

Building New Foundations: A Living Wage at Swarthmore College 12/4/04

The Living Wage Campaign at Swarthmore has been working for over four years to create a policy that requires our college to pay its workers a salary high enough to pay for basic needs while working only 40 hours a week. We've come far. Today, with our support, the Board of Managers WILL pass a proposal that includes a wage of \$10.38 tied to inflation and health care for the children and spouse of our staff's lowest paid workers. This is a victory. When the campaign began the minimum wage at our college was \$6.66 and the ideals of a living wage were not present on campus. Let's say it again: this is a victory!

But have we won the war?

At the beginning of the semester, the Living Wage and Democracy Campaign had five demands:

1. Make \$10.72 (later \$11.26, after \$10.72 was indexed to inflation) the minimum compensation of the college, and implement the wage decompression plan recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee on a Living Wage.
2. Make the family health care and child care benefits recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee on a Living Wage a part of that minimum compensation package.
3. Create a realistic funding scheme that includes no net cut in pay to any of the College employee's or a cut in currently held staff positions.
4. The creation of a permanent college committee to monitor the implementation of the new minimum compensation package and to reform the package every 3 years according to cost of living increases
5. Implement the living wage in the next budget cycle, 2004-2005

We're a dollar short and don't have childcare, there is no permanent committee. There are issues of decompression at this college: employees who have been working at the college for years deserve raises.

In addition, there is work to be done outside of Swarthmore: in the Delaware County and Philadelphia community, and at other educational institutions across the country.

So, no, we have not yet won. But we have made an important stride: We have created a foundation for socioeconomic justice where none previously existed. We will continue to build on this new foundation. And today, we will claim a victory.