



The Workers' Edge

The Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

Spring 2012



Increase the Minimum Wage to a Living Wage: The Only Way Forward

by Carl Feuer

Increasing the minimum wage is one way to begin to cut into the wealth and power of the 1 percent and create a fairer America.

The proposed increase of the NYS Minimum Wage to \$8.50 will do next to nothing, however, to cut into the wealth and power of the 1 percent.

Only a determined campaign to raise the NYS Minimum Wage to a Living Wage (\$12.78), as TCWC proposes, will do that.

Such a campaign, if pursued by TCWC in a militant way, also has the potential to link up with and re-energize the Occupy Movement.

If you look around Tompkins County and elsewhere, the vast majority of people earning less

than \$12.78 are employed by 1 percenters like Wal-Mart, McDonald's, Holiday Inn, and many others. And most of these people are adult men and women trying to support a family.

In the competitive environment where these service sector 1 percenters operate, there is no way that they can raise prices to offset the wage increase enough to

The Workers' Center is creating its own yard signs: Make the Minimum Wage a Living Wage! as a way to build a bigger wave around this important issue.

We are looking for a couple of sponsors to help pay for the signs.

Would you be one of those sponsors?

Call the Workers' Center at 607-269-0409 to talk about it.

maintain the stream of money going into their pockets.

As a result, raising the minimum wage (\$7.25) to a living wage (\$12.78) will produce a direct transfer of money from the pockets of the 1 percent to the pockets of the 99 percent, mostly to those who are the poorest of the 99 percent. It will reduce the rate of exploitation in our society and be a significant step toward a fairer society.

By increasing the purchasing power of thousands of low-wage working families, it will also pump much-needed spending into Tompkins and other counties, creating a substantial number of new Living Wage jobs.

We can argue, as I have done in the past, that a rise of the minimum wage to \$8.50 at least is something, and at least it is doable. But make no mistake, this not only has little effect on the 1 percent, it also undermines much of our efforts to create a living wage community and society.

It undermines us because it gives low-wage employers unfair competitive advantage over anybody who considers paying a Living Wage to their employees and makes it less likely that

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Living Wage Petition Inside!

Please help spread the word.

Have your friends and neighbors sign our petition and bring the filled petition to the Workers' Center. All of us must work together to bring the change we want in our world!

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Member Spotlight: Becky Bowen

by Linda Holzbaur

If you've ever volunteered, you know that there are some people you can always rely on. The Workers' Center is lucky to know several people like that, including Becky Bowen. Becky first became involved at the Workers' Center when she was a freshman at Ithaca College, attending a series of workshops called Organizing School. The Organizing School tried to find ways that communities can resolve social issues from the ground up. It didn't take long for Becky to go from participant to workshop facilitator.

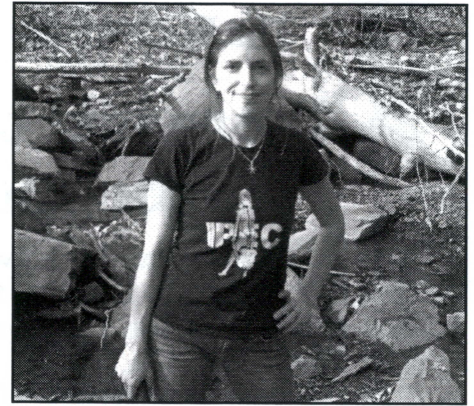
Becky says 'Getting to know people at the WC was, and is, a great way to get to know others in the community. Especially as a college student, it would've been easy to pass on through in four years without knowing anything about the place where I was living. Instead, I found an amazing organization that helps people stand up for their rights and get the fair treatment that everyone deserves. Though there are hundreds of nonprofits in the area, TCWC gets at the core of the challenges facing Tompkins County residents.'

Although Becky thinks that

Living Wage Certification and the Workers' Hotline are great campaigns, it is the Community Union Organizers (CUO) group that she feels most drawn to because it works to organize the whole community, not just one sector of the workforce. 'Friends from out of town always remark at how lucky our community is to have these resources available. It's an obvious need everywhere but here at TCWC, we're actually doing it!' she says.

Currently the outreach coordinator at the Community Science Institute, a certified nonprofit water testing lab that monitors local stream quality and educates about issues relating to water quality, Becky has also worked part-time at Ithaca Carshare and in a variety of delivery driving, wait-staffing jobs. Becky was inspired to join the CUOs by Diana Ceja, another delivery driver, who always feels the need to stand up for what is right.

Becky grew up in a town in rural, central Pennsylvania, Lewisburg, where she has 'a wonderful supportive family of two parents, two sisters and a brother.' She is engaged to her



Becky Bowen

longtime partner (and TCWC member) Zac Sims; they are living in and fixing up a log cabin out in the forest in one of the more remote areas of the county.

And of course, because she's full of energy and ideas, Becky is busy with many other things. Besides her TCWC involvement, she's on the Board of the Finger Lakes Permaculture Institute. She plays guitar and violin, loves being outdoors doing things connected to the earth like growing and canning food, does yoga and plays with her Himalayan cats.

Thank you, Becky, for your exuberance, your thoughtfulness and your dedication to helping others.

New Occupational Health Resource for Southern Tier Workers

We are happy to announce the Grand Opening of The Occupational Health Clinical Center's new Binghamton office. OHCC, a worker-focused, publicly funded medical practice that offers accurate diagnosis of work-related illness in current and former workers, is a great resource for workers who have been injured or made ill on the job.

OHCC is a tremendous advocate for worker health and safety as well as worker's

rights. We are lucky to have this unique clinic nearby.

The Grand Opening will be on Friday, May 18, at 840 (Upper) Front Street/US Route 11 (near Broome County Community College). Located in the same building as Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County, parking and clinic entrance are located behind the building. Everyone is welcomed.

www.upstate.edu/cnyohcc



Over 175 people participated in our Living Wage Rally on March 12, 2012. Above Left, Neisha Butler talked about the challenges of life as a single mother, student and low wage worker. Above right, Living Wage certified employer Mandi Meidlinger, owner of Jillian's Drawers, described that she feels morally committed to paying a Living Wage. With Mandi is her daughter Jillian. Photos by Nikki Sayward.

Leave A Legacy for Tomorrow's Workers

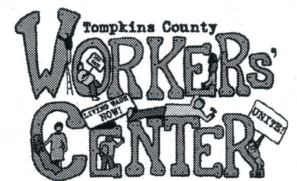
Are you considering planned giving while writing your will or updating an old one? Please remember Tompkins County Workers' Center. Your future donation will continue the

fight for justice for the next generation of workers.

Planned giving not only cuts or eliminates capital gains taxes, it also is a guarantee that the cause you fought for during your life con-

tinues after you're gone.

Talk to your financial planner about the right option for you: help ensure that the Tompkins County Workers' Center's work continues for years to come.



tcworkerscenter.org
607-269-0409

Interested in Occupational Health & Safety training at your organization, school or workplace? Call Carlos @ 269-0409

Tompkins County Workers' Center Plays a Significant Role in Creating an Upstate New York Workers' Center Movement

by Pete Meyers

The past year has been a particularly rewarding one for the Tompkins County Workers' Center in the sense that we are actively helping to create a Regional Upstate New York Workers' Center Network. Our intention to create such a Network took a serious uptick in the past year, having received a \$10K grant from Interfaith Worker Justice to mentor, stimulate, and deepen the regional connections between worker justice efforts upstate.

The Tompkins County Workers' Center is the longest standing Workers' Center in upstate New York. The Workers' Center of Central New York (<http://workerscentercny.org>), located in Syracuse, started about four years ago, and they are making incredible efforts at becoming sustainable in Onondaga and surrounding counties. Our two Centers have worked closely together for the past several years and have had conversations about merging our work together more intentionally.

Other efforts in upstate include Workers' Center start-ups beginning in Rochester, Buffalo, Albany, Binghamton, Cortland, and Utica. Each

effort is at varying levels of development. It is true and clear that for workers to develop more power, we must develop and deepen our connections and abilities to empower and organize workers on a larger regional basis in such a way that is mutually reciprocal.

Some of the benefits of regionalizing our work include the following possibilities:

- the potential to field calls to a central Workers' Rights Hotline that would be shared by the various locales who are part of the regional network;
- sharing our resources and experiences with each other in such a way that helps to expand our knowledge base;
- being able to mobilize collectively to bring more power to bear on any specific Workers' Center's campaign;
- the possibility of joining forces to help bring statewide changes.

If you live in another part of the State of New York and would like to either start your own Workers' Center or plug in to one of the already-existing efforts, please give our office a call at 607-269-0409 or send us an email at

TCWRH@tcworkerscenter.org

A Living Wage: The Only Way Forward

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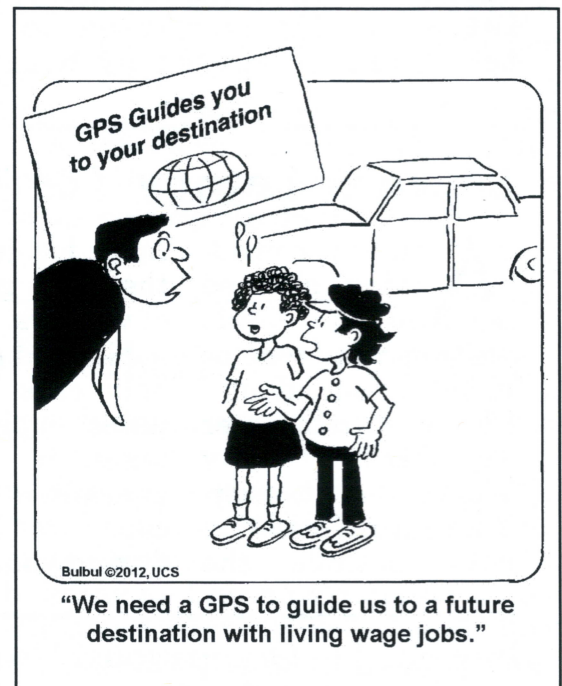
they will do so.

In conclusion it is worth remembering that, as inequality researcher Chuck Collins says, *"We are living in an inequality death spiral. These growing inequalities of wealth, power and opportunity interact in a frighteningly dynamic way to contribute to a downward spiral of worsening social, ecological and economic con-*

ditions."

Income redistribution is the best and most direct way to deal with that inequality death spiral but it won't come from increasing the minimum wage to \$8.50. It just might come by linking with Occupy and building a movement committed to making the minimum wage a Living Wage.

Carl Feuer is one of the founders of the Tompkins County Workers' Center.



Spring Potluck

Saturday June 9 5:30-7:30

bring friends, family and a dish-to-pass!

Beverages provided.

@ the Workers' Center

115 E. MLKing St/ The Commons

2nd floor above Autumn Leaves Used Books

May Day Activities in Tompkins County

The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice"

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
Bending the arc of the universe: JUSTICE or JUST US(?)

From our allies at Occupy Ithaca and Occupy Cornell:

What do racial justice, worker justice, and education justice look like? What are we going to do about it?

In solidarity with the May 1st global strike, Occupy Ithaca and Occupy Cornell call for a People's School on the Commons.

Join together for a May Day People's Gathering on the Ithaca Commons on May 1st from 10:30AM to 4 PM.

May Day is a day to confront widespread racial discrimination, declining wages and insecure contracts for workers, the exploitation of undocumented workers, rising debts for students, ever mounting stresses for working parents, and crippling income and wealth in-

equality.

May Day is a day to organize and educate around justice—for students, for families, for workers, for the marginalized.

At the People's School we will explore together ways to build justice in our workplaces, in our schools, and on our streets.

The People's School will be organized based on an effective, directly democratic method that enables groups of people who are passionate about an issue to organize themselves and choose the most effective way to use their time. Everyone's participation is encouraged, everyone's input is valued.

May Day is a day for exercising our right to peaceably assemble, and we are not requesting a permit in order to do so.

Cost: Free to the people!

Lunch will be provided at noon by Food Not Bombs Ithaca.

6:30PM: Join us for the Occupy Ithaca General Assembly.

Those interested in moving from discussing injustice to direct action for justice will assemble at the Bernie Milton Pavilion. Together, we will decide upon a particular direct action based on the passions, know-how, and comfort levels of all participants.

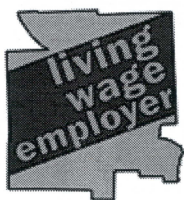
Once we have come to consensus on a direct action, we will act.

More information on Open Space Technology, the method we'll be using to organize the event, can be found at: www.openspaceworld.org and www.chriscorrigan.com/openspace/whatisos.html

The Workers' Center and the Labor-Religion Coalition of the Finger Lakes will also participate in the May Day People's School. Watch our website and Facebook page for updates on schedules and activities.

Support our 79 Certified Living Wage Businesses!

We welcome our newest certified Living Wage employers: Aigen Financial Group, International Food Network, McNeil Music of Ithaca, Mama Goose/Mimi's Attic, Michael May Construction, Owl Cafe, Red Feet Wine Market & Spirit Provisions, Three Tier Consulting



Advocacy Center

Aigen Financial Group

Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County

Alternatives Federal Credit Union

Ancient Wisdom Productions

ASI Renovations

Autumn Leaves Used Books

Black Box Computing Consulting

Blue Spruce Painting & Decorating

The Bookery

Boyce Thompson Institute

Buffalo Street Books

Catholic Charities

CFCU Community Credit Union

Colonial Veterinary Hospital

Community Foundation of Tompkins County

Community Dispute Resolution Center

Contemporary Trends, Inc.

Cornell Child Care Center

Day Care & Child Development Council of Tompkins County

Downtown Ithaca Alliance

Finger Lakes ReUse

First Baptist Church of Ithaca

First Congregational Church of Ithaca, United

Church of Christ

First Presbyterian Church

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

The Frame Shop

GreenStar Coop. Market

Home Green Home

Hospicare and Palliative Care

Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County

International Food Network, Inc

Ithaca Carshare

Ithaca Health Alliance

IthacaMed

Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services

Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency

Jewel Box

Jillian's Drawers

Loaves and Fishes

McNeil Music Of Ithaca

Mama Goose / Mimi's Attic

Michael May Construction

Morris' Men's Wear & Morris Too

Multicultural Resource Center

The New Roots Charter School

Northeast Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine

Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources (OAR)

Ongweoweh Corporation

Owl Cafe

PPM Homes, LLC

Red Feet Wine Market & Spirit Provisions

Renovus Energy Inc.

Shade Tree Auto

Significant Elements

Single Brook Technology

Snug Planet LLC

Sparks Electric

Sprague & Janowsky

St. Catherine of Sienna Church

St. John's Church

St. Luke Lutheran Church

Stone Quarry House, B&B

The Strebel Planning Group

Sunbeam Candles

Sunny Brook Builders

Sustainable Tompkins

Taitem Engineering

Taughannock Aviation Corp

Temple Beth El

Three Tier Consulting

Tompkins Community Action

Tompkins County

Tompkins County Public Library

Town of Ithaca

TRC Energy Services (Ithaca)

United Auto Workers Local 2300

Upscale Remodeling Corporation

Ward & Murphy



Pete at the March 12 Living Wage Rally

Does your job cause health problems? Exposed at work to

Toxic chemicals or pesticides? Sickening gasses?
Lifting that hurts your back? Stuff that makes it
hard to breathe? Frequent cuts or bruises?
Could you use some help knowing how to prevent
workplace hazards?

But no insurance? We may be able to help!

Free exams available once a month at Amax Clinic, 259 W. Onondaga St., Syracuse
Third Monday of every month from 1-3 p.m. starting April 16, 2012

- Hearing loss due to a noisy workplace
- Back or shoulder pain due to lifting or typing
- Asthma or breathing problems due to work-
place dust or fumes
- Arm, wrist, or hand pain due to repeating mo-
tions in factories or other workplaces
- Dizziness or headache due to chemicals
- Rashes caused by cleaning liquids

Call OHCC at 315-432-8899
or 800-432-9590

A project of the
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CLINICAL CENTERS

- Publicly funded
- Offers advice about how to deal with
threats to your health and safety at
work
- Open to ANY worker with job-related
health or safety issues



Temp workers • Day laborers • Used Clothes Sorters • "Welfare to Work" Workers • Hotel Maids • Home Health
Aides • Landscape Workers • Farm Workers • Fair or Carnival Workers • Victims of Workplace Violence

I Want to Get Involved in the Fight for Workers' Rights!

\$_____ individual Annual Membership
Due=One Hour's wage or \$7.25 if not working
During the next year, **I'LL BE THERE** at least five
times for someone else's fight, as well as my
own. Contact me with Rapid Response Alerts.

signature

Your name (please print)

Home street address

city

state

zip

phone(s)

email

Send to: TCWorkers' Center, 115 The Commons,
Ithaca NY 14850

You'll receive a laminated card in the mail or at a
meeting. Great to have you with us!

is a member of the Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC)

During the next year, **I'LL BE THERE** at least
five times for someone else's fight, as well as
my own. If enough of us are there, we'll all start
winning.

TC Workers' Center, 115 The Commons
Ithaca 607-269-0409 www.TCWorkersCenter.org

I'll be There...

...standing up for our rights as working people to
a decent standard of living

...organizing working families to take strong ac-
tion to secure better economic future for all of us

...fighting for secure family-wage jobs in the face
of corporate attacks on working people and our
communities

...supporting the right of all workers to organize
and bargain collectively in the workplace.

SAVE THE DATE

Rally!

Tuesday, May 1st, 4:45pm

@ The Tompkins County Courthouse, 320 n. Tioga Street

**At 5:30, The Tompkins County
Legislature will debate a Resolution
Declaring That the NYS Minimum Wage
Should Be a Living Wage! Join us outside to rally,
then go inside for the public comment period.
Watch our website and facebook page for details on the rally
and the other events planned for May Day.**

Questions? Try the Workers' Rights Hotline! 607 269-0409

TC Workers' Center

115 E. ML King Street
The Commons
Ithaca NY 14850
TCWorkersCenter.org

