

Marcia Newfield Interview by Irwin Yellowitz

A project of the Professional Staff Congress Archives Committee

(Conducted on January 31, 2017)

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Irwin: This is January 31, 2017. I am Irwin Yellowitz and I will be interviewing Marcia Newfield as part of the PSC oral history project. Thank you Marcia for joining me, and let's begin with a question that we ask each of our interviewees. What was background before coming to CUNY? You might tell us something about your family, your education, and your employment before you came to CUNY.

Marcia: Okay, so I was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, but was moved here at two months old or so. My father was a laborer who had been a cigar maker before The Depression, and then he'd worked for a company [as a manager] for 13 years or something. Then after The Depression was left out Both my parents were immigrants. My mother had been a legal secretary. She had been based in Springfield, Massachusetts. My father was in New York. [Their families] somehow got them together. They were both older people. My mother was 38. My father was 50.

So I was the child, sort of the surprise. I don't know, the child of elder parents who weren't that acclimated, as it were. I mean they spoke English at home of course, although they knew some Yiddish which they used when they didn't want me to understand something.

Irwin: Right, that was common.

Marcia: But there was no thrust to teach me Yiddish or have me [be Jewish]. My father was an atheist and my mother went along. Later on in my life, I started to study Judaism after I had gotten immersed in Hinduism and studied with one of these gurus. But I went to City College ... I went to Brandeis for two years; then I went to City [College]. My father died. I went to City. We didn't have much money at all. We were very -

Irwin: What years were those, approximately?

Marcia: '52, approximately, when I graduated. I went to the Bronx High School of Science. When I graduated from there, the man that my father worked for, who was a cousin, a very, very, very wealthy man, he helped pay for my Brandeis years. But I only lasted at Brandeis for a couple of years and then my father died. I got sick. I went to the Jewish Theological Seminary for a while and then I finished up at City College [in English literature], and got a cum laude there and honors society.

Then I got a scholarship to NYU in English [towards] a master's degree in English, and that killed me. I mean in the sense that I felt if I didn't get out of there in five minutes I was going to lose my love of poetry, and so I stopped. I eventually completed that master's degree, but [when] I stopped, I went to the Bank Street College of Education. I felt that children were closer to poetry than the NYU graduate program, which was entirely true. And so I got that degree and then I taught at a nursery school for doctors' children ... You know, I did various things in education and then what happened? I started to write a lot, poetry and this and that and the other. I went to the artist colony in Massachusetts called the Cummington Community of the Arts. I got accepted and I started painting while I was there, and then I was also writing. But then I wrote some children's books which were published. There were about six books for children that were published.

I came back to New York. I didn't do that all at that colony, but I came back to New York. I started to paint. I thought what am I doing here at 10:00 in the morning painting? And I was part of a poetry group as well and the people there were teaching in New Jersey [at] Montclair. They got me to teach there as an adjunct, teaching women's studies, which was really good for me. I liked it but -

Irwin: Approximately what year was that?

Marcia: Pardon me?

Irwin: Approximately what year were you at Montclair, just to put some perspective on it?

Marcia: Yeah, yeah, it was in the late '70s. I mean I also worked at NYU on a project, but the bottom line is that like at Montclair they were paying nothing. It was really nothing and so I said I had better try to get into CUNY. I need a little more than nothing. So that's when I started in '88, I started adjuncting at CUNY and at BMCC. I was also adjuncting at Long Island University, so I was doing both for many years.

Then in 2003 or so, I became very involved in the union, and then Eric Marshall, who'd been the first vice president ... Not the first, but he was in this regime in the New Caucus. He took a job with NYCIT so then I became acting vice president, and then I was elected shortly afterwards. So then for about 13 years I was vice president for the part timers, and I just resigned in 2014 or so, is it? No, we're '15 now. I think it was 2014 but that's not important.

Irwin: We're in '17.

Marcia: We're in '17 now, so I've been not vice president for two terms [since 2015]. Well, from one term Susan got elected. Susan [DiRaimo] got elected in '15, I guess. That was when the last big election was, in '15. So I was acting as vice

president and actual vice president from 2003 to '15, right? That's a long [time].

Irwin: And you've been active.

Marcia: And I've always been active. Then part of my trajectory here at the union ... After I got [to be] vice president I remember sitting over somewhere and I saw that there was a meeting of the leaders and I thought why aren't I going in there? I'm a leader. I wasn't allowed to go there. You know, it was the secretary, the treasurer, the four leaders.

Irwin: This was in here?

Marcia: Here, this was in 2003 or '04, and [I thought] how come I'm not in that leadership meeting? Then I realized that it was there's leadership and there's leadership. You know, I was part of the DA and then later on I was part of the negotiating team but I wasn't in the inner, inner. So I said, "Okay, I'm just going to join every committee on the planet here, on the PSC planet because I -

Irwin: That's a time consuming strategy.

Marcia: Well, then I know what's going on. I wanted to know what was going on, so I joined the finance committee, which I knew the least about, and the international committee and the ... Well, now I'm on the elections committee. Well, then I started the part time committee, which has always been there, but with Eric it had been a tiny little group and I made it open to everybody. So it became the First Friday committee. Then what other committees? The grievance policy committee ... You know, I took the grievance training. I became a grievance counselor, a grievance officer, which I still am now two days a week.

So I started to get into the [interstices] of the union.

Irwin: I think you were doing grievance way back in the '90s weren't you? When I first met you -

Marcia: I first took the grievance training -

Irwin: - I was [an] officer of the union and you were doing grievance.

Marcia: I was? I don't remember that.

Irwin: Yes.

Marcia: But I remember what I did do is I ran for the welfare committee, the welfare advisory group, because I saw there's no adjunct. It was still politics [Irwin Polishook's] regime and I remember going to meetings and arguing with

politics [Polishook] about blah-blah-blah. But I remember going on that. So I kept trying to insert myself. Yes, and no, you know, I mean it was successful and not successful. At BMCC, I worked a lot with Alberta Grossman, you know, and she was very active and very wonderful. She got lists out of them and, you know, who were the adjuncts, how many adjuncts where there.

Before the New Caucus formed we were this little adjunct committee, you know, CUNY Adjuncts Unite. We were active in the petition campaign to get [an] office hour and we published a journal ... not a journal but a [newsletter]: CUNY Adjunct Alert. You had said that, you know, you would want to ... I'm not ready to give all the materials, but I will get some materials to the archives. Wait, where is it? I brought ... Because I got a kick out of this one. I brought some of the pins. You know, we had a lot of pins over the years of this event, that event. Where did I put it? Here ...

Irwin: Wow, that's quite a collection of pins. Archives will love this because there were so many [caucuses?]. I'll say there were [are] at least two dozen in here.

Marcia: Twenty ... yeah, yeah.

Irwin: Pins of different sorts.

Marcia: Well, pins of different events that we were pushing or activating for.

Irwin: Well, New Caucus and also adjunct.

Marcia: Yeah.

Irwin: Well, that's great. You'll contribute that to the [Archives].

Marcia: You know, full time justice for part time faculty.

Irwin: Yes, that's a good slogan.

Marcia: And then the health insurance, which was a very big campaign here, very big. And then, you know, "I am PSC." I'll have more because I have tons at home. So then I became a liaison for AAUP and for AFT as, you know ... Now the adjunct started to emerge a little stronger, right?

Irwin: Right. Okay, well let's get to the issues that you've been facing. What were the major issues when you came to CUNY?

Marcia: Well, when I started in '88, I was aware [of] the health insurance ... Well, first of all, it seemed like you had to work forever to get a pension, and it wasn't now where ... It was like very long and one year didn't count as a year, it was like seven ... I remember -

Irwin: It wasn't compulsory, [as it] was for us [full time faculty]?

Marcia: No, no, nothing was compulsory, but Clarissa came and told us how long the waiting period was. I thought that's bad. The adjuncts were organizing about health insurance, about pension, so I got involved. That's when I got in touch with Alberta and I started working at BMCC to maybe change things a little. So I believe at that time I remember fighting for shortening the health insurance eligibility period. I also became aware that it wasn't like an automatic thing to become a union member. We fought with Polishook. I know he's your friend. Is he okay now or not, because I've seen him at those concerts and [looked] bad.

Irwin: No, he's not well.

Marcia: Not well. He was very stingy with the union cards. People had to, you know, beg him to get a union [card]. There was no campaign. His point of view, like Sandy Cooper's point of view, because I talked to her too, was we don't want to burden the adjunct with deducting dues, that at that time they felt that a lot of the adjuncts were graduate students and they had, you know, little money. That was the rationale. Then one of the first things that PSC did when they came in was to [agree to collect] agency fee from part timers.

Irwin: The New Caucus.

Marcia: The New Caucus, I mean, when the New Caucus came in. But before that it was a big fight. When we came in 2000, when the New Caucus came in in 2000, there were ... And I have some statistics from Diana [Rosato] ... there were how many, there were [on] May 2001, there were 915 total adjunct members and grad members; 853 adjunct, 63 grads, 915. So then we got it up. In October 2001, because of the [PSC inclusion], we had 6,815. Now, they weren't all members. There were 4,719 were fee payers, but we had gotten 2,025 people to sign cards.

Now that's still a problem. I want to say that -

Irwin: Well, at that point, I should ask you about the dues. There was a change when the New Caucus came in.

Marcia: Well, they changed it from 1.05 percent, which were the dues for all. Well, no, there was like 86 ... There was some sort of set dues, you know, for everybody who was a member.

Irwin: Prior to 2000?

Marcia: Yeah, yeah, and then once they passed a resolution, they said okay, every check, adjuncts will pay one percent and full-timers will pay 1.05 ... Was it oh-five or five?

Irwin: Yes, 1.05 and this meant, of course, that adjunct dues were reduced for most adjuncts because [the former flat dues had been higher.]

Marcia: Well, because they had been paying like a flat -

Irwin: Because it went to a percentage rather than a flat fee.

Marcia: A flat fee, right. I don't know if it really was reduced because I don't know how many people ... Well, some people were only teaching one course, right, or two?

Irwin: Oh, I think it was reduced which is why so many more adjuncts were able to join.

Marcia: Well, I don't know. I hear you. I'm not sure about whether the money was the biggest thing or the concept, the understanding you're going have a union representing you. I mean that was the goal of the New Caucus; we're going [to] represent you. Their first act was to collect money and say okay ... And then also they elected a couple of adjuncts to the executive committee. Up to that time it had only been one [adjunct] and she only got a half a day release time, you know, to do grievances as well.

Then Eric started to come in and realized this is a lot of work. This was more than three hours. So then when I came in I fought for more time, you know, payment for time. That's when I quit my LIU job because I couldn't teach 12 credits there and 12 credits here and also do any kind of legitimate work. Also, I then became eligible for social security. So I traded social security and the payment here for teaching at LIU, which was not a tragedy for me because it was always a big deal to teach [at] two [colleges]. So I was teaching four classes a semester, or sometimes the classes were six hours. You know, they were remedial classes, but whatever, it was a long haul.

Irwin: Okay, so on the issues for adjuncts you mentioned healthcare, which came through the welfare fund that started in 1986. What are some of the other issues? Salaries, of course, wages are always [very low.]

Marcia: Well, it was also professional hour. There was no office pay, and that was a gigantic campaign in 2001 when the New Caucus first took power. I remember I and others organized a hearing before the senate [New York State Senate], the legislative higher education committee. Ed Sullivan was the only one who showed up but we kept him [for 8 hours]. There were people ... It was tri-state. It was a big deal and that's one of the pieces that I'm going to submit to the archive, is the testimony of all those people all day.

Irwin: Oh, good.

Marcia: Ten in the morning until 6:00 at night from every college, private and public. It was a big deal and I felt very proud when students testified, you know, saying how much the adjunct[s] had done for them. Because there was then and there still is a terrible ghettoization of the adjunct, you know, that the adjunct is not good enough, the adjunct is less than ... The adjunct is

somehow not part of the club. You know, then when PSC wanted the contracts, we got 100 adjunct conversions lines to lecturer and then [in] another contract we got 100. All together, I think there were 200 or 250 conversion lines.

We have 25 in this contract but they're not surfacing [enforcing] it. You know, and I would talk to some of the people who had gotten them and I said, "So what's so different?" I mean obviously they had some job security and more money, but the biggest thing they said to me was, "Well, now they talk to me," meaning the full-timers. They talk to me.

Irwin: Because they were now full time lecturers instead of [adjuncts.]

Marcia: Yeah, well, they had status. They were seen as colleagues. Before [as] the adjunct, you're just passing in the night, even though some of these adjuncts had been there god knows, you know, 20 ... I was there for 30 years. They don't talk to me either, really. I mean, you know, they know me and they wanted to have me come for a drink for the [Christmas] party but I didn't come. I felt angry. I was busy, but also I felt, look, you didn't even offer me a sub-line so that I could have retired with health insurance. I felt that there wasn't enough appreciation.

Irwin: Why do you think that was the case, that full-timers -?

Marcia: In my particular ... Oh, why do I think, because I think it's guilt. I think you hold on to meritocracy just like you hold on to white privilege, or Christian privilege, because you're afraid that if you let it go your heart's going to break. You're going to have to fight against the system. That's what's going on now, wanting to hold on to actually a privilege that seemed to have diminished, you know, with both -

Irwin: Substantially.

Marcia: - academia and in the body politic. I mean these people are holding on to prejudice and to vileness. But you see, and that's what I've been thinking about in this whole thing I'm looking at. Another thing I'm going to give you, not today, but is this ... In '98 or so there was an international group started, COCAL, Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor. In 2015, or whenever the hell it was, we hosted it. Well, '98, we hosted it here. And Manny Ness, who runs the Journal of [Society and Labor], let us have a whole issue devoted to contingent stuff, write articles about contingency.

Because COCAL represented in the beginning, the U.S. and Canada. Then it included Mexico, so there were two COCALs so far in Mexico, one or two, and there's still going to be another one. Every other year there's a conference, so the international sort of perspective. And these articles are really interesting, you know, so I think they should be in the archive and I'll get them there.

Irwin: Absolutely.

Marcia: Because Mexico is even worse than [the U.S.] But I mean it's all over. You know, there's 77 percent of the workforce, 76 ... It's just out there and what does it mean?

Irwin: Well, now adjuncts teach the majority of the courses in CUNY, yeah. So is it 77 percent?

Marcia: Yeah, well that's nationwide. At CUNY I think it's 60 percent in the community colleges, but, you see, it's still adjuncts are still considered an afterthought. I mean Barbara [Bowen] has been brilliant and forceful with the legislature. But the whole thrust has been we've lost full time lines and that's appropriate. But there's not been an equal thrust. We've got people working in poverty wages. You know, we have transformed the university into a proletariat. Because the thought that, well, there aren't enough full time lines somehow was thought to have more appeal to the legislators [than] in saying stop treating teachers as peons.

I don't know, but it's still a problem. This latest budget request is saying \$7,000 a course, you know, and in the latest contract that three-year appointments, which had created a lot of issues for people, for adjuncts, long time adjuncts who feel they won't get those three-year appointments, and it's not a real grievance process. We feel there will be, but still, even when people get their Ph.Ds they stop me on the street and say, "I'm getting \$300 more, and that's it. I'm an assistant professor now." This adjunct assistant -

Irwin: I know AFT and AAUP both have called for equivalency so that an adjunct would be paid the equivalent amount that a full-timer would be paid.

Marcia: Right, parity, even minus research, but parity for classroom work, which right now, we get paid about one-third, approximately. So of course, even if you were there for many, like top step ... You know what, I have two master's degrees but it doesn't count, two steps. So it's \$4,000 a course, three hour or four hour, whatever. Then you're stuck in poverty or semi-poverty, or gentile poverty. Like right now, I'm retired. I have to live on social security. I don't get my healthcare paid for, so I have to get that deducted. So I get a small pension, very small because of being an adjunct, and I have the little extra work here, but it's like not middle class in terms of money.

Irwin: Especially in New York City.

Marcia: Well, I have a rent-stabilized apartment.

Irwin: Well, I've noticed over the years that ... And this leads to my next question ... that CUNY was more resistant to making changes for adjuncts than in any other area.

Marcia: Well because they want their “flexible labor.” This last round, when I was on the negotiating team for a long time, but in the last round, where we were fighting for the three-year appointment and the temporary two-year appointment for very long term people, they went berserk. And at 2:00 in the morning, 3:00 in the morning the chief negotiator, [unintelligible 00:24:07], said, “We’re used to carte blanche.” She said that, carte blanche. You order what you want from the menu. There’s no prix fixe. You’re ordering what you want, and so they don’t want to give that up. Because the three-year appointment is a commitment to that particular adjunct that even if you don’t have courses, or you feel that, you know, you’re not getting enough enrollment somehow you have to do something for that adjunct to give them the equivalent of six hours and health insurance if they get it.

They don’t want that. That’s it, and on top of not wanting to give it, they want to blame the adjunct for being an adjunct, especially if the adjunct relies on the adjunct [teaching for their primary income.] Like we had in our department a woman who was the chair of some department at blah-blah, Pratt, or something like that, and she was adjuncting. Well, good for her, you know. She was adjuncting as a little extra. But if there’s somebody who’s depending on adjuncting, that’s not okay.

Irwin: And that is the case for most people.

Marcia: [Unintelligible 00:25:15] we never got to most. We can’t put it in numbers you know. Well, there are over 2,000 who get the health insurance. So in order to get the health insurance, although some people are screwing around with it ... Some people are fudging it. They’re a chiropractor who teaches two health courses and is getting our insurance because he’s teaching six hours but he really should be getting it through his practice, and [inaudible 00:25:39] went crazy with that, with those people, the entrepreneurs.

If there are 13,000 adjuncts now ... And here’s the latest numbers from December 6, 2016. We’ve got 14,397 adjuncts. Now, remember we started with the New Caucus after we got going with 6815. So we got more than double. Now this included continuing ed people, which wasn’t included in that, but you understand what that means?

Irwin: Yes, it’s more than doubled.

Marcia: And that hurts me. I feel oh, well, we lost. CUNY won. They have more flexible labor, even if they have to, you know, fix it a little, you know, with the three-year appointments. They still got more flexible labor, not less.

Irwin: But is it flexible labor that's also cheap labor, [unintelligible 00:26:42]?

Marcia: Well, so that's equal.

Irwin: Through the adjuncts?

Marcia: The flexible equals poverty. Do they pay their bills too? The adjuncts, if the adjunct is sitting in a course with 36 people and [CUNY is] getting FTEs for those people. They're getting government help for those people or they're getting CUNY help. Somehow or other, the value that the adjunct is giving them is like 12 times what [the adjunct is] earning. So to me ... and because of this interview I was thinking about a lot ... you know, this is the essence of capitalism. It's just the essence. It's a microcosm and it's the essence and it's rationalized, and it's rationalized by everybody. Rationalized by CUNY administration, who act, when you're in a negotiating session with them, they act as if they own CUNY. They're like Exxon. I couldn't believe it when I got into those meetings. Brent [?] and them all, they thought they owned CUNY and we were like the employees. The fact they're civil servants or civil employees was not in their consciousness. That was one thing. So that's CUNY acting as if they own us.

Then there's the full-timers who rely on their autocracy to the idea of, well, I got my Ph.D. and I've published some articles. Let's not talk about the value of all the articles, but that makes me entitled to privilege and these people are, [the adjuncts,] you know, the servants and they're lucky to have a job at all. And most of them aren't good enough. And when the choice comes to make them a lecturer we say no, we don't want them around. It's okay that they're there and they [are] taking their part. We don't really want them at department meetings.

This is a problem. This is such a deep problem, but it's no different than the rest of America. If you're poor, it's your fault. It's not the system and you're not going to do anything to change the system. PSC has tried. I believe in getting that health insurance thing, let me tell you, but they sat at meeting[s] for a year. And if we hadn't endorsed de Blasio at the beginning, we would have never gotten that health [insurance]. He pushed. We just, with that guy ... Who's the head, the chief labor guy, his guy? I forgot his name but we had to push.

Irwin: Robert Lynn.

Marcia: Yeah.

Irwin: Well, Steve London had been working on that issue since 2000 without success until [Mayor DeBlasio was elected.]

Marcia: I know. Well, Steve was trying to prove to people, you know, that the welfare fund couldn't handle it, you know, that is was not going to get to the point of no return because of the insurance companies and all that. I remember once I saw you at a DA meeting or after, and another full timer came over to you, and said ... Because Steve had taken some of the ... Steve, I mean the executive committee, the negotiating team, had taken some of the retro pay and put it into the welfare fund.

I mean the retirees cost plenty for their [insurance]. Well, the drain on the welfare fund, but this guy said to you, you know, that people were furious that they didn't really know ahead of time that we were doing that. It kind of snuck up on them. This guy said to you, "You know, why did they do that? What did they do?" And you said, "Well, it's because it's the right thing." You said that. I overheard it and I was very impressed but that's not the common [sentiment]. Like after we got pregnancy leave, we had people screaming and moaning, "Well, I didn't get pregnancy leave." You know, they don't want anybody to have anything better than they did. There's no sense of this [somebody] politics. The commons, social welfare, that's a problem, a big problem, and so, like anybody else, I want to blame someone.

You know, some of the adjuncts are blaming Barbara. You know they're doing a PERB complaint. You know that, right?

Irwin: Yes, I've heard about it in passing. I don't know much about it.

Marcia: It annoys me no end because they are saying that Barbara didn't fully inform adjuncts before they voted on the contract on the three-year business being out. You either, you get your appointment or you get a one-year probation, but then you're out. Like, they made it like tenure, you know, that either you qualify for the three year. You can't come back as a one year. You know, you can't keep going, and we fought that. The bargaining team and all of the people, the voting members of the ... There were three adjuncts on the negotiating team.

After the fight, we realized that if you kept the one year and you kept it through, you know, people would opt out because they don't want the scrutiny. Even though I say to people, "You've been teaching for 20 years. You're not lying." I mean that's the thing that impresses me very much with adjuncts, most of them; they're trying to do a good job which is unbelievable that these people are getting paid nothing, or very little, and they're trying to do a good job.

Irwin: Would you explain for the listener what the three-year provision is and how it changes what existed before? That's in the current contract.

Marcia: In the current contract it's a pilot program for five years or so, and it's says that if an adjunct passes ... If you're going to reappoint an adjunct after they've done 10 semesters, five years, 10 semesters, continuously with six credit appointments at least for each semester, that you give them a three-year contract. Up until now, it was only a one-year contract. And that, in order to get the three-year contract that person has to be ... You know, they have to look at their record. The P and B [Personnel and Budget Committee] of a given department has to look at their record, and then the president has to approve it.

But it doesn't have to be extra. You don't have to do anything extra, really. In other words, up to now, you've only been observed once [every semester] for five years, and then you don't have to be observed. So there are people who have been there for 30 years that we observed 10, 15, years ago. And so they have to now either be observed, you know, look at their record, look at the student evaluations, and then, yes, you get a three-year. You get a three-year. You're guaranteed six hours of semester. If the courses don't fill up or blah-blah-blah happens, somehow, the department, the college has to make it up. Are you [going to] give them money or give them an extra course somewhere and do something? That's a big deal, a three-year guarantee versus a one year, but it only applies to maybe, again, like with the health insurance at the beginning, you know, maybe 2,000. I mean Steve figured every inch out, you know.

And so a lot of people aren't going to be eligible but they can be accruing to that so that, theoretically, if you looked at the end of five years, or you looked down the road, you say, "Well, CUNY is a place that has mostly adjuncts with some guarantee of employment."

Irwin: Now, wouldn't everyone who has the 10 semesters apply for this three-year -?

Marcia: Well, they don't apply. You get to be eligible. You don't have a choice unless you quit.

Irwin: Right, so you're eligible and then the P and B automatically considers you. And suppose they say no?

Marcia: Well, they can also decide at that time to give you a one-year ... So, if somebody observes you and says, "Hey, this person is really horrible. Even if they've been here for 20 years, they really need to do A, B, C, D." So they send someone. They give them a mentor. They do something to coach that person, and then they look at them again.

I mean I just had a conversation yesterday with somebody who didn't get two classes ... I mean they'd been decreasing his job ... He was at nine, now he has three. He's writing letters to everybody and he's bitching and moaning. I just talked to the chair ... Not the chair of the department yet, but the committee curriculum person who runs his course. The guy's been a disaster, you know.

Irwin: So maybe he shouldn't be getting even a reappointment.

Marcia: That's what the curriculum person said, that he hasn't even turned his grades from last semester, that, you know, he shouldn't even be teaching this thing. You see, so a lot of people, because they need ... And she said to me ... I said, "So, why have you kept hiring him?" She said, "Well, at the last minute ..." That's not okay, right? So a lot of these people, these big departments where, you know, you've got to observe everybody once [every semester] in

the first five year, they don't have enough full-timers to observe all these people.

You see, part of the problem of this density of adjuncts is that you put more workload on the full-timers to do committee work, to do observations. And yet they're still supposed to do their research.

Irwin: Oh yes, that is absolutely the case. It does put a heavier load on the full-timers.

Marcia: And that's why if you could give adjuncts some parity, and also give them, you know, money for committee work, they would be adding. They would be more integrated, you know, and they'd be adding to the department. You know, they're going to go online big time before they go into governance. Governance and online are totally threatened. Meanwhile all the proliferation of deans, you know, and this and that, it's really tough.

Irwin: Well, CUNY is only a microcosm of the whole country.

Marcia: Exactly.

Irwin: It's happening everywhere.

Marcia: No totally, but you see it's holding on. It's holding to that ... So it's a smaller and smaller group of people with privilege, but each group with privilege is behaving the same way, whether you're the privileged administration or the privileged faculty. What does it take, you see, and this is what's happening now in the country, what does it take to get out of your comfort zone? When you feel that somehow something so basic is ... I mean don't know. I got involved during the Civil Rights Movement. That's when I was going to college, Brown versus Board of Ed. I said, "Oh, this is not right. I can't wait forever, you know." And so I got into that kind of work of teaching, running a nursery school for black kids.

But what is it going to take now? I mean I went to the Women's March and then I was [in] the elevator, coming home after seven hours, exhausted. And there was a lady in the elevator with a card, an elderly lady with a card and [wagon]. You know, it wasn't your most likely person and she said, "Oh, you had to go. It's 1933." That's what she felt.

Irwin: Yeah, in Germany, 1933.

Marcia: Yeah.

Irwin: Okay, I want to ask you, a shift to some of the politics of the PSC. You were part of the New Caucus. Why did you join the New Caucus? Why did you think it was necessary to have a change of leadership?

Marcia: Because I thought that [Polishook] and company were very reactionary, you know, like that they didn't want adjuncts in the union, particularly, even though they couched it as defense of the adjuncts. I felt they didn't have ... They were into, "Let's make nice." One thing is I remember Mohamed -

Irwin: Yusuf [Yousef] , yes.

Marcia: I remember at the welfare fund, and he was so happy that he had gotten kids, people's children to go on until 25 or 26, you know, and that was a good move. But they were all so focused on benefits for the full-timers they didn't take [adjuncts] into any account ... And in part, maybe they didn't foresee this proliferation. You know, they thought it was graduate students and professors and that graduate students were really doing internships, even if they had a whole class to themselves, right? And that fight at NYU and Columbia, you know, it's still going on, right, even though the grad ... And Yale, I mean it seems to be going on. Barnard just voted to unionize. It's going to happen.

Well, everybody is going to be unionized but then so what? Are they going to get more money? Are they going to get more allocations? Are they going to get real jobs?

Irwin: Well, we'll see about that because Columbia is fighting it in court, and if the NLRB changes under Trump, that decision may change too.

Marcia: Exactly, and look how hard NYU fought.

Irwin: Yes, to make graduate students students and no longer eligible for unionization.

Marcia: I mean that was weird, I mean that they didn't want to see these people as employees. But that's part of this perpetuate the comfort zone of people who are comfortable. I don't know, I think, it's so short-sighted, but it depends what your sights are. I think the sights of the people who voted for Trump and the sights of the people who want things to stay as they are or were, is that they want a king, like somebody to tell them what to do, how to do it, and that's what's happening now. Because the people who were for Trump are still for Trump even though he is behaving like [a] maniac.

Irwin: Oh yeah. They may not be for him two years from now but right now they still support him 100 percent.

Marcia: And you live in New Jersey, right?

Irwin: Yes.

Marcia: Where do you live?

Irwin: In Bergen County. As a matter of fact, our congressman [was] unseated, we unseated a very conservative Republican congressman. Josh Gottheimer was one of the few Democrats to win in 2016. He unseated a 15, 16-year incumbent. So my district ran against the trend.

Marcia: Yeah, well, you're living close to my friend's cousin, right, David Zimmerman's friend, his cousin Dory or ...

Irwin: Dory [Gerber].

Marcia: Yeah.

Irwin: Yes, she's a good friend actually.

Marcia: Well, her cousin I went to college with. We had been friends, yeah.

Irwin: Well, in 2000 the New Caucus took over. Do you think they've done a respectable job in meeting the adjunct needs?

Marcia: It's very problematic. I think they've done their best given the situation, given they're accepting the basic situation that there are going to be adjuncts. If there's not enough money, that we want to preserve tenure, we want to preserve the academy as we know it. So we're going to try to make some situations better for adjuncts, like the fight for the professional hour, the fight for the adjunct health insurance, the fight for a higher pay, you know. And one of the contracts that was a greater percentage to those stuck at the top.

And now the three-year appointment and the contract enforcement, which wasn't really there, but it's still a drop in the bucket because of 14,397. Then in the fight that Steve [London] was very adamant about, the nine-six, you know, the workload, they, meaning the leadership, did not want to increase the work because CUNY had been abusing the waivers. That became a very big issue that adjuncts were supposed to do nine hours at one school and one six-hour course at the other. But if the college wanted them to do more than that they could file for a waiver.

We realized at one point there were 500 waivers in a semester, most of them from Staten Island, not most, but a lot from Staten Island, because they were abusing the waiver policy just like they were abusing the substitute policy of keeping people in sub-lines forever so they didn't have to pay them the full traffic ... So Steve in particular wanted to catch them, and we did. You know the [contract] enforcement committee and [unintelligible 00:43:40], we got lists and we said to Judy, "You're violating the contract by doing so many waivers and we're going to sue you." Then we went to arbitration and it was [unintelligible 00:43:49] because the deal was if an adjunct teaches a full time load, you have to pay them as a full-timer and CUNY was violating that with this waiver.

And so we got up to arbitration and the arbitrator said, “You guys settle it.” So we had them over the barrel there and that was when the adjunct insurance came. So we did a trade. Rather than pursue that legal thing, which we were right about, you know, make them pay all those people, we had them contributing to the health insurance package.

Irwin: Okay, let’s say a bit more about the health insurance because that goes way back to ’86. It was originally a welfare fund program.

Marcia: I know that.

Irwin: And would you explain the importance of having it changed to a New York City [program.]-

Marcia: Well, because we couldn't afford ... The welfare fund could no longer carry it. The health insurance companies [costs] had gone up so exponentially so that now, COBRA, if you need to get COBRA, you know, you're not teaching, it's like \$700 a month or something for one person. Adjuncts can't afford that. If you're making \$3,000 for a course, you know, where are you getting that money? And so the welfare fund couldn't do it, so then it was a question of whether we drop the adjuncts. But somewhere in the fine print it says that CUNY has to pay something for this adjunct thing, so we got them on that.

You know, you've got to pay, therefore you've got to cooperate. In the beginning, when we first broached [Mayor Michael Bloomberg][unintelligible 00:45:21] on a city plan, CUNY turned on us. They said yes one minute. They were like drunk. They said yes one minute and no when it came to sitting at the table, all right. But this time it was just a miracle ... not a miracle. It was just endless work and it was de Blasio. It was de Blasio.

Irwin: I think it was, yes. In this case he was the crucial factor.

Marcia: Yes, because he instructed his people to give Barbara what she wants.

Irwin: Well, you might mention that the PSC was the first union to support de Blasio when he was still in the primaries, before he ran for [mayor.] -

Marcia: Yeah, exactly right, because somehow we realized his value, you know, that he had a progressive mind. And then, of course, he got blown away by [Cuomo], who hated him. Now maybe they'll get a little bit together, you know, in the face of the larger gorilla, and we just endorsed him again, you know, last week. It was a fight. It wasn't unanimous at the DA. You see, but the other thing that I've realized in all of this that most people, most workers at CUNY, adjuncts, [HEOs], the whole bit, are not that conscious of the mechanism of the governance here, you know, of the PSC. Most adjuncts, they don't even know how much they earn. They don't know their rights until it becomes too late.

Like now with the bonus business and the ratification, well hell, I don't know, you know. So they don't read the fine print. I once wrote an article for one of the newspapers [AAUP or somewhere] that they're like romantics, these adjuncts.

Irwin: Well, this is true for full-timers also. When I was Chapter Chair at City College I was amazed at how little the full-timers knew of their own benefits under the [contract.]

Marcia: Exactly. They only come to know when they're retiring and they went to see Clarissa [Weiss] or they now go to see Jared [Herst] and they ... "Oh, this, that." I should have done the tax different [deferred] annuity 30 years ago. I didn't. I only did it whenever. I mean that's like an incredible boon for people, so that's a problem. That's like the United States. That's like the people of the United States, right, and that's why they're able to just to do one little sleight of hand after another. It's very sad.

I mean, I don't know, maybe what's happening now will change that with all these lawyers that are coming down with this provision and that provision. I mean can you believe this? I mean, you know, Trump is yelling at the Pope.

Irwin: Well, that won't help him down the road.

Marcia: So the nine-six, the workload, became a big issue, a very big divisive issue. And it still is because it's one thing to have a principle ... The idea was you keep to four courses. You don't let anybody teach more than four courses because you don't want full-timers to have to teach more than four courses. But meanwhile the adjunct who was getting the waiver is being deprived of another \$5,000 or \$4,000, and if you're earning a low income that makes it different [for you]. Never mind that it may be bad for your health and bad for your student to teach seven courses, but nevertheless, you're surviving. So where's the answer to that, you see? So meanwhile, a full-timer can take an overload and an adjunct can't get a waiver. Well, we have had a lot of fights on that one.

Irwin: I can understand that.

Marcia: You know, because it's, again, keeping part of the status quo.

Irwin: Yes, I think relatively few full-timers do take on an overload, but some do.

Marcia: When we tried to take it away ... There was one contract thing where we took ... At BMCC they were up in arms because they needed the extra money, the full-timers, to do whatever.

Irwin: Yes, I think in the community colleges I'm sure there was more overload teaching than at the senior colleges.

- Marcia: Because they were earning less you think, or why?
- Irwin: No, because I think they didn't put as much emphasis on scholarship and research, although there is a scholarship and research requirement, but it isn't as high as in the senior [colleges.]
- Marcia: I understand. Now are you familiar with this ... He does a lot of TED talks ... Ken Robinson? He's British.
- Irwin: No.
- Marcia: Well, he came here. He's a big education name. You know, what is college and what is higher ed, and is everybody supposed to be into a certain mold to be intelligent?
- Irwin: No, I don't know his [work.] Okay, let me follow another line, and that is within the PSC. Have adjuncts been active within the PSC [unintelligible 00:50:39]?
- Marcia: More than before but not enough. Much more than before, but before meaning in the [Polishook] days, or something. Now we have a liaison project where adjuncts get paid to be at each college to be the liaison. We had about 17 or 19 people on the delegate assembly who were part-timers of one sort or another. I don't know how many ... Well, we'll see in April. We encourage people to run all the time but it's extra work, it's no pay, it's time, you know. So, more and more people have gotten agitated.
- Now, it's unfortunate that some of the people who've gotten active have used their energy to be against the PSC, you know, like in the PERB charge. And you've been at DAs. You've heard Holly and others, right?
- Irwin: Oh yes I have.
- Marcia: You know, it seems like we're the enemy. You know, I find that not intelligent.
- Irwin: Well, we were talking about, you and I were talking about this before we started the recording. But in the '90s there was a strong movement among adjuncts in CUNY to have a separate union, and I don't know whether that's come up again this time but -
- Marcia: Well, yes, it comes up periodically.
- Irwin: I wonder what the arguments were for a separate union in the 1990s, what your position was on it, and do you think it's better that adjuncts be within the PSC?

Marcia: Well, I think the AFT data has shown that adjuncts in mixed unions generally do better. I don't know where the adjunct ... I mean first of all, the decertification process, which many [Vincent Tirelli] has written about -

Irwin: [Vincent Tirelli.]

Marcia: Yeah, in his Ph.D. thesis and outside. It takes years because no other union will touch you for the period in which you're decertifying, and where are you going to get the money? And if there are so few activists now, are they get to be more? Here this union has gotten them health insurance. The union is getting them a pension and it gives them services. You know, they can call Jared, they can do this, they can do that. They can get grievance [help.] You're going to take that away and where's the budget coming from?

I mean the strength of the argument for decertification ... And not that there aren't some unions in California [unintelligible 00:53:12] that are independent, but you have to have a base and you have to have a source of money. I mean the argument is that, well, if you did have those things you would have the clout. "Hey, we provide 77 percent, 60 percent of the teachers. Give us this. Give us that." But then you'd be setting the full-timers against the part-timers even more articulately. I don't know. I just don't know if it's [feasible].

Irwin: Well, we have a model in our area, Nassau Community College.

Marcia: Yeah, but Nassau Community College -

Irwin: How does that work with the [separate union?]

Marcia: Well, first of all, they were on the take because of what's his name, [D'Amato]. They had all kinds of access to money. They had all kinds of deals, that's what my understanding, and that now -

Irwin: They may have a separate adjunct union and [a union for full timers.]

Marcia: Yeah, but now they're not doing so well, that adjunct union. You know, they were an anomaly. Now, the one in California, not so much. I forgot the name of that union but I don't think it's feasible right now.

Irwin: Well, I certainly agree with you but I know that was [an issue] ... Among adjuncts, that has been a -

Marcia: Yeah, but it surfaces -

Irwin: - persistent alternative course.

- Marcia: Yes, but when you get to the ... What's the word? When you get to the nitty-gritty, none of the people who want to certify, decertify, have the real mechanisms for doing so, for getting over the hurdles.
- Irwin: Yes, because they'd have to set up an entire operation, separate operation. And, as I mentioned earlier, my experience is that CUNY is more resistant to making changes for adjuncts, whether it would come from a separate union or from [PSC.]
- Marcia: They would sweeten the pie. You see, they would want there to be ... Because one of these people who are doing the PERB thing wrote to [Silverblatt], as a lawyer, you know, and said, "I don't want this three-year thing. You know, I didn't know that." Pam answered, "I didn't want it either"
- Irwin: She probably didn't.
- Marcia: Are you kidding? She's the one who said *carte blanche*. They did not want it and they still are holding ... They [don't] even want to have a grievance process.
- Irwin: Yes, I agree that CUNY has been very difficult in dealing with adjuncts. In my opinion, it's because they're cheap labor and they help support the university. So do you agree with that?
- Marcia: Oh, totally, totally. I mean it's a mecca in New York City. I went to a meeting once in California and one of the colleges had forgone their annual raise in order to give it to the adjuncts. I said, "Why did this happen? What happened?" And they explained to me that they were losing ... They were somehow up in the mountains somewhere and they were losing people all the time and they wanted some stability, so they gave them money to hold them.
- Irwin: I see, okay. Oh, yes, this question, we have touched on it but I just wanted to conclude with this, about full time faculty and staff. You said that you didn't think that they had been very supportive of adjuncts.
- Marcia: They were supportive about the health insurance, you know, a single issue. It was a big issue but -
- Irwin: But do you see a way of building good solidarity between adjuncts and full-timers, because after all, adjuncts now comprise the majority of the teaching faculty, and yet that hostility I think still does exist.
- Marcia: Well, because they have to realize that it's like white people and the Civil Rights Movement. At a certain point, if you don't have a country with civil rights laws, if you can't vote, you know what I mean, it goes on a spectrum from slavery, where you have the idea that you can own a person and their labor, to gradual changes, but not enough changes. So it's okay to incarcerate or frisk, you know, a black kid or put him in jail, or have the schools be blah-

blah, until ... Some adjuncts ... A significant amount of white people start to realize this is not in our benefit and it's not to our benefit. It is against our country. It is against our values. There's something wrong with this, right? It's not moving us ahead. Then, as the black people got more opportunity, look how much they've achieved, you know, for the body, for the whole world. I mean how would you want to keep depriving a group of growth, and that's what the full-timers have to realize with the adjuncts.

Irwin: Well, the unions certainly agree with you. When you look at AFT, you look at NYSUT, PSC, they all say ... AAUP ... they all support a greater equity for adjuncts and support [for] adjuncts by full-timers.

Marcia: And governance. But between that support and the actual doing of it ... Because would people have to make sacrifice? That's the big thing. What kind of sacrifices? Would it entail a sacrifice? On the other hand, you say, well, or would it entail like a shared push to, you know, the millionaire's tax or this tax or that to get them? And that's where Barbara is going, you know, get them to give us two billion; they meaning the ... Whether the legislature the full ... Do they want everybody to flourish or do they want to hold on to their meritocracy?

Irwin: I don't know. That's a question for the future. We'll see that. Well, I think we've reached the end, unless you want to add anything.

Marcia: Well, I think the thing that disturbs me the most is the fact that despite the PSC's progressive stance and actions, the number of adjuncts has more than doubled. That, to me, is the great pain, and so there are more and more people living on less. I mean I don't really care and so therefore, the teaching job is devalued, and the enrichment of teaching is devalued.

Irwin: This is nationwide. I think, as you mentioned earlier, higher education has become a business and cheap labor is part of a business, and adjuncts fulfill that in higher education.

Marcia: Right, and then it's going now towards more online, which makes it even more impersonal and robotic. You know it becomes what's the goal for humanity? It becomes that kind of question.

Irwin: Yeah, well certainly for higher ed, I think if we were to do this interview in 30 years we would be talking about an entirely different landscape from what we see now.

Marcia: Yeah, but see, also the question has come up at various conferences, well, why continue these Ph.D. programs, because that's another victim? That's another group of people who are held in perpetual sort of servitude. I mean I've met people from Yale in the post doc world, you know, and they're hanging in year to year.

Irwin: I believe about one-third of the faculty in the United States is now tenured. The other two-thirds are either full-timers who do not have tenure or adjuncts, or graduate students, other contingent forms of teaching. And that's a remarkable change. When I began in higher education, almost 100 percent were full time tenured, and there was just a sprinkling of adjuncts who filled in specialized courses and so on.

Marcia: Right. So what do you think the answer is?

Irwin: Well, the answer is that a strong union movement has to fight these changes. Unfortunately, higher ed is not unionized, in the main, and therefore the changes go on without any brakes from the faculty at all. But even when you do have a union, unions don't control the institution. They're not management and so they can only slow down the progression. But I think in the end, as I say, 30 years from now I would expect that there will be very few full time college professors and we will have online courses and adjunct teachers. It will be quite different from today and quite different from when you and I began.

Marcia: Well, it's also the idea of human contact of being in a classroom and with a person.

Irwin: Absolutely. It will be a different form of education, a lesser form, except maybe for a few elite colleges, which will be private colleges that will keep the old system and have students pay a fortune in order to go [there.]

Marcia: That's what they're doing now.

Irwin: As they do now, right. Well, thanks very much Marcia. I appreciate your coming in and doing this interview. Thank you very much.

Marcia: You're welcome. So then tell me, when I get all these archives together, who should I call?

Irwin: Let me just stop this.

[End of recorded material 01:03:22]