

# Economic Genocide? What's that!

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During the November 29th Student for Staff open meeting at McMillan Hall the union president used the expression "*economic genocide*". Subsequently, he was ridiculed about his choice of words. What did the president mean? Is economic genocide a possibility? It's obvious what economic means but what the heck is genocide? The definition of genocide in the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary uses the terminology of "*an act of deliberate and systematic destruction*". When the president made his statement he was referring to employees wages and the limitations placed on them.

Since the early 1990's constrictions have been continually put into practice in order to affect employees salaries. This article will review different aspects of our wages and the controls placed on them so you'll have a clearer understanding about the president's intentions when he acknowledged "*economic genocide*".

**Broadbanding:** Let's start with the type of salary scale presently used; BROADBANDING! In 1997 a salary scale known as broadbanding was implemented for the AFSCME and SATTS employees. A Broadband scale can be equitable to both the employer and employees but it can also be abused and include hidden impediments to restrain salaries. One of the fundamental ideas of broadbanding is to clump different jobs together in order to pay the same rate of pay for each job. Our clumps are bands and zones (E1, E2, F1, F2, G1, G2). In reality, the different positions within the same band and zone have distinctive responsibilities and duties that could justify dissimilar rates of pay. One technique that can be used to impede wages with broadbanding is to "weight" down salaries, "weighting" down meaning to hold down wages. Weighting down salaries can be accomplished by placing jobs that are commonly paid a lower rate of pay within the same band and zone as other higher paying jobs, therefore holding down the salaries of the higher paying jobs. The broadbanding scale utilized at MU combines the AFSCME bargaining unit positions with SATSS employee's jobs. An example of weighing down could be; an Administrative Assistant (SATSS) and a Master Trades Specialist (AFSCME) are both G2's. Should these two jobs be in the same pay band and receive the same rate of pay? Another example is; a Program Assistant (SATSS) and a Building and Grounds Coordinator (AFSCME) are F1's. Once again should an assistant earn as much as a coordinator? Wages can be stagnated when jobs are combined in this manner. It's possible the SATSS and AFSCME Jobs were combined in order to "weight" down and retard wages. At this point the big question is "*are the SATSS wages holding down the AFSCME salaries or is it the opposite and should they be separated into their own broadbanding scales?*"

Since the broadbanding system has been created and practiced throughout the last 9 years another hidden impediment is surfacing and becoming more apparent, "wage compression", the size of the gap between your wage and the starting rate for your band and zone. Several issues surround wage compression and it has an effect on newer employees as well as long term workers. Due to the manner in which the broadbanding system has been systematized it's becoming obvious that newer employees will never earn much more than the starting wage of their band and zone. The pattern seems to be that every two or three years the starting rates increase. If the new starting rate is more than your wage then your salary increases to the new starting rate, this affects the newer employees. If the new starting rate is below your wage you fall into the merit/equity raise category, this affects the longevity employees. The merit/equity raises have never been satisfactory due to the fact they are less than the amount of the starting wage increase. Therefore the gap between the wage of a long term employee and the new starting rate decreases. The main purpose for increasing starting wages is to recruit future workers. These are people who don't have an established work record with the university; they may or may not be a good employee! If the university believes future employees are worth raising the starting pay for then it only makes sense that we (the current workers) are worth at least the same amount because we have proven ourselves through good evals, good attendance, dedication, etc. The union's leadership believes that established employees are worth at least the same if not more than the amount the starting wage increased for your band/zone. Because of wage compression we get the feeling our employer values future employees more than the established ones. It's hard for us to believe that these impediments were an unforeseen error when the broadbanding system was being developed.

To view MU's broadbanding pay scale go online to MU's Human Resources web site [www.units.muohio.edu/prs/Personnel/](http://www.units.muohio.edu/prs/Personnel/).

For more about broadbanding go online to AFSCME's web site [www.afscme.org/wrkplace/cbr2971](http://www.afscme.org/wrkplace/cbr2971).

**Starting wages:** Now let's address the more obvious; starting wages! It's no secret that MU's starting wages are well below the market. In 1997 a prestigious consulting firm hired by MU advised that their starting, mid point, and maximum wages are 18% to 19% below market value (mercer report online at students for staff web site). During the 2003 contract negotiations a fact finder appointed by the state of Ohio recommended starting wages for the 2005 calendar year that are still 18% to 26% higher than the present ones (fact finders report online at students for staff web site). There's only one explanation for this, the university has not competed with inflation! In 1987 my starting wage as a building service worker was \$6.17 an hour. According to the United States Department of Labor inflation calculator ([www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov)) that same rate of pay would equal \$10.61 today (current starting rate for a Building Service Worker - \$8.80hr.). In 2003 the fact finder recommended a starting wage for the year 2005 of \$10.54 for Building Service Workers. It looks to me like the fact finder knew something. The starting wages are still unreasonably too low and we don't believe that's been an innocent oversight.

**Step raises out, job enrichment in:** During the early 1990's, which are the decertification years when MU wouldn't negotiate a contract with the union, the university alone decided to discontinue a step raise system in favor of a merit oriented job enrichment compensation plan. The old step raise system guaranteed employees a decent salary by reaching a top out wage within 5 to 8 years (depending on your job) just for being employed. On the other hand the job enrichment program put into service has built in features that place limits on the advancement of employees wages. To be eligible for some job enrichment programs you may be required to meet qualifications such as: no reprimands, a recommendation from your supervisor, being employed for a minimum amount of time, and excellent evaluations. Mandates like these control and limit who and how many employees will be accepted into the programs. If job enrichment participation can be limited then wage increases can be controlled. Furthermore, some employees don't have the academic ability to complete job enrichment and other employees just aren't interested. The final result is, only some employees benefit from a merit job enrichment based compensation plan when all employees benefited from the step raise system. We're led to believe that Job enrichment was developed to help increase wages but it is suspect its existence is to decelerate employee's wages and hold back the bargaining unit payroll growth as a whole. We don't believe this has been a harmless misjudgment by the university.

**Longevity pay:** Here's a good one! The current longevity pay is a prime example of a masquerade party. The manner in which the present day longevity pay is issued gives a false impression. Again the university by itself decided to change the longevity pay during the years they wouldn't negotiate a contract with the union. Employees wages are impeded two ways by the current longevity pay compared to the old longevity pay. First, the old longevity pay was issued after you topped out on your pay scale. Remember, that under the old step raise system employees topped out in 5 to 8 years of service. Now the longevity pay is issued after 10 years of service. That means employee's automatically lose 2 to 5 years of longevity pay! Second, the old longevity pay was added to our base salary but now it's allotted as a bonus every year. Most people don't understand the difference between "adding it to your base pay" versus a "bonus every year" so I'll explain it. When longevity pay is added to your base salary it compounds from the previous year(s), but, when the longevity pay is a bonus it does not add up or compound from the year(s) before. The old longevity pay increased your base salary and helped build your retirement. Now it doesn't increase your base pay and it does very little if anything to help your retirement. I urge everybody who has received longevity pay within the last fifteen years go to the human resources office and pull your file. Take the percentage the longevity bonus represents per year, add that percentage to your base salary for that year, repeat these steps for every year then total it. You might be surprised at how much more an hour you'd be making today if the longevity pay had been added to your base salary. I did it, and found out I'd be making .95 cents more on the hour (8% over 9 years). Furthermore, if I got the five years of longevity pay I was denied of I'd be earning around \$1.20 more on the hour. Receiving this money would have put my salary a little bit closer to what I feel it should be. Then my feelings concerning substandard pay would be deflated and I wouldn't be writing letters like this! The university changed the rules governing the longevity pay during a period of time when they wouldn't negotiate a bargaining agreement. Now it's up to us, the workers, to reverse it. We don't believe this has been an innocent mistake on their part.

**Probation:** No raise after successfully completing a probation period is just another subtle way that wages are impeded. Workers deserve a pay raise after completing a probation period whether it's an initial or a promotional probationary period. Probationary raises could be used to help ease the pain of wage compression. We don't believe this has been a naive error on their part.

Have mechanisms been deliberately and systematically put into place in order to control wages? Is it a possibility or is it a probability economic genocide has been utilized? We understand it's the employers interest to put limitations on salaries, but at what cost? At the cost of full time employees who even participate in job enrichment surviving on food stamps? Or, retirees returning to work because they can't live on their pension? Or even employees not earning much more than a starting wage during their career? The broadbanding pay scale should be scraped in favor of a system that is more honest and equitable. Maybe the SATSS and AFSCME jobs should be separated into their own broadbanding scales. That way they couldn't weight down each others salaries. We feel the starting wages are still below the market, a step raise system could work along side job enrichment, the proper way to distribute longevity pay is to add it to our base salary, and workers absolutely deserve a raise after completing a probationary period.

If it appears our wages have been assaulted from every angle then maybe they have. If so consider this, did it occur by accident? Or was it pre-designed, premeditated and pre-calculated; in other words deliberately and systematically. **The good news is we have the ability and opportunity to change these wage disparities because they are negotiable items. That's why it's so important that every worker in our bargaining unit should join and support the union.** My hope is we can look to the future and start fixing it before it's too late. If we can't, more of what you just read is already waiting for us. We make this university work and we deserve better. Economic Genocide? Yea, I agree with the President!

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