UNITED STUDENTS AGAINST SWEATSHOPS

YEAR IN REVIEW 2016-2017
United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) is the country’s largest, student-led labor solidarity organization.

For over 20 years, USAS has organized in solidarity with workers on our campuses, in our communities, and overseas in the factories which produce collegiate apparel.

**More than ever, our movement is growing.**

Students and workers alike are fighting for respect and dignity in the workplace. Joined by a vision of collective liberation, we are a powerfully coordinated direct action student movement.

1155 Connecticut Avenue NW Suite 500, Washington, DC 20036  
| staff@usas.org | www.usas.org | Facebook: United Students Against Sweatshops | twitter + instagram: @usas
MISSION & VISION

United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) is a grassroots organization run entirely by youth and students. We develop youth leadership and run strategic student-labor solidarity campaigns with the goal of building sustainable power for working people. We define “sweatshop” broadly and consider all struggles against the daily abuses of the global economic system to be a struggle against sweatshops.

We envision a world in which society and human relationships are organized cooperatively, not competitively. We struggle towards a world in which all people live in freedom from oppression, in which people are valued as whole human beings rather than exploited in a quest for productivity and profits.

CAMPUS WORKER JUSTICE

By fighting back against outsourcing of campus jobs, privatization schemes on public universities, and organizing alongside campus faculty and staff for fair contracts, USAS is leading the resistance against the increased corporatization of our universities.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGNS

Major sports and apparel brands hold multi-million dollar contracts with universities. By joining in solidarity with garment workers fighting for better workplace conditions, students have unique leverage in advancing major wins in the global labor movement.

STUDENT WORKER ORGANIZING COMMITTEES

Ten percent of the entire U.S. workforce are working while taking classes. Under the banner of $15 on Campus student workers are organizing for a living wage, respect, and freedom of association for student workers and university employees.
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On November 9th, coast to coast, student activists dropped their pens and notebooks and stormed the streets in a gesture of resistance. An anti-immigrant, anti-woman, and anti-worker boss had just been elected to lead our country, and students were ready to fight back.

Despite the emboldened xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia, sexism, and racism - USAS convened in a critical moment to center, and build community power. Students mobilized strong coalitions on campus, organized direct actions, and developed rapid response strategies to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable members of campus communities.

On January 20th, over 20 universities in our network led massive walk-outs at their universities.

With advanced preparation, student organizers were equipped to make demands of their universities, and send the message that our campuses would continue to be the battlegrounds of democracy against corporate interests and white supremacy.

In place of classes that day, USAS locals led direct action trainings for those who participated in walkouts and channeled the momentum of an outraged student body into building the resistance.

In 2016 and 2017, USAS locals across the country played a critical role in achieving protections for targeted students and workers on their campus, including commitments for non-compliance with Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE), stronger penalties on hate speech, sanctuary campus protections and more.
USAS CELEBRATES 20 YEAR LEGACY
STRATEGIZING THE RESISTANCE

On February 24th and 25th, students from across the country gathered in Columbus, Ohio at The University of Ohio for the 20th National USAS conference, celebrating 20 years of student and worker power.

On Friday afternoon, hundreds of students, alongside workers and community allies, marched across campus demanding that The Ohio State University “Stop the Sellout” of their energy sector to private interests.

Mehlam Bhuriwala, a student at University of Texas- Austin and a member of USAS Local 18 spoke out to show the broad student support for this fight, “We don’t all go to this school, but we all feel the dangers that are present today as a result of putting corporate interests before the student and staff voice. This is a campus, not a business.”
On Saturday, workers from different struggles and industries came together to call for student support in their fights. The panel highlighted the ways in which diverse struggles across the world are interconnected.

A recurrent theme across the panel was the strong leverage of student solidarity in achieving victories. In her own words, Heidy Barreiro, a food service worker at Northeastern University and member of Unite Here Local 26 stated, 

“Without the students, there is no fight.”

Throughout the weekend, students continually demonstrated that even in Trump’s America, students and workers have the power to hold our universities accountable to be the progressive institutions many claim to be. In the coming year, students will continue to make our demands heard, escalate our campaigns, and show corporations who truly has power at the university.

Above: Students from across the country march through the campus library at the Ohio State University alongside Communication Workers of America Local 4501 members. Photo by Ashley Clark.

Left: Asma Elhuni, Georgia State University student co-facilitates conference plenary on student organizing after the election of Donald Trump. Photo by Sara Grana.
BUILDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF MOVEMENT LEADERS

In addition to winning strategic campaigns which build power for the working class in the short term, USAS is here to train the next generation of labor leaders to sustain the movement.

For over 20 years, USAS has trained generations of powerful and strategic leaders who have gone on to successfully lead as skilled organizers, campaigners and researchers in the labor movement.

Our Regional Organizer (RO) program was a big success in 2016 and 2017. We employ this intensive leadership development program to supervise working class, primarily women of color to receive high quality training and mentorship in concrete organizing skills.

RO’s brought home major wins, including the launch of a localized fall training program hosted across 25 universities, and campaign victories for workers rights on their campuses and in their region.

1 of 4 USAS members are employed in labor unions and social justice organizations post graduation

This year, we are proud to say USAS members have accepted competitive positions and placements in labor unions and organizing programs. Our undergraduate members are consistently accepted in the Unite-HERE OBB training program, AFSCME Union Scholars and Union Summer at the AFL-CIO, among other competitive training programs for young organizers.

Additionally, graduating seniors this year accepted organizer and researcher roles at National Nurses United, Service Employees International Union, Unite HERE, American Federation of Teachers, United Campus Workers and more.

We equip students with tried and true campaign skills, educate them on the growing dominance of corporations in a globalized economy and instill the importance of social justice and intersectionality within their lives and campaign work.

USAS continues to be the student to union pipeline, and we are committed to shaping a labor movement with young and passionate leaders on the frontlines.
It’s no secret that workers across the U.S. are constantly struggling to get by. It’s also not a secret that the bosses who control the workplace have the money and power to improve the lives of millions of workers.

Thousands of workers at our universities who clean our dorms, feed us in our dining halls, teach our classes, and keep us safe on our campuses are living in poverty, subject to harsh retaliation if they speak out or try to form a union.

USAS stands with campus workers in their struggles to win better conditions, wage increases, healthcare benefits, and a union.
"I go to the richest university on the planet, but that hasn't stopped our administration from trying to make healthcare unaffordable for its dining hall workers."
- Tim Shea, Harvard SLAM, USAS Local 5

Harvard University may be the richest university on the planet, but that did not stop the university administration from attempting to make healthcare unaffordable for its food service workers. While Harvard University has an endowment of over $35 billion, the university refused to pay the workers a base income of $35,000 with no price hikes on health insurance.

After more than four months of unsuccessful contract negotiations, workers went on strike. Student Labor Action Movement (SLAM), USAS Local 5, mobilized students in solidarity with workers to fight for better pay and healthcare.

By the end of this historic strike, over half of the undergraduate student body had signed petitions in support of workers demands and hundreds of students walked out of class to demonstrate to the administration that workers are an integral part of the Harvard community.

This campaign, at the richest university in the world, showed what is possible when students and workers unite in their demands of the university. Ultimately, over 250 students staged an occupation of the administrative building where negotiations were taking place. Students stayed well into the night until it was announced that the university had agreed to the workers demands.
Despite the rain, Brandeis Labor Coalition (BLC) marches through campus alongside faculty just days before their vote to unionize.

FACULTY AND STUDENTS UNITE

Barnard College students united with majority low-wage women workers to call out the hypocrisy of a women’s institution paying their contingent faculty poor wages, ultimately securing a contract after a two-year long battle at the bargaining table.

At Brandeis University, the Brandeis Labor Coalition supported faculty through petitions, call-ins, and marches to show student support for the faculty unionization drive.

Additionally, at Fordham University, a Jesuit institution, students campaigned for the last year to secure an agreement from the university President to agree to a fair unionization process and recognition of a faculty union. Only after escalated campaigning and highly publicized violence against student organizers by campus security, did the university agree to respect the faculty’s right to unionize.

Student support for contingent faculty, graduate students, and full-timers has proven essential to securing unionization processes free from intimidation, strong contracts through fair negotiations, and even a commitment to recognize a faculty union at a Jesuit institution.

Members of Student-Worker Solidarity (SWS), USAS Local 12 at Columbia University/Barnard College demonstrate with faculty for a fair contract.
Nike tried to turn back the clock on decades of fundamental labor rights advancements. Together with garment worker unions around the world, United Students Against Sweatshops wasn’t going to let that happen.

This year student pressure has successfully resulted in major universities deciding to cut ties with Nike, ending multi-million dollar licensing deals at premier sports universities and more. Rutgers, Cornell, Georgetown, UCLA, UC Santa Barbara, UC Berkeley and UW Seattle were among those which stood up to the brand, ultimately sending the message that sweatshop labor is not so cheap after all.
VICTORY VS. NIKE

In a hard-fought victory, students and workers forced Nike, the world’s largest sportswear brand to reverse their dangerous anti-worker position, barring independent inspectors from their factories.

After a two year globally coordinated campaign by students and workers, Nike signed a landmark factory access agreement with the Workers Rights Consortium (WRC).

In October 2015, Nike announced a dangerous anti-worker policy that prevented the WRC from communicating with workers inside its factories. Without the ability to communicate with the WRC, hundreds of thousands of garment workers were silenced from speaking up about labor violations. Nike’s ill-advised decision to initially block the WRC from monitoring its factories was a blatant attempt to turn back the clock on decades of progress made by garment worker leaders and student anti-sweatshop activists.

"Workers at Hansae are overworked and underpaid. Nike must know we are humans, not machines."

Outraged, students at over 25 universities launched the “Just Cut It” campaign against Nike, and demanded that their universities sever ties with Nike until the brand agreed to unequivocal WRC factory access. The need for independent inspectors was made urgently clear following an investigation at a large Nike subcontracted factory, Hansae Vietnam, where the WRC unearthed alarming human rights violations. The violations included mass faintings due to illegally high temperatures, wage theft and discriminatory firing of pregnant women. Nike had regularly audited this same factory without reporting any of these abuses, even after workers went on strike demanding these problems be resolved.

IF THERE IS NO PEACE FOR US, LET THERE BE NO PEACE FOR THEM.

Garment workers in Bangalore, India protest Nike’s decision to bar the WRC as part of the Global Day of Action on July 29th, 2017.
Along with garment worker unions, student outrage escalated with USAS calling on Nike to immediately open its factories to WRC investigations and remediation plans. Over 600 university faculty signed a letter demanding Nike reverse its anti-worker policy. USAS hosted two national “worker tours” featuring union leaders from Cambodia and Thailand, who spoke out against Nike’s widespread sweatshop abuses, as well as the need for consistent independent factory monitoring. In July 2017, students and workers in 25 cities across 12 countries demonstrated at Nike stores and supplier factories during a Global Day of Action Against Nike.

Due to student pressure, the national campaign resulted in Rutgers University, UC Santa Barbara, UCLA and UC Berkeley ending their multi-million dollar sponsorship agreements with Nike. Other campus campaigns resulted in Nike losing the right to produce university logoed apparel at Cornell, Boston University, Georgetown, and Northeastern University.

It has been proven once again that when students stand in solidarity with workers organizing for dignity and respect, and use their strategic leverage in their universities, corporations will feel the pressure and concede to the demands of workers.

Ana Jimenez,
COLA, USAS Local 3

The collective efforts of students and workers around the world gave way to a victory this month, when Nike and the Workers Rights Consortium signed an unprecedented agreement with clear standards for factory access and remediation at Nike supplier factories.

This agreement builds on the historic precedent that USAS activists set with Nike in 2010, when the sports behemoth was forced to pay $2 million legally-mandated severance pay to 1,800 former Honduran garment workers.

“This campaign serves as a wake-up call to apparel companies that even the most powerful sports brand in the world cannot refuse to comply with internationally-recognized labor standards, in the face of a strong, coordinated campaign led by garment workers and students.” says Angeles Solis, USAS International Campaigns Coordinator.
WE RISE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS.
WE RISE FOR WORKER'S RIGHTS.
WOMEN WORKERS VS. NIKE

Nike boasts of empowering women, but its garment workers tell a different story.

Can you imagine the irony of sewing “Equality” on a shirt for a brand which is complicit in the firing of pregnant women?

Wage theft? Mass faintings? Union-busting? While Nike markets themselves as champions of women’s equality, the abuses behind their factory doors expose that the only thing they champion is their own bottom line. The garment industry is not designed to be transparent or accountable, on purpose. Brands would like us to believe nothing more than they are gracious in providing work to working women in desperate conditions abroad, and yet perpetuate substandard labor conditions and suppress worker organizing.

As a solidarity organization, USAS directly centers the voices and demands of garment workers in international campaign work. This last spring, USAS partnered with the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) in hosting internationally renowned labor leader, Sophorn Yang on a nationwide tour. Sophorn Yang, President of the Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions and a former garment worker herself spoke on behalf of 10,000 garment workers in Cambodia and the uphill battle they face in labor organizing.

We traveled through the frigid temperatures of the Northeast, to the windy cities of the Midwest, to the deepest corners of the South and of Appalachia, and to the waters of the Pacific Northwest.

The launch of the tour commenced by speaking to prominent leaders in Congress and leading a demonstration at the International Women’s Day at the Women Workers Rising in D.C. From there, we spoke at the Workers United Convention in solidarity with garment workers producing here in the U.S. The tour continued with a two week delegation at the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women in New York City where the story of student and worker power reached the ears of global leaders.

We successfully spoke at over 15 universities on a nationwide tour. Sophorn inspired global leaders, students, university Presidents, labor and community groups to defend worker organizing.
WRC AFFILIATION

Victories Against The Odds
Oregon State University, Florida International University, University of South Florida and College of Marin affiliate with the Workers Rights Consortium

As one of the original founders of the Workers Rights Consortium, USAS has worked tirelessly to uphold independent inspection as one of the cornerstones of the global labor movement.

Universities operate like labor markets, both domestic and abroad. Thanks to student pressure, colleges and universities represent critical leverage within the entire global supply chain. By holding major brands and licensees like Nike and Adidas to high labor standards - we have identified kinks in the armor of corporations that place profit over people. USAS does not advocate for the elimination of factory work overseas, but rather, work for the betterment of workplace conditions with garment workers across the globe.

With one of the country’s largest licensing programs, University of South Florida students won a highly escalated campaign including building a powerful coalition with other labor and student groups.

Members of USAS Local 25 at the University of South Florida drop a banner to pressure President Judy Genshaft to affiliate with the WRC in spring of 2017.

Florida International University in Miami continued the momentum with a win as well!

Additionally, the College of Marin in California also affiliated after several years of advocacy and organizing on campus, leading to an even stronger WRC presence on the west coast.

And finally, students of Sweatfree OSU, USAS Local 172, accomplished a truly historic feat in the campaign against Nike, with the successful affiliation of Oregon State University with the WRC. In the 90’s, Phil Knight, founder and former CEO of Nike Inc. made it illegal for universities in the state of Oregon to affiliate with the WRC.
STUDENTS & WORKERS UNITED

GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION AGAINST NIKE

JULY 29TH 2017

From Boston to Bangalore, Houston to Hong Kong, and Seattle to El Salvador workers staged protests at supplier factories, and students shut down U.S. NikeTowns on July 29th, 2017.

The demands were heard loud and clear around the globe - reinstate orders in union factories and let independent watchdog, the WRC, inside Nike factories.
Students have already won major #15onCampus campaigns, with student workers winning a $15 minimum wage at University of Washington Seattle, NYU, and Columbia.

The student worker leaders of SWOC are building a national student worker organization that builds local power for student workers to demand not only living wages, but an end to unpredictable scheduling, sexual harassment, and racial discrimination that is rampant on university campuses.

Through short term issue campaigns, SWOC organizers are building long-term membership in their organizing committees, which will grow into non-majority unions that advocate for all student workers and students on campus.
ENVISIONING THE FUTURE OF STUDENT WORKER ORGANIZING

The victory of $15/hr at University of Washington Seattle led by student workers increased the wage of over 9000 workers employed by the university, a major employer in the state. We expect to see this city-wide economic impact with more SWOC victories. Young people recognize the power that we hold as the defenders of democracy, and we believe building that power starts at home, in our own communities where we have the most leverage.

Rutgers University student worker leader, Danny Taylor had the following to say when we asked him why he is fighting for $15 at Rutgers and building a Student Worker Organizing Committee:

"Every warning light in my car dashboard is on, and I can't afford to fix it. I am anxious on my way home and my way to school, that any day could be the one my car breaks down. I am so tired.

But USAS has given me the knowledge and skills to fight for a living wage and win. I am learning how to respond to the misconception that I do not deserve a living wage. USAS is the community that both supports, and strengthens me with the motivation to move forward. I am having worker to worker conversations, learning more about our common struggles.

I am hopeful our anger will give way to action and a victory this coming semester."

"I am learning how to respond to the misconception that I do not deserve a living wage"
FIGHTING FOR $15 NATIONWIDE

USAS is proud to be the official student partner of the Fight for $15.

University systems are the largest employers in over fifteen states.

Students across university systems have the power to demand their university take the lead in providing a living wage to all campus employees, effectively tackling the issue of economic inequality across entire regions, and for thousands of working families.

Given skyrocketing tuition and living costs, USAS for $15 and a union proves to be timely and relevant force for economic justice.

Pictured: Andi Flores, UT Austin USAS Local 18 leads a Fight for $15 action on May Day, 2017
USAS JOINS THE MARCH ON MISSISSIPPI

Members of USAS Local 121 at the University of Mississippi brought the heart of student solidarity to a mass march in Canton, MS which attracted thousands from across the region and nation. USAS Local 121 helped bring out over 150 students.

Nissan has faced serious backlash for labor violations against primarily black auto workers facing wage theft and horrible working conditions. Together with community members and the United Auto Workers of America, students joined this historic fight.

Student leaders at University of Mississippi and members of Students Against Social Injustice, USAS Local 121 at the historic March on Mississippi.
GENTRIFICATION STATE UNIVERSITY
We won't let our tuition dollars displace black families

In 2016, Georgia State University President Mark Becker purchased the Turner Field Stadium effectively displacing a large number of predominately black families from their neighborhood. Students and community residents escalated demands on the GSU president to sign a legally binding community benefits agreement with impacted residents.

USAS AT THE 2017 PEOPLE'S SUMMIT

This year, over 45 USAS members represented at the People’s Summit in Chicago, where students joined labor leaders and progressive to celebrate the victories and prepare for the coming year in the movement. USAS leader, Dominique Scott, of Students Against Social Injustice (SASI), USAS Local 121 at the University of Mississippi, speaks to a crowd of 4000 about the backlash to organizing for racial justice on campus.
SUPPORT STUDENT ORGANIZING

PLEDGE TO USAS TODAY!

$15 FOR $15K

Donate to be a USAS monthly contributor at $15/month to help us reach our fall goal of $15K raised solely by individuals.

KEEP OUR MOVEMENT STRONG

USAS aims to keep our movement independent and supported by students, and worker justice organizations.

GIVE TODAY!

DONATE AT USAS.ORG!
SOLIDARITY, FOREVER.