

THECATALYST

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

VOLUME 18, # 5 BUCKNELL CAUCUS FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE APRIL 2001

THE FAIR LABOR CAMPAIGN AT BUCKNELL

AN UPDATE ON THE MEETING WITH THE ADMINISTRATION

AND THE NAMES OF CAMPAIGN ENDORSERS

On April 4th, ten members of BCEJ met with President Rogers; Dennis Swank, Controller and Acting Vice President for Finance and Administration; and Catherine Sweeney, Director of Personnel. We requested this meeting to seek the President's endorsement of the Fair Labor Campaign and to explain in person its various details and our reasons for proposing it. Again, the Campaign seeks:

- 1. A minimum living wage of \$9 per hour, adjusted annually for inflation, plus access to subsidized benefits, for all employees.**
- 2. The addition of three support staff members to the University Committee on Planning and Budget (UCPB).**
- 3. The establishment, by President Rogers, of a permanent Fair Labor Committee that regularly will report to the campus about the state of working conditions and that will serve as a confidential grievance committee for support staff members.**

PLANK # 2: ADDING SUPPORT STAFF TO THE UCPB

We start with the best news. At our meeting, President Rogers confirmed what we had already learned -- that the Administration had proposed that three support staff employees be added to the membership of UCPB. The UCPB amended the administration's proposal slightly and, as faculty procedures require, will bring the amended motion to the entire faculty for a vote next September. *Its motion will be to add one salaried staff person and two hourly wage staff persons to the Committee, all three to be elected by their own constituencies.*

We in the BCEJ are very pleased with this gesture, and hope that the faculty will approve it. If it does, the University will have enacted one-third of the Fair Labor Campaign.

PLANK # 1: A \$9 LIVING WAGE, PLUS BENEFITS**FOR ALL BUCKNELL EMPLOYEES**

The President argued that it would be irresponsible for him to endorse a living wage without further information about its costs. Indicating his shared concern about the issues we raise, however, President Rogers did agree to send a letter urging the UCPB to study the cost of implementing such a wage. His gesture will implicitly support an earlier request by BCEJ's faculty advisers that the UCPB make such a study. Its chairperson had already told our advisers that the Committee will look into the issue as soon as possible. It is good to have President Rogers' reinforcement of that request.

Rogers also expressed concern that a living wage will "compress" Bucknell's staff wage structure, causing others to expect commensurate raises. This kind of compression can be unfair to long-time employees being paid wages according to scales that were set before the living wage. Thus, a living wage often compels corresponding higher wage rates for others in order for the relative wages to be fair and reasonable. The UCPB will certainly take this fact into consideration, as it should. That consideration, however, is one that must follow, we feel, only after the initial basic step that justice mandates – first insuring that all employees receive at least a minimum living wage.

Though referring anything to a committee is fraught with hazards, we are confident that the UCPB will complete its study in a timely a fashion. We are equally confident that once all the figures are taken into account, a living wage will still prove to cost a tiny proportion of Bucknell's annual operating budget, and that a compensation program designed to minimize the problem of wage compression is also easily affordable.

PLANK # 3: THE FAIR LABOR COMMITTEE

President Rogers said that he would need time to think about this proposal further and to discuss the matter with his staff. Director of Personnel, Catherine Sweeney, in particular, questioned the need for such a committee because she said that both formal and informal procedures at Bucknell already provide all employees the means to bring forward a grievance without fear. We responded that during our eighteen month existence BCEJ members have had numerous private conversations with staff people -- including some supervisors -- and continue to receive mail from others who fear speaking out about job concerns. We urged Ms. Sweeney to consider these problems as results more of the hierarchical employment structure at Bucknell rather than of acts by individual bosses. We also pointed out that institution of a grievance committee should not threaten the administration, since it claims to be eager to meet employee needs, and will cost the university nothing.

Finally, President Rogers also cautioned that before he can reasonably consider any proposed changes to institutional structure, he must first fill the several vacant slots at the top of his administration. He agreed to work with the other administrators once they are hired to continue exploring how to address the issues

we have raised. We understand him to mean that he will again take up consideration of the Campaign's proposals no later than early next fall.

WHAT NOW FOR BCEJ AND THE FAIR LABOR CAMPAIGN?

- We will continue to seek endorsements for the Campaign. You can email us to add your name to those on the following pages.
- Our "Transition Committee" of returning students and faculty will -- mostly through email -- solicit endorsements all summer, then re-group next fall so that the BCEJ can be off and running.
- We will stay in touch with the UCPB, ready to offer that Committee additional research sources for its study of the living wage if it asks us to do so, and to answer questions about conditions at Bucknell.
- We will continue to emphasize to President Rogers the need for the Fair Labor Committee and work with him as he considers it.
- We will regularly publish *The Catalyst* to provide the community with updates on the Campaign.
- We will continue to recruit new members next year.

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. Our web site contains all the issues of *The Catalyst* and information about BCEJ: www.orgs.bucknell.edu/catalyst

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ORGANIZATIONS: Amnesty International; Animal Defense League; Best Buddies; BCEJ; Bucknell Progressive

Alliance; Environmentally Minded Students in Action; Friends of Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals; International Spectrum; Partnership for Unveiling Labor and Sweatshop Exploitation; Social Justice College; Students for Asian Awareness at Bucknell.

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