

# THE CATALYST

*(kat'ə-list) n., an agent that provokes change*

VOLUME 18, # 2

BUCKNELL CAUCUS FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE

NOVEMBER 2000

“Economic justice – who could be against that?” Author and historian Howard Zinn, at Bucknell, October 24, 2000, endorsing *The Catalyst*, the BCEJ, and campaigns for fair labor practices.

## JOB #1593: AN UPDATE

In our last issue, we printed a job ad from *Notes and Notices* for the position of a Special Events Assistant for the president's household. We noted that this job calls for a 35-hour week, without benefits, despite the fact that the person who takes the job will be working in a household whose principal breadwinner receives at least \$170,000 a year, with \$30,000 of benefits, along with a free mansion to live in. Our chagrin led us to print the ad and to write a letter to the president asking that he intervene to have it withdrawn. We sent copies of this letter to Peggy Plympton, Vice President for Finance and Administration; Catherine Sweeney, Head of Personnel; and Richard Zansitis, Counsel for the University. In a letter dated October 2nd, the same day *The Catalyst* was published, and received by us on October 5, the president wrote that “I personally am very concerned that all such matters are fully considered for their impact on the individual employees, as well as on the institution as a whole,” and said that Peggy Plympton would reply. On the same day, we received a letter from Vice-President Plympton. With her permission, we reprint it here:

*Dear Members of the Bucknell Caucus for Economic Justice Steering Committee:*

*President Rogers has asked me to respond to your letter of September 13 in which you questioned the status of a temporary position that is being assigned to the Special Events office.*

*I thought it might be helpful if you knew that Bucknell has a careful review process for both faculty and staff positions. Occasionally, because of timing or special needs, temporary staff members are placed in an area pending the University's position review process. That was the case when a decision was made to place a temporary staff member in the Special Events Office. Although it is expected that there will be an increase in the assignments to that office, a formal position request must be developed and presented for review before a benefits-eligible position can be added.*

*I think you should also know that unlike some employers, all University full-time regular positions receive full benefits, whether scheduled for 35 or 40 hours per week. (70% of these positions are scheduled for 35 hours per week.) Partial benefits are also provided to certain regular part-time positions that are scheduled for less than 35-hour weeks. Positions that are not approved for benefits are for the most part scheduled on a temporary basis or scheduled during peak periods of the academic year. Persons who apply for these positions are always fully informed about the position status. Many staff members start at Bucknell in such positions, and then move into benefits-eligible positions for which they are qualified as openings occur. Depending on the outcome of the review, this may be one of the options for the Special Events position.*

*The University does invest a considerable amount of its resources in salaries, benefits, and staff training and development opportunities and has been exploring the possibility of providing some benefits for casual employees for some time. Total compensation alone represents more than 60% of the University's operating budget, and benefits costs, particularly health care costs, are rising at a rate that is more than triple inflation. Therefore, careful consideration of staff additions and the*

*management of salary and benefit costs ensure that the University can maintain competitive salaries and benefits while at the same time it strives to restrain the rate of increase in tuition costs – something that I know is always of concern to students and their parents.*

*You raise valid concerns, and I hope that this information at least provides a context for the decision to place a temporary position in the Special Events Office. Please feel free to contact me if I can provide any additional background information on University staffing procedures.*

*Sincerely, Margaret F. Plympton, Vice President for Finance and Administration*

We have indeed contacted VP Plympton, for, while her letter seems to express some sympathy with our ideas (“you raise valid concerns”), it does not indicate the university’s willingness to address them. The job ad – which did not, incidentally, identify the position as “temporary” -- has not been changed, thus our original objections to it remain in place. The symbolic significance of the ad and job, and the troublesome description and employment structure, all remain. Nor do VP Plympton’s comments in the Nov. 3 *Bucknellian* indicate an institutional understanding on Bucknell’s part of the importance of providing its employees reasonable, fair, and just employment compensation and conditions. We raised specific questions in a letter to VP Plympton, and have a meeting scheduled with her regarding the overall economic justice situation at Bucknell, beginning with the wage and benefits structure for staff members. As we go to press, Bucknell is completing interviews for the position, and is planning to make an offer. We, of course, fully support anyone who might decide to accept the position, and only wish that she or he might be provided a living wage and benefits. We will keep readers of *The Catalyst* informed.

**ANY NEWS? If you would like to submit an article about any aspect of economic inequity at Bucknell, or know of such a situation, please contact one of the members of the Editorial Collective, listed on the last page, or send us a note (Bucknell Caucus for Economic Justice, Box C-3925). Anonymity will be rigorously protected. We have already received much good information from staff, students, and faculty, and are following up on people’s concerns.**

**JOIN US? We welcome new members interested in working with us to bring fairness and justice to Bucknell’s economic practices. If you’d like to become a part of the BCEJ, contact one of the editors of this issue of *The Catalyst*, or send a note to our mail box.**

## **OUR NEXT CONCERN: A LIVING WAGE AT BUCKNELL**

### **Victory in a Living Wage Campaign at Wesleyan**

“VICTORY: It’s official: after having occupied Wesleyan’s admissions office from Tuesday April 4 at noon until Wednesday April 5 at 9:30pm (33 hours), Wesleyan students declared victory in our fight for workers’ rights on campus. The Initial [custodian] workers are extremely happy with the outcome.

“Q: How much will a living wage, benefits, a pension, and paid vacations for the janitors cost Wesleyan?

A: \$216,000 annually. Consider the fact that Barbara Jan Wilson, VP of University Relations intends to raise \$200,000 a day for Wesleyan. Consider the 15 million dollars we spent on Long Lane property—which is land, grass, and old buildings--not human beings with families--and for which we have no definite plans. Consider the 10 million dollars we are spending on classroom renovations, most of which is spent on already adequate rooms.” ([www.wesleyan.edu/uslac](http://www.wesleyan.edu/uslac))

### **Examples of schools with living wage campaigns either completed or in progress:**

Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Wesleyan, Brown, Stanford, U. of Tenn., Earlham College, Fairfield U., Swarthmore.

### **Towns and cities that have enacted living wage ordinances since 1997:**

Fifty-three, of which the following are examples: Santa Cruz; St. Louis; Cleveland; Omaha; Ypsilanti Township, MI; Somerville, MA; Durham, NC; Corvallis, OR; Duluth, MN; Milwaukee; Gary, IN. Seventy-five more now have living wage campaigns in progress.

## WHAT WOULD BE A LIVING WAGE AT BUCKNELL?

Luckily for those who want an answer to this question, last spring students in Bucknell classes collected information, made a public presentation at Bucknell last spring, and issued a report on a living wage in Lewisburg and the surrounding area. President Rogers received a copy of the report last summer. The students based their study on this definition of a living wage: *a sufficient income to allow a family to live independently of public assistance, food stamps, rent, and child-care subsidies, and that keeps the family above the federal poverty line.* To determine what such a wage might be locally, students collected original data provided by government and private research groups. They then generated cost-of-living estimates for the local area. Their report is entitled “A Living Wage at Bucknell.”

As in living wage studies elsewhere, the students’ estimates reflect the following most basic costs that families must meet in order to keep afloat: age-appropriate child care costs while parents are working; a minimal, no frills food budget; clothing and personal care items; housing and utilities; transportation; medical care; and taxes. The “medical care” part of this definition would presume that a worker is making \$9 an hour and is covered by some kind of medical insurance plan. Were this not the case, \$9 an hour would not allow any family to provide even routine medical care, much less pay for a serious illness or accident. Thus, cities that now have living wage ordinances ordinarily add between one and two dollars to the hourly wage of employees not covered by health insurance.

The work of these Bucknell students was aided importantly by data on staff compensation at Bucknell provided by VP Plympton that carefully protected the identity of all those whose rates were listed. This report has provided us the figures below (and all the numbers assume that employees participate in medical insurance plans):

### What is a living wage in the local area?

**For 1 adult and 2 children (under 6 yrs. and infant) in Lewisburg = \$14.50/hour (and benefits)**

**For 1 adult and 1 child in Lewisburg: \$10.78/hour. In Milton: \$ 9.00/hour (and benefits)**

**For 2 adults and 1 child in Lewisburg : \$9.93/hour. In Milton: \$8.24/hour (and benefits)**  
(This hourly rate assumes that one parent is working 40 hrs. per week, the other 30 hrs. per week.)

To add to the meaning of these numbers as they relate to the wage structure at Bucknell, please refer to the **BCEJ INDEX**, on the next page. In the **INDEX**, we have focused on the \$9 living wage (1 adult and 1 child in Milton) as an example, and only that. All such studies, like that of the Bucknell students, provide various wage levels for different family sizes. In future issues we will include additional information about a living wage campaign, and we invite any ideas about how to make such a campaign successful.

### Donations Are Appreciated

**In order to remain as independent as possible, we are funding *The Catalyst* strictly from donated funds. If you support our efforts, please contribute. You may send your contribution to one of the people listed as part of the Collective for this issue, or to our campus mailbox : Bucknell Caucus for Economic Justice, Box C 3925.**

### Is This Employment Practice “Fair”?

“CALLING ALL STAFF MEMBERS, BROTHERS, SISTERS, SONS, DAUGHTERS, FRIENDS AND RELATIVES—The Dining Service is in need of additional staff for special events for Homecoming/Inauguration weekend... Hourly rate for these events will be \$6.50 per hour. If you are a current staff member and will have

worked 40 hours for the week in your regular position, *appropriate overtime will be paid on the \$6.50 rate.*” Job ad in Bucknell Notes and Notices, 10/9/2000. Emphasis added.

## **BCEJ INDEX\***

**Number of Bucknell Employees Presently Earning Less Than \$9 an Hour (the Living Wage in Milton): 230**  
(Of these, 94 are full time, 131 are temporary/casual, and 5 are part-time.)

**Average Wage Rate of Temporary/Casual Employees: \$6.70 per hour**

**Cost for Bucknell to Bring the Wages of All Full-Time Employees Up To \$9.00 an Hour (the Living Wage in Milton): \$238,127**

**Cost to Bring the Wages of the 131 Casual/Temporary Employees Up To \$9.00 Per Hour: \$216,150\*\***

**Total Cost for Bucknell to Bring the Wages of All its Employees Up To a Living Wage (in Milton), With Full Benefits for Full-Time Workers and Partial Benefits for All Other Workers: \$454,277**

- ◆ **Bucknell’s Operating Budget, 2000-2001, Projected: \$135,000,000**
- ◆ **Proportion of Bucknell’s Operating Budget Needed for A Living Wage: 1/3 of One Per Cent**
- ◆ **Total Surplus in Bucknell’s Operating Budget in 1999-2000: \$1,450,000**

\*The wage and budget figures are for the 1999-2000 academic year.

\*\*This figure was calculated by BCEJ assuming that temporary/casual employees work an average of 10 hrs. per week over a fifty week year, and adds \$1.00 per hour for partial benefits.

### **“FAIR LABOR PRACTICES ”: A NEW MOVEMENT AT UNIVERSITIES**

Recently, a *University Code of Conduct for Fair Labor Practices* has been endorsed by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and other academic groups, and a variety of national religious and labor organizations. This Code of Conduct centers on several “Fair Labor Practices.” It indicates that the nation’s leading universities are beginning to recognize that such policies as guaranteeing a living wage are not idealistic and unrealistic, but, in fact, are necessary steps if colleges and universities are to be what they should be – places that teach, endorse, and enact what Bucknell’s mission statement describes as “institutional programs and practices that exemplify compassion, civility, and a sense of justice.” Though we do not have the space here to print the entire “Code of Conduct,” basically it focuses on these central issues: employees’ right to unionize without harassment from the university; a living wage, including health and other benefits; safe and humane working conditions; academic freedom; and a workplace free of discrimination.

In getting Bucknell to stop sending the anti-union letter it used to distribute to employees, in bringing attention to the ad for job # 1593, and now initiating a focus on the living wage at Bucknell, the BCEJ is actively participating in this national campaign. At present, the organizers of this Code of Conduct movement are holding public hearings in New York City before a panel of well-known academics, journalists, religious leaders, and politicians. The hearings feature testimony from food service workers in Albany, laborers at Stony Brook, clerical workers at NYU, adjuncts in Boston, janitors and students at Wesleyan University, and graduate students at NYU. This testimony will be used to bring to the public’s attention how colleges and universities frequently violate their lofty pledges – such as Bucknell’s claim to be committed to “just” practices – by having wage and working conditions that are unfair, unjust, and downright uncivil. We are in contact with students, professors, and staff who are leading this movement, and we will continue to keep our readers posted about the latest developments in it.

*The Catalyst Editorial Collective for this issue:*

Kristen Erickson, Dawn Lonsinger, Julie McLaughlin, Alex Monticello, Janet Jones, Sandra Morris, Karl Patten, Bekka Payack, R. J. Prushnok, Charles Sackrey, Geoff Schneider, Doug Sturm, Paul Susman, Carol Wayne White