



EMORY

Office of the President

19 April 2011

Mr. Alex Zavell
Students and Workers in Solidarity

Dear Alex:

Thank you for your letter sent on 6 April on behalf of SWS. That letter, along with earlier correspondence and meetings with members of the administration and others in the Emory community, has drawn Emory's attention to the ongoing disagreement between two very large organizations, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and Sodexo, Inc. According to its web site, SEIU is the "fastest growing union" in America, the largest healthcare union, the largest property services union, and the second largest public services union. Sodexo claims on its own web site to be the leading food-services provider in North America, serving more than 10 million persons daily in some six thousand locations, just on this continent.

On one side of the debate, SEIU alleges instances of abuse by Sodexo of its employees—such as human rights violated, workers dismissed without cause, reprisals levied for labor organizing, and overwork for substandard wages. Sodexo responds that such allegations are not true and are part of an ongoing smear campaign by SEIU. Sodexo explains that this campaign is designed to convince universities to pressure Sodexo to give in to SEIU's demands to capitulate to organizing efforts without allowing Sodexo employees to vote in secret ballot elections under procedures established and overseen by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). SEIU posts on its web site reports from Human Rights Watch and TransAfrica about the alleged abuses by Sodexo. In turn, Sodexo posts claims that it has earned praise and awards for its employment practices, ranging from a first-place ranking by DiversityInc for diversity inclusion, to recognition as "best company for hourly workers" and "best company for multicultural women" by *Working Mother Magazine*, to praise by Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and others as an employer of LGBT workers.

For its part, Sodexo has brought a suit against SEIU, charging violations of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, alleging that SEIU has engaged in blackmail, vandalism, trespassing, harassment, and violations of lobbying law. Sodexo asserts that SEIU uses students and front organizations like United Students Against Sweatshops to help assert its positions, and that SEIU has donated (according to the Department of Labor) at least a hundred thousand dollars to USAS because it serves the union's purposes. SEIU, in turn, calls the lawsuit "bogus."

The crux of the issue appears to stand at the intersection of the competing interests of two giant organizations: on the one hand, SEIU's interest in breaking more fully into representation of food service workers on university campuses; and, on the other hand, Sodexo's wish to preserve its reputation and position of leadership in the food service industry.

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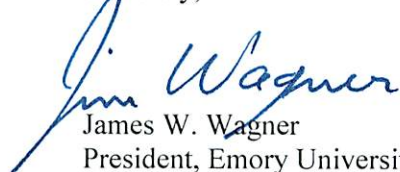
For us at Emory, as an ethically engaged community, two questions arise. The first is whether food service workers employed by Sodexo at Emory are treated fairly and have the right and freedom to unionize without being intimidated or threatened. The second, broader question is how best to weigh competing claims about activities beyond our campus.

With regard to the first question, from what we have been able to determine, Sodexo does not engage in practices that block employees from the opportunity to vote in secret through the federally sanctioned NLRB process. Sodexo's employees have avenues available to them if they have grievances—specifically, Sodexo's human resources department and the NLRB. Nor have we found evidence that Sodexo workers on the Emory campus are subject to systematic violations of either Emory's code of ethics or Sodexo's own internal policies.

With regard to the second question, concerning claims levied by Sodexo and SEIU about activities beyond our campus, our judgment is that the unresolved charges and counter-charges do not warrant terminating Sodexo's contract on the Emory campus.

Because of interest expressed by some members of the Emory community in this issue, I am prepared to share this response more broadly. As you have opened a conversation about the matter in the *Emory Wheel*, you may also wish to share this letter with the editors of the *Wheel*.

Sincerely,



James W. Wagner
President, Emory University