



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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University of Virginia Students and Faculty Campaign for Living Wage 1997-2000

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

April 15

1998

to: December 1

1999

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia*

Goals:

To raise the wage of University of Virginia employees to \$8.00.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 050. Teach-ins

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- University of Virginia Students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Labor Action Group

Partners:

Susan Fraiman

Involvement of social elites:

Ralph Nader, Richard Trumka, Barbra Prear, Jody Williams, Bobby Muller

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Labor Action Group (LAG)

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 3.25 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

John Casteen, University of Virginia Board of Visitors

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known.

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:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

While the new pay wage was constant, the cost of living rose. The new salary was only for direct employees, and employees working for other companies (ie: dining companies, etc) not owned by the university continued to make minimum wage. Even so, the student run campaign achieved success in getting the workers a living wage.

From 1997 to 2000, students at the University of Virginia held a campaign to raise the living wage from the lowest pay of \$6.10 to \$8.19. In June 1996, a year before the campaign began, the University's Office of Equal Opportunity Employment Programs commissioned an investigation, called "The Muddy Floor Report," that published statistics on racial bias in hiring and pay at UVa's employment office. The report revealed that housekeeping staff had some of the lowest wages, a third of them qualified for food stamps, and most of them were women and/or African-American.

In the fall of 1997, students and faculty founded The Labor Action Group (LAG), and officially launched the "8.00 Campaign" on 15 April 1998, which came to be known simply as the Living Wage Campaign. The campaign goals were to achieve a living wage for all University of Virginia employees. UVa President, John Casteen, responded to the campaigners demands by saying that he did not have the authority to determine the wage of University workers, and that wage decisions belonged to the Virginia General Assembly, which contributed eleven percent of the university's budget.

The most widely recognized action within the campaign was a teach-in on 15 April 1998. Susan Fraiman, English Professor at UVa, worked with the Labor Action Group to organize a teach-in called "Worker's Rights are Civil Rights." Over six hundred community members attended. Speakers included political activist Ralph Nader, Labor Leader Richard Trumka, and Chair of the University of North Carolina's Housekeeper Association Barbra Prear. Students sold orange and blue "\$8" buttons to raise awareness for the campaign. Both Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams and famous peace advocate, Bobby Muller wore "\$8" buttons in solidarity with the campaign during a Nobel Peace Laureate Conference on campus.

LAG also created groups to discuss employment-related conflicts called Employment Councils. In 1999, Morrison Management Services fired Richelle Burress, a UVa hospital cafeteria cashier, for wearing an "\$8" button. LAG got her job back by defending her right to free speech and eliciting community sympathy by publicising her story through campus and citywide newspaper articles. Shortly after, on 1 December 1999, LAG members held a rally with banners and signs to celebrate Burress's reinstatement and emphasize free speech

The campaign won in October 2000, when the University's Board of Visitors raised the lowest wage (\$6.10) to \$8.19 without acknowledging the campaign. The new policy only applied to low wage University sponsored workers, not the majority of workers on UVa's campus. The new salary only applied to direct employees, and employees working for other companies (ie: dining companies, etc) contracted by the university continued to make minimum wage. Even so, the student run campaign achieved initial success for a period of time. This campaign may also have increased public awareness that the City of Charlottesville was not paying city workers a living wage. In 2000, Charlottesville officially declared itself a living wage city.

Research Notes

Influences:

- 1.) Influenced by the work of the activists who they invited on campus.
- 2.) Influenced living wage campaigns at other schools, and UVa's second living wage campaign which started in 2006.

Sources:

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

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[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/wave-campaigns/student-living-wage-movement-late-1990s-mid-2000s>

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