

# Purdue University students campaign against sweatshops, 2000

- [Student Anti-Sweatshop Labor Movement \(1990s - 2010s\)](#) [1]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) student participants](#) [2]

- [Student Anti-Sweatshop Labor Movement \(1990s - 2010s\)](#)

## Timing

March 27,  
2000

to:

April 7,  
2000

## Location and Goals

Country:

United States

Location City/State/Province:

West Lafayette, Indiana

Location Description:

Purdue University Campus

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

To convince Purdue University administrators to agree to join the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC)

## Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 016. Picketing>Camped out in tents on Memorial Hall
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)>Hunger Strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 016. Picketing>Camped out in tents on Memorial Hall
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)>Hunger Strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 016. Picketing>Camped out in tents on Memorial Hall

- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects›Students attempted to deliver red tape with which they tied themselves to a building to the University President.
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)›Hunger Strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 016. Picketing›Camped out in tents on Memorial Hall
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)›Hunger Strike
- 178. Guerrilla theatre›Students depicted a visual representation of sweatshop labor

Methods in 5th segment:

- 016. Picketing›Camped out in tents on Memorial Hall
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)›Hunger Strike

Methods in 6th segment:

- 013. Deputations›Strikers negotiate with Purdue University Administration
- 016. Picketing›Camped out in tents on Memorial Hall
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)›Hunger Strike

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 002. Letters of opposition or support

Segment Length:

Approximately 2 days

## Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Students at Purdue University

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Purdue Students Against Sweatshops

Partners:

Not Known

External allies:

Local Steelworker Unions, the Purdue Black Student Union, Purdue Off-Campus Student Coalition, Indiana University's No-Sweat, Purdue University Student Government, Students from the University of Miami-Ohio

Involvement of social elites:  
Not Known

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Indiana University's No-Sweat
- Local Steelworker Unions
- Purdue Off-Campus Student Calition
- Purdue Students Against Sweatshops
- Purdue University Student Government
- the Purdue Black Student Union

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Students from the University of Miami-Ohio

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

The only group that actively participated in the campaign was the Purdue Students Against Sweatshops, however, all of the other groups listed expressed support for their efforts.

Segment Length:

Approximately 2 days

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

Opponents:

Purdue University Administration, Purdue University Conservative Action Network

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Members of the University Conservative Action Network interviewed with the school's daily newspaper, expressing reasons they disapproved of the hunger strike and other efforts.

Campaigner violence:

None Known

Repressive Violence:

None Known

## **Success Outcome**

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Total points:

8 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign was ultimately successful, as Purdue University went on to join with the Worker Rights Consortium. The Purdue Students Against Sweatshops organization still exists under a different name (Purdue Organization for Labor Equality), showing that it not only strongly survived to the end of the campaign, but well after. The group did not grow much overall, but did more than double its initially very small size, so it was awarded a point for a small amount of growth.

In 1997, student activists formed an organization called United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS). Entirely student run, the organization strives to "win victories that set precedents in the struggle for self-determination of working people everywhere, particularly campus workers and garment workers who make collegiate licensed apparel." In an effort to pursue these goals, USAS created another organization in 2000: the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC). The WRC works world wide to monitor the working conditions of factories used to produce collegiate apparel such as hats, shirts, and sweatshirts.

Student activists at numerous campuses began to campaign for their school to join the consortium. This frequently entailed the school in question withdrawing from the Fair Labor Association (FLA), a different self-monitoring group which many of the student activists found insufficient. A number of the campuses involved in the effort, including the University of Pennsylvania, held sit-ins to pressure the school's administration to join the WRC. Some campuses, however, opted to employ different tactics.

At Purdue University, in Indiana, a group of student activists went on a hunger strike. Starting on Monday, March 27, 2000, six Purdue students moved into tents on the Memorial Mall on their campus and stopped eating. These students, the Purdue Students Against Sweatshops, announced that they would continue with the hunger strike, living in tents until Purdue President Steven Beering agreed to sign Purdue University to join with the WRC.

The students were not alone in their ideals. The hunger strike was kicked off with a rally. Local steelworker unions, the Black Student Union, Purdue Off-Campus Student Coalition, Indiana University's No-Sweat and members of the Purdue Student Government all showed up to the rally in support of the hunger strikers. Students from the University of Miami-Ohio visited Purdue's campus early in the week, to show their support for the cause. By the following Friday, the Purdue Students Against Sweatshops had more than doubled in size when thirteen anti-sweatshop activists tied themselves to a pillar using red tape.

This is not to say that the efforts of the group went without opposition. Members of Purdue's University Conservative Action Network voiced their opinions on the matter, stating their beliefs that the University was wise to take time in investigating the WRC and whether it would be a feasible means of monitoring factories. The University Conservative Action Network expressed concern that the hunger strike would pressure the school administration into a decision before it had been well thought out. Members of the group also claimed that the WRC was linked to the Communist party, which the members of the Conservative Action Network did not support. The members of the group were, however, sure to emphasize that they did not support sweatshop labor, but simply felt that taking time to research the WRC was the best thing for the University.

Other students also criticized the efforts of the Purdue Students Against Sweatshops via writing letters to the school's daily newspaper. Although there were never any counter protests against the effort of the hunger strike, there were many arguments against their case. Students of Purdue University brought up many points against the hunger strike, varying anywhere from arguing that sweatshops provide jobs to impoverished peoples, to one student who argued that workers' rights was irrelevant because it didn't deal with their eternal souls, and "if everyone is going to die anyway at some point, why bother?" However, the written responses to the hunger strike were not all negative. A number of students wrote to the paper in support of the Purdue Students Against

Sweatshops efforts, occasionally admonishing the students who wrote in opposition of the campaign.

Amid all of the controversy in the press, the hunger strike continued, and the Purdue Students Against Sweatshops held a demonstration on Monday, April 3 - one week after the hunger strike began. The demonstration was meant to be a visual representation of the reality of sweatshop labor. Fifteen student activists acted as workers, bosses, and consumers. The "bosses" whipped the "workers" with cloth, telling them to work harder. "Consumers" circled the others, chanting "Buy More!" while blindfolded, unable to see the atrocities happening right in front of them.

The University administration seemed unwilling to move on the issue, determined to wait for more information on the WRC before making a decision. However, on April 6, the Purdue Students Against Sweatshops and the University held negotiations, reaching a compromise that pleased both parties. The students agreed to end the hunger strike following the University's decision to provisionally join at least one factory-monitoring group by September 30th, 2000. The students then ate on April 7th, breaking what ultimately ended up being an eleven day fast.

Purdue University is now a permanent affiliate of the WRC, and the Purdue Students Against Sweatshops still exists under a new name: the Purdue Organization for Labor Equality (POLE).

## Research Notes

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Letters sent by readers to the Purdue Exponent:

3/30/00: <<http://archive.purdueexponent.org/2000/03/30/opinions/w.html>>

3/31/00 a: <<http://archive.purdueexponent.org/2000/03/31/opinions/par.html>>

3/31/00 b: <<http://archive.purdueexponent.org/2000/03/31/opinions/rya.html>>

3/31/00 c: <<http://archive.purdueexponent.org/2000/03/31/opinions/mil.html>>

4/03/00 a: <<http://archive.purdueexponent.org/2000/04/03/opinions/lee.html>>

4/03/00 b: <<http://archive.purdueexponent.org/2000/04/03/opinions/kap.html>>

4/05/00: <<http://archive.purdueexponent.org/2000/04/05/opinions/davis.html>>

4/10/00: <<http://archive.purdueexponent.org/2000/04/10/opinions/lettera.html>>

Additional Notes:

Edited by Max Rennebohm (23/07/2011)

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Ashley Banks, 07/02/2011

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