

## "We have a war against working people," said Dolores Huerta at UMKC

*Civil rights activist calls for an economic justice movement to support workers*

[Fadhel Kaboub](#) Jan . 26 . 2004

Around 500 people gathered on Friday (Jan. 23) night at UMKC's Pierson Auditorium for the Social Justice Speaker Series delivered by Dolores Huerta, co-founder and First Vice President Emeritus of the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO (UFW).

Dolores Huerta, nicknamed 'the dragon lady' for her toughness and perseverance during negotiations, reminded her KC audience that Martin Luther King was killed in Memphis, TN, where he was helping sanitation workers to organize a labor union to fight against low wages and intolerable working conditions.



**Dolores Huerta speaks before a crowd of 500 at UMKC**

*photo by Abraham T. Dyer*

"How can we honor Martin Luther King and not honor the right of workers to have a union," said Huerta referring to president Bush's visit to the King Center in Atlanta last week.

"Young people go to school and don't know what a labor union is. In California, there was a great labor studies program at the college level, but our new California Governor [Arnold Schwarzeneger] wiped it out from the budget," said Huerta. "We have a war against working people," she continued.

Dolores Huerta expressed her views about President Bush's proposal to legalize many undocumented workers calling it "legalized slavery." She said that many Mexican farmers come to the U.S. because they couldn't compete with big US agribusiness in Mexico.

Huerta commented on the "No Child Left Behind Act" calling it a "prison preparation program." She continued by saying "the prison population is increasing because our education system is deteriorating."

Huerta argued that all the current problems with the healthcare system, and education system are caused by people in office. "We need to do something about it, we also need more ethnic and gender representation," said Huerta explaining why she is endorsing Howard Dean.

"50% of people don't vote, and 75% of young people don't vote, and it's mostly young people who get killed now in Iraq," said Huerta reminding young people in the audience of the importance to participate in the democratic process.

"The most important day of your life is election day, not your birthday, because that's the day that will effect you for the rest of your life."

Dolores Huerta spent a major part of her speech rallying young people and students in the audience and arguing that they should use their education to help workers achieve a decent standard of living. "Civil rights movement, and women's movement were all built by young people

like you," she said

"If you're on a deserted island, like on the show "Survivor", who would you take with you, a farm worker or an attorney?" said Huerta adding that "the people who create the nation's wealth are the people who work with their hands, like farm workers, and not CEOs."

Continuing her life-long support for the working-class, Dolores Huerta called for "an economic justice movement to support workers." She also spoke about the need for reparations to the African American and Native American community. "There should be free education for all," she said.

At 69, Dolores Huerta continues to use all her energy to support the union she co-founded with Cesar Chavez, with whom she also founded the Robert F. Kennedy Medical Plan, the Juan De La Cruz Farm Worker Pension Fund, the Farm Workers Credit Union, the first medical and pension plan and credit union for farm workers.

This event was co-sponsored by the UMKC Arts and Sciences Student Council, Students for Wymyn's and Gender Studies (SWAGS), The Campus Greens, The Sociology/Criminal Justice Club, American Humanics, The Economics Club, Association of Latin American Students, Minority Student Affairs, Hispanic Law Students Association, The Institute for Labor Studies, American Studies, and Women's and Gender Studies.

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