

Students Set to Target FLA Monitoring System

By ELIZABETH BREYER
Assistant University Editor

Two UNC-affiliated labor watchdog groups continued to develop this summer, making several changes in an effort to create better ways of monitoring production conditions.

But some students said they will continue to fight for the University to withdraw completely from its involvement with one of those groups, the Fair Labor Association.

Senior Kea Parker said students still maintain the same attitude toward the FLA as they had before the summer.

"One of our broad goals is to sever all ties with the FLA and invest more energy with the (Worker's Rights Consortium)," she said. "We're still a member of both, and we still have a problem with that."

But Auxiliary Services Director Rut Tufts said both groups are improving.

The WRC supports more complete disclosure of reports conducted by independent monitors and takes a proactive stance to establish living wage indices for each country.

The FLA carries out monitoring through a system of internal auditors and delegates who report back to the

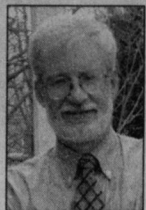
group, and it focuses less on individual factory disclosure and wage conditions.

Tufts was elected to the WRC Board of Governors in July. He will represent all member schools with licensing of more than \$1 million in revenue.

Tufts, who is also the co-chairman of the Licensing and Labor Chancellor's Advisory Committee, said his role in the WRC had helped improve its decision-making process. "The schools felt they needed a stronger voice," he said.

He led a movement to change the allocation of votes on the WRC board, creating an even split between representatives of students, universities and professional labor advisory groups.

"The 5-5-5 (allocation of representatives) is far from ideal, but it is progress," Tufts said. He said the universities in the WRC wanted to gain a stronger presence because the FLA did not have



Director of Auxiliary Services Rut Tufts said both labor groups were making improvements.

much room for their opinions.

Over the summer the WRC also began the process of finding a permanent executive director.

The FLA has also made several changes since May, including developing and testing a new protocol for monitoring conditions in overseas factories.

"The FLA is at the point now in the process of identifying and certifying monitors so we can begin the process of inspecting the conditions in licensing production facilities," Tufts said.

The LLCAC will meet throughout the year to evaluate membership in both groups and will make recommendations to Chancellor James Moeser.

"Students for Economic Justice spoke informally to Chancellor Moeser last spring, and I sense that it will be the same struggle as to which labor group we should join," Parker said.

Anthropology Professor Jim Peacock was named LLCAC co-chairman when Pete Andrews vacated the position in May. Along with Andrews and business Professor Nick Didow, Peacock taught a course at UNC several years ago about Nike Corp. and its working conditions.

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Worker Allies Seek Fair Deal

By ELIZABETH BREYER
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Student advocates for economic justice plan to continue bringing the fight for equality and fair treatment closer to home this year by pushing for UNC housekeepers' rights.

The University branch of UE Local 150, a statewide public service workers' union, and members of the newly formed campus group UE150 Solidarity Network intend to band together to meet workers' demands.

"It's important for students to invest more energy in on-campus issues and create more of a tie between the students and staff," said Kea Parker, a network member.

The requests of housekeepers have been a prominent issue at UNC since 1991, when several members of the group filed a class-action grievance claiming unfair wage practices and racial discrimination.

"There are some fundamental things that are issues every year," said Sandi Chapman, a member of the Solidarity Network. "Respect on the job, the grievance process - and, of course, our long-term goal is for workers to earn a living wage."

Litigation and protest dragged on until 1996, when the case finally reached court. The late Chancellor Michael Hooker reached a settlement with the group after weeks of mediation, signing an agreement that provided retroactive salary increases, career training programs and education and regular meetings between housekeepers and



UNC housekeepers gather in front of South Building in April 1999 to demand the resignation of Director of Housekeeping Michael O'Brien.

University officials.

The agreement reached in this settlement expired in December.

Barbara Prear, head of the University branch of UE 150, said housekeepers are trying to meet with administrators to renegotiate some of the issues that had been contained in the settlement.

"There is no way to ever get a contract with the University, but we are trying to meet with them, although we are having a real problem getting through to them," she said.

Since 1996, complaints have also been aired about the potential for the University to privatize maintenance and housekeeping and about administrative handling of filed grievances.

"Problems with the grievance process have been big in the past, but we will continue to work on it by getting the management to handle (grievances) so workers feel like someone is listening," Chapman said.

Prear said recent changes to the organization of the housekeeping division spurred many of the current problems.

"The main issue is reorganization and accountability of the director to the workers themselves," she said. "They must meet with us as an organization - what they have been doing is totally unacceptable."

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