



Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

Tulane University cafeteria workers strike for right to form union, 2010

March

2010

to: April

2011

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *New Orleans, Louisiana*

Location Description: *Tulane University*

Goals:

The right to unionize

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention › formal document asking for the right to unionize
- 006. Group or mass petitions › petition put forth by TUSC, asking for campus support of the workers' rights to unionize
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › TUSC members held supportive posters outside meetings between workers and Sodexo
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › TUSC members distributed pamphlets with information about unionization outside meetings between workers and Sodexo
- 015. Group lobbying
- 038. Marches › solidarity march featuring students and workers
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 097. Protest strike › one-day strike carried out by cafeteria workers at Tulane University

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 097. Protest strike › another 24-hour strike

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

- 162. Sit-in › 21 students sit-in at administration building

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- service workers
- students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Tulane University Solidarity Committee (TUSC)

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Partners:

United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS)

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Barbara Ehrenreich, famous author that spoke out on behalf of the workers and joined them in a rally.

State Senator Edwin Murray also made an appearance at a rally in order to show his support.

State Representative Austin Badon and former mayoral candidate James Perry articulated support for the efforts of the students and workers at a rally at City Hall.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Barbara Ehrenreich
- SEIU
- State Representative Austin Badon
- State Senator Edwin Murray
- TUSC
- USAS
- former mayoral candidate James Perry

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 65 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Sodexo

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Sodexo did not respond to the campaign. SEIU, however, has begun to file a lawsuit against Sodexo for violating labor laws.

In 2009, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) began to take action against Sodexo, a multinational food services corporation, with the intent of improving wages and other conditions for Sodexo employees. A year later, the SEIU began to reach out to students on college campuses across the United States. A campaign on the campus of Tulane University started to organize in March of 2010.

In response to the SEIU's nationwide efforts, Sodexo initiated informational meetings with its employees at Tulane University to discuss unionization. Outside these regular meetings, students from the Tulane University Solidarity Committee (TUSC) staged demonstrations, holding signs supporting workers that wanted to unionize and distributing pamphlets with additional information on unionization. The TUSC also started to circulate a petition in support of unionization efforts.

Later on in the month of March, further demonstrations were held. On March 24, renowned author Barbara Ehrenreich met with students and workers to offer her support. Ehrenreich participated in a forum organized by the TUSC, the African American Congress, Men of Color, and Amnesty International. The students, accompanied by two professors, delivered the petition they had been circulating to the president's office, with 1,092 signatures. A second petition, containing 110 signatures from Tulane faculty, was also presented. Hundreds of students also organized a rally, before several workers joined them in a march to present a letter to Sodexo General Manager Phoebe Cook. The marchers chanted "shame on Sodexo" as they made their way toward Cook, who eventually refused to receive the letter. Brian Ford, a member of the TUSC, called Cook's action "a slap in the face." State Senator Edwin Murray also made an appearance to voice his support for the efforts of the students and workers.

Sodexo employees from Tulane University, Loyola University, and the Recovery School District met in mid-April to present to the Economic Development Committee of the New Orleans City Council a list of grievances regarding Sodexo. Helen O'Brien, president of the local branch of the SEIU also spoke out against Sodexo, raising allegations that Sodexo employees were owed more than \$20,000 dollars for overtime hours worked. Following the meeting, a rally was held on the steps of City Hall. There, State Representative Austin Badon and former mayoral candidate James Perry articulated support for the efforts of the students and workers. Later that week, students and workers from Rensselaire Polytechnic Institute in New York began unionization

efforts after being inspired by the efforts at Tulane University.

On April 22, a Sodexo worker from Tulane University spoke out publicly. The worker told the media, "In my experience, Sodexo does not want their employees to form a union despite what they say to the press." The worker also expressed pride in participating in the campaign to "clean up Sodexo." The very next day, 50 of the 54 Sodexo workers working in the cafeteria took the day off in protest of Sodexo's labor practices. The strike was in part organized by the United Students Against Sweatshops.

With the campaign appearing to gain momentum, Tulane University began to discipline its student activists. The University's decision angered the parents of many students. One parent issued a statement asking Tulane to "drop the disciplinary charges against students who support those workers so the lessons they learn from their Tulane experience are positive."

The next large-scale action occurred in October. Sodexo workers from Tulane authorized a strike on October 5, and executed the strike two days later. Between thirty and fifty workers joined students and a brass band in a march to Tulane's student center. The workers were wearing anti-Sodexo shirts and chanted anti-Sodexo slurs as they marched. At the student center, the marchers held a brief rally before marching past the dining hall.

The campaign continued to pressure both Tulane administration and Sodexo, but neither budged. Students decided to take more extreme action in April of 2011 and twenty-one students held a sit-in at a Tulane administration building. The students read letters of grievances, sang songs, and offered chants like "We want change and we don't mean pennies!" Again, neither the Tulane administration nor Sodexo budged. After seeing a largely unsuccessful campaign, SEIU decided to intervene and filed a lawsuit against Sodexo in May of 2011 stemming from allegations regarding labor violations. The struggle then transitioned to the courts.

Research Notes

Influences:

Inspired students at RPI to support the unionization efforts of their campus workers (2)

Sources:

"21 Tulane students sit-in to Kick Out Sodexo!" 27 April 2011. Online videoclip. YouTube. Accessed 9 May 2011

Askarinam, Leah. "Sodexo reacts to union talk." *The Tulane Hullabaloo* (New Orleans), 12 March 2010

----. "Campus rally supports unionization." *The Tulane Hullabaloo* (New Orleans), 26 March 2010

Eggler, Bruce. "Workers protest pay to council-unfair labor practices by food-service firm are claimed." *The Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 14 April 2010

Glasstetter, Josh. "Sodexo could face trial over alleged violations of U.S. labor law as NLRB takes up charges against the company." *SEIU Blog* 3 May 2011

Huffpost Business. "Clean up Sodexo: a worker speaks out." *Huffpost Business* 22 April 2010

Lewis, Edmund W. "Tulane Univ. food service employees seek unionization." *Louisiana Weekly*, 29 March 2010

Nola, Bruce. "Workers picket at RSD schools - Also, strike authorized at Tulane, Loyola." *The Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 6 October 2010

----. "Sodexo workers stage one-day walkout at Tulane, demand better wages." *The Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 7 October 2010

----. "Tulane workers stage protest against employer - One-day strike targets Sodexo policies." The Times-Picayune (New Orleans), 8 October 2010

Pasko, Jessica M. "RPI students, community rally for worker unionization." The Record (Troy, NY), 16 April 2010

Times-Picayune, The. "Sodexo simply wants workers to hear all sides." The Times-Picayune (New Orleans), 17 April 2010

Wharton, Billy. "Interview from the Sodexo strike at Tulane." New York Examiner, 30 April 2010

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

Julio Alicea 09/05/2011

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/) .

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu> .

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

Source URL (retrieved on 02/25/2020 - 12:36): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/tulane-university-cafeteria-workers-strike-right-form-union-2010>

Links:

[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-student-participants>