

## **STUDENTS FOR WORKERS RIGHTS (SWR) AT UALBANY**

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Dear Provost-In-Charge Susan Herbst and to Whom Else it May Concern:

Today is International Workers' Day, and on this day to celebrate workers' rights achievements we're asking you to celebrate it with us and do the right thing.

Our UAlbany contract with the disgraced Coca Cola corporation tarnishes our reputation and our image. Coke has been widely condemned by many organizations and unions- a few being the US Postal Workers, the United States Steelworkers' Union, the Teamsters Union, the national United University Professors, the Professional Staff Congress, and the International Labor Rights Fund.

In 2006, Comptroller of the City of New York, William C. Thompson, Jr., filed a shareholder resolution calling for an investigation into alleged violence against union officials and employees at Coca-Cola's Colombian bottling affiliate, sponsored by the New York City Employees' Retirement System (NYCERS), Teachers' Retirement System for the City of New York (TRS), New York City Police Pension Fund, New York City Fire Department Pension Fund and the New York City Board of Education Retirement System (BERS).

"The New York City Pension Funds are concerned about the allegations of alleged human rights abuses at Coca-Cola's Colombian affiliate," Thompson said in his press release. "By failing to address this issue, Coca-Cola has fostered a negative image of itself and is now the subject of a boycott campaign, which poses a financial risk for its investors."

The New York State United Teacher's (NYSUT) passed a resolution urging its statewide organization to not support Coke. "Concerned about claims that Coca-Cola Co. is complicit in human rights abuses in Colombia, (NYSUT) approved a resolution calling on NYSUT and its affiliates to refrain from serving or selling Coca-Cola products at its offices or union events until allegations have been investigated," states NYSUT's website.

Right next door at an Albany County Guilderland public school, a Coke machine was removed thanks to the belief in ethical and humane working conditions by the principal of the school and some of its teachers.

Students with SWR have already given you a presentation on Coca Cola's human rights and labor abuses and serious environmental problems. We are now asking you to listen to the over 1,000 other students who've signed our petition – not to mention student and faculty support – who are asking you to help restore UAlbany's image and reputation by clearing our complicity and association with such a disreputable corporation.

More than 1,000 students are asking you:

- For the University at Albany to cut the contract with Coca Cola immediately.

We also want:

- **Adoption of enclosed campus wide Code of Conduct** for University at Albany, modeled after the Code of Conduct/ Statement of Principles for Worker Rights the Taskforce on Sweatshop Labor developed in 2000.
- **Adoption of the enclosed Code of Conduct to be used in any university bids** to define what a “Responsible” bidder means. Currently the term “Responsible” is left vaguely unarticulated and is left up to business-focused administrators to determine.
- **Non-Exclusive Contract:** A commitment in writing to all appropriate parties including University Auxiliary Services, Institutional Services, Students for Workers’ Rights and Student Senate to have a non-exclusive beverage contract to benefit and put students first, not business.
- **The creation of a new taskforce** with students, faculty and community members to review contracts, or corporations manufacturing or providing goods and services for UAlbany consumption.

The mission of this Taskforce would be similar to the Taskforce on Sweatshop Labor, which includes, “The University at Albany is committed to ensuring that apparel *sold on our campus is produced with full consideration of the rights and work conditions of the workers who produce these goods. The University at Albany stands firm in its opposition to sweatshop labor.*”

Instead of having such a narrow definition of sweatshop labor as pertaining only to apparel products, we want the creation of a Taskforce to be engaged in ensuring that contracts, products and services for UAlbany consumption is produced with full consideration of the rights and work conditions of the workers who produce those goods. Students for Workers’ Rights must be part of this new taskforce and the taskforce must be open to student & faculty participation and decision making.

- **An official University at Albany press statement** cc’d to Students for Workers’ Rights, and Coca Cola national headquarters publicly condemning Coca Cola’s atrocious labor, environmental and human rights abuses and tell them they must ship up; form a global human rights’ agreement and follow it like they are being asked. They should for now follow the UN’s Declaration of Human Rights or face a domino of contract-cuts with other universities.

UNDHC states: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association... to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.... Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile...”*

Coke is guilty of complicity in union decimation by means of intimidation, blackmail, torture, kidnapping, and 9 counts of murder of union organizers in Colombia. This is the charge by International Labor Rights Fund, of the Steelworkers’ Union, and many other organizations.

Everything we ask is grounded in the mission and principles founding the Taskforce on Sweatshop Labor and is in step with its vision. We hope that you too understand the vision of President Hitchcock and our former President Hall was to make our university more ethical and respected. This is building on efforts that they began. We look forward to talking with you in person and talking this over.

Please do the right thing this MayDay, on International Workers’ Day and respect workers’ rights!

Sincerely,

Students for Workers’ Rights at University at Albany