

# maquila network update



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## Barrios released from prison

But Mexican labour rights activist continues to receive death threats

**O**n January 12, a small group of supporters, including MSN coordinator Lynda Yanz, was waiting outside the Puebla state prison for permission to visit Martin Barrios, president of the Human and Labour Rights Commission of the Tehuacan Valley, when Barrios suddenly walked out of the prison a free man.

Barrios was greeted by overjoyed family members, colleagues from the Commission, the MSN coordinator, and seven former workers from the Calidad en Confecciones garment factory, whose employer, Lucio Gil Zarate, had brought the charges against Barrios that resulted in his arbitrary arrest and detention.

Falsely accused of attempting to blackmail the maquila owner, Barrios had been held in prison for two weeks without chance to post bail.

According to Barrios, his release was the result of the enormous local, national and international pressure that was brought to bear on the state authorities, not the good will of those authorities or his accuser.



**Above:** *Martin Barrios in jail*



**Left:** *Barrios and supporters upon his release from jail*

### Arrested for defending worker's rights

In November 2005, the Commission had filed a complaint with the local Conciliation and Arbitration Board on behalf of workers employed at Gil's Calidad en Confecciones factory. The complaint charged the company

with forcing employees to work 12 hours a day without overtime pay, making arbitrary and unjust pay deductions, mistreating workers, and failing to provide facemasks or clean drinking water.

On November 10, the company signed an agreement pledging to eliminate the

abuses, but, according to the Commission, Gil failed to comply with the agreement, and conditions worsened.

In order to convince Gil to resume negotiations, the workers staged a legal work stoppage on November 21. Gil responded by locking them inside the plant until 6:00 or 7:00 p.m.

When they arrived at work the next

morning, all 163 workers who had participated in the strike were told they were fired. The factory was closed that same day and production was shifted to a factory owned by Gil in Ajalpan.

The Commission filed a second complaint with the Board for unjust dismissal.

—continued on page 8—

**inside**

- Marcos unmasks the labour behind the label ... 2
- Students win Toronto No Sweat policy ..... 3
- Play Fair at the Olympics Campaign Report ..... 4
- News & Notes ..... 6

PHOTO: AFL-CIO SOLIDARITY CENTER

# Marcos unmask the labour behind the label

Speaking in Altepexi, Puebla on February 12, 2006, Zapatista leader subcomandante Marcos made the following statement in support of the rights of maquila workers who make blue jeans in Mexico's Tehuacan Valley:



## 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 Ethical Trading Action Group and is active in Stop Sweatshops campaigning.

### Editorial Staff

Priscilla Claeys  
Bob Jeffcott  
Georgia Marman  
Kevin Thomas  
Lynda Yanz

### Translation

Anibal Viton

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**Maquila Solidarity Network**  
606 Shaw Street  
Toronto, ON, M6G 3L6 Canada  
Phone: 416-532-8584  
Fax: 416-532-7688  
E-mail: [info@maquilasolidarity.org](mailto:info@maquilasolidarity.org)  
web: [www.maquilasolidarity.org](http://www.maquilasolidarity.org)

*When we buy a pair of blue jeans, we don't see how they were made. The story of exploitation that we have been told by our compañeras and compañeros is not written on the jeans. You don't see the working days of more than 12 hours. You don't see the humiliation that the workers experience at the hands of the line supervisors or the factory managers or the maquila owners. You don't see the exploitation they suffer after those long workdays when they receive only a small amount of money.*

*That's how the system tricks us. The products appear, but you don't see the worker who made them, and who suffered to make them. And, above all, you don't see who gets the money that you pay for those jeans. The money doesn't go to the compañeras and compañeros who sewed the jeans, who dyed them, and who put the label on them. It goes to the factory owner. It may well go to one of the big politicians or to one of their relatives who, in the Tehuacan Valley, has the name Gil. And when we look behind those names, we find that there are big brands based in other countries.*

*On these jeans is written a story that ended at the moment they were dyed in blue, when the dye residues were released and contaminated the waters of the Tehuacan Valley, when the polluted waters started to affect the indigenous people and communities who depend on the spring water. And when they lost their water and their land, they had to emigrate to the United States in order to find work. And they find themselves walking in one of these big North American cities and on the billboards they see these jeans being marketed by a US brand for a price in American dollars. And they know they were made by one of their relatives.*

*Imagine if all the products we buy carried the story of exploitation, the suffering and humiliation of the workers. Every product would become an agitator who would be saying that there is no justice in this land.*

*We have to scratch our story on these jeans with our own hands because we don't have anything else with which to write our name on them – the story of our dignity, our strength and our courage. On this pair of jeans will be written not only the story of exploitation, but the story of a rebellion that started in February 2006 in Altepexi and, together with all those who are rising up in the rest of this country, illuminated Mexico with the most beautiful example of love that this land has experienced – the story of people fighting together so that everyone lives in justice, democracy and freedom.*

# Students win adoption of No Sweat policy at Toronto Catholic School Board

When the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) was ready to approve a No Sweat purchasing policy for its school uniforms last November, students, teachers, parents, staff and trustees all expected it to conform with the draft policy their joint committee had sent to the Board.

After three years of campaigning, debating and drafting, a comprehensive No Sweat policy was ready to be adopted.

But vigorous lobbying by uniform suppliers convinced TCDSB trustees to remove two key recommendations before adopting the policy on November 10. Although suppliers would be expected to meet minimum labour standards when producing uniforms for the Board, they would not be required to disclose factory locations, nor would they be subjected to any independent verification of factory conditions.

Martin McCarthy, President of RJ McCarthy, a major supplier of Catholic school uniforms in Canada, told the Board that he is “fully supportive of the policy of the Board,” but that public disclosure “would put at risk our competitive advantage, and make public what is proprietary information.”

Public disclosure of factory locations is already a require-



“Student commitment to the issue has been consistent, and commitment has grown.”

**Tahnee Pantig,**  
student, Cardinal  
Carter Academy of  
the Arts

ment at a number of other Ontario Catholic school boards.

At least eight Ontario Boards have been working together to develop a two-year pilot project with the US-based Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) to verify conditions in their supply factories. Over the course of the project, the WRC will carry out investigations into at least two selected supply factories and work with suppliers to address any labour rights violations they encounter. In addition, the WRC requires full public disclosure of factory locations.

## Activists regroup

As the TCDSB’s December meeting approached, No Sweat campaigners regrouped and began lobbying Board trustees to reopen the discussion.

“Student commitment to the issue has been consistent,” said Tahnee Pantig, a student at Cardinal Carter Academy for the Arts, “and commitment has grown.”

Students launched “patch days” at local schools, wearing patches saying, “I want to know where my uniform was made.” They also turned up en masse to the December TCDSB meeting, along with parents and supporters.

After a lengthy debate, the Board agreed to reconsider the policy and invited the Worker Rights Consortium to speak about their pilot project at the Board’s next meeting in January 2006.

The issue came to a head at the Board’s February 8 meeting, when supportive trustees moved to reinsert in

the policy the requirement for full public disclosure of factory locations.

After receiving deputations and arguments from students, teachers, priests, and trustees, supported by presentations from the Maquila Solidarity Network and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, the TCDSB voted unanimously to revise its policy to apply to all apparel purchased by the Board and to require full public disclosure of factory locations.

In addition, the TCDSB voted to join the other eight Ontario Catholic school boards in the WRC’s two-year pilot project.

Trustees repeatedly cited the student leadership and dedication to the issue as the main reason for adopting the revised policy.

“Their time has come,” said Board Chair Oliver Carroll, who initially voted against public disclosure, but changed his vote following the student campaign. “We have an obligation to respect what our students are saying. There has to be some tangible result from that effort.”

# PLAY FAIR at the OLYMPICS

## CAMPAIGN REPORT

As the Turin Winter Olympic Games come to a close, it's time to take stock of what has been achieved by the Play Fair at the Olympics campaign to date and to look forward to what we might accomplish by the opening of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics.

The Play Fair at the Olympics campaign was launched in March 2004, four months prior to the Athens Olympic Games, by an international alliance that included the Global Union Federations, Oxfam International, and the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC).

In Canada, the campaign was led by the Canadian Labour Congress, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam Quebec, the Quebec Coalition Against Sweatshops, and MSN.

The two main objectives of the campaign were:

- To convince the Olympic movement that it needs to ensure that the Olympic ideals of respect, dignity and fair play also apply to the young women and men who make the Olympic-branded sportswear products;

- To convince the sportswear companies that make Olympic-branded products to join together with trade unions and other

concerned organizations on a "program of work" to address endemic problems in the sportswear industry.

### ENGAGING WITH THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

The Alliance proposed to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Olympic movement that they require as part of their licensing, sponsorship and marketing contractual agreements that companies making Olympic-branded products comply with internationally recognized labour standards.

It also proposed that the IOC work with international trade union organizations and appropriate NGOs on the development of an ethical labour standard policy and effective mechanisms for its implementation, and that respect for workers' rights be made an integral part of the Olympic Charter and the IOC Code of Ethics.

In Canada, the Play Fair at the Olympics Coalition had two fruitful meetings with the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) in 2004, and as a result of those meetings, the COC agreed to consider a

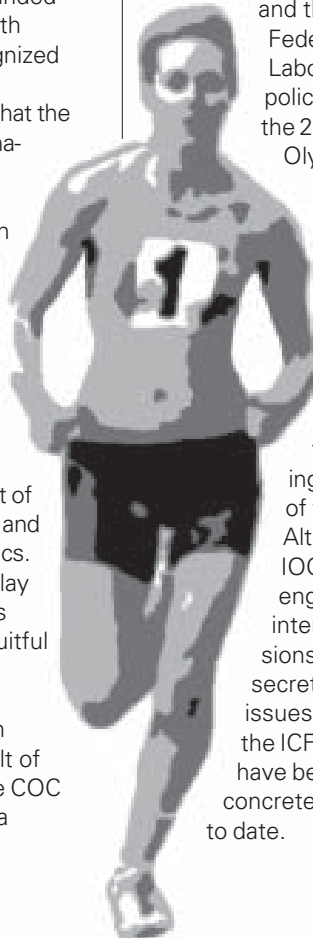
proposal for an ethical licensing policy.

Also in 2004, the BC Ethical Purchasing Group, a coalition of labour, student and non-governmental organizations in British Columbia, met with the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) and proposed that VANOC adopt the City of Vancouver's ethical purchasing policy as its own. That proposal is currently part of broader discussions between VANOC and the BC Federation of Labour on policies related to the 2010 Winter Olympics.

In October 2005, the ICFTU, on behalf of the Play Fair Alliance, met with the marketing department of the IOC. Although the IOC agreed to engage in internal discussions within its secretariat on the issues raised by the ICFTU, there have been no concrete outcomes to date.

### CAMPAIGNING AND ENGAGING WITH BRANDS

In order to push for sector-wide solutions to endemic problems in the sportswear industry, the campaign organizers decided to focus on the "second-tier" sportswear brands that have managed to escape the level of public scrutiny that companies like Nike, Reebok and Adidas have experienced.



The brands highlighted were Asics, Fila, Kappa, Lotto, Mizuno, Puma and Umbro. The campaign also lobbied the first-tier brands to bring their purchasing practices in line with their commitments to core labour standards.

In the first six weeks of the campaign, 100,000 signatures worldwide were received on cards, petitions and protest letters sent to the companies and the IOC. By the time of the Athens Olympics, more than half a million signatures had been collected.



## RESULTS TO DATE

Although most of the targeted companies acknowledged the need for a sectoral approach to dealing with endemic problems in the industry, there has not been significant progress to date on sector-wide collaborative action.

More progress has been made with individual companies on bringing their codes of conduct more in line with international labour standards, particularly concerning freedom of association. Some of the companies also agreed to engage directly with labour and nongovernmental organizations in producing countries on how to more effectively implement their labour standards policies.

Although it was not a demand of the campaign, two of the targeted companies, Puma and Asics, responded by joining the Fair Labor Association (FLA). As well, four FLA member companies – Nike, Reebok, Adidas and Puma – responded jointly to the Play Fair campaign program of work, acknowledging the central importance of promoting freedom of association, greater worker awareness of their associational rights, and an environment that made it possible for workers to exercise those rights.

## CANADIANS TAKE ON ROOTS

In Canada, the campaign pressured and encouraged Canadian Olympic supplier, Roots, to bring its code of conduct in line with interna-

tional labour standards and to collaborate with labour and nongovernmental organizations on the development of a more credible and effective code compliance program.

Roots' initial response to the campaign was to declare that since all its Olympic-branded products were made in Canada, there couldn't possibly be problems in its supply factories.

The coalition challenged Roots to disclose where its products were made in order to verify whether a "Made in Canada" label was proof of decent working conditions. It also revealed that some of Roots Olympic-branded apparel products were actually made in China or Taiwan.

Roots eventually agreed to meet with the coalition and made some improvements in its code of conduct. Roots also began to explore possible membership in the Fair Labor Association, though it is unclear whether it will move forward to become an FLA Participating Company.

## WHAT ABOUT HBC?

In 2005, VANOC made a surprise decision to change uniform suppliers from Roots to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). Although HBC's code of conduct is slightly more consistent with international labour standards and its code compliance program slightly more transparent than those of most other Canadian retailers, the switch to HBC does not guarantee that Olympic-branded products will be made under decent conditions.

A quick shopping trip to The Bay reveals that most of

HBC's Olympic-branded apparel products were made in China, a country that severely restricts freedom of association, where hours of work violations are the norm rather than the exception.

To its credit, HBC has shown a willingness to enter into dialogue with the Play Fair at the Olympics coalition, and has indicated that it might provide more transparent reports on its Olympic-branded products.

However, the recent buyout of HBC by US investor Jerry Zucker could put these tentative plans in jeopardy.

## FROM TURIN TO VANCOUVER

Now that the Turin Olympics are behind us, the campaign is looking ahead to the Beijing Olympics in 2008. The lead-up to those games will be an important opportunity to challenge sportswear companies and the industry as a whole to seriously address systemic worker rights violations in the world's largest garment producing country, as well as in other garment producing countries, particularly violations of and restrictions on freedom of association.

For the Canadian coalition, the 2010 Vancouver Olympics will be an exciting opportunity to attempt to set an important precedent for the Olympics movement – the adoption of an ethical licensing policy for Olympic-branded products that is firmly based on international labour standards.

# news & notes

## Spectrum workers still awaiting compensation

Almost one year after the collapse of the Spectrum garment factory in Bangladesh, the survivors and families of the victims of the tragedy are still awaiting the compensation they were promised. The factory collapsed on April 11, 2005, killing 64 workers, injuring over 70, and leaving hundreds jobless.

According to the European Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), so far, only the Spanish retailer Indetex, whose Zara brand was made in the factory, has pursued the development of a trust fund for the injured workers and families of those who perished at Spectrum. Most of the other European companies that were sourcing from the factory have not yet



made firm commitments to pay into such a fund, says the CCC.

According to the CCC, it is also disturbing that there has been no progress to date on the proposed health and safety review and assessment of the structural safety of all multi-story garment factories, which has been called for by Bangladeshi unions and NGOs since the collapse.

Former Spectrum workers currently touring Europe at CCC's invitation are meeting with companies to demand that the trust fund become a reality and that workers receive their legal severance pay.



PHOTOS: CLEAN CLOTHES CAMPAIGN

## Worker murdered for stealing T-shirt

**Twenty-year old garment worker Panna Miah was beaten to death by factory management personnel for allegedly stealing a T-shirt.**

According to the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF), after working through the night at the Titanic Products garment factory in Bangladesh, Panna put on the T-shirt to stave off the early morning cold.

When he left the factory to get some breakfast, a security guard accused him of stealing the T-shirt. The guard and the production manager reportedly took Panna to a room on the third floor of the factory and beat him to death. They then hung him from a ceiling fan to make it look as if he had committed suicide.

According to the ITGLWF, workers at the factory claim they are often subjected to beatings and abuse, and that a woman worker had been beaten only three days before Panna's murder.

At the time of his murder, Panna and other workers at the factory were reportedly owed one month's wages and four months overtime pay.

## China reports violations

A recent Chinese government survey reveals that most private firms in China are violating their workers' rights.

According to the report, 80% of private firms fail to sign employment contracts with new employees, as required by law. As a result, workers employed in these firms are unable to receive termination, pension or health care benefits.

The survey also found that 13% of workers employed in the private sector were not receiving the legal minimum wage and 8% were not receiving their wages on time.

Based on a survey of 2,000 companies, the report found that violations were most prevalent in the real estate, light industry, catering and clothing sectors.

## Strike wave hits Vietnam

In January, tens of thousands of Vietnamese factory workers employed in the country's industrial parks and free trade zones staged wildcat strikes to protest the government's decision to postpone until April a promised 40% increase in the base wages in foreign-owned factories.

In response to earlier strikes, the Prime Minister had agreed to raise the minimum monthly wage to US\$55 in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. However, workers, whose wages are not keeping up with inflation, were dissatisfied with the three-month delay.

With the cheapest labour rates in the region, Vietnam has attracted close to \$8 billion in direct foreign investment. Most of the country's garment and sports shoe factories that produce for export are owned by Taiwanese, Hong Kong or Korean firms, but the products are made for well-known US and European brands.



*Child worker producing Wal-Mart clothes in Bangladesh. The CA number above indicates it's bound for Canada*

## Wal-Mart reacts to child labour exposé

The Bangladeshi newspaper *New Age* reports that top executives of Wal-Mart Canada held closed-door meetings with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in January to complain about the negative publicity the company has received because of the use of child labour in the manufacture of its products.

According to the article, Wal-Mart Canada's president and CEO Mario Pilozzi told the meeting, "Sales in our stores have declined drastically after negative reports

on the involvement of child labour in Bangladeshi garments were aired by the Canadian television network."

Pilozzi was apparently referring to a Radio Canada exposé on Wal-Mart's labour practices that was aired in Quebec just before Christmas.

The Wal-Mart Canada representatives reportedly told the BGMEA the company would suspend sourcing from Bangladesh if the factories failed to be in compliance with minimum labour standards.

## Reporter shot in armed assault on newspaper office

On February 6, armed men carrying AR-15 and AK-47 rifles and grenades entered the offices of Nuevo Laredo's largest daily newspaper, *El Mañana*, shot up the reception area and set off a fragmentation grenade outside the editorial office.

Jaime Orozco Tey, a reporter who had been covering the narco wars and the struggles of maquila workers in the Mexican border city was shot five times and is in critical condition. He was apparently the only person targeted by the gunmen.

According to the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM), *El Mañana* is known for its courageous coverage of the drug trade and the maquila industry. Its owner, Ninfa Deander sits on the CJM board of directors.

The support of the people of Nuevo Laredo for the newspaper was demonstrated when it was learned that Orozco needed a blood transfusion and dozens of citizens went to the hospital to donate, says the CJM.



PHOTOS: COALITION FOR JUSTICE IN THE MAQUILADORAS



new  
resource

***Made by Women: Gender, the Global Garment Industry and the Movement for Women Workers' Rights, Clean Clothes Campaign, January 2006, 128 pp, [www.cleanclothes.org/ftp/made\\_by\\_women.pdf](http://www.cleanclothes.org/ftp/made_by_women.pdf)***

# Barrios free but not safe

—continued from page 1—

## Surprise arrest

On December 29, MSN received an urgent phone call from the Commission, informing us that Barrios had been picked up by state intelligence police outside his home in Tehuacan and transported to a prison in the capital city of Puebla.

The Commission was particularly alarmed because two years earlier Barrios had been attacked and beaten by unknown assailants under similar circumstances. At that time, the Commission had been assisting workers who unjustly fired from factories owned by Mexico's "denim king", Kamel Nacif. They noted that Gil was doing subcontract work for Nacif.

The Commission was also concerned that the charge against Barrios had been filed on the same day as independent journalist, Lydia Cacho, was arrested by Puebla state police in Cancun and transported back to Puebla to face defamation charges brought by Nacif concerning allegations that he was involved in a child prostitution ring. Cacho's out-of-state arrest had been widely condemned by Mexican human rights organizations, including the Commission.

## Campaign to "Free Martin"

In the midst of the holiday season, MSN sent out a call for help. Hundreds of organizations and individuals responded, including Canadian faith, labour and human rights organizations; US organizations, such as the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center in Mexico, the US/Labor Education in the Americas Project, and the Washington Office on Latin America; and international organizations, including the ITGLWF (the Global Union for garment workers), Amnesty International, and the Clean Clothes Campaign.



subcomandante Marcos (centre) and Martin Barrios (right)

On January 2, a paid ad, signed by 30 local maquila owners, appeared in a Tehuacan newspaper, declaring the owners' support for Barrios' arrest and accusing the Commission of organizing protests and strikes that discourage foreign investment in order to blackmail the owners.

MSN began lobbying the major US brands whose blue jeans were made in Tehuacan, urging them to call on their suppliers to stop harassing human right promoters. One company, Gap Inc., sent a letter to the Puebla state governor, expressing its concern for Barrios' safety. MSN and our US counterparts also lobbied the Canadian and US governments, urging them to intervene.

In Mexico, human rights, indigenous, campesino, and independent union organizations, as well as hundreds of maquila workers in Tehuacan, staged protests and held press conferences to denounce the "criminalization" of human rights promoters and demand Martin's immediate release.

## Free but not safe

Although Barrios' unexpected release from prison was welcomed by the Commission and other Mexican human rights organizations, they continued to fear

for his safety. Their fears proved to be well founded when, on February 12, Barrios received warnings from two trusted sources that a maquila owner had hired someone to kill him.

The warnings came shortly after Zapatista leader subcomandante Marcos had delivered a speech at a rally in the nearby community of Altepexi, in which he condemned the state governor and maquila owners for persecuting Barrios and exploiting maquila workers.

The warnings also came in the midst of a national scandal caused by the publication in the Mexican daily newspaper *La Jornada* of transcripts from taped telephone conversations revealing that the Puebla state governor and Kamel Nacif had plotted the arrest and attempted rape of Lydia Cacho.

During his visit to the Tehuacan Valley as part of the Zapatistas' *otra campaña* (the other campaign), Marcos stated the following about Barrios:

"We care for this *compañero* because of what he represents here in the Tehuacan Valley and moreover, although he doesn't know it, because of what he represents in the struggle we are waging across the whole country. We're not going to wait for something to happen before we raise our voices and send a message to the state government, the federal government and those who have power in this country that he is not alone. That everyone in the national movement of *la otra campaña* is with him."

