

maquila network update

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Nike Workers Beaten for Supporting Union

The struggle of young Mexico garment workers in Atlixco, a small town in Puebla, Mexico, has become the focus of Students Against Sweatshop mobilizations on US university campuses, and a huge headache for the sportswear giant Nike.

Workers, who produce sweatshirts at a Korean-owned Nike contract factory for at least 14 US universities, were illegally fired, pressured to "voluntarily" resign, and beaten by police for demanding the right to be represented by an independent union.

These are clear violations of the right of workers to freedom of association under Mexican law, the Nike code of conduct, and collegiate licensing codes of the US universities whose products are made in the factory.

On January 9, 800 workers at the Kuk Dong factory staged a work stoppage to protest the illegal firing of five workers and the forced resignations of

20 others who had complained about low wages (US\$32 for a 50-hour week) and rotten food served in the factory cafeteria, and had requested a copy of the collective agreement.

The striking workers demanded that the company reinstate the fired workers and respect their right to organize an independent union.

The workers are currently "represented" by the FROC-CROC, a union federation controlled by the historical ruling party of Mexico, the



Puebla, Mexico: Injured Nike workers enter ambulance after beatings.



Sign on a Puebla factory: "The personnel who work in this enterprise are affiliated with FROC-CROC"

PRI. Workers complain that the FROC-CROC was brought in by the company without the workers' consent, and that it negotiated a "protection contract" with their employer without their knowledge or approval.

On January 12, 300 state police in full riot gear attacked 300 workers who were guarding the factory. The workers, who put their hands in the air and retreated to the factory gates, were hit, pulled, pushed and insulted by the police.

Fifteen workers ended up in the hospital, and two were kept overnight. One of them

was in serious condition from blows to the head. Two strike leaders were violently kidnapped by the police, but were later released.

The police had apparently been ordered to remove the strikers by the PRI state governor. As well, Rene Sanchez Juarez, the local leader of the FROC-CROC, was

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STOP pulling the wool over our eyes

ETAG Launches Corporate Disclosure Campaign

The Ethical Trading Action Group (ETAG) is calling on the federal government to make changes to the Textile Labelling regulations to require companies to publicly disclose the names and addresses of all manufacturing facilities making clothes sold in Canada.

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

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In the coming months, ETAG member organizations will be mobilizing public support for its proposal to make information available to consumers on where our clothes are made.

According to Dennis Howlett, National Coordinator of the inter-church coalition Ten Days for Global Justice, "the changes we are proposing to the Textile Labelling Act would strip away the veil of secrecy that allows companies to hide their links to sweatshop abuses. It would make it make it easier for consumers to make ethical choices when they shop."

ETAG's government lobbying effort is a key element in the NGO/labour/church coalition's "No Sweat" campaign, which is calling on universities, school boards, municipal governments and other public institutions to adopt No Sweat purchasing policies ensuring that

licensed and bulk-purchased apparel is made under humane working conditions.

No Sweat policies also require companies making apparel products for public institutions to disclose where those products are made.

Lobbying Tobin

On January 30, ETAG member groups sent a joint letter to Industry Minister Brian Tobin requesting a meeting to discuss its proposal. The letter was submitted on behalf of senior officers of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Maquila Solidarity Network, Oxfam, the Steelworkers Humanity Fund, Ten Days for Global Justice, and the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees.

The letter states: "Although this would require only a

small change to the Regulations – which can be accomplished without any new legislation – and would require relatively few new resources (given that the data would be self-reported by companies and could be archived under the existing system), it would carry great benefits for Canadian consumers and would signal your government's commitment to fair play in the workplace and in international trade."

Universities Take the Lead

With the adoption of university codes of conduct for licensed apparel, which include disclosure provisions, a handful of companies have recently agreed to disclose some factory locations in order to access the lucrative university licensing market.

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ETAG Calls for Ban on Burma Imports



The Ethical Trading Action Group (ETAG) and the Canadian Friends of Burma are calling on the Canadian government to impose a total ban on all imports of apparel and other products from Burma until the human rights situation improves in that country.

Statistics Canada figures show that in the first nine months of 2000 there was a 170% increase in apparel imports from Burma compared to the same period in 1999. According to ETAG and the Friends of Burma, the dramatic increase in Burma imports proves that the Canadian government's policy of asking companies to voluntarily refrain from doing business with Burma's brutal military regime is not working.

Since 1995, there has been a steady increase in

the value of total imports from Burma, but the increase in garment imports is the most dramatic. Apparel now represents 81% of all products imported from Burma, compared to 51% in 1995.

Retailers Identified

Docking orders obtained by the MSN and the Friends of Burma show that between August and October of 2000, Reitmans imported at least 94,238 kilograms of clothing from Burma, and Saan Stores imported at least 49,340 kilograms.

Much of the apparel from Burma is shipped through CRSA Logistics Ltd., and shipping records do not always indicate which retailers have ordered the products. "Made in Myanmar" labels have been

discovered on Wal-Mart, Reitmans, Saan, La Senza, Le Chateau, and Cotton Ginny products sold in Canada.

In response to a campaign led by the MSN and the Friends of Burma, in 2000 Wal-Mart declared that it has no plans for future imports from Burma, citing the Canadian government's policy as its reason. However, Wal-Mart has so far refused to make a written commitment to cease sourcing from Burma until the human rights situation improves sufficiently to warrant renewed imports.

Defying the ILO

Canadian retailers importing apparel from Burma are not only defying the Canadian government's voluntarily policy, they are also ignoring the recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO) of the United Nations.

On November 16, the ILO took the unprecedented step of invoking Article 33, requesting that all ILO member states, employers and unions review their relationships with the Burmese regime to ensure that those relationships do not contribute to the use of forced labour.

On December 12, Amnesty International released a

report documenting the institutionalized use of torture in Burma. (For more information, visit: www.amnesty.org).

"Increased imports from Burma are helping to keep its brutal military rulers in power," says Corinne Baumgarten of the Canadian Friends of Burma. According to Baumgarten, the regime uses the profits from joint ventures in the apparel sector, and from a 5% tax on apparel exports, to finance the repression of its citizens.

Look for the Labels

ETAG and the Friends of Burma are calling on consumers to be on the lookout for "Made in Myanmar" labels. "Bring the item to the store manager and tell him or her why you won't

buy clothes made in Burma," suggests Baumgarten. "Tell them to stop importing clothes from Burma until human rights are respected in that country."

They are also asking Canadians

In the first nine months of 2000 there was a 170% increase in apparel imports from Burma

to write Foreign Affairs Minister Manley, calling on his government to impose full economic sanctions on Burma's military regime, including a ban on imports from Burma.

CUSTOM TRIM Workers Testify on OH&S Violations

On December 12, 2000, 20 current and former employees of the Custom Trim and Auto Trim maquila factories in Valle Hermoso and Matamoros, Mexico testified before the US National Administrative Office (NAO) on the serious health problems they and their families have suffered as a result of exposure to toxic chemicals and other workplace health hazards.

Formerly a Canadian company based in Waterloo, Ontario, Custom Trim is currently owned by the Florida-based Breed Technologies.

Back in July, the workers had joined with the tri-national Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM) and 25 labour, religious and labour rights organizations, including the MSN, in co-filing a complaint under the NAFTA labour side agreement alleging that the Mexican government had failed to enforce its health and safety regulations.

After enduring six months of threats and harassment for filing the complaint, in December the workers traveled to San Antonio, Texas to tell their stories. These are excerpts from five of those stories.

“I’d like to state what I felt and I feel today: anxiety, despair, uncertainty, nervousness and the fear of probably have a baby that has no brain, anencephalia... When I was fired from Auto Trim, I suffered withdrawal symptoms... Even today, it is very difficult for me to accept my addiction to the yellow glue... Unfortunately, I witnessed the problem in other co-workers.”

Joaquin Gonzales, describing his addiction to glues and solvents he was exposed to while working at Auto Trim.

“After I had worked some five years at the maquila plant [my wife] gave birth to a child that, unfortunately, was born with spina bifida... The doctor told me that he had a tumor in his spinal column that covered it completely. They sent him to Reynosa, and there were five operations performed on him...”



Above: Custom Trim workers take a break.

And that's how my child died... [Before] one of the operations, I was asked to give a blood donation... When I went for the blood testing, the doctor told me that my blood was poisoned, was tainted, and that they couldn't use it. Thus, I could not be a donor to my child... Some 15 days after I buried my child, the manager of human resources called me in and said: I heard about your child and I'm very sorry, but don't feel that it's because of the workplace. It's not because of the thinner, the Varsol or the solvents; your child was born like that because, well, it's part of nature...



Bruno Mantagna Lopez and Joaquin Gonzales



PHOTO: PETER SILVA

rt in a vigil the night before NAO hearings.



CJM PHOTO

I was [later] discharged unfairly by the human resources manager because he thought I was complaining too much.”
Bruno Mantagna Lopez

“After working for a year at the company, I began to experience problems in my wrist, my neck and my back. My two arms are affected. The greatest impact is on the right side. . . We had to do this movement to tighten the leather around the steering wheel, and you had to do it really, really fast. . . I’d like to show you how with this hand, [but] I can’t really move this hand any more. . . And we knew that we were hurting our hands, but they didn’t care about that; what they were concerned about was that we should meet our

production quotas. . . One time, I asked the doctor, Why can’t I get tested; why can’t I get my disability? And he told me the head of personnel at our company had said to just ignore us, that there was really nothing wrong with us and that we should not be place on disability. Some of my co-workers were able to at least get 10, 15, 27 and 40 percent disability, but I was one of those that was left jobless, without any security, without anything.”

Beatriz Reyna Vasquez

“Between 1996 and 1997, 15 women had miscarriages. In 1996, there were five miscarriages in just one month. Between 1996 and 1997, there were 14 newborns with serious birth defects or serious health problems; 13 of them died during infancy or immediately after birth.”

Dr. Francisco Mercado

“I am a nurse. . . The workers would come to me complaining about wrist problems and soreness in their shoulders, neck and back. They also complained about muscle weakness. They could not pick up even the smallest things. And they said this was because of the repetitive movement they performed at their workstations. They also complained greatly about irritation in their noses and in their throats, irritated eyes . . . All of this, they thought, was related to the solvents that they were using. In August of 1995, five women had miscarriages at the plant. They were not allowed to go to the doctor because they were still on their work shift. And the company would say, Just try to use what we have here – we have some aspirin that will help reduce the pain – and go back to work.”

Isabel Morales

“I worked 12 hours a day, Monday through Saturday, and during my shift, I used yellow glue and Varsol. We used it as if it was water, and I was exposed 11 hours a day to these toxic substances in a completely enclosed building with an obsolete extraction system. . . We were never given any information about the solvents that we were using or of the chemicals and their potential hazards. In 1993, a government agency came to visit the plant. The day before they came, the company asked us to hide the solvents and the glue containers and ordered us to clean up our workstations. The government closed the plant, but the very next day, it was opened again, . . . and there were no changes in spite of this government visit. I have very strong reasons to come here to San Antonio to make this public report. After seven years of being exposed to these toxic substances, in 1995, my wife and I had a daughter that died two hours later; she had anencephaly.”

Ezequiel Tinajero

news & notes

Duro Workers Demand Union Vote

On January 19, workers at the Duro gift bag factory in Rio Bravo, Mexico staged a work stoppage to demonstrate their support for their independent union. Their action was in solidarity with independent union leaders who were in Mexico City pressuring the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board to set a date for a union representation vote. The workers are currently "represented" by a government-affiliated union of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM). A second "official" union central, the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Campesinos (CROC), has also applied to represent the workers. The CROC apparently did not consult any of the workers before submitting its application. In Mexico City, members of the tri-national Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, including the MSN, participated in a demonstration in support for the Duro workers. Officials of the CROC staged a noisy counter-demonstration denouncing the independent union as unpatriotic and calling for the expulsion of the foreigners. Meanwhile, 77 fired Duro workers continue to fight for their reinstatement. CJM members are now planning Valentine's Day actions targeting the US greeting card company, Hallmark, a major buyer of Duro gift bags.

Chentex Struggle Continues

Hopes of a resolution to a long and bitter dispute at the Chentex maquila factory in Nicaragua were dashed when the Taiwanese Nein Hsing Consortium, which owns the factory, refused to sign

an agreement that their representatives had verbally endorsed ten days earlier. The agreement would have provided for the reinstatement of two union officers and at least 80% of 128 fired union members. Management is now saying they will only hire back seven of the fired union members. The company is threatening to close two production lines and lay off 200 employees, claiming that a solidarity campaign in the US is drying up orders. According to Pedro Ortega, leader of the Nicaraguan Garment Workers Federation, while Wal-Mart has cut back on orders from the factory, it is not one of the Chentex's major clients and has not been the target of the solidarity campaign.

Will Sri Lanka Follow Harris' Lead?

In late December, the Harris government rushed through legislation with no public debate making it legal for employers in Ontario to pressure their employees to work 60 hours a week for less pay. Meanwhile, Sri Lankan garment workers and women's and labour rights groups are fighting proposed changes to their country's overtime legislation that would change maximum overtime hours for women workers from 100 hours per year to 100 hours per month. The Chairperson of the Sri Lankan Board of Investment, Thilan Wijesinghe, claims that the change is needed so that Sri Lanka would remain internationally competitive. Sound familiar?



Adidas Boycotts EU Hearings

On November 23, British Labour MEP Richard Howitt publicly criticized Adidas for refusing to attend European Parliament hearings into labour practices in the sportswear industry. He charged the company with showing "utter contempt for a properly constituted public hearing." Adidas missed the testimony of Rainy Hutabarat of the Urban Community Mission in Jakarta, Indonesia who reported the findings of a study on sweatshop conditions in an Indonesian factory producing for the company. She concluded that company codes of conduct have not led to meaningful change, that workers should be paid a living wage so they are not compelled to work overtime, that their right to freedom of association must be respected, and that workers should be educated on the Adidas codes of conduct and involved in code monitoring on an institutionalized basis. The hearings were a follow up to a resolution on "Standard setting by European companies in developing countries: towards a Code of Conduct"

adopted on January 13, 1999. According to the Clean Clothes Campaign, the resolution "foresees a model code of conduct, a social label, public hearings, and the creation of a 'European Monitoring and Verification Mechanism'."

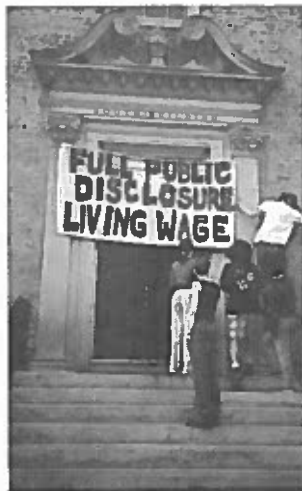
Shareholders Challenge Sweatshops

SHARE (Shareholder Association for Research and Education) has an-

nounced the filing of shareholder proposals with the Hudson's Bay, Sears Canada and Wal-Mart on the issue of sweatshop labour. The proposals submitted by institutional shareholders call on the companies to adopt higher labour standards in their codes of conduct and independent and transparent monitoring methods. SHARE, a new Canadian labour-sponsored organization promoting shareholder action, is working in collaboration with church and labour shareholder action groups in the US.

Yoo Yang Workers Win Union

After getting the bureaucratic runaround for 14 months, workers at the Yoo Yang garment factory near San Pedro Sula, Honduras have finally won legal recognition of their union. In March, the Minister of Labour had rejected their application for an industrial union that would have covered workers from more than one factory in the free trade zone. In July, they submitted a second application for a one-factory union. This time their application was sabotaged by the suspicious resignation of the union's executive committee. After electing a new executive committee, the workers then submitted a third application. According to the US/Labor Education in the Americas Project (US/LEAP), renewed attention from the US Embassy, the International Textile, Garment and



Leather Workers Federation, US/LEAP, and grassroots activists all help the workers achieve recognition of the Union of the Workers of Yoo Yang (STEYY).

More University Codes Adopted

Following in the wake of the successful Students Against Sweatshops campaign at the University of Toronto, other Canadian universities are moving to adopt similar No Sweat purchasing policies for university-licensed and/or bulk-purchased apparel. In November, the University of Western Ontario became the second Canadian university to adopt a No Sweat

policy. However, the SAS group at Western is critical of the provisions of the code and the lack of student input in the process. Codes are now under discussion at the University of Waterloo, the University of Guelph, McMaster University, the University of Alberta, and Carleton University. SAS campus groups and

the Ethical Trading Action Group are beginning to dialogue with university administrations about how the codes will be implemented, and what information will be publicly disclosed on the factories where those products are made.

Behind the Swoosh: Facts about Nike and Barbie's Trip Around the World: Globalization in the Toy Industry, Victoria International Development Education Association (VIDEA), November 2000. Two new resources for Stop Sweatshop campaigners. Contact: videa@home.com

Made in China: A Factory Walkabout, Bob Jeffcott, MSN, *Our Times* magazine, January 2001. Contact: ourtimes@web.ca

Monitoring Mattel: Codes of Conduct, Workers and Toys in Southern China, May Wong and Stephen Frost, Asia Monitor Resource Center, December 2000. Critique of Mattel's workplace monitoring and reporting program. Contact: admin@amrc.org.hk

Breaking the Myth of Flexible Work, Alice de Wolff, Toronto Organizing for Fair Employment (TOFFE), 54 pp., participatory study of working lives of contract, temporary and part-time workers. Contact: cwproject@hotmail.com

Blowing the Whistle on a Neighbourhood Bully, UFCW, 16 pp., workbook for social activists who hate Wal-Mart. Contact: mike@ufcw.ca

Two New Stop Sweatshop Posters:

Stop Sweatshop Abuses, Canadian Labour Congress. Contact: sweatshop@clc-ctc.ca

Don't close your eyes to sweatshop abuses: Exploitation is never in fashion, Oxfam Canada. Contact: 1-800-466-9326.

Nike Workers Beaten

— continued from page 1 —

reportedly at the scene of the police attack, pointing out strike leaders to the police.

Faced with protests by independent unions in Mexico, including the National Workers' Union, the telephone workers, and the independent Volkswagen workers' union, and increasing pressure

on Nike from student, labour and solidarity groups in the US, Canada and Europe, Kuk Dong management agreed to allow strikers to return to their jobs with no reprisals.

On January 17, management violated the agreement by refusing entry to the factory to several independent union supporters.

Others union supporters who succeeded in entering the plant were picked out by representatives of the "official" union, reported to security guards and told to leave, or told they would have to resign "voluntarily."

On January 25, a six-member investigative team from the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), a code implementation body involving 67 US universities, released a preliminary report confirming that severe ongoing violations of university codes were taking place, and calling on its member universities to take immediate steps to seek the reinstatement of the five fired

leaders of the independent union and all other workers who have been "idled after the work stoppage and are willing to go back to work."

On the same day, the International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF) released a report to universities affiliated to the Fair Labor Association (FLA), confirming that the company had failed to reinstate

striking workers, and this would have a negative impact on any subsequent union representation election. The report calls on Nike to send someone to the factory with the authority to insist that all workers be reinstated.

The fact that the ILRF investigation was carried out by a respected Mexican labour lawyer at Nike's request will make it difficult for Nike to ignore his recommendations.

The Kuk Dong dispute has been a major blow to Nike,

which claims its code of conduct and external monitoring system ensure respect for freedom of association and other worker rights.

According to Marion Traub-Werner, a Canadian Students Against Sweatshops activist who was in Atlixco during the dispute, "the Kuk Dong workers have received an out-pouring of support from their families and the surrounding communities. They are clearly being denied their right to organize a union that represents their wishes and interests."



Maquila worker's home in Puebla state, Mexico

PHOTO: MSN

Disclosure Campaign

— continued from page 2 —

Agreement to disclose by some of the major brands, including Nike, Gear for Sport, and Russell Athletic, has weakened the industry's argument that disclosure regulations would be a catastrophic company-killer. So far, no one's "competitive advantage" has been harmed by university disclosure requirements.

Under Canadian law, companies are already required to provide information to consumers on fabric content, the country of manufacture, the company that owns the brand, and their postal address. Most of this information appears on the labels of the clothing, while more detailed information is kept by Industry Canada, and can be accessed by looking up the "CA number," which appears on the label, through an Industry Canada website.

Information on the manufacturing facility where the item was made could easily be included in the "CA number" files and accessed by members of the public who want to know more about the products they're buying.

All it takes is a change in the federal regulations under the Textile Labelling Act. And the political will to help consumers link products to their place of manufacturer.

These minor changes in an obscure piece of federal regulation would give us the tools to make major advances in the fight to eliminate sweatshop abuses.

For more information on the ETAG campaign for corporate disclosure on where our clothes are made, contact the MSN.