

maquila network update

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Students Push the Envelope on Codes of Conduct

On October 20, students from more than 100 US university campuses called on their schools to join a student-created consortium to enforce codes of conduct on labour practices in the manufacture of university-licensed clothing. University-licensed apparel is a \$2.5 billion business in the US.



ABOVE: University of Toronto students toil in a mock sweatshop set up on their campus, drawing attention to the conditions under which licensed clothes are made.

Last year, students occupied university administration buildings at campuses across the US to win codes of conduct with strong living wage provisions and requirements that companies disclose the names and addresses of the production facilities where the apparel is made. This year, they are pushing the envelope on how these codes of conduct will be put into practice.

United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) is promoting its Worker Rights Consortium as an alternative to the Fair Labor Association (FLA), the product of the Clinton administration's Apparel Industry Partnership initiative. Members of the FLA include Nike, Liz Claiborne and other major labels, as well as more than 50 universities and some NGOs, including the International Labor Rights Fund.

In contrast to the FLA,

which focuses on the certification of supply factories by accredited monitors chosen by companies, the WRC emphasizes public access to information and independent verification of worker and third party complaints of code violations.

While only one university, Brown, has so far agreed to join the Worker Rights Consortium (and Brown also intends to remain a member of the FLA), student activism is pushing apparel companies

and the FLA to make stronger commitments on corporate disclosure and independent monitoring.

Companies Respond

In response to student demands for corporate disclosure, on October 8, Nike announced plans to release a partial list of its university apparel production facilities for five universities that are members of the FLA. Nike

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Student actions escalating



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released the locations of 39 factories that produce apparel for Georgetown University in Bangladesh, China, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Taiwan, Thailand and the United States.

On October 18, Reebok released an external audit report on labour practices in two factories employing 10,000 workers producing Reebok sport shoes in Indonesia.

On October 20, the Guatemalan NGO monitoring group COVERCO released a detailed and candid report on code violations and steps required to address them at a Liz Claiborne supply factory in Guatemala.

COVERCO's pilot project study was carried out with the cooperation of Liz Claiborne, and the report was released with the company's agreement.

On November 3, the US Collegiate Licensing Company (CLC), which coordinates licensing among US universities, announced that five manufacturers would join with five universities in a pilot project to test independent monitoring of codes of conduct in supply factories in Mexico, Costa Rica, Korea and India. Verification audits will

be carried out by Verite, a US not-for-profit organization.

According to the CLC, suppliers will be notified of steps that need to be taken to comply with its labour code standards, and a report and process description will be made public.

While none of these new initiatives satisfies the students' demand for full public disclosure of all production locations, they do represent a significant advance toward transparency in code monitoring and public access to information.

Canadian Students Mobilize

Meanwhile in Canada, Students Against Sweatshops groups are now active on at least six university campuses, most of which are in Ontario.

At the University of Toronto, students and the administration have reached agreement on a code of conduct, but the university has yet to approve the code.

The U of T code requires manufacturers to publicly disclose where university-licensed products are made and to accept monitoring of workplace conditions by

university-appointed monitors.

Students at U of T, York, Waterloo, Western, Guelph and other schools have organized bookstore leafleting, rallies, sweatshop fashion shows and banner hangings to raise student awareness of sweatshop abuses and to pressure their administrations to adopt strong codes of conduct with provisions for full public disclosure and independent monitoring.

"It's taken on-going student actions to get us this far," said Ian Thomson of Students Against Sweatshops at the University of Toronto. "Now pressure is escalating at universities across Ontario as students realize we're in a position to make a contribution. Our schools have to start taking responsibility for the treatment of workers producing licensed clothing."

maquila network update

is published quarterly in English and Spanish by the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN). The MSN 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. The MSN acts as the secretariat for the Labour Behind the Label Coalition and is active in Stop Sweatshops campaigning.

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news & notes

Tough Anti-Sweatshop Bill Approved

On September 29, California Governor Gary Davis signed a pioneering bill to tackle sweatshop abuses in the state's \$30 billion garment industry. Bill 633 imposes a "wage guarantee" requiring manufacturers, and retailers who make their own private label apparel, to pay workers the minimum wage and overtime compensation when their contractors fail to do so. It also gives garment workers a process to quickly recover their unpaid wages. The bill is the result of a ten year campaign by garment workers and advocacy groups and lengthy negotiations with manufacturers and retailers. According to Sweatshop Watch, the bill is a major breakthrough because it recognizes the responsibility of manufacturers and retailers for the labour practices of their contractors.

Fashion Show Exposes Trade/Sweatshop Link

On November 2, over 200 people attended a public forum in Toronto on "Sweatshops, Free Trade and the Americas." The forum, co-sponsored by the Maquila Solidarity Network, the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD) and Students Against Sweatshops-Canada (SAS-C), was part of a week of events organized parallel to the trade ministers' negotiations for a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The forum was kicked off by a "Sweatshop Fashion Show," exposing the link between free trade and the spread of sweatshop abuses in the Americas. Models in the mock fashion show included Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians, ICHRDD President Warren Allmand, Berta Lujan of the

Mexican Action Network on Free Trade, Dick Martin, President of the Inter-American Regional Workers Organization, and members of Students Against Sweatshops-Canada. A panel discussion highlighted the efforts of women's groups to improve conditions in free trade zones. The panelists included Reyna Montero of Casa de la Mujer (Women's House) in Tijuana, Mexico, Rosibel Flores of the Women's Movement - "Melida Anaya Montes" in El Salvador, and Josefa Rivera of the Movement of Working and Unemployed Women - "Maria Elena Cuadra" in Nicaragua.

Indonesian Workers' Jobs on the Line

Sustained international pressure has forced management at the PT Gamentama garment factory in Indonesia to negotiate with an independent union representing fired workers, but so far the company is only willing to offer the workers severance pay. The workers are demanding reinstatement in their jobs. In July, the workers went on strike for salaries that meet the minimum wage and transportation and meal allowances that comply with Manpower Department standards. The company refused to meet with representatives of the Indonesian Prosperity Union led by Muchtar Pakpahan. The striking workers were fired, and an international campaign was launched demanding their reinstatement and recognition of their union. The factory produces apparel for the Gap, Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren, DKNY, and Eddie Bauer for export to the US and Canada.

Nike Still Not Doing It Just

Nike claims that 75% of its Indonesian shoe workers make an average of 400,000 Rupiah a month.

However, a recent survey of Nike shoe workers in Indonesia found that 1,939 of the 2,300 workers interviewed were making between 250,000 and 300,000 Rupiah (US\$35-\$42) per month. Only one percent of the workers were making 400,000 Rupiah a month.

1,309 workers reported seeing another worker mistreated or yelled at (57%). 818 complained of forced overtime.

500 workers producing shoes for the Canadian manufacturer, Bata, were also interviewed. Although Bata produces cheaper shoes for sale in the Indonesian market, wages were higher than those paid at Nike contract factories.

MEC Campaigns for EPZ Reform

The Nicaraguan Movement of Working and Unemployed Women - "Maria Elena Cuadra" (MEC) is leading a campaign to reform the country's free trade zone legislation. MEC is demanding changes to the law to require maquila companies to respect the national labour code and minimum labour standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO). MEC has collected 50,000 signatures in support of their proposal. On October 7, accompanied by 100 women maquila workers, MEC leaders presented their proposal to the Nicaraguan National Assembly.

For information on how to support these campaigns, visit the MSN website:
<http://www.web.net/~msn>

Lives of Guatemalan Unionists Threatened

On October 13, five leaders of the Guatemalan Banana workers union, SITRABI, were captured by 200 heavily armed men, threatened with death, and forced to resign and abandon their homes. The unionists had been organizing against the firing of nearly 900 workers by a Guatemalan subsidiary of the US-based Del Monte Fresh Produce. The banana union leaders have made an urgent request for international action to ensure their safety and that of 3,000 banana workers who remain on or near the plantations. A report on the incident by the UN agency MINUGUA notes that the union hall where the SITRABI leaders were held at gun point is located 400 metres from the national police station in the centre of the town of Morales. "At no time during the entire episode in which there were numerous vehicles and armed men surrounding the union hall did the national police make any effort to investigate what was taking place," states the report. MINUGUA calls the use of paramilitary forces in Morales "the second most serious breach of the Peace Accords outside the killing of Archbishop Gerardi."

Kathie Lee Feels the Heat

Kathie Lee Gifford is feeling the heat once again for alleged sweatshop practices in factories producing apparel bearing her label sold by Wal-Mart. The Salvadoran labour federation FEASIES reports that workers employed at the Caribbean Apparel maquila factory are subjected to forced pregnancy tests, forced overtime and a 12 hour work day, sexual harassment, physical and verbal abuse, lack of



Kathie Lee Gifford

access to health care, unreasonable production quotas, restrictions on use of washroom facilities, lack of potable water, and poor ventilation. According to the US National Labor Committee (NLC), two Caribbean Apparel workers were fired after meeting with a NLC/United Students Against Sweatshops delegation in August. Lorena del Carmen Hernandez Moran was reportedly detained for two hours by management, interrogated about her union activities, offered bribes, questioned about her children and forced to sign a blank piece of paper. Union organizer, Giovanni Fuentes, has reportedly received a death threat from Caribbean Apparel's lawyer.

Fire Victim Denied Compensation

On November 3, the Hong Kong Coalition for the Safe Production of Toys released a public statement condemning the Italian toy company Artsana (Chicco) for failing to provide compensation to victims of the 1993 Zhili fire at a toy factory in China. According to the Coalition, Artsana had agreed as early as 1997 to pay compensation of 300 million lira to the fire victims and their families. The company claims it was unable to obtain a list of the victims, and that the

money has gone to support humanitarian projects. The Coalition says that months ago it provided the company a list of about 40 victims. "To many people, Zhili fire which killed 87 workers and injured a further 47, is old news," says the

Coalition, "but the survivors, their families and the victims' families are still suffering... They need money for medical treatment and for their livelihoods NOW."

Sweatshops: Clothes - The Real Cost of the Clothes You Buy, first of series of booklets on apparel, toy and shoe industries, Victoria International Development Education Association, Nov. 1999, 32pp, \$6, video@home.com

The Power and Limits of Consumer Action, by Kevin Thomas (MSN), Issue Paper #5, The United Church of Canada, Moderator's Consultation on Faith & the Economy, <http://www.fait-and-the-economy.org/Thm4Pap5-Thomas.htm>

NO LOGO: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies, by Naomi Klein, brand name secrets and anti-corporate activism, Knopf, Jan. 2000, 512 pp, \$35.95.

Phillips-Van Heusen: An Industry "Leader" Unveiled, An Investigative Report into the Closing of a Model Maquiladora Factory in Guatemala, US/Labor Education in the Americas Project, June 15, 1999, usglep@igc.org

The Case for Corporate Responsibility: Paying a Living Wage to Maquila Workers in El Salvador, the National Labor Committee, May 14, 1999, <http://www.nlcnet.org>

Close the GAP Education and Action Guide, retailer action cards and other campaign materials, Ten Days for Global Justice, 24 pp, \$10, www.web.net/~tendays

Voluntary Codes of Conduct: Do They Strengthen or Undermine Government Regulation and Worker Organizing, Oct. 1999, MSN.

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