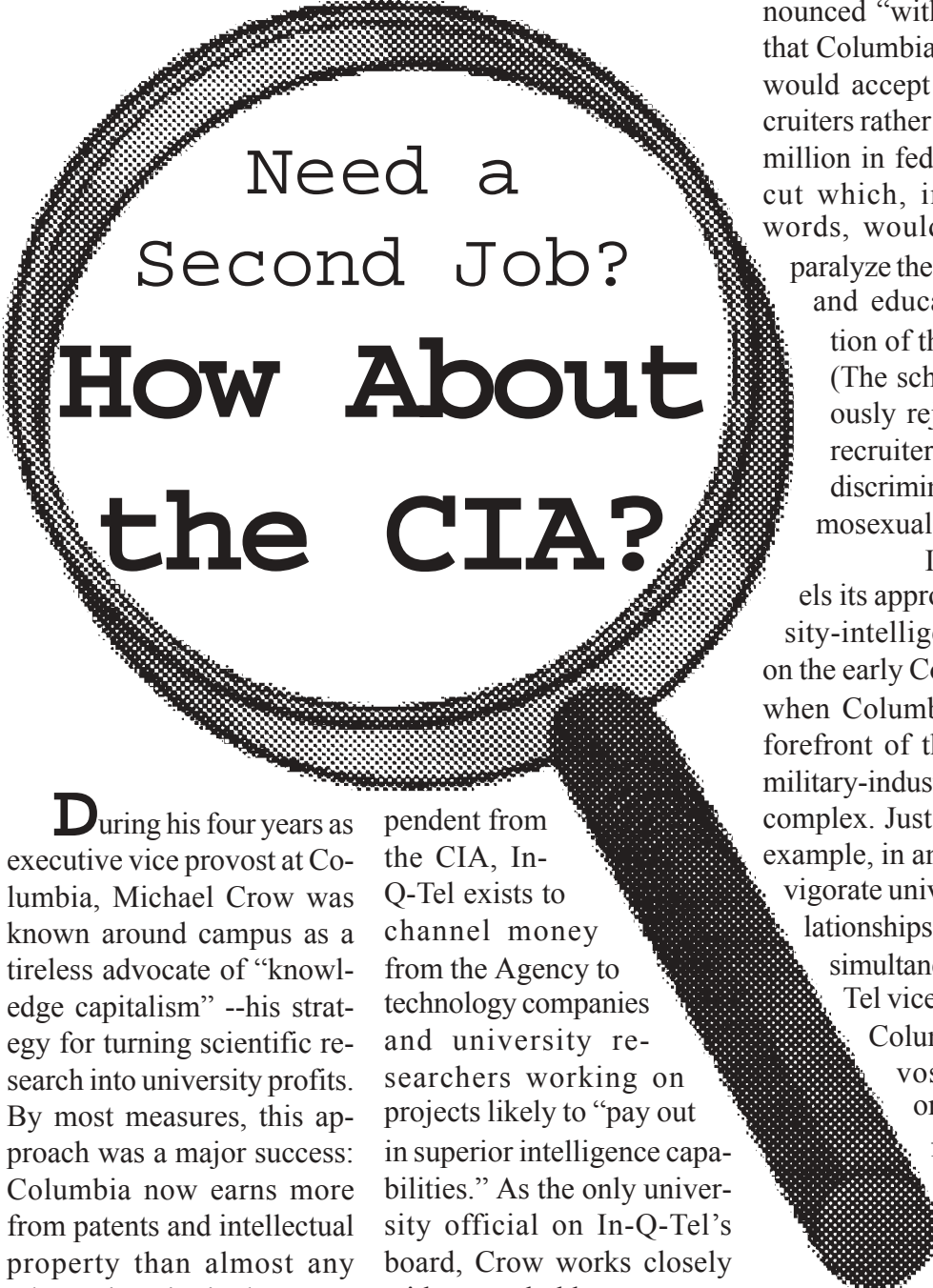
## Quotes of the Month

**"I have openly opposed unionization of graduate students."**

*- President Bollinger, when asked by a caller to the Brian Lehrer show on January 31 about his position on TA and RA unionization, and whether he planned to bargain in good faith with GSEU.*

**"The unionization of graduate assistants does not violate institutional academic freedom or interfere with the student-faculty mentoring relationship."**

*- from the Amicus brief filed at the NLRB by the American Association of University Professors, on behalf of GSEU/ UAW.*



# Need a Second Job? How About the CIA?

**D**uring his four years as executive vice provost at Columbia, Michael Crow was known around campus as a tireless advocate of “knowledge capitalism” --his strategy for turning scientific research into university profits. By most measures, this approach was a major success: Columbia now earns more from patents and intellectual property than almost any other university in the U.S.

Despite his money-making prowess, Crow --like many graduate students, clerical workers, and maintenance employees-- had to work a second job while employed at Columbia. For the last several years of his tenure, he also worked for the CIA.

Since 1999, Crow has been vice-chairman of In-Q-Tel, a company advertised on its website as “a private, non-profit enterprise funded by the Central Intelligence Agency.” Technically inde-

pendent from the CIA, In-Q-Tel exists to channel money from the Agency to technology companies and university researchers working on projects likely to “pay out in superior intelligence capabilities.” As the only university official on In-Q-Tel’s board, Crow works closely with several elder statesmen of the defense establishment, including former executives of Lockheed Martin as well as former Defense Secretary William Perry.

Crow’s dual appointment is one sign that Columbia’s relationship with military and defense institutions may be undergoing its first major overhaul since the late 1960s, when the university’s coziness with the defense industry became the subject of campus-wide protest. In October, for instance, President Bollinger an-

nounced “with great regret” that Columbia’s Law School would accept Air Force recruiters rather than lose \$300 million in federal funds -- a cut which, in Bollinger’s words, would “essentially paralyze the entire research and educational operation of the University.” (The school had previously rejected military recruiters because they discriminate against homosexuals.)

In-Q-Tel models its approach to university-intelligence relations on the early Cold War, a time when Columbia was at the forefront of the burgeoning military-industrial-university complex. Just after 9/11, for example, in an effort to reinvigorate university-CIA relationships, Crow --acting simultaneously as In-Q-Tel vice-chairman and Columbia vice provost-- helped to organize a conference introducing academic scientists to the intelligence community.

But a revival of such ties poses special concerns --especially for international students. Since 9/11, the CIA has become increasingly insistent that only U.S. citizens work on intelligence-related projects. Given the growing numbers of international students in U.S. engineering and science departments, such restrictions present serious practical --not to mention ethical-- problems for any researcher hoping to accept CIA funds.

Many scientists object as well to the CIA’s insistence on secrecy --a policy that contradicts the research university’s purported values of openness and information-sharing.

According to a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal*, some schools, including MIT and the University of California, have refused to accept contracts that discriminate against international students. The *Journal* article didn’t cite Columbia’s stance on the issue. But it did say that Kathleen McKeown, chairperson of Columbia’s computer science department, was considering accepting In-Q-Tel funding for an upcoming natural-language project.

Michael Crow left Columbia this past year to become president of Arizona State University, where he continues his work as In-Q-Tel vice chairman. Commenting on the departure, then-Columbia president George Rupp praised Crow’s “vision” and “seemingly inexhaustible reserve of energy.”

“Michael Crow has helped Columbia anticipate and take best advantage of the trends that are reshaping American research universities,” Rupp declared.

As the U.S. gears up for a prolonged “war on terrorism,” growing collaboration with the CIA and with the U.S. military is likely to remain one of those trends. What its consequences will be for international students --and for university research as a whole-- not even the CIA knows for sure.

## Health Plan, from front page

Ms. Jackson estimates she'll spend nearly \$2200 a year out-of-pocket for regular doctor's visits, monthly blood tests, and medication. Additionally, her doctor recommended taking an oral contraceptive to supplement her other medications, but the cost is not covered by Columbia health insurance. "I can't afford it," she stated. Her university funding provides her with a stipend of \$16,050 a year. If she didn't cut corners, she would spend roughly 25% of her income on health ex-

penses.

Ms. Jackson's case is not an extreme example either. As one art history graduate put it, "If you're a sick woman, and you go to Health Services, they tell you it's just PMS."

While Columbia's insurance helps defray some of the cost, it fails to keep up with the rising price of health care. In 2000, a Philosophy graduate student was diagnosed and hospitalized with Lyme Disease. When asked how he paid his bill --about \$1500-- he replied, "I settled it with a collection agency."

Two health plans cover Columbia's graduate population. On the Morningside campus, students are covered by Aetna at a cost of \$2043 for the comprehensive plan or \$6529 for full family coverage. At the Health Science campus, individual students are covered by Blue Cross at \$1525 or \$4830 for family coverage. When asked why students are not allowed to choose which of the two providers they want, one Health Service employee stated, "That's just the way it is." No reason was given for the price discrepancy between the two

campuses.

Between requiring grad students to commute from outer boroughs to receive health service, dictating which hospitals they can go to, misdiagnosing health conditions, and requiring grad students to spend a significant portion of their stipend on health care, Columbia's Health Service has shown that it is out of touch with the needs of graduate students.

"When we get to the bargaining table, we are going to put decent health care at the top of our list," said Ms. Jackson.

## Abuse of Temps, from front page

them less than union members for doing the same work and denying their rights.

According to the Local 2110 and Local 693 contracts, any employee who works on Columbia's campus for more than four months is a permanent worker, and hence covered by the contract. (The only exception is for workers who are replacing someone on a leave of absence.) But Columbia is hiring workers as temporary employees, often from temporary agencies. Then, the University keeps these workers in temporary status, well past the four-month deadline.

In one case, Jane Green (not her real name), an immigrant from South Africa, was sent to Columbia by a temporary agency. She lives in the neighborhood, and has two small children in addition to three older kids. Originally, she thought she was going to temp for two or three weeks. But the weeks went by, and she stayed. Soon, she had been at Columbia for eight months.

Green says that she was a hard worker. She trained new employees, and even left her family to come in to work on Christmas Day. "I wanted that job so bad," she says. But after eight months, Green was tired of not getting benefits or wages that others around her were getting for the same work. She notified Local 2110 that she was still a temporary worker.

Union representatives told her that what Columbia was doing was in violation of the contract, and though she was not yet a member of the union, they vowed to fight alongside her to make her job full-time. But when Green filed a grievance under the contract, Columbia fired her.

The reason, her supervisors claimed, was that she'd never shown them a high school diploma -- "They had never asked for it

before," she says. Green had gone to high school in Africa, so she had to send her elderly mother money to finance a long trip to her old school to produce her diploma. Even after she'd produced the diploma, Columbia told her she couldn't come back to her job.

"They didn't even say they were sorry," says Green. "They just discarded me like I was a wet diaper. They should really not do this to anybody again."

Columbia has been known to hire temporary workers for one, two, and even four years without ever making them permanent.

Since learning about Columbia's abuse of temps, Local 2110/UAW and Local 693/SEIU have been organizing around the issue. The two unions have filed grievances, seeking to win back pay and benefits for approximately 40 workers. The union is also asking that the University pay the back union dues.

Victor Rivera, the president of Local 693, tells of one case on the Health Sciences campus, in which the employee had been working for Columbia for two years as a temporary, performing a job that should have been covered by the union contract. She was getting paid only slightly higher than the minimum wage, and not receiving any benefits.

"Our calculations suggest that she is owed over \$20,000 in back pay alone, not counting benefits," says Rivera.

The grievances are currently before a neutral outside arbitrator. Without a contract, and without a union to fight for workers, there is no way that Columbia's use of temporary workers could be addressed. Alone, clerical temps would have no rights and not be able to fight the university. But together in our union, we can stop these injustices and make sure that every Columbia worker enjoys the rights that all of us have worked hard to win.



**If you would like to find out more about Graduate Student Employees United (GSEU/UAW), or to get involved, please call our office at (212) 749-6703, or email us at [GSEU@2110uaw.org](mailto:GSEU@2110uaw.org). You can also visit our website at [www.2110uaw.org/gseu](http://www.2110uaw.org/gseu).**

