

THE CATALYST

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

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BUCKNELL CAUCUS FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE /
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A LIVING WAGE AT BUCKNELL

Updating the Campaign

Bucknell's Mission Statement Declares:

“Bucknell's residential character provides a matrix within which institutional programs and practices that exemplify compassion, civility, and a sense of justice form an aspect of the educational experience.”

Last year, the BCEJ launched a Bucknell Living Wage Campaign. Basing our conclusions on several studies, both national ones and one done by a class here, we maintained that a living wage at Bucknell would need to be at least \$9 an hour, plus subsidized benefits. Using this newsletter as a way to publicize our campaign, we provided clear evidence for our wage determinations, and revealed that 230 Bucknell employees were being paid less than a living wage. We also calculated that a living wage, by itself, would cost Bucknell about \$500,000 a year. Later, the administration argued that in order to avoid the wage compression that would result from raising the wages of the lowest paid staff members *only*, the University would need to raise the wages of some others as well. They speculated that this step could cost as much as \$4-5 million a year. Based on these numbers, we believe the University can “afford” a living wage if that is its priority. We also reminded readers that the moral imperative of the living wage at Bucknell is a compelling one, given that 230 of its workers were being paid poverty wages when the University's *Mission Statement* proudly and clearly commits us all to “institutional programs and practices that exemplify compassion, civility, and a sense of justice.”

Last spring, BCEJ took its Campaign to President Rogers, and he agreed to endorse our letter to the

University Committee on Planning and Budget (UCPB), his principal campus financial advisory body, asking it to study the feasibility of implementing a living wage that would provide benefits for all Bucknell employees while also addressing the issue of wage compression. The UCPB is presently gathering materials and planning to undertake that study. *We in BCEJ/P.U.L.S.E. will keep the campus informed of its progress. Further, given the time that has passed (and continues to pass) since we first brought attention to this problem, we will do all we can to bring about a living wage at Bucknell during this academic year.*

BCEJ Merges with P.U.L.S.E. (Partnership for Unveiling Labor and Sweatshop Exploitation)

Last week, the members of these two organizations agreed to join hands and work as a single group. P.U.L.S.E. – founded in 1997 – and BCEJ have for two years collaborated on several projects. The main goal of both groups is the common one of improving the conditions of working people here and elsewhere. We think that our coming together, as has happened with similar national organizations, will help us both to work more effectively.

MAKING BUCKNELL'S LABOR PRACTICES MORE FAIR

In addition to calling for a living wage at Bucknell, BCEJ/P.U.L.S.E. members believe that support staff members need more fair and just participation in key parts of Bucknell's governing structure. On the back of this page, we describe two such structures that are badly in need of change, and that we see as now clearly unfair and unjust.

THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND BUDGET. This committee, the importance of which is described above, is now populated solely by faculty, administrators, and students. *There are no staff members on the committee, even though there are over 600 staff persons at Bucknell.* Fortunately, UCPB members, in part from our urgings, have this year proposed to the faculty that three staff members be added – one professional and two non-professional – to make its deliberations more democratic and fair. We heartily support the UCPB motion, and we are quite hopeful that at its October meeting the faculty will vote to make these additions.

THE FAIR LABOR COMMITTEE. BCEJ/P.U.L.S.E is also campaigning for Pres. Rogers to establish a special ad hoc Fair Labor Committee, and is asking him to:

- 1. Request that his staff arrange a process whereby three non-professional staff members and one professional staff member are elected by secret ballot from their constituencies to serve on the FLC for three years;**
- 2. Request that the Bucknell Student Government arrange a process whereby two students are elected to serve on the FLC for two years, both chosen by secret ballot from their constituency;**

3. Request that the President of the Faculty arrange a process whereby one faculty member is elected to the FLC for three years by a secret balloting of the entire faculty.

The FLC would have two principal tasks:

To Supplement Current Grievance Procedures. *The FLC would not replace the grievance procedures now in place. Those employees who have full confidence in the present procedures could continue to use them. However, in our twenty months of talking to staff persons about their circumstances, all of them – without exception – were either hesitant to speak frankly to their supervisors about job concerns, or worked with someone who was. Thus, for those who would prefer an avenue other than that of going to their own bosses with problems (like most of their counterparts in similar hierarchical structures), the FLC would provide one.*

To Make Regular Reports to the Campus on “The State of Working Conditions at Bucknell.” Such a committee, for example, could have informed the campus about poverty wages in Dining Services, as we did; or, it might have called attention to the bizarre anomaly of a public advertisement for a person to do a demanding, non-benefits job in the president’s house, as we did. More importantly, because such a committee would be composed mostly of support staff, Bucknell might for the first time get the *inside* story on working conditions from those who actually do most of the work. It is important that we know how members of the support staff actually perceive their work, its benefits and costs, where it has gone sour and where it has been improved, and its ability to afford them workplace dignity. And how much truer – always a desirable outcome at a University – that perspective would be than that contained in usual references to everyone here as contented members of a big happy campus family.

In our next issue, we will provide a fuller set of reasons concerning the need for a Fair Labor Committee, including evidence that, because Bucknell does not have such a process, BCEJ/P.U.L.S.E. is increasingly a body on campus to which staff grievances are being directed. While we are pleased that we can play this role as long as no official body is doing so effectively, this is not an ideal situation, given that we have no official standing as such a body, nor the power to act officially on the grievances brought to us.

WANT TO CONTACT OR JOIN US? If you would like to join BCEJ/P.U.L.S.E. or submit information to us about job practices at Bucknell (we rigorously protect anonymity), please contact one of us by e-mail, or through campus mail at Bucknell Caucus for Economic Justice, Box C-3925. **WANT TO ENDORSE THE CAMPAIGN?** Already, almost 700 Bucknellians are supporting the campaign, but we need continuing support. To add your own name, or that of an organization, please reply to the electronic version of this issue with a request to be

added to the list. For the names of our endorsers, see our last issue, V. 18, # 5, at:: <http://www.orgs.bucknell.edu/catalyst>.

The BCEJ/P.U.L.S.E. Steering Committee: Lori Adamczyk, Meredith Clayton, Kristen Erickson, Lizz Fiedler, Janet Jones, Katie Kohn, Dawn Lonsinger, Mike McCaffrey, Saundra Morris, Beth Oesterling, Emily Park, Karl Patten, Cindy Peltier, Jennifer Perrine, Charles Sackrey, Geoff Schneider, Doug Sturm, Paul Susman, Hilbourne Watson, Carol Wayne White