

UNC Students Sit-In to Demand No Sweatshop Apparel and End to Union Busting, 5 arrested on 16th day

By Linda Gooma, Chapel Hill, NC

Gooma is a member of Student Action with Workers at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and the Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill chapter of the youth group FIST. She has been an active participant in sit-ins against sweatshops at UNC. The following is Gooma's report of the arrest of students, in which she was singled out by police after making a press statement.

Five University of North Carolina students have been arrested after 16 days of peacefully occupying the office of UNC Chancellor James Moeser.

Students from Student Action with Workers and the Carolina Sweatfree Coalition began the sit-in because the chancellor had been refusing, for three years, to meet with us as well as his own labor licensing committee to discuss UNC's ineffective labor codes. These codes still allow UNC apparel to be made under sweatshop conditions, including poverty wages and no freedom of association.

Because of the action of SAW and other student groups, Chancellor Moeser was forced to listen to the demands of the students and scheduled an emergency licensing committee meeting to discuss the Designated Suppliers Program. The DSP would ensure that labor codes that had been adopted by the university almost 10 years ago would be enforced.

The committee, however, had been advised by the chancellor to discuss options other than the DSP for the past year, so it was no surprise that when the committee met with the chancellor, many members expressed a lack of adequate knowledge about the program to make any informed decisions about its implementation. The committee voted 5 to 7, with two abstentions, against recommending the DSP. Only two students sit on the committee.

Several students and workers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill participated in a sit-in in Chancellor James Moeser's lobby, the longest sit-in at UNC since 1993. About 25 students and workers entered the administration building on Thursday, April 17th and have been occupying it ever since. These students and workers are affiliated with Student Action with Workers (SAW), a UNC group affiliated with United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) international, as well as several other campus groups that are part of the Sweatfree Coalition and community-based youth group, Fight Imperialism-Stand Together (FIST).

Brand names such as Nike and Adidas are currently partnered with UNC to make apparel bearing the "Carolina" name. These brands source the apparel from factories all over the world. It is in the brands' best interests to pay as little as possible to these factories for the clothing produced by the workers, and therefore have been paying increasingly lower prices for the apparel. This forces factory owners to cut the wages of the workers producing the apparel. Workers in these factories, however, have not remained silent. Many have tried to organize their factories or become involved in union



Members of FIST and SAW/USAS during sit-in. Photo:FIST

activities. These attempts are met with harsh consequences, however. Union organizers have been assaulted, harassed, fired, and even killed. In addition, brands often "cut and run" from factories in which a union has been established, often leaving hundreds of workers without jobs or means of livelihood.

What is important in this crisis is the power dynamic. While brands have power over the factories, administrations of universities have power over the brands and recently students have begun putting pressure on their administrations to pressure brands to pay enough to factories for a living wage as well as allow freedom of association among all workers.

In 1999, students at UNC held a 72 hour sit-in to pressure the university to adopt codes of conduct which would ensure freedom of association and a living wage for workers producing Carolina apparel. However, almost 10 years later, these codes are still not being enforced because brands refuse to pay enough to the factories to allow for these worker gains. In fact, when factories do follow these codes of conduct, they are penalized by losing orders to other factories

that pay their workers lower wages.

The Designated Suppliers Program was designed to combat this practice of brands "cutting and running" from organized factories by requiring brands to source their apparel from factories that uphold these basic human rights, a living wage and the right to organize. The DSP, once adopted by a university, would begin a gradual process of sourcing increasing amounts of apparel from fair labor factories. These practices would be monitored in the factories by a third-party non-profit agency called the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC). Already, 42 universities have signed on to the Designated Suppliers Program, including Duke, Cornell, Columbia, and the entire University of California system.

For three years, students in SAW have carried out a campaign to ask the Chancellor to adopt the Designated Suppliers Program. Because the students have been ignored for these three years, they decided to stage a sit-in, the fourth in the country in the past two weeks, all for the DSP, to pressure the Chancellor to adopt the DSP and uphold the labor codes that the university already has in place. The first in the recent string of sit-ins took place at Penn State University on April 15th when 31 students were arrested on the first day demanding the DSP. Later that week, 9 were arrested at Montana University followed by 6 students being arrested at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. With the UNC-CH sit-in currently in its sixth day, students at University of Florida have begun a hunger strike.

"The University tries to portray itself as a university for the people but this struggle around the DSP exposes their true motives - profit and friendly relationships with big corporations," stated Ben Carroll, member of both SAW and FIST. "While the University likes to talk about respecting workers rights, they do everything they can to ignore the demand for a DSP for the apparel with the UNC logo. This apparel brings in huge profits for the university because of the cheap labor they are able to secure by super-exploitation of workers. The University won't sign onto this program because it would contradict their established capitalist relationships."

The following website contains more information on the students' efforts and the campaign for UNC to adopt the DSP:
<http://dsp4unc.wordpress.com/>

Why Mumia is a Hero to Young People

By Tyneisha Bowens, Miya Campbell and Rhapsody Scintilla members of New York and Boston FIST

The following is a commentary from three members of the youth group Fight Imperialism, Stand Together (FIST) on the eve of the April 19 march and rally in Philadelphia to demand the freedom of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

There is a man in the state of Pennsylvania who has a street in France named after him. That man is Mumia Abu-Jamal, a journalist and ex-member of the Black Panther Party—an organization classified as "terrorist" by the U.S. government. A former Black Panther, Mumia is now in his 26th year on Pennsylvania's death row.

Mumia is a hero to Black youth and all people seeking liberation. The "voice of the voiceless," he chronicles the legacies of people's struggles worldwide. One of the greatest threats to U.S. imperialism is the uprising of "young Mumias" from the streets of Philadelphia to the streets of Paris.

At the age of 15, Mumia joined the Black Panther Party in Philadelphia, one of the most racist and repressive cities in the country. He became the lieutenant of information for the Philadelphia chapter and later worked with the New York and Oakland chapters. Mumia performed a variety of duties, ranging from selling the Black Panther newspaper to armed security duty.

With his fellow Panthers, Mumia was a leader in the Black Liberation struggle of the late 1960s and earlier 1970s, which was demanding the right of Black people to self-determination, self-defense and, ultimately, complete liberation.

Since his time in the BPP, Mumia has dedicated his life to the education and liberation of Black people in the U.S. and across the world. He is a journalist and was integral in calling media attention to the attacks of the Philadelphia Police Department on local Black Panthers and the MOVE organization, including the 1985 bombing of the MOVE compound. In that act of state terrorism, 11 Black people died, including four children.

Is this man not a hero? Is Mumia not a freedom fighter? Why are there no holidays for him and other leaders of the

Black Liberation struggle? Did he not dedicate his life to the liberation of the most oppressed?

In history the word "hero" has been used to define a variety of people. The men considered to be the "founding fathers" of the United States are often referred to as heroes, but it is undisputed that these men were active in racist institutions, including slavery.

George Washington owned slaves and at one point had teeth removed from the mouths of slaves in order to have them implanted in his own jaw. Thomas Jefferson raped Sally Hemings, a teenage slave he owned, said to be his wife's half sister. In 1858 Abraham Lincoln, the man credited with emancipating Black people from slavery, stated the following: "While they [Black people and white people] do remain together there must be a position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race."

These three men, along with many other wealthy white men in U.S. history, have been labeled heroes. Youth and students across the country are taught daily that they are the type of people we should celebrate. Their histories of racism, sexism, capitalism and heterosexism are covered up and the mass murder and displacement they are responsible for is called the establishment of the United States.

But those are the oppressor's heroes. Who are ours? Who are the heroes of people of color, women, lesbian/bi/gay/trans/queer folks and the working masses? One of them is definitely Mumia Abu-Jamal.

In 1981 Mumia was framed for the murder of Daniel Faulkner and sentenced to execution. The U.S. government, the Fraternal Order of Police and the racist mainstream media have waged a campaign against Mumia for 27 years, portraying him as terrorist and a murderer. But the people's struggle has kept him alive.

The negative portrayal of Mumia and the Black Liberation movement as a whole is an aspect of the overall war against Black people, specifically Black youth. Like the omission from the history books of the 1935 Wiley College debate team, recently portrayed in the film "The Great Debaters," the criminalization of Mumia is a deliberate attempt to erase the contributions of



Mumia Abu Jamal

Blacks in the United States.

Combined with disproportionate military recruitment and incarceration, as well as the blatant murders of Black youth by the state, the eradication of Black Liberation history is a strategic tool in the oppression of Black people. Cases like the Jena 6, the Jersey 4, the state murders of Sean Bell and Amadou Diallo, as well as the case of John White, are all a part of the attack on Black people and our basic human right to self-defense. One must ask: Why is it that when people of color are forced to defend ourselves, it is considered by the state to be an unheroic, criminal act?

The Black Panther Party of the 1960s and 1970s and Mumia Abu-Jamal are our heroes and revolutionaries. They are the leaders of our national liberation. We as youth, especially Black youth, see the BPP as proof of Black agency in history, in opposition to the education we receive that portrays Black people as a historically passive people.

Though many of us can name Mumia as our hero, there are far too many of us who have no idea who he is and what he has contributed to human history. It is a product of the state's attempted eradication of all liberation movements fighting against U.S. imperialism, specifically those led by people of color.

In the words of Mumia: "I'm fighting every day, not just for my freedom, not just for my liberation, but for all of our liberation. Unabashedly I'll fight for revolution because I think revolution is our only solution. I'm not shy about using that word."

Mumia: father, grandfather, journalist, freedom fighter, visionary, revolutionary. Mumia is not just a hero but a flame-sparker and we are the Inheritors of the Fire.