STUDENTS & WORKERS UNITE FOR JUSTICE

Highlights from the 2004 National Student Labor Week of Action

From March 29th to April 4th, approximately 10,000 students and workers on nearly 200 campuses organized over 300 events for the 5th Annual National Student Labor Week of Action, honoring the lives of Cesar E. Chavez and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. These national actions were coordinated by the Student Labor Action Project of Jobs with Justice (JwJ) and the United States Student Association (USSA).

Partnering organizations included Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan (MEChA), United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), NAACP Youth and College Division, Student Action with Farmworkers (SAF), American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), Not With Our Money, Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA), and the Sierra Student Coalition.

Various union locals of American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the Communications Workers of America (CWA), the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees and Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union (UNITE-HERE), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the United Steel Workers of America (USWA), the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), United Farm Workers (UFW), and Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) worked with students to organize actions, rallies, teach-ins and other activities to demonstrate the power of students and labor working together.

Many of the events organized for the week centered around ongoing student-labor campaigns and demands, which are highlighted below.

STUDENTS DEMAND CAMPUS LIVING WAGES & CODES OF CONDUCT!

Washington, DC - Eleven students were arrested on March 29th at the George Washington University (GWU) in D.C. for peacefully protesting against the unfair treatment of the workers that serve the GW community. Students from the GWU Progressive Student Union and surrounding DC SLAP schools, such as Georgetown University, entered their student union building and announced that they would not leave until the university adopted a labor code of conduct and affiliated with the Worker Rights Consortium. Students began setting up tents while about 100 supporters chanted in solidarity within the lobby. DC SLAP, DC JwJ, and the DC Metro Labor Council brought community support, as well as various local unions including SEIU, HERE, and the IUOE. Brandon Neal, President of the NAACP Youth and College Division addressed the crowd, expressing his support for the student movement. Students received public support from Senator Ted Kennedy who spoke at a rally to protest the arrests. Charges were dropped against the students on April 21st. They continue to put pressure on GWU to do the right thing.

Students from U. Maryland Baltimore and Virginia Commonwealth U. marched and rallied with the United Workers’ Association at Camden Yards.

GWU students celebrate after the charges against them were dropped.
St. Louis, MO - The Student Worker Alliance (SWA) of Washington University launched a living wage campaign to promote workers’ rights on campus. To escalate the campaign, they planned a whole week of events. Events included: a forum organized by SWA and Amnesty International called “Nickel and Dimed: Trying to make it in St. Louis,” which was an exposition of the lives of the workers on our campus; a Boot the Bell event to educate students and administrators about the integrity of some of the companies that provide food on campus; a discussion on campus living wages that included a great panel of speakers including Nick Fichtenbaum (SWA), Economics Professor Raines, and Ken McCoy from ACORN St. Louis; and a silent march that involved 40 students and community members to protest recent unjust firings of campus workers, including the 36 Nicaraguan workers who were sent back to Nicaragua and have yet to return. To culminate the week, 250 people gathered to stand in support of a living wage and workers’ rights at Washington University on Friday, April 2nd. Speakers included representatives from St. Louis JwJ, ACORN, and Ana Rizo, national coordinator of SLAP addressed the crowd. In attendance were students, campus workers, St. Louis JwJ, SEIU, USWA, FLOC, religious community members, and ACORN. The presence of the service workers at the rally proved the most powerful component in creating a unified atmosphere between students, workers, and the community.

STUDENTS STAND UP IN SUPPORT OF WORKERS’ RIGHTS!

Boston, MA - Boston SLAP and JwJ supported Justice for Janitors during the week of action! On April 1st, Boston SLAP organized a citywide call-in day for the Tufts Janitors with SEIU Local 285. On April 2nd, they organized a rally and demonstration at the University of Massachusetts Boston in support of 400 janitors who were recently denied a pay increase. On April 4th there was a Boston SLAP action at Ritz Deluxe Apartment complexes against Commercial Cleaning, the Ritz’s cleaning service that fired an employee a month ago for no valid reason and continues to violate union contracts. They also participated in a huge rally to abolish poverty on the Boston Common and then lead a march to the Ritz apartment complexes where they delivered an eviction notification to management for violation of Martin Luther King’s dream of fair treatment for all workers.

Philadelphia, PA - Philadelphia SLAP and AFSCME 1723 win victory with campus workers at Temple University! Philadelphia SLAP and Philadelphia JwJ held a Teach-In on Wednesday, March 31st at Temple University on the “Corporatization of Higher Education”. Students were educated on how and why universities are increasingly being run on corporate models and how this is currently playing out and affecting students and workers at Temple University. The Teach-In also served to build support for a 500-person rally on April 1st that Philly SLAP and JwJ organized with Temple workers, AFSCME 1723, who won their contract two days after that awesome energetic rally.
Austin, TX - On April 5, about 30 University of Texas Austin (UT) shuttle drivers and a coalition of Austin SLAP, Not with Our Money, faculty, and UT staff held a rally and picnic to bring attention to the refusal of ATC Transit to bargain in good faith with the drivers. The drivers have not had a raise in three years and their health benefits have been slashed. Before the action, the drivers received a memorandum from ATC threatening all workers who attended the event with termination. One week later, two of the most active union members were fired. Since the rally, the Austin public transit authority (which also subcontracts with ATC) has publicly indicated some support for the workers, but UT has yet to comment on the struggle. Students and workers have since rallied in support of the fired workers, and expect that they will be reinstated in the near future.

STUDENTS DEMAND GLOBAL JUSTICE!

Seattle, Washington - Washington State SLAP and JwJ organized a week of global justice awareness events. One event included a panel featuring Luis Adolfo Cardona, a Coca-Cola Union leader forced to flee Colombia for his life; Tara Widner, staff representative of the USWA and an organizer of the Miami Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) protests; and Akson Mounlamai student leader of Washington State SLAP, JwJ and APALA. Other events included a Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) action in Pierce County and an event highlighting the resistance movement of Mayan Women in Chiapas, which was sponsored by the UW MEChA and the UW Bridges Center for Labor Studies.

STUDENTS ORGANIZE TEACH-INS AND FORUMS ON LABOR JUSTICE

Chicago, IL - During the National Student Labor Week of Action, Chicago SLAP held an Anti-Oppression Training at Lake Forest College. Midwest student labor activists got together for a weekend of learning and discussing the ways in which identity and oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.) play out in the context of our organizing. Speakers included Prexy Nesbitt who co-founded the Chicago Clergy and Laity Concerned (CLAC) Anti-Racism Training Institute, Cindy Levitt who is an anti-racist/multicultural educator, Simon Strikeback who was the first Chicago SLAP intern, Cynthia Rodriguez who is the vice president of SEIU Local 73, and a representative from Chicago Women in the Trades.

Kent, OH - At Kent State University, student groups including CHANGE, Student Anti-Racist Action, Campus Animal Rights Expedition (CARE) and Students Eliminating Environmental Destruction (SEED) joined with labor groups like the USWA, KSU Staff United, AFSCME Local 153, AAUP-KSU, HERE, and Tri-county Central Labor Council, as well as community organizations including Kent Natural Foods Co-op, Late Night Christian Fellowship, Policy Matters Ohio, and American Friends Service Committee (Akron) to organize a whole Week of events for the National Student Labor Week of Action. The Week of events included a Labor Action Games Night; a screening of a Roger Hill video “A Year in the Movement” (featuring FTAA Miami protests, May 4th 2003 Kent State anti-war protest, various other protests); a Labor Action Rally with dozens of speakers and musicians; a speaking event on “How can students and workers change society?” with Staughton Lynd, a civil rights and anti-war activist and legendary labor organizer; a Fair Trade Coffee Workshop; Labor Films “CorpOrNation” and “Live Nude Girls Unite!”, and a very fun Benefit Concert.
Corvallis, OR - National Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Aztlan (MEChA) kicked off their conference and the National Student Labor Week of Action by bringing together about 1,000 activists from MEChA, as well as PCUN, CIW, and Portland Jobs with Justice (JwJ). They continued the legacy of Cesar E. Chavez by marching from Oregon State University to a local Taco Bell and then City Hall, demanding justice for farmworkers.

Notre Dame, IN - University of Notre Dame MEChA, Progressive Student Alliance, and Amnesty International organized a series of farmworker solidarity events for the National Student Labor Week of Action, including a powerful candlelight march in support of farmworkers struggling for their rights. A hunger strike was undertaken by freshman, Antonio Rivas. The students called for the University to be Catholic in its actions; to issue a statement guaranteeing that Notre Dame will NOT enter into any more contracts with Taco Bell, as part of the “Boycott Taco Bell” campaign of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers; recognize campus workers’ right to organize through a statement of voluntary recognition for collective bargaining and through issuing a statement of neutrality; and grant recognition to the student club “United in Diversity” and affirm that Notre Dame will not discriminate based upon sexual orientation. In addition, the CEO of Gallo wine serves on Notre Dame’s Board of Trustees, which created the opportunity for students to pressure the Trustee member to address many issues, including the lack of health care for 75% of grape pickers, who are members of the United Farm Workers. Community support for the hunger strike included North Central Indiana Central Labor Council, SJVP Jobs with Justice, and the Center for Social Concerns.

Student Labor Week of Action Partnering Organizations

Contact the Student Labor Action Project at: