

218  
.xzwai**BURRELLE'S**

73

WN

**PETER DREIER and FRANCES FOX PIVEN**

*Dreier is professor of politics and director of the public policy program at Occidental College in Los Angeles.  
Piven is professor of political science at the City University of New York Graduate Center.*

# Campus Activism Has Returned

<sup>8.122</sup>  
If you're going to a graduation this season, you will see more than caps and gowns. You will see placards, too. Student activism is back.

Forty years after black and white college students organized the lunch-counter sit-ins that helped jump start the civil-rights movement, another generation of student activists is mobilizing to challenge widening economic inequalities at home and abroad.

In the last three months alone, students at Johns Hopkins, Tulane, Yale, Purdue, Macalaster, Wesleyan, Harvard, Pomona and the universities of Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan, Oregon, Arizona and Iowa have launched hunger strikes and engaged in civil disobedience.

They are demanding living wages for the university employees who serve their food and clean their dorms. And they are demanding decent pay and working conditions for the Third World workers who make their college T-shirts and sweatshirts.

The \$2.5 billion collegiate licensing industry has galvanized much of this activism. Major companies like Nike, Gear and Champion pay universities sizable royalties for the right to use the campus logo on caps, sweatshirts, jackets, uniforms and other items. The companies typically contract with clothing factories in Mexico, Central America and Asia. Many use child labor, pay below-subsistence wages and discriminate against women.

They often keep workers in line with intimidation and violence. Two

years ago, campus groups formed United Students Against Sweatshops to protest these practices. The group now has chapters at almost 200 colleges. And university administrators are responding.

More than 200 campuses in the last year alone have adopted codes of conduct that the apparel companies must follow. The codes require companies to pay their workers a living wage (adjusted for local living costs), to disclose the names and address of all the factories that produce the goods and to allow colleges to verify compliance.

The big remaining problem is verification. Student activists are insisting on finding an effective monitoring system before clothing is granted a "no sweat" seal of approval. The apparel companies wanted universities to join the Fair Labor Association, an industry-sponsored self-policing system.

But the students are demanding that their universities join the Workers Rights Consortium instead, because this organization relies on human rights groups to monitor the factories.

The strategy has already struck a nerve at Nike, the largest collegiate licensing firm. After the University of Oregon joined the Workers Rights Consortium in response to student pressure, Phil Knight, CEO of the Oregon-based firm, withdrew a \$30 million gift to renovate his alma mater's athletic stadium.

According to the Detroit News, Nike also broke off negotiations with the University of Michigan for a gift of \$22 million to \$26 million after that

school joined the consortium.

But students are acting locally, as well as globally. They are protesting working conditions on their own campuses. At the University of Illinois and the State University of New York at Albany, demonstrators focused on the right of graduate students — who now do much of the teaching at universities — to unionize.

At the University of Michigan, students demonstrated against racial biases in hiring and teaching practices. Student protesters at Wesleyan, Harvard and Pomona called for their institutions to pay janitors, food-service workers and other employees a living wage.

More and more students see themselves as part of a broad crusade against economic injustice. United Students Against Sweatshops participated in the protests in Seattle and Washington against the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund.

Campus activists have earned an "A" in citizenship. Their activism gives them experience they can carry with them into future work with unions, and in community, environmental, human rights and public interest movements.

At a time when the press and the pundits lament the apathy of the American public, these students are acting with hope and optimism on America's democratic promise. They are a force for change that this country sorely needs.