

Students join clean energy movement

by Nate Etter

Penn State students made their voices heard in the nation's capital in late February when a group of 40 students attended Powershift, a national youth summit for energy reform. The conference organized students to lobby policymakers on climate change and to protest at the Capitol Power Plant.

Conducted by the Energy Action Coalition, a coalition of 50 youth organizations throughout the U.S. and Canada, the conference attracted more than 12,000 young people.

"The youth of America turned out in record numbers to elect a new president and Congress in the last election. We're here now to take our rightful seat at the political table," said Jesse Tolken, director of Powershift. "We have the chance to work with our new leadership to build a new green economy and address our climate crisis with the passage of bold energy policies."

Katie Taylor, a junior English major at Penn State, started the Powershift group on campus and was tenacious in obtaining university funding for the trip. She recruited

"The intensity you're seeing here is a reflection of a national movement. This country is tired of dirty coal!"

--Robert Kennedy, Jr.

Penn State students by organizing lectures, concerts, and other fundraisers.

The weekend featured seminars, panel discussions, a "green" career fair and musical performances. It culminated in a day of lobbying and a rally on Capitol Hill.

The highlight of the conference came when thousands of participants joined a protest that surrounded the Capitol Power Plant, a coal plant that fuels the Capitol Complex. Protestors blocked all entrances to the plant from 1 p.m. to dusk. The protest was organized to pressure Congress into transforming the coal-powered plant into a cleaner energy facility.

"From coal and oil, to wind and sun; this power shift has begun!" chanted the crowd of more than 2,000 people.

As the protestors marched down New Jersey Avenue, led by a police convoy blocking traffic, the Capitol building loomed in the distance as a constant

reminder of why they were there.

"This plant is symbolic of all coal plants across the country," said David Singer, a volunteer medic for Greenpeace, who helped organize the protest. "If Congress is powered by coal, what kind of example is that setting to the rest of the country? That has to change."

"The amount of energy and power in the crowd was awesome," Rob Chakravarty, a junior political science major at Penn State, said. "The amount of press this is getting, the amount of people that are here, one can imagine how this can affect not only those involved but anyone who cares about the energy future of our country."

But not everyone was thrilled about the protest against coal-based energy. At one corner, the demonstrators were met by an

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Photo by Jordan Blaise
Protestors surround Capitol Power Plant in Washington D.C.

PSU union workers see wage increase this year

by Suzan Erem and Tamara Conrad

In the midst of the worst economic times since the Great Depression, as Centre County begins to feel the pinch with higher mortgage foreclosures, wage freezes and cutbacks, there is one group of workers who can feel just a little more secure than most people: members of Teamsters Local 8 at Penn State.

Those 1,600 maintenance, housekeeping and food service workers who clean up after, feed and maintain the university for 43,000 students plus faculty and staff will see a wage increase this July for one reason only: their union contract.

Wages for these workers currently range from \$10.75 to \$26.24 per hour and will

"If it weren't for us, students wouldn't get fed. Students need us as much as we need them."

--Catherine Coral

increase 3 percent effective July 1, 2009, according to the collective bargaining agreement between Penn State and Teamsters Local 8 obtained by *Voices*. New hires get additional raises within the first 26 pay periods. Penn State President Graham Spanier has announced a wage freeze for all other workers.

"I'm not happy about the wage freeze," said Academic Counseling Assistant BB Mure. "I'm very disappointed. All the costs

are going up. It's disheartening and emotionally deflating." Mure added that she was still grateful to have a job with benefits.

In good times, 3 percent may not seem like much to the professionals and managers who work at Penn State, but this year it's icing on the cake for workers often treated like they are at the bottom of the pecking order at the university.

But union contracts, like all things, eventually come to an end. The current agree-

ment expires in July 2010, and the Teamsters hope the economy is in better shape by then. Teamster officials were not willing to comment on the record for this article, but union members on campus had the same anxieties about the economy as their nonunion counterparts.

Catherine Coral, a union member who works at Otto's in the Kern Building, said she didn't think Obama's stimulus plan, at least the extra \$13 per paycheck she'll be getting, will make much difference to the economy.

"Penn State could've come up with another idea," she said, adding that help

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Student groups reflect Middle East conflict

by Lindsay Chew

For years the Palestinian and Israeli conflict has plagued the global community. The dispute now has hit close to home between two factions on the Penn State campus, Students for Justice in Palestine and the Israeli Alliance.

Students for Justice in Palestine was established in 2004 “to educate the student body and local community about the Palestinian crisis and promote justice, human rights, liberation and self-determination for the Palestinian people,” according to its mission statement.

Holding poetry readings, movie nights and question-and-answer sessions, Students for Justice in Palestine has tried to facilitate an atmosphere of education and understanding.

“We are here for one purpose, to educate

people about what is going on in Palestine and to make the community aware of what is happening to the Palestinian people,” said Sammy Haddad, president of the group.

In early March, the group hosted a panel discussion to highlight the Palestinian and Israeli points of view on the recent Israeli military assault on the Gaza strip in retaliation for rocket fire from Gaza. Lawrence Davidson, a historian from the University of West Chester, represented the Palestinian side. Arthur Goldschmidt, professor emeritus at Penn State, took the pro-Israel side. Goldschmidt was slotted originally to serve as a moderator on the panel, but when Tuvia Abramson, the former director of Hillel and scheduled speaker for the Israeli viewpoint, pulled out at the last minute, Goldschmidt took his place.

Students for Justice in Palestine and other attendees said the two perspectives were

presented evenly and honestly, but at least one member of the Israeli Alliance thought that was unlikely.

“Davidson is an extremist with tunnel vision,” said Andrew Scheinberg, a member of the Israeli Alliance. “And Goldschmidt was a co-author with Davidson. How equal could that be?”

The Penn State Israeli Alliance has found it hard to discuss ideas of peace with what members see as the extremists who make up the Students for Justice in Palestine, said the group’s president, Uriel Snyder.

“We are not looking to duke it out in a holy war,” Snyder said. “It is 150 years of violence and not one side’s fault.”

The Penn State Israeli Alliance, established in 2008, gives a voice to supporters of Israel whose views, it believes, have been overshadowed by pro-Palestinian voices.

Its mission is “to educate students about Israel and promote Israel awareness by fostering a united advocacy front in the Penn State community,” according to its Web site.

The establishment of the Penn State Israeli Alliance has elicited criticism from the pro-Palestinian group.

“It seemed like a contradiction to our group,” Haddad said. “When we offer them a place to talk they refuse...making us look like the radical one-sided group.”

The Israeli Alliance members see it differently.

“They have hostile and aggressive points of view,” Snyder said. “We are not looking to get into arguments about the past...but look forward to a peaceful future.”

Unity proved even more elusive at the end of March when Students for Justice in Palestine hosted British Member of Parliament George Galloway on campus, and the Israeli Alliance announced it was hosting its own speaker, Charles Freilich, the former Deputy National Security Adviser for Israel, the same night at the same time. Invitations from Students for Justice in Palestine to Israeli Alliance members to attend and speak at the Galloway event went unanswered, according to the pro-Palestinian group’s member David McLaughlin who provided a copy of the invitation, but who admitted the invitation was issued late and logistics would have been difficult.



photo by Shawn Duffy

George Galloway speaking on the Penn State campus in March.

Penn State Israeli Alliance members say they are looking to push aside the actions of the past and look forward to peace talks with pro-Palestinian groups regarding the conflict in the Middle East, but the Students for Justice in Palestine say the only way to peace talks is for the pro-Israel group to acknowledge the atrocities that Israel has taken part in against Palestinians.

“We cannot talk about peace when we do not have similar premises,” said David McLaughlin, a member of Students for Justice in Palestine.

Despite their differences, both groups agree on one thing: the importance of educating the public about what is going on in the Middle East.

“It is a necessity for both sides to be heard,” Scheinberg said. “Shedding light on the situation is first and foremost the most important thing.”

Representatives from both Students for Justice in Palestine and the Penn State Israeli Alliance have made it clear that the communication between the two groups is lacking. It is not completely missing, however.

“We are willing to speak with them whenever they choose,” Haddad said. “However, if the topic is peace they must understand what we are asking for.”

The hope for peace keeps both groups alive and thriving on campus.

“If you cannot find a way to communicate about peace on a college campus, where can you?” Snyder said. “I would love to see one day a unified group that is Students for Peace in the Middle East, not a group for each side.”

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PSU Black Caucus relives protest for diversity

by Lindsay Chew

Nearly eight years after a nine-day sit-in at the HUB-Robeson Center on the Penn State campus, members of the local black community came together in mid-March to reflect on "The Village" and the impact the protest had on university policy.

A week of events commemorated activism on Penn State campus that improved diversity and black education, according to organizers. The week ended with a "Now More Than Ever Conference" which drew past and present members of the Black Caucus, as well as other members of the black community.

"It gave people a chance to share their experiences," said Kenya Goods, president of the Black Caucus. "The reaction of the whole week was overwhelming, not in a verbal sense but in the number of people that attended."

Brian Favors, one of the original protestors from 2001, facilitated a workshop entitled "A Framework to Foster Diversity," the name of the 1998 document that spurred the action in 2001. Favors reviewed the importance of diversity on campus and the events that led to policy changes at Penn State.

Penn State developed "A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State" in 1998 to serve as a game plan for the administration to create a more diverse atmosphere on campus, through the student body and faculty.

The document was intended to ensure the growth of diversity on campus over five years through seven points of interest: developing a shared and inclusive understanding of diversity; creating a welcoming campus climate; recruiting and retaining a diverse student body; recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce; developing a curriculum that is supportive of a new general education plan; diversifying university leadership and management; and coordinating organizational change to support the diversity goals.

But in 2001, when the document's goals were tested, it proved to be little more than words on a page, said Favors.

That was when LaKeisha Wolf, a student and president of the Black Caucus at the

In 2001, a multi-racial group of students staged a nine-day sit-in to demand more diversity at Penn State. The protest resulted in the university adopting a new diversity plan, founding the Africana Studies Research Center and committing to hire 10 full-time faculty members in the African and African American Studies Department. Eight years later, Penn State has a net loss of nine black faculty and a net gain of 61 white ones.

time, received her first death threat. She dismissed it.

"We thought it was just a prank," Favors said.

But when she received her second death threat, it wasn't a joke any longer. Wolf took it to the administration, but the response from Old Main was lukewarm, according to Favors. Wolf and other members of the black community began to take a closer look at university policy.

On April 23, 2001 negotiations began between a group of black students and Penn State administrators that would result in a nine-day sit-in, dubbed "The Village." It would also result in a change in policy.

Negotiations ended May 3, 2001 with a revised "Plan to Enhance Diversity at Penn State" which resulted in the establishment of an Africana Studies Research Center that Penn State would fund with \$900,000 over five years. The agreement also stated there would be 10 full-time faculty members in the African and African American Studies Department by the fall of 2003.

Even with the efforts to update policy and create a more diverse campus, black students say they still struggle with racism and prejudice every day.

"You are different and people let you know it," Janay Jeter, vice-president of the Black Caucus, said. "It is funny, people act afraid of us, but when there are 2,000 of us and 40,000 of you, it should be us that are afraid."

In fact, undergraduate enrollment for the fall 2008 semester was 37,988 students, of which 1,560, or 4 percent, were black, according to the University Budget Office. That is equivalent to one black student for every 20.25 white students. Among faculty,

blacks are losing ground. Since 2004, Penn State had a net loss of nine black faculty members and a net gain of 61 white ones, according to the budget office.

Additionally, in 2006, Penn State bowed to a lawsuit by the powerful conservative Alliance Defense Fund and revised its harassment policy to place more of the bur-

den on alleged victims to prove the harassment is harmful enough to keep them from campus activities (*Voices* July/August, 2006).

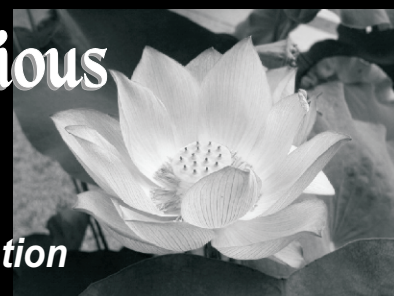
"In a community which recognizes the rights of its members to hold divergent views and to express those views, sometimes ideas are expressed which are contrary to university values and objectives. Nevertheless, the university cannot impose disciplinary sanctions upon such expression when it is otherwise in compliance with university regulations," according to the revised policy.

And with the new installment of "A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State" due this year, some question if the administration will learn from its past mistakes.

"Do I think it will take another village for change?" Jeter asked. "Yes."

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with gas money or simply getting to work would make a difference. Most workers start their shift before the buses are scheduled to run for the day.

"Most of us work at 6 a.m., but buses don't start running until 7:30 a.m."

The workers who clean dorms, cook meals and shovel the parking lot garbage after football games organized with the Teamsters union in 1967. They went on strike in 1979, but haven't voted to strike since then, and relations between the Teamsters and Penn State remain calm.

Still, there are seldom any references to these workers in university press releases or daily press coverage. A March 21 report in the Centre Daily Times stated, "University staff won't be getting pay raises in 2009-10, and some vacant staff positions are being left open, according to the university."

Over the years, there have been other organizing attempts among Penn State

employees, at least one by clerical workers and more recently by graduate students and fixed-term employees. The latest attempt was squelched relatively quickly when Penn State took the position that those workers were students and therefore not covered by the National Labor Relations Act, a position that has gained legal ground for some universities opposing organizing drives.

After clerical workers expressed interest in unionizing, Penn State revised many of its policies. Administrative assistants, as they are now called, enjoy flex time and other benefits they did not before, but will suffer the pay freezes that all nonunion staff will see this year.

Two other differences remain: 1. Penn State has the right to take away at any time the benefits listed in its personnel policies covering nonunion employees, but it does not have the right to change the union contract without negotiating with union members and their elected officers and 2. The ultimate judge of whether or not a nonunion

employee has been treated unjustly is President Graham Spanier and the ultimate judge for a union employee is an arbitrator who hears both sides and decides. The arbitrator is agreed upon and paid for by both the university and the union.

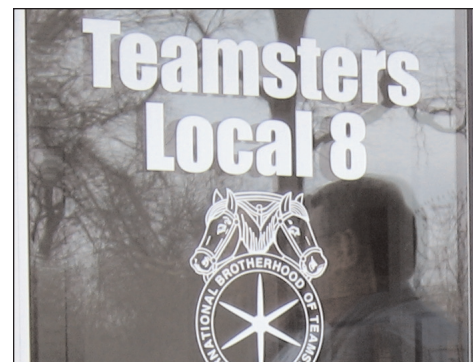
Coral said her job is more secure than a professor's job for one reason: The service she provides.

"If it weren't for us, students wouldn't get fed," she said. "Students need us as much as we need them. If it weren't for students we wouldn't have a paycheck."

Otto's Manager Deb Bradley, a nonunion worker, saw other possibilities for cutbacks though.

"I do think we are evaluating operations," Bradley said. "I think hours of operations and staffing could be affected in the near future." But Bradley said she hopes that what Penn State has to offer is what parents will spend their shrinking pennies on.

"I feel fortunate because I think education is still a priority for students and parents, which in turn [means] they'll do what's nec-



The Teamsters Union represents 1,600 workers on campus who will get raises this July.

essary to send students to school," she said. "If money could go to vacation, TV or sending students to college, I would send my student to school."

With tuition rising, student loans becoming out of reach and unemployment climbing, even those three choices may not be on the table for many Pennsylvania families. But union employees still have wages, protection from unjust layoffs and firings, and a raise to look forward to in July to hedge against the current tough times.

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estimated 20 members of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a free-market think-tank dedicated to celebrating coal use and keeping energy affordable. The pro-coal group jeered from the sidewalk and waved picket-signs of Al Gore's face saying, "Not evil. Just Wrong."

"What helps people most is not taxing and rationing but access to affordable energy whether it's generated by coal or some other source," said Christine Hall, a member of the organization's communications

team.

The march concluded with a rally, featuring many prominent speakers. Speakers included environmental lawyer and activist Robert Kennedy Jr.

"The intensity you're seeing here is a reflection of a massive movement nationwide. This country is tired of dirty coal!" Kennedy said.

"Powershift is not the end, Powershift is just the beginning," Taylor said. "The greatest part of this whole experience is taking what we learned at the national level and bringing it back to our local State College area."



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