

maquila network update

September 1997 Vol. 2 / No. 3

Fall Campaigns Target Sweatshops

Labour rights activists in Canada and the US have begun three months intensive Stop Sweatshop campaigning targeting back-to-school and holiday clothing, footwear and toy markets. In Canada, the Labour Behind the Label Coalition kicked off campaigning with the launching of its *Wear Fair Action Kit* on Labour Day.

Northern/Woolworth

The Labour Behind the Label Coalition is calling on groups across the country to increase the pressure on the Woolworth Northern Group to redress abuses of Metro Toronto home and factory workers whose rights were violated by Woolworth contractors and to ensure similar violations do not occur in the future.

During the back-to-school shopping period, groups across the country are organizing store leafleting, meetings with store managers and letter writing bees.

On June 21, the coalition together with the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) Ontario District Council staged

a successful "Sweatshop Fashion Show" outside Toronto's Eaton's Centre.

As UNITE members modelled Northern Traditions, Northern Reflections and Northern Getaway clothes produced under sweatshop conditions in Metro Toronto, fashion show MC Alex Dagg contrasted the sewing cost and sales price of each garment.

Meanwhile coalition members gave away "Stop Northern Sweatshops" balloons to children entering the mall.

On September 6, over 40 participants in a Stop Sweatshops forum in Hamilton leafleted their Eaton's Centre and the Northern Reflections store. Before being escorted out of the mall by security, they delivered a letter of protest, signed by forum delegates, to the store manager.

Leafleting of Northern stores is also being organized

in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

Day of Conscience

On October 4, two weeks before the White House Task Force on

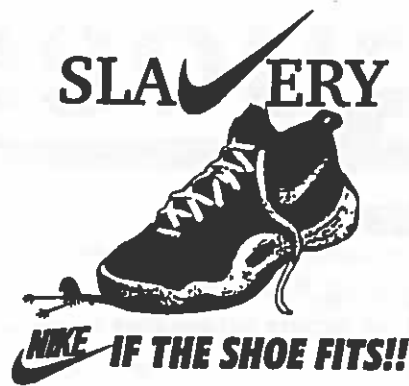
Sweatshops releases its final report, a broad coalition of US groups is staging a National Day of

Conscience to End Sweatshop Abuses. The US coalition is demanding a strengthening of the anti-sweatshops accord released in April 1997 by the Clinton appointed US Apparel Industry Partnership to include provisions for a living wage and real independent monitoring.

In the US, anti-sweats activists are organizing marches, store leafleting, rallies, vigils, ringing of church bells, and inter-denominational services. October 4



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will also be the US coalition's kick-off to their "Holiday Season of Conscience."

To draw attention to sweatshop conditions in Canada, the Labour Behind the Label Coalition is calling on groups across the country to mark October 4 as the culmination of back-to-school actions against Woolworth Northern stores.

The coalition will also launch a petition calling on the Canadian government to initiate a process similar to that in the US to challenge sweatshop conditions in Canada and off-shore.

October 18 Nike Protests

On October 18, Nike campaigners will stage store actions in Canada, the US, Europe and Australia, demanding that Nike accept truly independent monitoring of working conditions in its Asian contract factories and ensure that workers making its products are paid a living wage.

In Canada, the Maquila Solidarity Network is working with groups in other cities to organize store leafleting, rallies, street theatre and letter writing.

Meanwhile, at schools and universities, student groups and union locals are opposing Nike corporate sponsorships of ath-

letic programs. Primary and high school students are writing to Chicago Bulls basketball star, Michael Jordan -- who receives \$20 million a year for promoting the Nike swoosh -- asking him to oppose Nike sweatshop practices.

November APEC Forums

On November 20 and 21 in Vancouver, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development are hosting an international forum on "Workers' Rights and Democratic Development." The forum is part of the People's Summit on APEC, which will also include forums on issues facing youth, women, indigenous peoples, and other sectors.

December 1 - 5 Holiday Week of Action

In December, Stop Sweatshops campaigns will expand their focus to target health and safety and other violations against toy industry workers in Asia and Mexico.

The CLC is calling on its affili-

ates to join with social movement partners in a December 1 - 5 week of action against sweatshop abuses and child labour. ♦

Calendar

September:

Leafleting of Woolworth Northern stores

October 4:

US National Day of Conscience Against Sweatshop Abuses/ Canadian solidarity actions target Woolworth and federal government

October 18:

Nike Day of Action

November 17-24:

People's Summit on APEC in Vancouver

December 1-5:

Holiday Week of Action against sweatshop abuses and child labour.

For information, contact MSN.

Mattel Harassment...One Year Later

On September 9, MSN members across Canada sent faxes to Mattel and the Governor of the Mexican state of Baja California protesting inaction in the case of four former Mattel employees who, one year ago, were illegally detained by management personnel, interrogated for ten hours and pressured to sign resignation letters.

Mattel has done nothing to compensate the four women or to discipline those responsible.

In March, the Mexican state court ruled that because the managers had not demanded a ransom for the women's release, illegal confinement had not taken place. The women are now petitioning the state Governor to reopen the case.

Solidarity faxes also came from the APEC Labour Rights Monitor (ALARM) Project and the Coalition for the Safe Production of Toys, both based in Hong Kong. ♦

Maquila Network Notes

Custom Trim Workers Exchange Experiences

In mid-August, two Mexican former Custom Trim employees, Manuel Salvador Bravo and Leonor Olvera Puente, visited Waterloo, Ontario to discuss common issues with their Canadian counterparts. Workers found more commonalities than differences, especially on health and safety issues.

One of the critical differences is wages. The basic hourly rate for Custom Trim workers in Waterloo is \$12.22. In Matamoros it is \$1.51 and in Valle Hermoso \$.71.

Although Waterloo workers are concerned that more jobs may be shifted to Mexico, they learned that Mexican workers also suffer job insecurity.

Leonor is one of many workers who has been pressured to resign after suffering repetitive strain injuries. Manuel was fired, along with 27 other workers, for participating in a wildcat strike to raise wages and improve conditions.

Leonor and Manuel's visit was sponsored by the Steelworkers Humanity Fund, following on a December visit by Waterloo Custom Trim workers to Matamoros and Valle Hermoso.

Custom Trim is a Canadian-based company that produces trim elements for steering wheels, shift knobs, seats and head rests. ♦

Canadian Unions Support Fair Vote for Mexican Workers

The Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Autoworkers, and the Communication, Energy and Paperworkers are calling on the Conciliation and Arbitration Board in Tijuana, Mexico to ensure that Hyundai contract workers are allowed a democratic vote on whether to be represented by an independent union.

On September 3, the board was to hold hearings to set a date for a vote by workers at the Han Young factory, which produces parts for truck tractor trailers exclusively for Hyundai.

The Canadian unions are also urging the board to order the reinstatement of three fired union leaders, and to prevent any further intimidation, firings or attempted bribery of workers.

On June 2, Han Young workers staged a wildcat strike demanding wage increases and payment

of profit-sharing, improved health and safety measures, and recognition of their independent union. The company agreed to address all the workers' demands, but soon after the strikers returned to work, it hired a union-busting consultant and began back-peddalling on concessions it had made.

Meanwhile, workers at two other Hyundai sub-contractors in Tijuana, Dae Won and Ley Mex, have been waiting for almost a year for the Conciliation and Arbitration Board to rule on their application for an independent union. During that time, the contractors have fired union leaders at both factories.

The Maquila Solidarity Network is working with Factor X/Casa de la Mujer in Tijuana and the Korea House for International Solidarity (KHIS) to promote solidarity between workers in Korea and Tijuana employed by Korean companies such as Hyundai. ♦

P-VH Workers Win Only Union Contract in Guatemala's Maquilas

On August 14, Phillips-Van Huesen (P-VH) workers in Guatemala became the only maquila workers in that country with a signed collective agreement.

On Labour Day 1996, workers launched a union membership drive to obtain the 25 percent threshold needed to legally require the company to negotiate. On the same day, solidarity groups in five US cities leafleted stores selling P-VH products.

When the Guatemalan Ministry of Labour re-

fused to rule on whether the union had signed up the required number of workers, the US group Human Rights Watch conducted an independent investigation, which confirmed that the workers had met the legal requirements. As a result of pressure organized by the US/Guatemala Labor Education Project, P-VH CEO Bruce Klastky, who sits on the board of Human Rights Watch, accepted the findings and agreed to negotiate. ♦

new resources

Behind the Swoosh: The Struggle of Indonesians Making Nike Shoes, edited by Jeff Ballinger and Claes Olsson. Wide variety of background articles for Nike Campaign activities. 224 pps. Contact: Press For Change, PO Box 161, Alpine, NJ 07620.

"The Border," Special issue of *Race, Poverty & the Environment* edited by Ruben Solís, Summer/ Fall 1996. Includes profiles of US/Mexico border cities as well as information on labour and environmental struggles. Contact: Earth Island Institute, Box 29908 Presidio Station, San Francisco, CA 94129.

"Education for Action, Union Building for the 21st Century," Special Issue of *Our Times* magazine, September 1997. Includes articles comparing strategies and struggles of labour educators in Canada, US and Latin America.

"The Young and the Feckless," by Stephen Glass, *The New Republic*, August 1997, pp. Excellent critique of Andrew Young's monitoring report on Nike production practices.

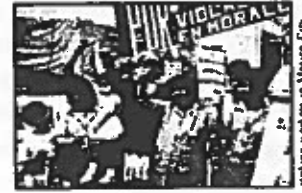
"Fighting Sweatshops, Building Solidarity," by Bob Jeffcott and Lynda Yanz, *Canadian Dimension*, September/October 1997, pp. 25-27. Analysis of the Canadian garment industry and the Stop Sweatshops movement.

"Death Comes to the Maquilas: A Border Story" by Debbie Nathan, *The Nation*, January 13, 1997, pp. 18-22. Links violence against women and women's work in the maquilas.

"Evening the Odds: Cross-border organizing gives labor a chance" by David Bacon, *The Progressive*, July 30, 1997, pp. 29-33. Describes independent union organizing in Tijuana, Mexico.

TRAVEL FOR TRANSFORMATION PRESENTS:

Solidarity Mission to Mexico



The Mexico Solidarity Tour is designed to provide a forum for education and exchange amongst Canadian and Mexican workers.

Not only can we support the Mexican independent labour movement in their struggle, but we can learn a great deal from their strategies to fight back.

Spring '98

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Sponsored By



A 45-page education/action kit for individuals and groups interested in getting involved in Campaigns to Stop Sweatshops. Includes Issue Sheets, Action Tools, and Corporate Profiles. In Canada, send \$6.50 (includes postage). Bulk rates available.

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The **Maquila Network Update** is published bi-monthly in English and Spanish by the Maquila Solidarity Network. The Network includes over 400 organizations and individuals across Canada. The MSN promotes solidarity between Canadian labour, women's and social movement groups and Mexican, Central American and Asian counterparts organizing to raise standards and improve conditions in maquiladora and export processing zones.

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Coming soon: MSN's new web page at <http://www.web.net/msn>

