

Organizing Helps Salary Increases

By Chris Bauman
Ink Contributor

The UNC Housekeepers' Association won a significant victory this month when the state government approved of the minimum state salary increase of \$14,549 for all state workers. Housekeepers and students have been organizing since the Summer of 1991 to raise the minimum salary for all state workers.

This fight for higher wages began three years ago at UNC when two Housekeepers Marsha Tinnen and Annie Pettiford decided they weren't going to be quiet about the injustices against the lowest paid state workers. Since then the Housekeepers'

Association has grown.

In January of 1992, 91 UNC housekeepers filed a Class Action Racial Discrimination Grievance against the University, citing the poverty wages, unfair work conditions and a lack of training programs. Close to 90 percent of the housekeepers are African American and around 70 percent are women.

Since then, the Housekeepers' Association and students have met with UNC Administrators, the Office of State Personnel, UNC lobbyists and members of the legislature. Students have rallied, spoken out, marched and organized community support from organizations all across North Carolina. The North Carolina Public Service Workers

Organization and the Workers Want Fairness campaign have both played a big role in this victory for all state workers.

The housekeepers and students were marching as recently as November 1993. Two days after a Wake County Superior Court Judge, Henry Hight, dismissed their grievance, 200-plus housekeepers and students marched in protest.

Arthur Kinoy, who once served as an attorney for Martin Luther King Jr., from the Center for Constitutional Rights, spoke at the march urging the housekeepers to press on with their fight for justice.

This work is finally paying off because the minimum salary for housekeepers and other state

workers has increased from \$11,800 to \$14,549 in the last six months.

Tinnen said the raise is a moral victory for the group, but added that they would continue to get the minimum salary to \$16,000.

"Well, it's better than nothing," Tinnen said after the Feb. 23rd announcement. "I think the pressure from the movement really made an outstanding impact in 1993."

Even Chancellor Hardin had to recognize the efforts of the housekeepers when he announced the salary increase to the public. And since the announcement, he has tried to take credit for the pay raise.

UNC spent \$3,000 to produce an eight-page insert that appeared

in every *Daily Tar Heel* and the University employee newspaper. They talked about all the work they did to win the pay raise and the report failed to mention the efforts of the UNC Housekeepers' Association and the issue of racism that 91 workers raised.

Students who want to join the struggle for justice are encouraged to attend the meetings at 5:30 p.m. every Wednesday in the basement of the Campus Y.

Currently, students are organizing educational forums about the problems of the working poor and the housekeepers. We are also conducting a survey for the UNC Housekeepers' Association and doing other research.

Regardless of Color, Life in Chapel Hill is Complex

By John Hinton
Ink Contributor

Every year, February is a month for celebrating the contributions that African Americans have made in the United States.

People at UNC and surrounding local citizenry, however, will be wrestling with touchy racial issues that persist like a bad cold.

Chapel Hill, once known for its liberal tradition of racial tolerance, is quickly getting a reputation for intolerance toward people who lack membership in the white race.

The evidence of this growing intolerance can be found in the controversy surrounding the Black Cultural Center, allegations of racism by the UNC housekeepers, the voluntary and involuntary segregation throughout the UNC campus, and the effort to remove LaVonda Burnette from the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Board of Education. People like Jesse Helms must be enjoying the racial strife that has engulfed the city known as "a pat of butter in the sea of grits."

It is amazing that people in

Chapel Hill can be so diametrically opposed on racial matters while at the same time cheer for the Tar Heel sports teams where both African-American and white players compete together.

What is troubling about the racial atmosphere in Chapel Hill is that both African Americans and whites seem to be willing to live with the status quo.

African-American students constantly complain about injustices they have suffered on and off campus by white folks, but they choose to live with the insults instead of finding ways to address the problems.

Most African-American employees who complain about their working conditions and low wages, are also willing to live with these inequalities. They fear that, if they complain too loudly, they will lose their jobs.

Some whites are sympathetic and supportive of African Americans and their grievances, but many feel that their complaints are groundless and insignificant. They believe that the government addressed their concerns in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, and

they should stop shouting racism and pull themselves "up by their bootstraps" and achieve the American dream on their own merits.

Ideally, African Americans should strive to achieve economic parity with whites. In reality, that goal is harder to reach than landing people on Mars.

Whites, especially white men, control everything in Chapel Hill as they do throughout North Carolina and the United States. They own most of the businesses, especially banks; hold most of the elected offices; and serve as most of the campus administrators and faculty members. To put it simply, they control the economic livelihood of African Americans locally as they do nationally.

The majority of them treat African Americans and other minorities fairly and according to the federal, state and local laws. But if their treatment is so fair, then why are so many African-American citizens complaining? Do they see these continuing injustices as a prelude to a return of the Jim Crow era in America?

Bernice Powell Jackson, the executive director of the

Commission for Racial Equality of the United Church of Justice in Cleveland, described the historical plight of African Americans eloquently in her column printed in the News and Observer in January during the weekend of the Martin Luther King Jr., holiday celebration.

"Those of us over 30 are intensely aware of the changes we have seen in our lifetime," she wrote. "We know first-hand what the segregated world was like. We remember what it felt like not to be able to stop at a restaurant or a restroom on a long automobile trip. We know what it meant not to be able to get any job we wanted, despite our education or background. We remember when there was no Congressional Black Caucus, when no cities had African-American mayors, indeed when many African Americans were denied the right even to vote."

Most people believe that segregation and discrimination will never again be sanctioned in America by law or custom. Indeed, African Americans have made tremendous gains in the past 30 years. For example, at UNC, there are nearly 2,000 black

students enrolled and almost 50 percent of the faculty members are African American.

City, county and state government agencies as well as private business employ African Americans in significant numbers throughout Chapel Hill, Carrboro and Orange County.

Despite segregated housing patterns at UNC, white and African-American students do socialize with each other in their normal activities. They engage in friendships and dating relationships even though there is constant pressure for both races to remain apart. Life in Chapel Hill is indeed complex for everyone regardless of their skin color.

Hinton is a second-year graduate student in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication from Raleigh.