

# THE SWARTHMOREAN

VOLUME 76-NUMBER 10

MARCH 5, 2004

SWARTHMORE, PA

75¢ PER ISSUE

## While the College's Board Met, Students Protested for Higher Wages for Staff

Nearly two years ago, Swarthmore College students held a rally in front of Parrish Hall to pressure administrators to raise the minimum hourly wage of employees to what they called "a living wage" of \$13 per hour.

Three months later, the college raised the minimum hourly wage from \$6.66 to \$9. The increase followed recommendations from a college staff compensation review committee, chaired by Melanie Young, associate vp for human resources. But it was the students who raised the issue first.

After some faculty and students argued that even the \$9 minimum did not constitute a living wage, President Al Bloom established a new committee of staff, faculty and students, chaired by Ms. Young and Prof. Barry Schwartz.

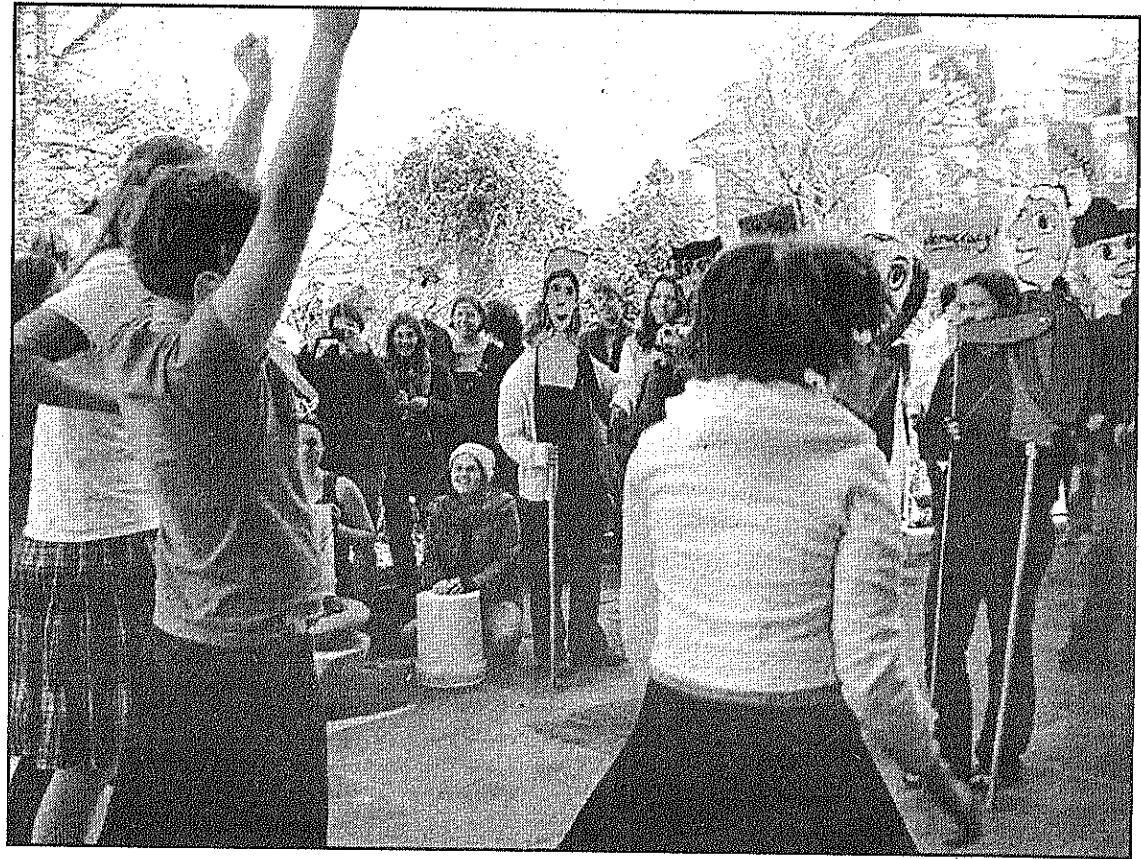
This new Ad Hoc Committee on a Living Wage was charged with coming up with their best proposal without regard to cost. The majority

recommended a minimum wage of \$10.72; a minority of members recommended \$13.89.

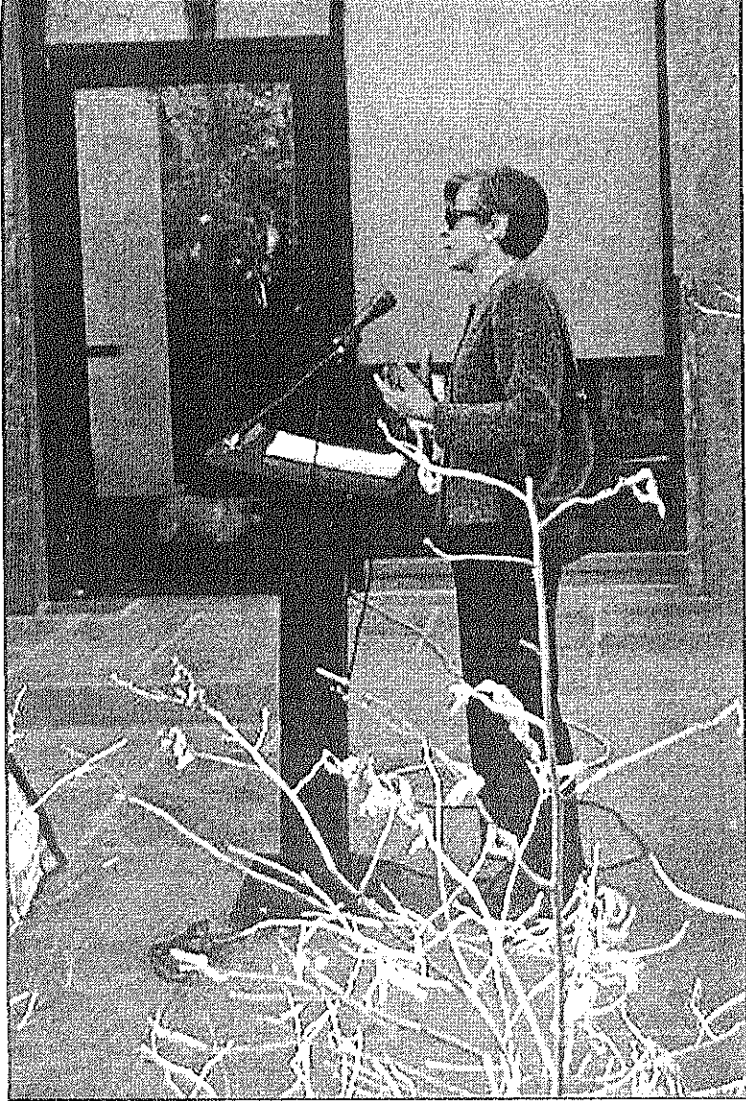
Fast forward to Saturday morning, Feb. 28. While the college's board of managers was meeting in Kohlberg Hall, students rallied for the majority recommendation. However, some students held up signs for the higher number.

Math professor Charles Grinstead, who had been on the compensation review committee during the first round of protests, attended the rally to hear what the students had to say. He argued that if the college got behind another raise, "all constituencies should contribute to the cause. ...There's no such thing as a free lunch." The \$10.72 per hour plus more benefits was a reasonable goal, he said, but the \$13.89 was not. One of the problems, he said, was the "ripple effect" of raising the wages of the 25 or so employees making the

(continued on page 12)



The Radical Cheerleaders chanted at the Living Wage Rally last Saturday at Swarthmore College.



Aurora Camacho de Schmidt

## While the College's Board Met, Students Protested for Higher Wages for Staff

(continued from page 1)

lowest salaries upon the wage earners closest to them. In other words, if workers making \$9 per hour received raises to \$10.72, would people making \$11 per hour expect raises, too.

Grinstead said the movement should be called the Living Compensation Movement. Most employees, he said, should be paid with benefits — child care, health care — based on need.

With the exception of a handful of people, most of the speakers were students. Emma Benn, a chemistry senior from Bryn Mawr, said she had family members cooking other people's food and cleaning other people's places. Reading from an untitled poem, she said: "...[T]his isn't just a fight for a living wage, this is a fight to live ... and that's worth life itself."

Staff member Kae Kalwaic of Wallingford spoke on behalf of workers' rights. An administrative assis-

studies for 10 years, she said, "Work is a noble concept in America, and yet the American view of equality has not always translated into fair treatment for the millions of workers who repair our buildings, prepare our food and clean our spaces." She urged the students to "bridge the gap between the ideal and reality."

In an impassioned speech, Spanish professor Aurora Camacho de Schmidt of Swarthmore, said "poverty is greater and deeper than ever" but workers' movements start with small drips that become rivers like the rally of 75 people or so who were present. Spanish has no word for living wage, she said, but rather the expression *salario digno* or dignified salary, a "Spanish word [that] has been undervalued for a long time." Raising the minimum wage, she said, was a "matter of justice."

The board will make its final decisions about employees' hourly pay