



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Yale University students protest sweatshop labor, 2000

- Student Anti-Sweatshop Labor Movement (1990s - 2010s)

1 March

2000

to: 20 April

2000

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *New Haven, Connecticut*

Location Description: *College Campus*

Goals:

For Yale University to revoke its membership with the Fair Labor Association and to instead join the Workers Rights Consortium.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 004. Signed public statements
- 016. Picketing
- 028. Symbolic sounds
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects
- 026. Paint as protest

- 028. Symbolic sounds
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 173. Nonviolent occupation › "Sleep-in"

Methods in 6th segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation › "Sleep-in"

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Yale University Students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Students Against Sweatshops (SAS)

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Harvard University Students, Union Leaders

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Harvard University Students

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 8.5 Days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Yale University Administration

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

None Known

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Because SAS did not achieve success with its original demands, the campaign was given a 0 for success. The students did make some sort of progress with the Administration through having the referendum added to the ballot and through the President's promises to discuss joining the WRC with other University Presidents, however because nothing came of these measures and Yale never actually joined the WRC, the campaign was completely unsuccessful.

On 1 March 2000, 400 Yale University students rallied to demand that their administration withdraw from the Fair Labor Association (FLA) and join the Workers Rights Consortium (WRC) instead. Both organizations focused on monitoring sweatshop labor and apparel companies overseas to ensure that the workers in these companies receive fair treatment; however, universities across the country began to oppose the FLA and argue that it did not actually monitor the companies properly or ensure good working conditions for employees.

The protests at Yale were influenced by a string of anti-sweatshop campaigns on college campuses across the country. Students gathered in front of Woodbridge Hall, a major administrative building on the Yale campus, and chanted, waved signs, and shook noisemakers. Several speeches were given by undergraduates, union representatives, and faculty members as well. More than 300 of the protestors signed tiny blue paper t-shirts condemning the FLA.

The rally and protest was a culmination of anti-sweatshop sentiments that had been building up within the Yale community for months. Prior to the first rally, Students Against Sweatshops (SAS) members had tried to get a meeting with the University President to discuss their concerns, but were denied any such meeting. After the rally, SAS gave the administration an ultimatum: If Yale did not withdraw from the FLA by 27 March, members would continue their campaign.

After a month of no response from the President or Administration, SAS kept to its word. As 27 March rolled around and the University still had not made movements towards withdrawing from the FLA or even considered joining the WRC, students began to mobilize and organize once more.

On 3 April, Students erected a three-sided, 7-foot-tall plywood monument with one side for workers, one side for students, and one side for administration. Each side had statements on it, and workers, students, and administration alike were invited to sign

the monument to show their support. The monument was erected in Beinecke Plaza on the Yale campus. Students held a sleep-in on the plaza to protect the monument, as the administration said they expected it to be removed each night and re-built each morning. On 4 April, around 200 students rallied on the plaza to protest the University's stance on sweatshop apparel and to support those "sleeping-in". Students at the rally chanted, listened to speeches, and shook noisemakers, similar to the first rally. That same night, Harvard students gathered on their own campus to call Yale administrators and express their support for the demonstration.

Twenty to thirty protestors slept by the monument each night, and the demonstrators stated that they would not end the sleep-in until the President agreed to meet with them and showed efforts to move towards meeting their demands.

On 6 April, SAS dropped over 400 cards into the Presidents office, each one reading "Meet With Us". The President proceeded to step outside of the building, greet the protestors, and retreat back into his office. He then agreed to meet with several members of SAS on 7 April.

President Levin announced at the meeting on the 7th that he would be holding a forum on 12 April to discuss his view on the Yale's affiliation with the FLA, and until then nothing would happen.

Protestors still refused to move, however, and remained at the Plaza until 20 April, when the Yale College Council Election was held. At the forum on the 12th, the President had stated that he refused to leave the FLA because he believed that the FLA was working towards creating better workplaces for its apparel employees; it still had a way to go but was not given enough of a chance to make change.

Students were unhappy with this response; however Levin also stated that he would put a referendum on the ballot for the College Council Election regarding the FLA and WRC conflict. The students remained at the sleep-in until the results of the referendum came in, after which it was clear that the student body agreed with the demonstrators: 72% of the students voted that the University should leave the FLA and join the WRC.

Following these results, Levin agreed to discuss the joining of the WRC with other Ivy League Presidents. He also hired a new assistant secretary to work on licensing issues and serve as a liaison between SAS and the University.

When the students heard that the President agreed to discuss joining the WRC, they ended the sleep-in. However, their celebrations came too quickly. Months after the demonstrations, Levin still had not made any headway towards joining the WRC or leaving the FLA. At that point, however, the University was no longer in session as a result of summer break, and not much was able to be done.

As the school year started up again, Levin made several promises to keep discussing with other Universities, however no progress was ever made and the students failed to hold further demonstrations. Yale University is still not a member of the WRC at the present.

Research Notes

Influences:

Yale University students were influenced by previous anti-sweatshop campaigns at Universities across the nation that took place throughout 1998-2000 (1).

Sources:

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[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/wave-campaigns/student-anti-sweatshop-labor-movement-1990s-2010s>

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