



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Harvard University Dining Services workers strike and win higher salary, 2016

- Student Living Wage Movement (late 1990s - mid 2000s)

5 October

2016

to: 26 October

2016

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: Cambridge, Massachusetts

Location Description: Harvard University

Goals:

Workers demanded \$35,000 yearly salary for full time employees. They also objected to proposed changes in the health care policy that would require more out of pocket payments.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches › HUDS strikers and various student organizers gave speeches at public rallies and demonstrations
- 016. Picketing › HUDS workers strike and picket around campus
- 038. Marches
- 097. Protest strike › HUDS workers strike and refuse to work

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches › HUDS strikers and various student organizers gave speeches at public rallies and demonstrations
- 016. Picketing › HUDS workers strike and picket around campus
- 038. Marches
- 097. Protest strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches › HUDS strikers and various student organizers gave speeches at public rallies and demonstrations
- 016. Picketing

- 038. Marches
- 051. Walk-outs
- 097. Protest strike
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches › HUDS strikers and various student organizers gave speeches at public rallies and demonstrations
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 051. Walk-outs
- 097. Protest strike
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 051. Walk-outs
- 097. Protest strike
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 051. Walk-outs
- 097. Protest strike

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- dining services workers
- labor union

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Harvard University Dining Services workers, UNITE HERE Local 26 Union

Partners:

Harvard's Student Labor Action Movement (SLAM), Harvard University students

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Harvard University Dining Services workers
- Harvard University Students
- SLAM
- UNITE HERE Local 26 Union

Groups in 2nd Segment:**Groups in 3rd Segment:****Groups in 4th Segment:****Groups in 5th Segment:****Groups in 6th Segment:**

Segment Length: 3.33 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Harvard Corporation

Campaigner violence:

No campaigner violence.

Repressive Violence:

No repressive violence.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

In 2016, Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts was one of the most elite universities in the United States. It had the largest endowment of any university in the country at \$35.7 billion. However, despite the wealth of the university, its treatment of its employees, specifically dining services employees, came into question in 2016. Starting in early June 2016, the dining services workers of Harvard began a series of negotiations with the university in order to demand a higher yearly salary.

The workers had made \$22 an hour, higher than their counterparts at other universities, on average. However, Harvard dining services typically did not pay its workers during the summer and winter breaks, so the average salary was around \$31,000 each year. The workers demanded a \$35,000 yearly salary, which they said would provide a living salary. They focused on a yearly salary rather than hourly wage because of inconsistency in work hours over the year. The workers also objected to proposed

changes in the health care policy that would require more out of pocket payments.

Negotiations eventually reached a stalemate in the fall of 2016. In response, UNITE HERE Local 26, the labor union that represented the Harvard University Dining Services workers (HUDS), and HUDS began planning a strike to pressure the administration.

On 5 October, roughly 600 HUDS workers began their historic strike. This was the first time workers had walked off the job. The strike began at 6 a.m., with workers walking out. Picket lines branched out throughout campus and converged on the Science Center Plaza and Harvard Yard, where workers rallied afterward. At the rally, UNITE HERE Local 26 called on Harvard's administration to end their "greed" and accept the union's demands. With workers largely absent, many dining halls closed and a meager workforce of less than 100 managers, temporary workers and volunteers sustained the rest.

The strike and picket lines continued as the stalemate in negotiations persisted. Harvard and the union met the day after the strike began, Thursday 6 October, but reached no agreement. The union stated that the strike would prevail until the University met their demands. The second day of the strike involved huge amounts of local and student support, both of which continued for the strike's 22-day duration. Each day, picket lines sprung up early in the morning, sometimes as early as 5:30 a.m. They carried on throughout the rest of the day, often peaking around meal times, when picketers and supporters marched around dining halls. Supporters and picketers held rallies throughout the day, with speakers, testimonies, and even performances from student groups. The union and the University met again on the third day of the strike, Friday 7 October, joined this time by mediators, two professors of economics.

The situation remained relatively the same for several days, with picket lines beginning every day in the morning and picketing, rallying, and marching throughout the day. Students continued to show their support for the strikers, often bringing food from the dining halls to the picket lines. Negotiations between the two parties also continued to no avail. The union and the workers decided they needed to take more aggressive action.

On 13 October, the union sought the attention of the 12 fellows (trustees) that sit on Harvard's governing board. UNITE HERE Local 26 representatives went to their offices. None of the fellows commented on the strike or any progress in negotiations. On 14 October, the 10th day of the strike, strikers staged a sit-in on the streets of Harvard Square. Before the sit-in, the workers rallied for health care for women. The sit-in lasted around 15 minutes, near a relatively busy traffic intersection. At the sit-in, nine workers, all of whom were women, and two organizers from the union were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct.

Student support reached a turning point on 17 October, with a mass organized walk out of classes, coordinated by the college's SLAM (Student Labor Action Movement). Hundreds of university students walked out of their classes at 12:30 p.m. to hold a rally. At the rally, various groups from the Divinity Schools and HUDS workers spoke, criticizing Harvard's treatment of employees..

Strikers continued to seek local support and reach a larger audience. On 19 October, they picketed and rallied around Boston City Hall and across the street from the Harvard Management Company. Also on this day, the Boston City Council voted unanimously to support the strike, a victory for HUDS workers and the union.

Momentum from the strikers and supporters culminated on 22 October, with a massive #SupportTheStrike rally and march organized by UNITE HERE Local 26. In the biggest action yet, around 1,000 people marched together in support of the HUDS strike. They marched to Cambridge City Hall and organized the largest action yet, a rally where speakers included UNITE HERE Local 26 president and the women arrested from the sit-in. At this point, Harvard administrators, such as Dean for Administration and Finance Sheila C. Thimba issued statements about "hopeful signs of progress", though the negotiations continued to be tense, and the union and university had not yet reached an agreement.

Once again, student support reached a new high on 24 October. Students staged the second walkout in support of the strike. Around 500 students walked out of class, and over 100 students and supporters sat in the lobby of 124 Mt. Auburn St, where negotiations between the two parties took place. They stayed until around 10:30 p.m, when Aaron J. Duckett, a HUDS worker

who attended Monday's negotiations announced to the lobby that the bargaining "made a lot of headway" that evening. Also on this day, one HUDS worker, Rosa Ines Rivera, published an op-ed in the New York Times entitled "Struggling to Serve at the Nation's Richest University," bringing the strikers' demands to a national audience. The strike also received national coverage from sources such as the Washington Post, New York Times, and Washington Post.

After weeks of fervent activism and a 12 hour bargaining session, on 25 October, the two parties reached a tentative agreement. On 26 October, the union voted on the proposed new contract. Union workers voted 573-1 to approve the five year contract. The new contract stipulated that Harvard would pay its full-time dining services employees at least \$35,000 a year and cover increased copayments for health insurance. Brian Lang, president of UNITE HERE Local 26, said that they "achieved every goal, without exception" at the close of negotiations. The approval of the new contract marked the end of the historic 22-day strike.

Research Notes

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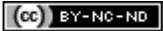
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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

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