

Students, local workers speak out against labor violations

On Saturday night, the Student-Worker Solidarity activism group protested in support of workers suing a local restaurant. Group leaders say their protest was also part of a push for higher wages citywide.

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Douglas Kessel / Senior Staff Photographer

Members of the growing student activism group Student-Worker-Solidarity protested two Upper West Side restaurants' labor practices Saturday night. It was just days before a court date for former employees at one of the restaurants, who say they were mistreated and underpaid.

Around 60 members of SWS marched down Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue to protest what they called sweatshop conditions at [Indus Valley](#), where employees are suing the management, and Domino's Pizza.

"We are gathered here as Student-Worker-Solidarity, as students and workers together to show we will not tolerate worker abuses on our campus and in our community," Jane Brennan, CC '14, an organizer for the rally, said.

Twelve former employees are [suing the owners and managers](#) of Indus Valley, on 100th Street and Broadway, alleging their tips were stolen and they were paid below-minimum wage, among other labor violations. The owners and managers face a deadline to name new lawyers on Dec. 13.

Delivery workers at Domino's Pizza, on 108th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, have also accused the franchised store of failing to pay minimum wage, forcing unpaid overtime hours, and firing any workers who complained.

The marchers were joined by members of employee rights organizations [Sweatshop Free Upper West Side](#) and [Justice Now!](#), and trailed by Public Safety and New York Police Department officers. They crossed College Walk before proceeding to Domino's and then Indus Valley.

The group held signs accusing the restaurants of "stealing wages" and being "cheap" while demanding that owners "pay your workers." Students also handed out fliers in front of the restaurants concerned.

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“Our main goal here is to raise awareness,” George Joseph, CC ’16 and a SWS leader, said. “It’s not just about Indus Valley ... it’s part of a bigger movement to push for higher wages in New York City.”

Some passersby stopped to speak with protesters, accepting their fliers, while others screamed “Shut up.”

A cashier at Domino’s Pizza, after closing the door to the store, said, “I’m not really paying attention.”

SWS took on the [Barnard union workers’ protests](#) earlier in the semester, which ended in a contract union workers and administrators [called a fair compromise](#). Columbia students in the protest said they believed it was their duty as students at an elite university to bring light to social justice issues.

“Even though we may be coming from an area of privilege, it’s our responsibility to fix these inequalities,” Joseph said.

“We are students. We have power,” Lizzy Wolozin, BC ’16, said. “It is our responsibility as citizens of America to give power to those who have none.”

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Correction: The number of employee-plaintiffs in the case is 12, not 11. A previous version of this article also stated that the owners and managers were expected to appear in court on Dec. 13. Spectator regrets the errors.