

# THE CATALYST

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

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BUCKNELL CAUCUS FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE

DECEMBER 2000

“Our campus inspires a love of place that, to my knowledge, is unsurpassed by any institution in this country.”  
President Rogers, Bucknell’s *Annual Report*, 1999-2000. As we have discovered, it depends on whom you ask.

**AN UPDATE: MEETINGS WITH THE BOSSES** – *Since our last newsletter, we have met with VP Plympton again, and others have met with her, about economic justice issues. Also, groups and individuals who met with trustees during Trustee Access Day mentioned staff salaries, the living wage, and The Catalyst. Some of us also spoke with Pres. Rogers about these matters. Information on those meetings, and other material, follows.*

## EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AT BUCKNELL

Recently, six BCEJ members (students and faculty) met with Peggy Plympton, VP for Administration and Finance, to ask, basically: Who decides which staff jobs are temporary/casual and which are full-time? Who decides compensation levels? How much money did Bucknell take in last year, and how did it spend it? The following information is based on our conversation with her and background from other sources.

### Who Runs Things at Bucknell?

1. The Board of Trustees. Ultimately, they rule the roost, and almost all the 40 members are in business or finance (36 are Bucknell graduates). The Board is largely self-perpetuating, without checks and balances: it recruits and elects most of its own members for six-year terms. The most desirable candidates are those most likely to contribute money to Bucknell. Each April, the trustees approve, or don't approve, a budget submitted to them by:

2. The President and her/his staff, the on-campus people who actually oversee the day-to-day affairs of the university. The President’s Staff includes principally: VPs for Finance and Administration, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and University Relations; and Deans of Arts and Sciences, and Engineering. This group has the last word on a number of issues on campus, subject, of course, to the trustees’ will, particularly on budgetary issues. They are advised by many below them in the hierarchy, especially:

3. The University Committee on Planning and Budget, composed of faculty, students, and top academic administrators. This Committee plays a vital role in the process when each fall it proposes an operating budget for the following fiscal year to the President, who submits his version to the trustees in January for its eventual approval in April.

Thus, at the top of the hierarchy of people who determine employment practices, there are no staff people directly involved.

### Who Decides About Jobs and Wages?

1. The budget proposed to the trustees in January includes three primary items: any net additions to staff, and the percentage increases in total compensation (the largest segment of the expenditure side of the budget), and in the comprehensive fee (by far, the largest component of the revenue side of the budget). *It is at this point in the budgetary process that Stef Rogers could – if he wanted to – recommend an increase in total compensation for non-professional staff that would assure that all of them received a living wage with benefits.*

2. Present university operations are shaped by the five-year plan adopted in 1996, a document initiated by former president Bro Adams with input from many quarters. This plan called for the student body to be reduced gradually and slightly over these years, and for only slight changes in comprehensive fees. With fewer students and a slower growth in total compensation fees, the plan also called for a freeze in the number

of most support staff positions. However, the student body grew slightly, rather than declining, and the freeze mandated that the increased demand on student services would be met with temporary workers, without benefits, rather than additional full-time employees. The hiring freeze thus keeps many people all over the university from moving up into better (higher level) jobs or into non-casual/regular positions, and also burdens employees with overwork.

### **The Freeze and Dining Services Workers**

Along with more students than had been anticipated, Bucknell has been facing the lowest area unemployment rate since the 1960s, meaning more competition to hire all workers. Bucknell's average wage scale for temporary workers in Dining Services is so low -- about \$6.50 an hour without benefits -- and the work so undesirable (because of a number of reasons that *The Catalyst* will continue to publicize), currently Bucknell is unable to fill fourteen positions in its operations (see the Nov. 3 *Bucknellian*). The only way out of this dilemma would be to offer better jobs -- ones with a living wage and better working conditions. Obviously, higher wages would cost money. In our last issue, we estimated a current annual cost of \$454,000 for a living wage for all employees at Bucknell. Where could that money come from?

### **The University Budget**

In our **INDEX** (see earlier issues, and below), we have provided some budgetary information, especially regarding what seems to us luxurious expenditures, and have stressed the small percentage of the overall budget it would take for Bucknell to pay its employees at least a living wage. What expenditures Bucknell can "afford" depends, of course, on one's perspective. For example, a recent letter to Dining Services workers (see below) said that benefits for temporary workers was something that "Bucknell is unable to offer at this time." However, from a different perspective, one might as easily say, "Because 230 workers at Bucknell make below-poverty-level wages, Bucknell is unable at this time to pay President Rogers \$200,000 in salary and benefits, cannot now afford to spend \$260,000 fixing up his already lavish house, and right now can't afford to hire a limousine service to chauffeur members of his family to and from special events." Other examples of exorbitant spending and waste, particularly of food, abound, as we all know. Because the budget process so heavily shapes Bucknell life, we are seeking more detailed information from VP Plympton and others. We will report it here as we get it.

## **EXTRA!! BUCKNELL PAYS DINING SERVICES WORKERS A LIVING WAGE!**

On November 26, 2000, all of Bucknell's Dining Services workers received a living wage! Here's how it happened. Each of them got a \$25 gift certificate to Weis grocery from Bucknell's Administration for having been "stretched to the limit" during the president's inauguration and homecoming. This is a typical gesture of rich people -- the Romans called it providing the peasants a little "bread and circus" to keep them happy instead of actually meeting their needs. **WHAT'S MORE**, Bucknell probably got a bargain itself, since it surely received a discount from its friends, the Weis family. **STILL AND ALL**, for those 99 full-time and temporary Dining Services workers being paid less than \$7.00 an hour, \$25 extra on Nov. 26th raised their wages for each of that day's eight hours by about \$3.00, thus for that day providing a minimal living wage for a parent and a child living in Milton! Thank you, Bucknell Administration! Now that all Bucknell Dining Services workers have received a living wage for **ONE WHOLE DAY**, we need to start striving to get that wage spread to the other 364 days of the year. One down, 364 to go!

## **BUCKNELL TRUSTEES: "TAKE YOUR CASE TO STEF ROGERS" PRES ROGERS: "IT'S POSSIBLE"**

Just before the November break, Bucknell's Board of Trustees met on campus and provided "access" to the rest of us to meet with them. At least three separate groups brought up living wage issues and *The Catalyst* -- students from BCEJ; and two other groups, staff people and BSG leaders. The three have since told BCEJ about their meetings. Staff workers and people associated with the Wood Company met with trustees to discuss various conditions in Dining Services. They gave trustees copies of articles from *The Catalyst*. One

staff person, who has since joined BCEJ, believes that at least some of the trustees with whom she met are not altogether opposed to a living wage at Bucknell. The staff people mentioned emphatically that paying \$6.50 an hour without benefits is simply wrong anywhere in the U.S., especially at a university claiming to be committed to justice. Not surprisingly, some trustees doubted that the \$9 living wage we advocate is the "right" one. Of course, the rate of a living wage, if one is adopted, will be at the heart of the struggle. We can only imagine how they might have reacted to the \$14.50 an hour needed in Lewisburg to support a family of three.

BSG student representatives who are not affiliated with BCEJ also brought the living wage campaign up with the trustees during their meeting about general issues of concern to students. Without our prior knowledge, they, too, provided the trustees with material from *The Catalyst*. Finally, BCEJ student members also met with trustees. They told them that our campaign is not exclusive to the Dining Services workers, or to a living wage alone, but that we hope to achieve greater welfare for all workers here. Some trustees were receptive to these ideas, but they also discussed the chain of command at Bucknell as it might relate to a living wage campaign. They said that President Rogers is responsible for the operations of the school and that if he deems wage increases necessary, he has the authority to make them happen.

Two weeks after the trustees' meetings, two BCEJ members were part of a BSG delegation that met with Pres. Rogers. When asked about a living wage at Bucknell, Rogers said that regardless of budget constraints, it is possible to come up with such solutions if an issue is of great importance to the entire Bucknell community. He said he is an optimist, and though he didn't give many answers or offer many opinions, he seemed open to student concerns. Does the living wage buck stop at his desk? We hope to find out.

## HOW GOOD IS WOOD?

In 1993, Bucknell asked the Wood Company, a subsidiary of the Resource Group of Allentown, to manage all University Dining Services. The university pays the Wood Company a fee for overall management. Bucknell, however, has input regarding Dining Services budgetary matters, including the cost of meal plans, pricing, and salaries. Any changes in these items are ultimately approved by Bucknell's administration. That means you can't finally blame the Wood Company for unfair wages among Dining Services workers. Nor can you blame them for unfair prices in the cute little convenience store where, in a rip-off practice "company stores" have used against their captive markets for years, one box of crackers priced at \$1.50 downtown costs \$5.25.

The university, not the Wood Company, also currently employs almost all of the staff, but both have to deal with the current shortage of workers. Obviously, the two main incentives to get more workers would be higher wages and decent benefits. Recently, the Wood Co. sent a letter to Dining Services workers offering temporary workers the opportunity to become Wood employees as of January 1, 2001. Those choosing to do so would be eligible for core benefits, but the new policy would offer nothing for staff already in benefits-eligible positions. Reprehensibly, we feel, the letter also stated that, "Because of economies of scale, the Wood Co. is able to offer core benefits, health care and dental coverage that Bucknell is unable to offer at this time."

Is this a good deal? For several reasons, no. First, the Wood employees would pay for 1/3 of the benefits, and the company for 2/3. However, Bucknell employees pay their share of benefits based on their wages, meaning that low-wage employees typically pay less than 1/3 of the cost of their benefits. Wood employees also wouldn't get the education benefits Bucknell employees do. We shared a copy of the Wood benefit package with the personnel director of an international firm. This director said that the benefit package was about average, as such packages go, but would be far out of the reach of almost all workers making less than a living wage for this area. The upshot is this, as we see it: "Unable," but actually UNWILLING, to pay decent wages and benefits to its own employees, Bucknell passes the buck to Wood.

## MEET THE FAMILY

*We very much want to introduce our happy Bucknell “family” to some of its less-attended-to members. The sketches that follow are based on information obtained by BCEJ from various Dining Services workers. Because the accounts are carefully designed to protect the anonymity of workers, they are composites (i.e. don’t tell any single individual’s story), and names are fake. The basic facts, however, are true. It is also true that some, perhaps many, Dining Services workers like their jobs and are pleased be to at Bucknell. Many, however, do seem overworked and underpaid. Additional introductions of “family” members, Dining Services workers and others, will appear in future issues.*

Bucknell “family,” let us meet some of ourselves:

“Lydia” has been working for Dining Services for four years. She makes \$6.45 an hour and works every day of the week, with two days off every other weekend. She works 12 days in a row two times a month, and a total of 80 hours every two weeks, yet doesn’t receive benefits. She can’t afford a car, so has to pay \$5.50 a day for transportation. Her shifts are 8 1/2 hours long, with one half-hour break per shift. She is also supposed to get two ten-minute breaks, but since Dining Services is so understaffed, she doesn’t. In our opinion, she seems to do the work for three people all by herself. As a casual employee, she does not have work in Dining Services in the summer. Her primary desire is for Dining Services to pay better so she can earn more and so that it could hire enough workers to do the jobs. She believes the pay and working conditions are what make Bucknell unable to hire more people.

“Jake” works in Dining Services forty hours a week, without benefits. He, like “Lydia,” is a casual employee and doesn’t receive work in the summer. He, too, has been working here for four years, and he would like to become a full-time employee so he could have benefits and year-round work. If a full time position becomes available, he would want to apply, but isn’t sure the workers always know about such opportunities. He says that he wishes that management would publicize such positions better to the employees when they become available, both with signs and by telling casual workers personally. He is supposed to get a 15-minute break in his 8 1/2 hour shift in addition to the 1/2 hour one, but never does. If he needs to use the restroom, he must wait for someone to come over and fill his shift for a few minutes, and people usually don’t have time to spare from their own under-staffed shifts. His chief concern is that he wants to be treated fairly.” He also thinks that people should be paid more, in order to make “enough that you can live on.” He receives raises, yet it isn’t clear what establishes how much of a raise a worker gets. He can barely make ends meet.

“Amelia” is a single parent with four children. She works in Dining Services 40 to 46 hours a week, five days a week, and makes \$6.30 an hour, without benefits. She spends \$20 a week for a ride to work, and \$15 a day for child care. Since the living wage for a family of five in Lewisburg is more than \$15 an hour, it is easy to see why she has to get food stamps in order to feed her children, despite her more-than-full-time job. (We believe Bucknell should be very disappointed in itself that one of its full-time workers would qualify for them.) And she certainly can’t afford the \$120 a month it would cost her to add benefits under the generous offer of Bucknell and the Wood Company. She feels that because of the wages and the overwork from understaffing, the Dining Services workers are not treated like real people. She says that all of the workers need to get raises, especially since they all do more than their share. She, like “Lydia” and “Jake,” figures that they are short-staffed because of working conditions, rates, and no benefits. All that she requests to make her job livable would be a decent wage, the necessary number of people to do the jobs, and for the Bucknell students, faculty, and Dining Services management to treat her with respect. Ultimately, she wants to be treated fairly—to be looked upon as a human being.

**WANT TO CONTACT US? If you would like to submit information to us about job practices at Bucknell (we rigorously protect anonymity), or if you would like to join the BCEJ, please contact one of us by email, or through campus mail at Bucknell Caucus for Economic Justice, Box C-3925.**

**DONATIONS ARE NEEDED. We finance the newsletter from personal funds.**

## BCEJ INDEX

Last summer, President Rogers told two of us that while a decent wage for all might be a good idea, paying it meant reducing something else, and he specifically mentioned the compensation of others on campus. VP Plympton's response to the idea of a living wage at Bucknell, according to *The Bucknellian*, was to ask for someone to tell her where the money would come from. And, recently, students discussing a living wage with a trustee provoked this response: "A living wage is a good idea, but would the students be willing to pay an extra \$150 each to finance it?"

Obviously, however, the money does not have to come from typical salaries OR from students:

### HOW WE COULD HAVE HAD A LIVING WAGE AT BUCKNELL DURING *THIS* YEAR – ONE PLAN

**Again, Number of Bucknell Employees Presently Making Less Than A \$9 Living Wage: 230**  
(94 full time, 131 temporary, 5 part time)

**Amount Needed To Pay A Living Wage to All Bucknell Employees This Year: \$454,000\***

**Postponing the Refurbishing of the President's House and Using that Money for Living Wages:  
\$238,000\*\***

(Enough Money to Provide A Living Wage to 94 Full-Time Employees Presently Not Making One)

**Reducing the Salaries of Bucknell's Top Five Administrators by 10% and Using that Money to Pay  
for Living Wages: \$70,000\*\*\***

(More than Enough to Bring 43 Temporary Workers Up to A Living Wage)

(Extra Benefits of Reducing Administrative Salaries: Less Glaring Inequality at Bucknell, Better Image, Stronger Commitment to "Justice" Mentioned in *Mission Statement*, Happier Bucknell Family. Five Top Administrators Left with Average "Living Wage" of Roughly \$140,000 Each, Plus Benefits)

**Requesting that Trustees Who Last Year Committed Over \$20,000,000 to the New Field House  
Instead Donate 1% of that Money to A Living Wage Fund: \$200,000**

(Enough, With Some Left Over, to Pay a Living Wage With Benefits to the Remaining Temporary Employees)

**Cost of This Plan to Students: 0**  
**Cost of This Plan to Faculty and Staff: 0**

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\*See our previous issue for the method we used to estimate both this living wage and its likely cost to Bucknell.

\*\*Actually, the remodeling cost \$260,000. We've allowed \$22,000 for making the place livable.

\*\*\*Estimate made from IRS data for 1998-99.

*The Catalyst* Editorial Collective for this issue: Ariane Allen, Kristen Erickson, Dawn Lonsinger, Julie McLaughlin, Alex Monticello, Janet Jones, Sandra Morris, Karl Patten, Bekka Payack, R. J. Prushnok, Charles Sackrey, Geoff Schneider, Andrew Smith, Doug Sturm, Paul Susman, Carol Wayne White