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Rob Wallace

In June 1996, the CUNY Board of Trustees authorized the University Contracting Office to enter CUNY into the CU Card contract with Citibank and its subcontractors, MCI, Diebold Incorporates, and Digital Equipment Corporation. That decision piggybacked on a previous one by the Board of Education, which was exemplary of how "affiliated institutions" are connected to CUNY administration's advantage to encourage the extraction of more fees from students beyond the $2.50 card-off fee.

"Other fees appear to be in store for students who agreed to the Citibank option of CU Card. There are the standard fees for overdrafts, for example. Another includes a $2.50 service fee charged for dormant accounts. A May 1996 Citicorp memo to William Arnold, SUNY College's Senior Vice Chancellor for Finance and Management, defines dormant accounts as "cardholders accounts which show no activity for a consecutive period of three months." Why charge $2.50 for these accounts? According to the Citicorp memo, "The objective is to stimulate account transaction activity." In other words, the aim of the charge is to push students into using the ATM machines, a service for which Citibank will charge $1 each time," stated Podolinsky at a recent student organizing conference held at Brooklyn College. The CUNY card system will be developed at nearby Florida State University by the MCI-Operated Card Application Technology Center (CATC). CATC provided SUNY administrators consulting services for SUNY Card.

The fees are exemplary of the sleazy nature of the contract. It's a no-lose situation for Citibank. The bank is making money off the poor and the rich, the same. The poor are in no position to negotiate rates when food and shelter are needed. For the rich, annual interest, over 300% for a high-interest finance outlet rake it in from poor Americans. CUNY Card, like its counterparts, pain-making industry. Sixty million Americans are basically shut out of conventional banking services. Those who do must instead engage the services of pawn shops, check-cashing outlets, rent-to-own stores, and high-interest lenders. The poor are in no position to negotiate rates when food and shelter are needed. For the rich, annual interest, over 300% for a high-interest finance outlet rake it in from poor Americans. CUNY Card, like its counterparts, pain-making industry. Sixty million Americans are basically shut out of conventional banking services. Those who do must instead engage the services of pawn shops, check-cashing outlets, rent-to-own stores, and high-interest lenders.
Giving Notice

All right, the card Bucks. What are we going to do about it? I'm not getting this card and I advise everybody else not to get it either," says Podolsky. "There is no reason why we need to get this card," he adds. This past December CCNY Day Student Government passed a resolution against CUNYCard. The Faculty Senate at City College also passed a resolution against the card.

CUNY has already boarded itself for such adverse reactions from students and faculty. In a November 19 memo to Vice-Chancellor for Legal Affairs Robert Diaz declares any students or faculty who refuse the card will be dealt with accordingly. Diaz cites the Henderson Rules of New York State's Education Law which declare members of campus communities must present ID to.college officials when requested. Diaz continues, "Students who refuse to present their CUNYCard when requested may be subjected to disciplinary charges. Such charges might include anything from suspension to expulsion. Diaz makes no mention of the type of discipline CUNY has reserved for faculty who refuse to comply.

Here on campus? When asked in an interview by The Campus what penalties students would suffer if they did not turn in their old cards for a new CUNYCard, CCNY Vice President for Finance and Management Nathan Dickmeyer replied, "We have been told that students that don't have the CUNYCard will not be allowed into the building.

This begs the question, Who told City College administrators that students without CUNYCard would be denied entrance into CUNY buildings? Does CUNY Central at 80th Street dictate security policy at CCNY? And, if not, why is Dickmeyer passing the buck to some unnamed source?

Clearly, if one or a few students refuse to give in their old IDs for the CUNYCard, they will likely be swiftly made an example of by CUNY administrators. Of what would any concerted effort to stop CUNYCard from infecting City College need to be comprised?

"The best thing to do is to keep doing what we've been doing — try to organize students and faculty against the card, hold forums and spread the word about CUNYCard. That's what has made the administration give pause and delay implementation," responds Keenga Taylor, a history major. The card's implementation, previously slated for March 17, has been postponed until next semester. "In the long run though, we need to take collective action against an administration that declares that if you don't use it, then we're going to dump you out of the school, we're going to give you hell if you don't comply with a contract CUNY negotiated with Citibank without any student input whatsoever."

On the possibility of stopping CUNYCard altogether, Dickmeyer stated in the Campus interview, "There are questions about the choices of Citibank and MCI... but we cannot eliminate, discriminate against suppliers other than by substantive or financial means. To do so is illegal. The procedures to choose the supplier is done at the State level with State lawyers. It's the usual administration excuse that "Our hands are tied. There's nothing we can do." But there are always ways to dump racist, anti-student, anti-union companies off-campus. It's just that Dickmeyer and other administrators embrace Citibank's agenda and have no intentions of bouncing their invited guest.

In fact, the contract allows for several ways to escape. For example, a section entitled "Participation," proclaims, "Affiliated Institutions within the State of New York may elect, but shall not be required, to participate in the SUNYCard System..." Each CUNY campus then, including City College alone, can opt-out of the contract if so chooses.

Under the "Termination and other remedies-SUNY" section, the contract reads, "SUNY may also elect, at its sole option, without liability 90 days to terminate this Agreement and its obligation hereunder, in whole or in part, by giving Notice..."

Sounds good. Let's give them notice: Get out you racist, thieving bastards! What these sections of the contract show is that all those bleatings from administrators that there's nothing we can do to get out of the contract are really inaccurate at best, lies at worst.

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