

Students storm chancellor's office



HENRY A. KOSHOLLEK PHOTOS/THE CAPITAL TIMES

County Supervisor Echnaton Vedder, in front of a throng of anti-sweatshop protesters, scales the door of Chancellor David Ward's office Wednesday to get a better look inside, where seven protesters had chained themselves to each other by the neck with bicycle locks.

Push *comes to* shove



About 100 protesters head up Bascom Hill to stage a protest at the chancellor's office about the university's sweatshop policy.

By Aaron Nathans

The Capital Times

The protesters shoved anything they could find into the crack in the doorway: a notebook, a shoe, some planks of wood.

University Police pushed back from the other side. When force wouldn't work, police sprayed a stinging solution into the eyes of the protesters, sending them into retreat. But one returned volley, emptying a fire extinguisher into the doorway.

It was an ugly scene at Bascom Hall on Wednesday: fists pounding against doors, protesters linked to each other by their necks with a chain of bicycle locks, a battle of wits between students and the administration. It was a day full of flash points that threatened to make things far worse.

It started when seven students took over the lobby of Chancellor David Ward's office, demanding that the university take a more active role in stopping sweatshop labor from producing University of Wisconsin-logo clothing.

The group entered the office quietly at about 2:15 p.m. and talked to Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Paul Barrows and Associate Dean of Students Roger Howard.

It didn't remain quiet for long. About 100 protesters marched up from Library Mall to the chancellor's office, and a University Police sergeant locked the door.

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UW's Ward agrees to quit sweatshop group

By Aaron Nathans

The Capital Times

UW-Madison Chancellor David Ward told protesters he will pull the university out of a controversial organization that monitors clothing makers for poor working conditions.

But he wants to talk to other Big Ten administrators about whether to join a new watchdog group that has the support of student activists.

Ward agreed to meet with the students on Monday after a brief encounter Wednesday night at Bascom Hall, five hours after students took over the lobby of his office and the hallway outside. Students outside the office pounded on the locked door, demanding to come in and talk to Ward.

But he holds off on picking new monitor

The protesters want to end the use of sweatshop labor in the manufacturing of merchandise bearing the University of Wisconsin logo. The protest included members of the Alliance for Democracy and the Madison Anti-Sweatshop Coalition.

As part of an agreement with students made last year after a prolonged sit-in, the university agreed to a provisional affiliation with the Fair Labor Association, which promotes dialogue with universities and other institutions concerned about factory conditions and worker treatment in Third World countries.

But student activists now favor the

newly formed Workers' Rights Consortium, which will hold a founding conference in April. Although both organizations are supposed to locate and monitor sweatshops, the consortium is being billed as more community-based and labor-oriented. The activists said the association is too influenced by corporations.

"We all feel there is some merit with the WRC," Ward said of the new organization. "This process will take some time. I'm not in a position to instantly or unilaterally join the WRC."

Ward said he wants to learn more about the group and determine what other Big 10 campuses will do.

Anti-sweatshop demonstrations also occurred Wednesday at the University of Michigan, where 20 students occupied a dean's office; and at the University of

Pennsylvania, where students ended an eight-day sit-in after officials at that school pulled out of the Fair Labor Association. Pennsylvania officials have not agreed to join the new group.

Local activists were skeptical that UW would join the new organization, and pressed for faster discussions. But Ward said his schedule would not permit a meeting until Monday.

David Ernesto Alvarado of the Alliance for Democracy told Ward he was unhappy that the process of ridding the university of ties with sweatshop labor has been tainted by mistrust.

"I'm very sad this has happened," Alvarado said.

As a concession to the students, Ward unlocked the door to his outer office and let students come and go as they wished.

As of about 9 p.m. Wednesday night, protesters remained in the lobby of Ward's office, mulling over what to do next, as plain-clothes University Police officers looked on.

Kim Brunner, a communications officer for the campus police, said some demonstrators remained at the office this morning after a peaceful night.

The university confirmed this morning that the repellent used on several students who tried to push their way into the chancellor's office was pepper spray.

"Based on reports that I have received, our police response was appropriate," Ward said in a statement.

No arrests were made as a result of the protest but police may still be reviewing the matter, according to UW spokeswoman Amy Toburen.

Sweatshops

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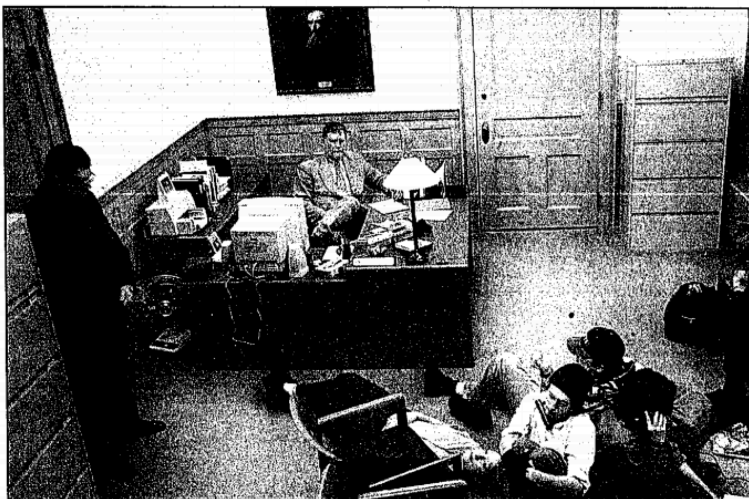
The protesters, dissatisfied with the performance of the Fair Labor Association — a sweatshop monitoring organization with which the university was affiliated, and which the protesters say favors business over workers — chanted "Ward said F-L-A; we say no way."

They slammed their fists into the wood and windows of Ward's door, pounding in between the heads of two plain clothes University Police officers. After a few minutes, the officers retreated to the back of the crowd, watching from afar.

Dane County Supervisor Echnaton Vedder climbed to the top window and taped a Bucky Badger doll with an anti-sweatshop statement attached. Some protesters unsuccessfully tried to take the door off its hinges.

Leaders urged protesters to monitor the other doors leading to the chancellor's office. At about 4 p.m., protesters sensed commotion at the lower entrance; they were there just as university police entered with duffel bags. There was a struggle at the door; then there was the spray.

Students clutched their faces, some running to a nearby door to rub their eyes with snow. But one student grabbed a fire extinguisher and blasted white powder toward the door. The spray from the extinguisher turned the hall-



MIKE DAVIES/THE CAPITAL TIMES

Sgt. Kurt Feavel from the University Police stands watch over protesters Wednesday as Associate Dean of Students Roger Howard looks on. On the floor, chained together with bicycle locks, are Sarah Turner (lying down), Marc Brakken (in winter hat), Bob Heamaver, and Molly McGrath on the phone.

way white, and people dispersed, covering their mouths with whatever they could find.

The door closed.

University officials later said in a statement that the police were there to help the chancellor's staff leave the offices.

"I turned my head right into a fountain of pepper spray," said protester Nolen Johnson, about an hour after the incident. "I couldn't

see for about a minute. My head's still burning."

"It's a small thing, if I have to get hit with pepper spray, if we get our demands met. That's a sacrifice," Johnson said.

Several minutes after the incident, Barrows met with the group in the hallway outside the chancellor's office. The throng had dwindled to about 50 hearty souls.

"We're terrified. We're scared

for the people inside," said Amanda Klonsky, a UW senior and one of the more vocal protesters.

Vice Chancellor Barrows said, "What I'm going to say is that the chancellor's willing to meet with you. I'm willing to set it up." As for the people inside, "as long as they abide by the rules, they are safe. They're responsible for their own safety."

Barrows walked away, and the

students stewed about the long process of making change and the university's ongoing promises to improve the sweatshop situation.

"It's like you push for something, someone makes you a promise, they don't keep it," said Erin McGrath, whose twin sister, Molly, was inside the office. "It makes you angry. Don't lie to me."

The gang in the hall munched on oranges, cookies and peanut butter as the hours went by. One bargained on the pay phone with a pizza restaurant, asking for several to be made without cheese — vegan-style.

There was no such luck for the people inside the office, who didn't have water or use of the chancellor's bathroom. By late afternoon, they had linked themselves together by the neck with U-shaped bicycle locks.

"I don't know they're being denied food and water," Barrows said in his next visit, around 7 p.m., responding to complaints from the students outside the office. "If they want water and food, they can get up and leave anytime."

A police sergeant was in the office with keys to the door to escort anyone out. One woman did leave at about 7 p.m., running out to the bathroom, looking exhausted. Also leaving at that point was a Capital Times reporter who got locked in while covering the initial discussion.

About 7:15 p.m., the well-dressed Ward finally showed up, and the less-dressy group began chanting again.

Ward then read a brief statement. Cheers erupted when he said the university would pull out

of the Fair Labor Association. He would meet with the students again on Monday.

But not all demands were met. The university wasn't ready to join the new Workers' Rights Consortium.

Ward ordered the doors to the lobby of his office opened and walked off to a waiting car in front of the building.

The jubilant group went in to see the remaining protesters. A thick scent of body odor filled the room, and those still locked together had smiles on their faces.

"I feel good that there's people in here," said Riza Falk, still locked to her fellow protesters. "I was getting really frustrated for a while."

There was the sweet sound of a saxophone. Someone else beat a bongo drum. The protesters prepared to keep on fighting, and wondered what was next.

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