



The Workers' Edge

Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

Contingent Labor: Focus on Higher Education and Adjunct Professors

By Rebecca F. Plante

On one hand, I like my job, which I take pride in doing well, and I look forward to every class.

On the other hand, it is dead end job (only every semester), with stagnant pay, and no pathway to predictable employment. The merits of my work are known only to my students, as no one evaluates my teaching.

"I don't know what to do, and I'm tired of giving my tenure-track colleagues teaching advice. --Ithaca College Adjunct Professor

I could quit - It's just a part time gig. This would be an easy decision if I didn't love my actual job, didn't work well with my colleagues or didn't care for my students, but none of those things are true. I'm a good teacher - my students learn and I make them work hard. I have a good thing going and my department appreciates my work.

If I quit, those things are lost, but the college gets just what it wanted: 9 years of my best efforts (the equivalent of 6 years of full time employment - compensated at a fraction of the salary and no benefits) and then me giving up and going away quietly when I feel used up. I don't know what to do, and I'm tired of giving my tenure-track colleagues teaching advice. --Ithaca College Adjunct Professor

First, the good news. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) just introduced legislation intended to extend the benefits of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program to adjunct professors. This would enable adjuncts with the student loan debt often associated with earning one, two, or more degrees to eventually have their government-backed loans forgiven.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU), with two million members across the U.S., Canada, and Puerto Rico, has created Adjunct Action, an effort to unionize contingent professors. Over 21,000 adjuncts have voted to unionize on their campuses, gaining the power of union bargaining, collective action, and access to benefits.

The New Faculty Majority, founded in 2009, has begun to raise awareness about all levels of contingent faculty. And adjuncts across the United States have used the Internet to publish accounts of their working conditions, their decisions to remain in or leave academia, and to connect.

The bad news is sobering. According to the Government Accountability Office in 2006, over one-third of the U.S. workforce is contingent – about 42.6 million people. A report for the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) suggests that, in 2011, about 1.5 million people worked as professors in the U.S. More than 768,000 of them were adjuncts. The *New York Times* reported that the percentage of full-time (tenure-eligible) U.S. college and university professors has shrunk from 75% in 1960 to about 27% in 2010. There are complex explanations for these statistics, including the fact that there are now more colleges and universities in the U.S. But data do not illuminate the lived experiences of the individuals who adjunct, particularly those for whom teaching is their sole employment and vocation – perhaps as many as 50% of all adjuncts.

Adjunct faculty hiring is based on many variables, including enrollment and budget.

On the Edge

McDonald's Rally	3
Another Step Toward Living Wage	4
What Matters at The Round Table	5
Leaflet for justice	5
Living Wage Certified Businesses	6
Become a Member	7



Contingent Labor cont.

People may be hired with little preparation time, often just before classes begin, and are usually hired on a semester-by-semester basis – e.g., with no long-term contracts or planning. Professors Gretchen Reevy and Grace Deason studied the psychological effects of this form of contingent labor; depression, anxiety, stress, dysfunctional coping mechanisms may occur (not surprisingly). The consequences of adjuncting are similar to those in other forms of contingent labor, particularly for those who want full-time employment and have lower incomes overall (according to Reevy and Deason):

- feeling dehumanized and devalued
- feeling alienated in one's professional and personal life
- feeling thoroughly and easily replaceable
- feeling unable to control the conditions of one's labor and workplace
- feeling powerless to create institutional and individual change

Adjunct professors are usually unable to simply change their workplaces to avoid these consequences – they are not able to, for example, start a new university or college or entrepreneur a better post-secondary environment in which

to labor.

Without malice, commentators on contingent labor in higher education will often suggest that unhappy adjuncts simply take their advanced degrees and skills and go elsewhere – find other jobs outside of academia, quit teaching, and so forth. This is an answer, a solution, but perhaps not the best one. A better path involves a careful and critical exploration of the ways in which, in the U.S., we have systematically eroded the foundations of labor and enhanced the alienating conditions for many kinds of laborers. Seasonal, temporary, underpaid, non-unionized, and contingent laborers across categories experience many of the same broader dynamics of the U.S. economy. It will be a long slog but seeing the common threads and mobilizing is vital to the mental, physical, and emotional health of everyone who labors, including those of us who benefit from the institutional structures that enable contingent labor.

Rebecca F. Plante is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Ithaca College, where she teaches courses on gender, culture, and sexualities. She is the author of several books and has been an invited speaker at conferences and universities across North America. Since the mid-1990s she has been doing 'public sociology' via radio, TV, print media, and now, Google Hangouts and podcasts.

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You can now sign up to receive **The Workers' Edge** via email!

In order to receive our next newsletter electronically, please email Courtney@tcworkerscenter.org. Be sure to email from the account where you wish to receive our newsletter, with the heading **"PAPERLESS"**.

We are also in the process of adding a newsletter archive to our website. Making all the back issues of The Workers' Edge available will provide both new and long-time members with a better sense of all our community has accomplished in partnership with the Workers' Center.

McDonald's Rally Leads to Discussion with Owner

It's quite simple really. Any person, whatever their occupation, should be paid fairly for their labor. They should be paid a living wage. For this reason, I have been a supporter of the Living Wage campaign here in Ithaca.

This past May, the Tompkins County Workers' Center, and the Labor-Religion Coalition of the Finger Lakes held a rally outside of the McDonald's on Route 13 in Ithaca in support of the workers there. As part of this 'action', I had the opportunity of running into the owners of this McDonald's and ended up having a productive conversation. Much to my surprise, we seemed to be on the same page when it came to paying workers a wage upon which they can live on. Given that our rally was happening outside of their establishment, they were apprehensive and defensive at first. However,

once the talk was framed around the well being of the workers, we began to have a meaningful discussion on the topic. The conversation ended with them agreeing to sit down at the table with the Workers' Center and Labor-Religion Coalition staff and discuss ways McDonald's workers can be paid a living wage. It is my hope that this happens, and these owners soon find themselves as one of the living wage employers certified by the Workers' Center.

It's my belief that it will take all of us – workers, activists, reasonable business owners, and elected officials alike – to truly establish a standardized living wage across this country. I would even like to see a living wage implemented that is indexed to the rate of inflation so that we are not fighting this same battle years from now. The adoption of such would be

By Christopher Banks



a huge victory for workers and our economy. I'm on board for the long run and encourage you to be as well. Please remember that this issue transcends party politics and reaches to the core of our ideals as people: justice, liberty, and goodwill. Be sure to join the Workers' Center for any of their Living Wage events coming this fall. Your support is definitely welcome.

Banks just received his Masters Degree in Industrial and Labor Relations with a Concentration in Collective Representation at Cornell University. He is now working at the US Department of Labor in Washington, DC. To see a two minute video of Chris' work, go to <http://bit.ly/ChrisBanks>.



Photo by Pete Blanchard

Another Step Toward a Living Wage for All

by Laurie Konwinski

The idea is simple: Every worker doing work for the Tompkins County government ought to receive a Living Wage. This includes not only County employees but also people whose employers have been contracted by the County. Those workers are also performing work the County

deems necessary, like caring for children in day care and running the Recycling Center. Workers' Center members spearheaded the effort to get the County government to consider this simple idea of ensuring a Living Wage for *all these workers*.

The result is a bit more complicated, given the realities of politics and government funding. Unlike Suffolk and Nassau Counties on Long Island, we haven't yet passed a Living Wage ordinance for contracted workers here in Tompkins County. However, thanks in part to the hard work of County Administrator Joe Mareane, advocates convinced our County Board to take a step in that direction. In the 2014 County budget, the legislators included \$100,000 in a contingency fund which can be used to increase County contracts in order to bring wage levels up to Living Wage.

In general, the County contracts in which workers aren't getting a Living Wage are with local not-for-profit agencies. This isn't sur-

prising. Those being served by these agencies—babies and little kids, people with disabilities, low income folks, the frail elderly—don't have much clout in our economic system. If we don't care enough about them, why should we bother to pay a decent wage to those who care for

"We're really happy to get up to this level, and we intend to keep up with it." - Stephen Griffin, FoodNet

them? This sad reality is reflected in government budgetary priorities at the federal level, and that gets carried through to the monies passed

through the State and on to the County.

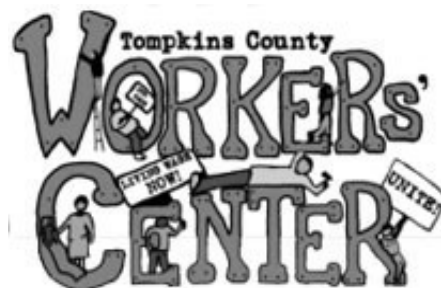
However there is some good news. This spring, the County legislature agreed to channel \$16,500 of that contingency fund to increase the contract with FoodNet, the local charity that administers Meals on Wheels in our County. FoodNet, which is serving meals to 400 people *per day on average, had paid a Living Wage in years past but wasn't able to continue due to federal budget cuts. The increase in County funding brought 17 FoodNet workers up to \$12.62/hour, which translated into nearly a 50-cent raise per hour.*

FoodNet executive director Stephen Griffin said of the increase, "We're really happy to get up to this level, and we intend to keep up with it." He noted that his board and he have worked hard to make the organization financially sustainable and to create full-time jobs with good benefits,

which he sees as crucially important to the organization and to the people FoodNet serves. He recognizes the wisdom of providing decent wages to reduce staff turnover and to make for a happier workplace.

Kiehara Hunter, a driver and food preparer at FoodNet, agrees that her agency is a great place to work staffed by friendly people. As a mother of two young children, she is grateful for the recent increase that brought her wage up to \$12.62/hour. "We are helping the needy so it was a very good experience to see that FoodNet is giving us a raise." FoodNet has recently applied to be certified as a Living Wage employer. Let's keep up the struggle until all our human services agencies merit this certification and all the staffers like Kiehara who are caring for vulnerable people in our community get paid at least a Living Wage.

-Laurie Konwinski serves as co-chair of the Labor Religion Coalition of the Finger Lakes and is employed by Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga, a not-for-profit agency that receives County funding AND has been a Living Wage employer for many years.



What Matters at the Round Table: Working for a Living Wage in Tompkins County



Stanley McPherson, right, and Milton Webb, left

Two workers, Milton Webb and Stanley McPherson, from the Tompkins County Solid Waste Facility, who have helped to spearhead efforts, along with the Tompkins County Workers' Center, to ensure that all Tompkins County 'contracted workers' are paid a Living Wage, host a weekly TV Show on Time Warner Cable.

Tuesdays at 7:30pm and Wednesdays at 9pm on Community Access TV Channel 13 (w/TWC provided Digital Adapter) & Channel 97-3 (new TVs)

Leaflet for Justice

Inside this newsletter, you will find an 8 1/2 by 11 piece of paper that is quarter-folded. The Tompkins County Workers' Center is asking all of its Member Supporters to consider taking these to all service and retail establishments you shop at and discreetly hand them to workers (for instance, in a restaurant, you could leave it with your tip). **FEEL FREE TO MAKE COPIES FOR YOURSELF WHEN YOU FREQUENT RETAIL AND SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS!** In a store, you could leave in various places where workers could find it. This is part of our larger drive to make sure that all of our workers are aware of their rights in the workplace.

Give this flyer out wherever you go!

Get Certified!

What is a living wage in Tompkins County?

Currently, as of May 3, 2013, in Tompkins County the living wage is \$12.62/hr (with health insurance. Without is \$13.94). This number will be updated in May of 2015 by Alternatives Federal Credit Union (to see details, go to <http://alternatives.org/livable.html>)

Are you a Certified Living Wage Employer?

By providing every employee a living wage, you show your integrity and leadership in the community. You create a positive image in the minds of current and potential customers. You strengthen relationships between staff members and management, and you raise employee morale and productivity and encourage employee loyalty.

Check out the next page for a current list of Living Wage Employers.



Support our 85 Certified Living Wage Businesses!

**Together these businesses employ over 2900 workers.
Thank you, local businesses, for taking a stand!**

Advocacy Center	First Baptist Church of Ithaca	One World Market
Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County, Inc.	First Congregational Church of Ithaca, United Church of Christ	Ongweoweh Corporation (Pallet Mgmt)
Alternatives Federal Credit Union	First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca	PPM Homes, LLC
Ancient Wisdom Productions (Web Designer)	First Unitarian Society of Ithaca	Quintiles Biosciences Inc. LLC
ASI Renovations	Foodnet Meals on Wheels	Red Feet Wine Market and Spirit Provisions
Autumn Leaves Used Books	Friendship Donations Network, Inc.	Renovus Energy, Inc.
Avalon Homes	Home Green Home	Segal and Sorensen
Black Box Computer Consulting	Hospicare and Palliative Care	Shade Tree Auto, Inc.
Blue Spruce Painting and Decorating	Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County	Shaw & Murphy Law Firm
Boyce Thompson Institute	International Food Network, Inc.	Silk Oak/Ithacemade
Brightworks Computer Consulting	Ithaca Carshare	Singlebrook Technology, Inc.
Buffalo Street Books	Ithaca Cayuga Optical Service	Snug Planet LLC (Home Performance Contractor)
Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga	Ithaca Health Alliance	Sparks Electric
CFCU Community Credit Union	Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services	Sprague & Janowsky (Accountancy)
Child Development Council	Ithaca Oral Surgery and Implants	St. Catherine of Siena Church
City of Ithaca	Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency	St. Luke Lutheran Church
Colonial Veterinary Hospital	IthacaMed	Stone Quarry House (Bed and Breakfast)
Community Dispute Resolution Center	Ithaca Teachers Association	Sunbeam Candles
Community Foundation of Tompkins County	Jewel Box	Sunny Brook Builders
Community Nursery School	Jillian's Drawers	Sustainable Tompkins
Community Science Institute	Julia E. Dean Pottery	Taitem Engineering
Contemporary Trends, Inc.	Loaves and Fishes	Temple Beth El
Cornell Child Care Center	Mama Goose/Mimi's Attic	The Frame Shop
Crown Construction, Inc.	Miller Mayer Law Firm	The Strebel Planning Group
Downtown Ithaca Alliance	New Roots Charter School	Tompkins County
Family and Children's Service of Ithaca	Northeast Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine	Town of Danby
Finger Lakes Naturals	Nutritional Wellness Center	Town of Ithaca
Finger Lakes ReUse	OAR – Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources	TRC Energy Services (Ithaca)
		United Auto Workers Local 2300
		Upscale Remodeling Corporation

To find out how your business or employer can become Living Wage-Certified, please go to find the application and criteria:
<http://www.tcworkerscenter.org/campaigns/living-wage-certification/>

Are You a Member of the Tompkins County Workers' Center?

I want to Get Involved in the Fight for Workers Rights!

\$ _____ Individual Annual Membership
Due= One Hour's Wage or \$8 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 for Rapid Response Alerts.

Signature

Name (Please Print):

Home Address

City/State/ZIP

Phone

Email

Mail to: TC Workers Center

115 The Commons/ E MLK St. Ithaca, NY 14850

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

**Is a member of the
Tompkins County Workers' Center**

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

I'LL BE THERE...

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

...organizing working families to take strong action 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 communities

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



Has your job made you sick? Occupational Health Clinical Center Can Help!

- **Are your symptoms work-related?**
- **Have you been exposed to substances on the job that might make a person sick?**
- **Have you recently left a job (through retirement, lay-off, termination, etc.) that caused your symptoms?**

**Call to find out how we can help you....
Occupational Clinical Health Centers are staffed by a team of health professionals actively working to support worker health and safety in 26 counties in New York. Occupational illnesses and diseases are highly preventable, and we can help.**

As a medical practice, we focus on Medical Services including medical and occupational history; physical exam and diagnostic testing, referral and social work services.

Prevention of Occupational Illness and Disease, including screening and monitoring; education and workplace safety assessment; data collection; public policy advocacy; worker/patient empowerment, including risk mapping, workers' rights to health and safety at the workplace; navigating the Workers' Compensation system, support groups and popular education related to the impact of worker health on public health.

**Convenient locations in Binghamton, Syracuse and Canton
Call OHCC at 315-432-8899 or toll-free at 1-800-432-9590**

SAVE THE DATE — Labor Day Picnic
Monday, September 1st 2014
11am-3pm @ Stewart Park

Large Pavilion

Music by Richie Sterns and Friends

Bring a dish to pass

**Free burgers (meat and veggie!)
and hot dogs**

Free Ice Cream!

The Mother Jones and Joe Hill Awards

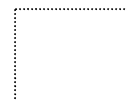
Goat of Labor Award

Everyone Welcome!

More info at tcworkerscenter.org or on Facebook



TC Workers' Center
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TCWorkersCenter.org



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