

Council delays decision to support living wage

BY NICOLE BRUNDA

Student Council voted to delay making a decision to lend support to the living wage campaign at Monday's meeting. Concerns expressed by some council members are likely to continue throughout the debate on the viability of pushing for a living wage for college staff.

The Swarthmore Living Wage and Democracy Committee, the student and staff group behind the campaign, presented the accumulation of five months of research and study on the status of Swarthmore's approximately 300 hourly employees.

After the presentation, about 25 members of the committee who had gathered in Parrish Parlors for the council's meeting requested Student Council support of the proposal, which many committee members termed "broad and philosophical." The Committee hoped to bring Student Council support to their first meeting with senior staff, which was held Tuesday morning.

After deliberating whether the present form of the proposal was too detailed for council support, a divided Student Council voted to table the issue six to four, effectively eliminating their support from the meeting that members of the Living Wage and Democracy Campaign had Tuesday morning with senior staff.

Mariah Montgomery '04, one of the campaign's leaders, said that support from the council would have been nice but probably wouldn't have made a huge difference in Tuesday's preliminary meeting. Montgomery said, "I'm happy that individual members on the council supported the campaign because they are students and represent the people who we are trying to reach. Though I would have liked Student Council to offer support for our proposal, we'll be back next week and hopefully we'll have filled in some of the gaps some members found."

All members of the council voiced philosophical support of the document but questioned whether specifics in the proposal, such as a reference to a dental plan, were too specific to allow Student Council's stamp of approval.

Jordan Brackett '01, Student Council college planning committee representative, said, "I don't want to say poor people shouldn't get money, but I don't think I can support the entire definition of a living wage presented [in the present proposal]."

Student Council members who voted to put council support on hold voiced a variety of concerns about lending council support to the living wage campaign's proposal.

Among the top arguments from those who voted not to endorse the proposal were



Michael Pasahow Phoenix Staff

Sam Blair and Mariah Montgomery, members of the Swarthmore Living Wage and Democracy Committee, answer questions posed by Student Council at Monday's meeting. The council voted to delay lending their support to the group's petition.

that the proposal would require funds from unspecified sources, which might endanger Student Council's current relationship with the College Budget Committee. Another complaint was the lack of clarity regarding whether the living wage campaign had the support of the full student body, which the Student Council is meant to represent in its entirety.

Liane Rice '03, Student Council appointments chair and one of the Student Council members who voted against tabling the issue, disagreed, stating that it wasn't the job of the council to figure out where the money would come from. Instead, she said, it was their responsibility to lend their support to various student groups.

Some members of the council offered evidence that not all staff supported the living wage campaign.

Marvin Barron '02, Student Budget Committee treasurer, summarized a conversation with his hall's housekeeper, alluding to a sign she had posted on the wall, which he said read, "I don't support the living wage campaign. Ask me why."

In the ensuing conversation, Barron said the woman told him she felt the job security many staff employees enjoy would be threatened by the layoffs that might result from increased wages. In addition, Barron referred to the present seniority wage structure, which benefits those employees who have been at the college for a number of years. Barron said he feared this might be lost if a higher living wage were implemented.

Members of the committee in the audience addressed both issues, stating that any agreement reached between the college and staff would explicitly prevent the college from lay-

ing off workers or hiring temporary employees to pay for the increased wages.

In addition, a committee member offered a plan that would bring the hourly wage at Swarthmore to a fixed minimum while still offering seniority benefits, albeit on a smaller scale.

Though receptive to committee's ideas, the Council decided that they did not want to sign the proposal without at least partial support and tabled the issue until they could gather more information and student opinions.

Montgomery said she hoped students would show support for the living wage campaign by "talking about the issue, signing the petition, and, if at all possible, attending the Student Council next week," when the committee will present a revised proposal to them.