

Stony Brook Kicks Coke Off Campus

June 19, 2008

The Social Justice Alliance (SJA) started the Coca-Cola Campaign on Stony Brook Campus in Fall of 2005, where they began educating students on the corporation's human rights abuses with SINALTRAINAL, a union in Colombia. They delivered letters to the Administration, informing them of the abuses and started holding panels and discussion forums to gain the support of the student body.

Within months, the Undergraduate Student Government passed a resolution that called on the University to remove Coca-Cola Products from campus; and before the end of the spring semester, several undergraduate and graduate clubs called on the university to do the same.

The next semester (Fall of 2006) began with members of the Social Justice Alliance greeting new students with locally-produced, pro-labor beverages and a promise to Administrators that they would not stop organizing until Coca-Cola was off campus. Soon after, members of the Graduate Student Organization unanimously passed a resolution to remove Coca-Cola from Campus.

With the support of the representatives of both the undergraduate and graduate sectors of the university, SJA was able to schedule a meeting with Karol Gray, the Vice President of Finance; Kevin Kelly of the Faculty Student Administration; and members of Procurement in April of 2007. At the meeting, five student leaders of the campaign made a presentation about Coca-Cola's abuses and demanded that they establish a committee to evaluate SINALTRAINAL's claims.

Just days after the meeting with Stony Brook Administrators, the United University Professions (UUP), which represents faculty and staff throughout the State University of New York passed a resolution against Coca-Cola and banned Coke products from their meeting. Coca-Cola Executives from North America, India, and Colombia then set up a meeting with Administrators and students to deny the allegations made against them. However, SJA members attended the meeting with a five-page report entitled, "The Case Against Renewing Coca-Cola," in which facts from human rights investigations were compared with common arguments that Coca-Cola regularly uses to support its innocence. A week later, Stony Brook UUP banned Coke from its meetings.

The 2006-2007 school year was promising for the Coca-Cola Campaign; not only did SJA have the support of the student body, but from faculty and staff as well. Fall 2007 started off strong, with SJA calling on its supporters to email Administration and voice their disappointment with the University's relationship with Coca-Cola. Nearly three hundred supporters called.

Finally, in November of 2007, Administration allowed Anita Halasz, an SJA Representative, to serve on the Executive Beverage Evaluation committee. In December,

the Committee reviewed the Code of Ethics, and once again, SJA claimed that Coca-Cola was not fit to serve the University due to its human rights abuses in Colombia.

While the committee still allowed Coca-Cola to be in on the bidding process, their complicity in the abuse of union workers was a serious concern for many of the members. The committee continued to meet in Spring of 2008, during which Camilo Romero, an international human rights activist who had just returned from Colombia, spoke to Stony Brook Students about SINALTRAINAL's continuing campaign against Coca-Cola.

The meetings continued until the end of the semester, and the University announced that they would not be continuing another ten-year exclusivity contract with Coke in June, 2008.