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Funding social change since 1967

RESIST

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A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority

April 2001

Students Take on Sodexho Marriott

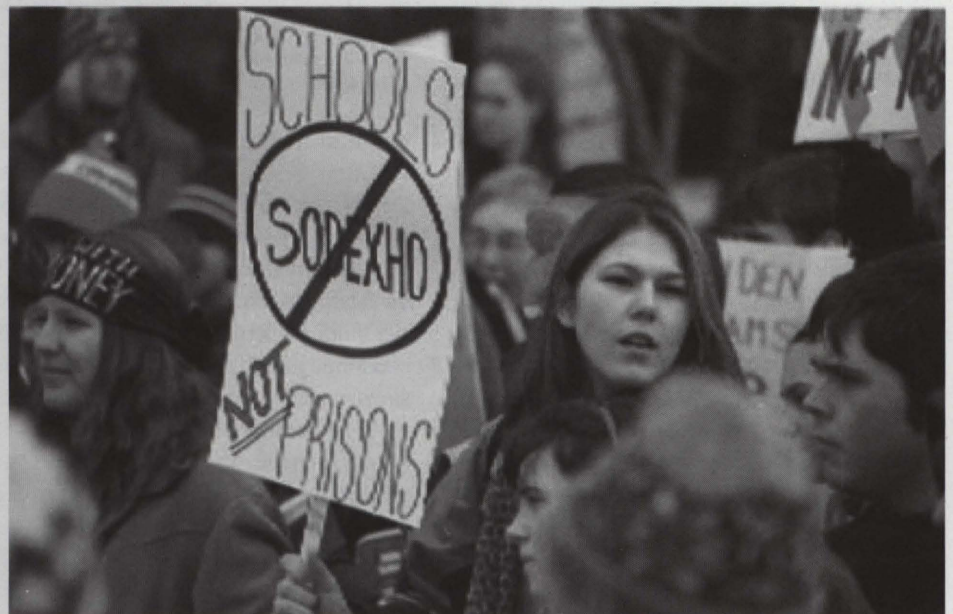
Prison Moratorium Project Says “Not with our Money!”

KEVIN PRANIS

*Everywhere we go,
people wanna know
why we're here.
So we tell them,
“We hate private
prisons
and Sodexho's food!”*

December 5, 2000. The Army cadence floats on winter winds across the campus of Buffalo State College, where more than 100 students and community members have gathered to protest the school's contract with catering giant Sodexho Marriott Services. The marchers arrive at their destination and shiver in the cold as they listen to local politicians, prison activists, prison guards, former prisoners and fellow students condemn both private prisons and those, like SMS' parent corporation, Paris-based multinational Sodexho Alliance, who seek to profit from them.

Finally, when the students have had enough, they rush the administration building, pushing non-violently past the security to take over the stairwell outside the President's office. After an hour and a half of chanting and door-pounding, 35 students get what they're looking for—an opportunity to grill a vice-president. How, an Af-



Demonstrators outside the Campus Center at Ithaca State College protest Sodexho Marriott Food Service's contract with the college. Photo by Melissa Thornley/THE ITHACAN

rican-American student asks, can an African-American administrator of a public college, which is itself being drained of resources by prison expansion, defend doing business with a company connected to punishment for profit?

Students win the argument, but not the war. For reasons nobody can quite explain, Sodexho is the only bidder that meets the school's criteria, competing in a market of one. It will take more than a two-hour occupation. The students promise to return.

Today is the first day of the rest of your fight against the prison-industrial complex.

Growth of the Prison Industrial Complex

Sodexho Marriott executives struggle to downplay that the largest food service provider in North America has developed a profitable relationship to the private prison industry. Here's the inside story:

It's 1995. The best kept secret in America is that there are roughly 1.5 million men and women living behind bars—most young, poor and of color. Few people are aware of the social costs, from the criminalization of a generation to the draining of funds from education and social ser-

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vices; and fewer still are aware of the social forces driving prison expansion, particularly the attraction of prisons to poor rural communities. Twenty years of research and advocacy on alternatives seems like so much spit in the wind, and many justice system reformers have either given up or started to spit in the other direction.

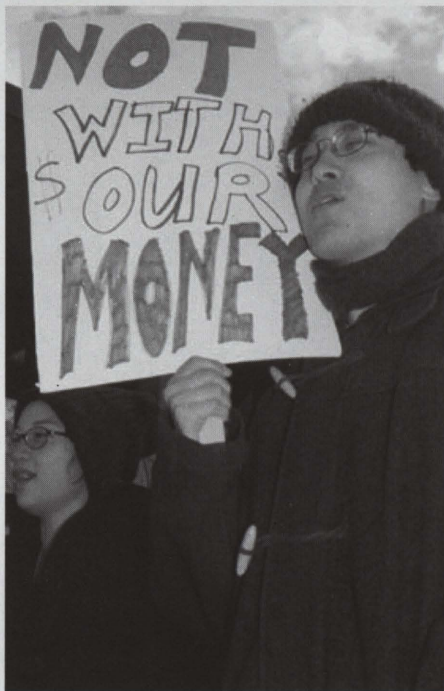
But there are stirrings. Activists talk of the need to oppose a “prison-industrial complex” which has begun to function much like the military-industrial complex. There is talk of the need for a concerted push for drug law reform. A handful of progressive student activists revives an old idea of a moratorium on prison expansion. All of us believe that, in a real sense, the fate of American democracy depends on stopping the gears from turning. We just don’t know how.

There are some good ideas. Organize students at public universities to fight against funding cuts that feed the prison boom. Organize people in rural communities to fight for alternative economic strategies. Build statewide coalitions—students, families, faith communities and anyone else we can find to reform harsh drug laws. We can make the arguments about how prison expansion endangers necessary positive social programs with no bigger societal benefit. I remember convincing dozens, if not hundreds, of college students that prisons were the key issue, and all of them asking “what can we do about it?” “Build a statewide coalition to fight prison expansion” just didn’t cut it as an answer.

Organizers Make Progress

Since 1995, prison organizing made slow progress while media coverage exploded. In 1995, major papers ran a story about prison issues every few weeks. Soon it was once a week, then once a day and then we stopped trying to keep track. The coverage was driven in part by the work of groups like Justice Policy Institute and The Sentencing Project but even more importantly by the sheer volume of fascinating and scandalous stories generated by the nation’s vast Gulag.

At the same time, we saw an activist renaissance on campus and in the streets that had much (although not everything) to do with the new leadership of the labor movement. In the Fall of 1996, students fresh from the AFL-CIO’s Union Summer



Protesters in Ithaca, New York, stand outside the Free Speech Rock to protest Sodexho Marriott. Photo by Alex Morrison/THE ITHACAN

program took newly acquired skills into dormitories and dining halls. A series of labor teach-ins took place around the country, adding momentum to campus and community movements for workers’ rights. The sweatshop movement exploded by providing students with an easy way to connect economic justice abroad to purchasing decisions made by their college administrators.

In November of 1999, the “Battle of Seattle” focused the nation’s attention on growing opposition to corporate power and top-down globalization. But another battle happened in Seattle outside the media spotlight. A mile from the downtown “security zone” a peaceful march of 100 or so people demonstrating for political prisoner and death row inmate Mumia Abu Jamal was attacked by police, who fired dozens of rounds of tear gas into a residential community.

Likewise, prison issues surfaced during the convergence on the IMF/World Bank meetings in Washington, DC. Five-to-six hundred demonstrators, including a number of students carrying signs reading “Dump Sodexho,” arrived early for an April 15 demonstration on criminal justice issues. Without warning, DC police cut the march in half and jailed more than 200 activists in a number of city facilities, including one run by—you guessed it—Corrections Corporation of America.

Today is the first day of the rest of your fight against the corporate police state.

Making the Campus Connections

All of the media stories and public education around racial profiling, racial disparities, mothers in prisons, rape in prison, costly prison expansion, private prison expansion—all of these have generated a public climate of unease with scattered pockets of rage. It is in this context that the campaign against Sodexho Alliance/Sodexho Marriott Services began and spread from 10 campuses in April 2000 to 20, then 40 and now more than 50 campuses across the US and Canada.

On the one hand, the Not With Our Money! campaign against Sodexho provided an opportunity for students to finally take the “industrial” part of the “prison-industrial complex” head-on by holding the largest institutional investor in Correction Corporation of America (itself the largest private prison company in the world) accountable for its crimes. On the other hand, the campaign brought together critical issues of campus democracy,

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ILLEGITIMATE AUTHORITY
Funding social change since 1967

For information and grant guidelines, write to:
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workers' rights and corporate power through a medium that virtually every student (or former student) in America can understand—the dreaded dining hall!

At Oberlin College, where every student is required to take a full meal plan, the Sodexho-prison connection was the catalyst for bringing together prison, labor, socialist, environmental and student co-op activists around a set of demands that encompassed dumping Sodexho, including temporary workers in the bargaining contract and purchasing more organic food. At the State University of New York at Albany, the Sodexho-prison connection added fuel to a struggle for union recognition on the part of workers organized by the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union. At the University of California at Santa Cruz, students of color and members of student government waged a referendum campaign in which student voted overwhelmingly to kick Sodexho off campus.

On many campuses, the coalitions and campaign demands reflected a sophisticated understanding of the links between multiple forms of oppression and injustice. Most students will not move forward on a campaign to fight prison privatization unless they can ensure the campaign will not be used against workers.

At the same time, students have adopted tactics that directly challenge “business as usual” on campus while projecting a vision of how things could be different. As we’ve discovered in the course of the campaign, campus food service is basically a scam in which one company is given a monopoly contract to serve in exchange for keeping the administration worry-free. The company often accomplishes this by providing the school with no-interest “loans” for capital improvements which are then repaid through the “contract”—i.e. the money students pay for their (often mandatory) meal plans.

Under such circumstances, sustained boycotts are counterproductive (the company just makes less food and more money), and students have taken to organizing one-day symbolic boycotts at which a food alternative is provided. On April 4, 2000, SUNY Binghamton and Earlham College used student organization funds to feed almost 1,000 people, while Hampshire College students organized a potluck that

All of us believe that, in a real sense, the fate of American democracy depends on stopping the gears from turning.

virtually shut down the dining hall. In May, 800 Oberlin students sat on the lawn and ate food cooked by activists, courtesy of the school’s vibrant co-op system, while listening to music and speeches about private prisons. In every case, students find that free, good food reminds students why they hate bad expensive food—especially when the company that makes it feeds prison expansion.

Struggling On

It’s one thing to fight and quite another to win. Ninety-nine out of 100 campus administrators agree: the fact that a company is 48%-owned by prison profiteers, or by the KKK for that matter, should have no bearing on contracting decisions. How else are we going to keep ensuring high, high quality food for a low, low price. Right.

NWOM! activists soon discover what sweatshop and anti-apartheid activists learned before them. Administrators from across the political spectrum will fight tooth and nail to prevent students from having real power on campus; that’s why they get paid the big bucks. On December 6, the day after the Buffalo State occupation, seven Ithaca College students took over the school’s financial aid office. After 34 hours, during which time they were denied food, water and even the use of a bathroom, the students got what months of letters, meetings and protests had failed to deliver: a serious meeting with President Peggy Williams. The students won major concessions, including a public forum with national Sodexho Marriott representatives. As friends in the sweatshop movement say, “direct action gets the goods!”

On February 12, 2001, Sodexho Marriott Services’ Senior Vice-President and General Counsel, Robert Stern, came to Ithaca College to face the music, in the form of a bunch of angry students and me, representing NWOM! Three things happened over the course of the evening. First, the set of artfully constructed phrases with which the company has defended itself in the media crumbled under a barrage of

facts and questions.

Second, the forum provided an opportunity to challenge not only Sodexho’s involvement with private prisons, but also a whole range of unsavory business practices ranging from the company’s support of the American Legislative Exchange Council, a right-wing think tank, to the company’s notoriously bad labor practices.

Third, it became clear that corporate America has been so blinded by its own propaganda and technocratic language, that its representatives can’t understand what other people will find offensive. When asked to give his opinion on prison privatization, Stern replied that, as with any other business, the private sector could add value to the operation. (RealAudio from the debate is available at <http://www.radio4all.net/proginfo.php?id=2645>.)

The President of Ithaca College has ignored student protests and vowed to continue the contract with Sodexho. Students and community activists vow to keep up the pressure.

On April 4, students at 25 campuses and grassroots activists on two continents will take actions intended to force Sodexho Alliance to divest itself of private prisons—not only the company’s 8% share of Corrections Corporation of America but also recently acquired Sodexho subsidiaries U.K. Detention Services and Corrections Corporation of Australia. The success of the actions may determine if corporations like Sodexho, which profit from the misery of prisoners, their workers, and even their consumers (“end-users” is probably a more appropriate term), will be able to act with continued impunity.

Kevin Pranis is the director of the Prison Moratorium Project. PMP received a grant from RESIST last year to fund the “Not with our Money Campaign.” For more information, contact PMP, c/o DSA, 180 Vorick Street 12th Floor, New York, New York 10014; www.nomoreprisons.org.

Idaho Students & Farmworker Wages

ARIELLE ANDERSON

Life in Idaho is not always a gem. In fact, the picture can sometimes look pretty bleak. Skyrocketing tuition and drop-out rates, a lack of affordable child care, nuclear waste dumps in our backyard, racism and hate crimes, species on the brink of extinction and widening divisions between rich and poor are all issues we must face everyday.

Yet facing those problems is exactly the mission of the Idaho Progressive Student Alliance. Founded in 1998 at Boise State University, IPSA works for social, economic, and environmental change. As students, we have to deal with the world as it has been left to us. IPSA works to give students information, training, opportunity and spirit they need to create a sustainable tomorrow. Though our organization is still in its infancy, we have created a network throughout almost the entire state of Idaho, and we are hoping that in the near future we will be working with other schools in the Northwest and eventually nation-wide.

One of the first and most successful campaigns IPSA has tackled is the Idaho Farmworker Minimum Wage Campaign. With help from a grant from RESIST, IPSA published an organizing manual to help students advocate for minimum wage legislation for farmworkers.

Students are concerned with this issue for several reasons. First, many students have been, or are now, farmworkers. These students understand first-hand the injustice occurring in Idaho. Second, many students realize that this issue goes beyond minimum wage and encompasses issues such as child labor, rights to an education, women's issues, quality of life and racism.

Farmworker Campaign

For the past two years, the Farmworker Campaign has been a main part of IPSA's organizing agenda. Farmworkers are among the poorest of the working poor, making an average of only \$6,500 per year (US Department of Labor, 1991). By comparison, Idaho per capita income was \$18,885 in 1995 and median family income was \$38,100 in 1997. Each agricultural season many farmworkers receive wages that fall below federal or Idaho state minimum wage. Many

Students realize that the Farmworker Minimum Wage Campaign encompasses issues such as child labor, rights to an education, women's issues and racism.

workers, including fruit pickers, beet thinners and weeders, are paid by piece rates that work out to be sub-minimum wages.

Ninety-eight percent of migrant and seasonal farm workers in Idaho are Hispanic or of Mexican descent. Sub-minimum wages severely hamper workers trying to support their families. As a result, low earnings often force farm workers to take their kids out of school to help them increase their earnings in the field.

Students identified this issue and IPSA has been concentrating on getting the state legislature to pass a Farmworker Minimum Wage bill. In January of 2000, IPSA participated in the Walk for Wages, a symbolic 20-mile march from Caldwell, Idaho to the state Capitol to coincide with Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Weeks later, IPSA coordinated a Rally for Equality on campus and then packed the halls of the Capitol for the House Agricultural Affairs Committee hearings regarding the farmworker minimum wage. In addition to testifying at the meeting, many students of IPSA presented a large banner with student signatures that read "Justice for Farmworkers Now."

When the 2000 Legislature failed to enact the bill, students picked up the pressure. IPSA members followed the governor throughout the state, holding signs and talking to people. We went to numerous public hearings, wrote letters to our representatives, and held rallies. However, progress was slow.

Finally, autonomous individuals (not an organized IPSA group) chose to make the Legislature listen to them on President's Day, February 19, 2001. These individuals sat down in the middle of the senate floor chanting: "What do we want? Farmworker minimum wage! When do we want it? Now!" At the same time, folks in the gallery held hands and chanted while confetti and leaflets were thrown to the floor. This

may seem insignificant, but in Idaho something like this is not done.

After years of struggle, an amended bill passed the legislature. This bill includes protection for 95% of farmworkers. Still the fight is not over, but 95% of coverage is significantly better than none.

Other Organizing Campaigns

IPSA continues to expand on college and high school campuses across the state. Training and education are vital to empowering students. Last year IPSA brought in trainers from United Vision for Idaho to teach us how to run empowering meetings. In addition, we had a Progressive Advocacy Training held in April 2000, with workshops on direct action skills, resisting corporate dominance, reproductive issues and dismantling racism. Nearly 50 high school and college students attended.

Within the first week of the Fall semester, IPSA held its first meeting and decided which campaigns were to be on the agenda. In addition to the Farmworker campaign, students of Boise State are challenging Boise Cascade to change their logging practices, which includes cutting down old growth forests. On March 23-25, 2001, IPSA held a conference about Boise Cascade that included speakers analyzing the impact of logging not only environmentally but also on a socioeconomic level.

IPSA serves as a vehicle for student voice throughout the state. We firmly believe in our work and the causes we fight for. Together we shall overcome.

Arielle Anderson is a member of the Idaho Progressive Student Alliance. IPSA received a grant from RESIST in 1999. For more information, contact them c/o United Vision for Idaho, PO Box 2181, Boise, ID 83701.

Students 4 Justice March on NikeTown

CAROL SCHACHET

In the late 1990s, students at West High School in Denver, Colorado, did not have enough desks for all its students. Some of the books were older than the seniors who had been held back a couple of times, and the paint on the building predated the New Deal. As student Selena Longoria described it, "When people come to our school, it's like walking into a jail cell."

Longoria and other members of Students 4 Justice decided to fight to make a difference in their schools and in their communities. A program of the Colorado Progressive Coalition, S4J is a multi-racial youth-led organizing effort to build a new generation of student leaders in the African-American, Mexicano and Chicano, American Indian, and Asian/Pacific American communities. S4J works in public high schools in Denver to fight for better schools, youth power, and an end to child labor, Nike sweatshops, and corporate welfare.

According to their mission statement, S4J "works to educate, mobilize, and unite students against corporations that are making millions off of youth of color by taking over our public schools, taking over prisons, and biting our culture without giving our community any props, money, or support. S4J fights those in power so that we can have a say in our own lives and in our own communities."

The efforts to restore West High School included some fund raising and some hell raising. The students organized around a school beautification campaign where they worked to get 21 trees donated and planted and pressured the School Board and administration to finally paint the building. But the organizing is about more than a better looking school, according to S4J organizer Soyun Park: "It's incredibly important psychologically. It's about going in front of the school board, in front of the city council. All of these students are doing their part to improve their own retention."

Do it Just!

In December 1998, dozens of students went to the mall—not to shop but to protest the \$24 million in "corporate welfare" that had been taken from taxpayers to build

the Denver Pavilions Shopping Plaza. More than 50 people challenged its grand opening with a nine-block march to NikeTown in the mall. Students informed consumers that Nike uses sweatshop practices to produce shoes that cost \$180 in the store but only \$6 to make. As high school junior Elsa Manuel explains, "Nike uses people of color to advertise and get young people of color to buy their products. But they pay their workers in Asia slave wages."

S4J members called for Nike and the Denver Pavilions to return 10% of their profits back to the community to support urban youth programs; pay their workers a livable wage; and lower the price of Nike shoes.

The "Do it Just!" campaign helped S4J reach out to more high schools and develop leadership and organizing skills among students of color.

Leadership Development

As the campaign against corporate greed gained momentum so did the desire to train African-American, Latino, Asian, and American Indian students from inner city schools to take leadership. S4J founders realized there was a tremendous need to give youth an outlet to empower themselves.

S4J has trained student leaders who

have organized demonstrations, testified in front of the Denver Public School Board of Education and the Colorado State Legislature on students' rights, affirmative action, and bilingual education. Members have also spoken at press conferences covered by televisions and radio stations around the state, as well as numerous print media.

More than 100 high school students of color take an active role in S4J. Additionally, two high school students are paid organizers for the organization and work out of the Colorado Progressive Coalition's office. S4J members identify ten or more underclass students to begin as paid staff interns for the next year ("Get credit for raising hell!")

According to Soyun Park, "There are many traditional opportunities for students who show conventional leadership skills. What we work for is to open some space primarily for students of color to have those opportunities."

Carol Schachet edits the RESIST Newsletter and relied heavily on information from Students 4 Justice to write this article. S4J received grants from RESIST in 1998 and 1999. For more information, contact them c/o Colorado Progressive Coalition, 1420 Ogden Street, Denver, CO 80218.

Join the Resist Pledge Program

We'd like you to consider becoming a Resist Pledge.

Pledges account for over 30% of our income.

By becoming a pledge, you help guarantee Resist a fixed and dependable source of income on which we can build our grant-making program. In return, we will send you a monthly pledge letter and reminder along with your newsletter. We will keep you up-to-date on the groups we have funded and the other work being done at Resist.

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GRANTS

Since its inception, RESIST has funded youth activism ranging from draft resistance and anti-militarism to police accountability and anti-sweatshop campaigns. RESIST does not fund these groups simply because "youth are our future." Rather, youth activists play a significant and meaningful role in the larger movement for social change.

Below is a partial list of RESIST grant recipients over the past several years. RESIST celebrates their vitality and their contribution to the movement for peace, economic, social and environmental justice. For more information, contact the groups at the addresses listed below.

Bill of Rights Education Project Project HIP HOP

99 Chauncy Street, Boston, MA 02111

Funding to expand the focus of ACTION for Justice's "education not incarceration" to encompass a push for the MCAS exam issue and to develop *Rising Times* paper as a Boston-area voice of youth.

C-Beyond

3629 Clayton Road, Concord, CA 94521

Funding for the Summer Internship Program which seeks to educate young people about social justice issues, teach organizing skills and take action on local issues.

Community Alliance of Lane County

PO Box 10837, Eugene, OR 97440

Funding for a youth leadership development program to expand the Youth for Justice group and train anti-racists, skinheads and other street-wise youth.

Community Alliance for Youth Action

2008 10th Street NW, Washington, DC 20001

Through the Youth Catalyst Project, CAYA works directly with young people in DC public high schools and helps young people analyze community projects and develop the tools they need to create meaningful change.

DRUM (Desis Rising Up and Moving)

c/o Brecht Forum, 122 West 27th Street,
10th Floor, New York, NY 10001

Funding for general support for South

Asian organization which brings high school youth and university students together to learn social justice and organizing skills; looks at the injustice of the INS detention system; and provides organizing and service.

Houston Committee for Youth and Nonmilitary Opportunities

850 Jaquet Drive, Bellaire, TX 77401

H CYNO displays literature on nonmilitary opportunities for job training and college financing in Houston area high schools as a way to counter the poverty draft.

Latinos Unidos Siempre

3248 Market Street, Salem, OR 97301

Funding for general support for Latino youth organization which seeks to challenge institutionalized racism, sexism and homophobia.

Long Island Gay and Lesbian Youth

32 W. Main Street, Bay Shore, NY 11706

Funding for the Youth Action Project which establishes Gay/Straight Alliance in schools and youth organizing.

Massachusetts English Plus Coalition

126 High Street, Second Floor, Boston,
MA 02110; maengplus@aol.com

Organized to counter the efforts of the English-only movement. Their mission is to advocate against all forms of language-based discrimination and promote better services for limited-English speakers.

The Newtown Florist Club

PO Box 908403, Gainesville, GA 30501;
newtown193@aol.com

NFC works with the community to expose environmental racism and to foster leadership development. Resist's grant helped NFC purchase a video camera to be used by the Youth Activist Summer Leadership Development Program to document industrial spills and their effect on the local community.

Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities (Project YANO)

P.O. Box 230157, Encinitas, CA 92023

Multi-year general support grant for or-

ganization engaged in counter-recruitment campaigns highlighting non-military alternatives for job training, education and community service.

School of Unity and Liberation (SOUL)

1357A 5th Street, Oakland, CA 94607

Funding for multi-year general support for organization which works to develop multicultural leadership development and organizing training programs for youth and to fight for affirmative action in California.

Sisters In Action for Power

1732 NE Alberta, Portland, OR 97211

Funding to develop a database and brochure for organization which build women and girls leadership on social justice issues.

Summer Activist Training Project

3465 W. 8th Street, Los Angeles, CA 90005

Funding for social and economic justice internships affiliated with the SAT project, in which Asian Pacific Islander youth learn grassroots organizing tactics.

Third Eye Movement

1230 Market Street, #409, SF, CA 94110

Funding for general support for youth-led organization which organizes, mobilizes and empowers young people to struggle against police brutality

Urban Retrievers

1315 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Funding for the Philadelphia Student Union which empowers public high school and middle school students to develop new educational models that reflect the need for constructive social change.

Youth Leadership Support Network

P.O. Box 5372, Takoma Park, MD 20913

Funding for the Young Organizers Seminar on Leadership and Coalition Building which will bring together young leaders and veteran organizers.

Youth Organizing Communities

P.O. Box 1482, Montebello, CA 90640

Funding for youth-driven organization fighting for educational justice and an end to the Prison Industrial Complex.