

# maquila network update

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## Lesotho workers tell Hudson's Bay: 'Don't Cut and Run'

I have come to Canada to tell the Hudson's Bay Company to live up to its responsibilities to the workers who make their products in my country," said Daniel Maraisane, General Secretary of the Lesotho Clothing and Allied Workers Union (LECAWU). "Don't cut and run; stay in Lesotho and be part of the solution to worker rights abuses."

Maraisane was speaking at a May 15 press conference in Toronto sponsored by the Ethical Trading Action Group (ETAG). Following the press conference, Maraisane, and his ETAG supporters, followed by a television crew, marched to the office of the Hudson's Bay Company where they demanded a meeting with HBC senior management officials.

Security guards blocked the entrance, but eventually allowed two delegates to enter the building, Maraisane and

UNITE's Canadian Director John Alleruzzo. As members of UNITE, MSN and other ETAG groups leafleted Bay Street office workers, Maraisane got his opportunity to make his case to HBC management.

### Resolution Debated

Maraisane's visit to the Hudson's Bay headquarters in Toronto took place one week before the company's annual shareholders meeting, where a resolution was considered calling for improved monitoring of factory conditions and better reporting on the company's efforts to achieve

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"The worst thing they could do is to cut and run from Lesotho."

Daniel Maraisane, General Secretary of LECAWU, outside of the Hudson's Bay office in Toronto

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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.

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# Juarez Murders Spark Surge of Organizing

**On March 8, International Women's Day, 50 darkly clad women headed out on a five-day and 370 kilometre march from Chihuahua to Ciudad Juarez, demanding an end to the wave of violence against women in the Mexican border town.**

Fuelled by their frustration with the unsolved murders of nearly 300 women, many of whom were maquiladora workers, the marchers made their way to Juarez from the state's capital, to the applause and tears of onlookers.

When the women arrived, a group of counter-protesters sent by local leaders of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the state's governing party, tried to block and assault the marchers. Women's groups complained that the PRI's attempt to disrupt the march is part of a campaign by state officials to discredit and silence anti-violence activists.

Women's, labour and human rights

groups had stepped up criticism of the local police investigation after eight more bodies were found in November 2001. Several Juarez activists have since received death threats against themselves and/or their families. The threats have spurred a surge of organizing.

On March 9, an action was staged on the international bridge connecting Juarez and El Paso, Texas, uniting women and men from both countries in solidarity.

On March 13, a forum was held in Ciudad Juarez to mark the end of the five-day March from Chihuahua. A solidarity

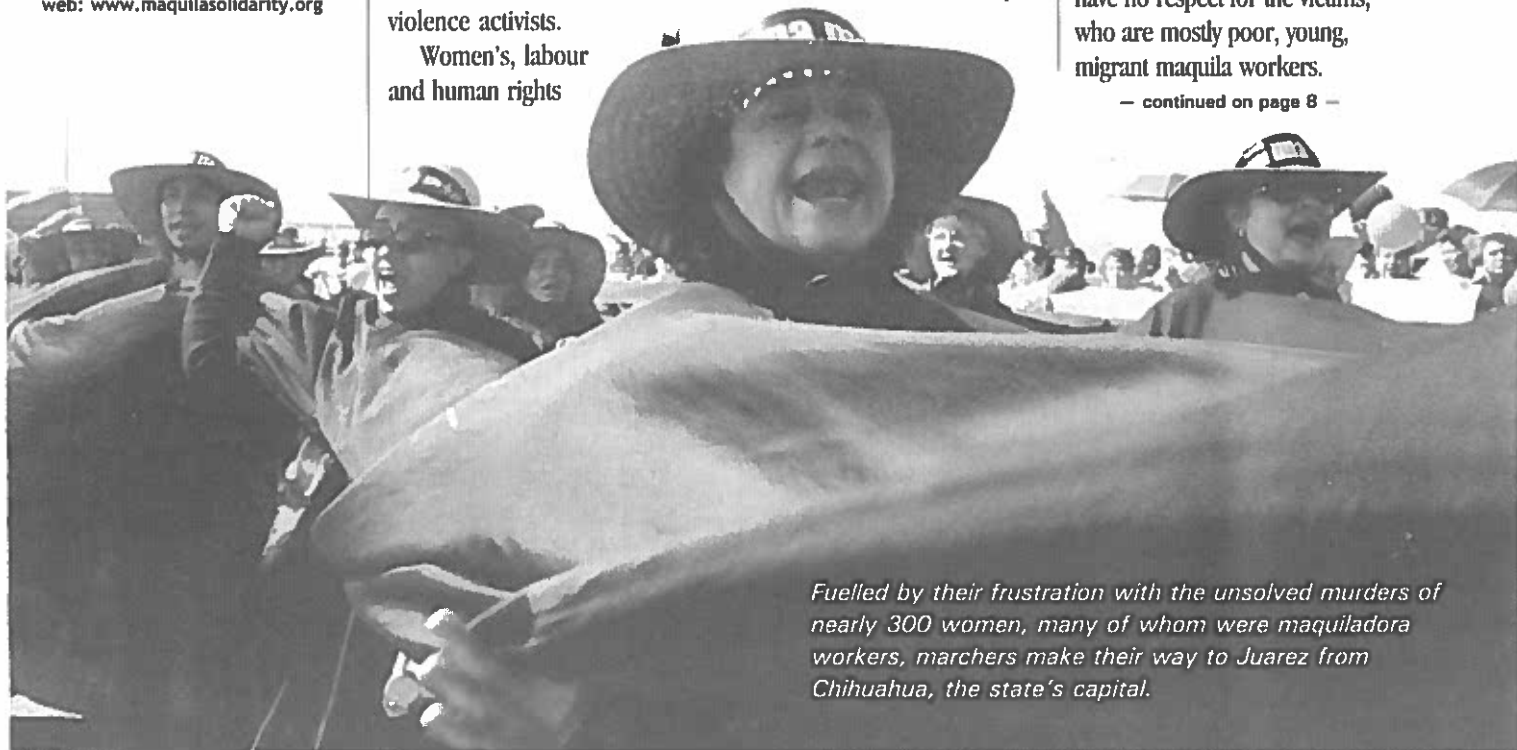
message signed by 34 Canadian organizations was delivered to the forum.

On April 16, 21 mothers of the murdered women occupied the Chihuahua State capitol. The action achieved meetings with a special commission of state deputies from most Chihuahua political parties, and the state governor, Patricio Martínez. The deputies agreed to ask Congress to provide more funds for Juarez law enforcement and better benefits to survivors.

## Who Is Responsible?

Suspicious abound as to why local and state officials have been dragging their feet on the murder investigations. Several men have been arrested over the years, but the murders continue. Some suspect officials are protecting one of their own. Others say that the police simply have no respect for the victims, who are mostly poor, young, migrant maquila workers.

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*Fuelled by their frustration with the unsolved murders of nearly 300 women, many of whom were maquiladora workers, marchers make their way to Juarez from Chihuahua, the state's capital.*



*Students Against Sweatshops – and a giant beaver – picketed ROOTS stores asking for disclosure*

## 'No Sweat' campaign heats up

On March 27, the CBC television consumer affairs show Marketplace cornered Industry Minister Allan Rock about whether his government supports corporate disclosure regulations proposed by the Ethical Trading Action Group (ETAG), a coalition of faith, student, labour and non-governmental organizations, including MSN. Rock stated on camera that he was not aware of ETAG's proposal.

In fact, ETAG has been in regular contact with Rock's office about the proposal since he became Industry Minister in January. On March 14, Rock's assistant reported that he had spoken with the Minister and that Rock would not be available at any time to meet with ETAG to discuss the proposal.

Since January 2001, ETAG has been lobbying the federal government for changes in

labelling regulations to give consumers more information about where their clothes are made and make it easier to determine whether clothes are made in sweatshops or under humane conditions.

Students across Canada have been participating in the No Sweat campaign, signing petitions and cutting out clothing labels to send to the Industry Minister, demanding information on where clothes bearing the labels were made.

A recent Vector poll reveals that 84% of Canadians support disclosure of the factory locations where apparel products sold in Canada are made.

### Rock confronted

On April 4, Minister Rock received his first delivery of clothing labels from No Sweat activists at a \$75-a-plate luncheon hosted by the Vancouver Board of Trade.

Following Rock's speech, two No Sweat activists challenged the Minister to help fight sweatshops by introducing new federal disclosure regulations. They presented him with a T-shirt covered with hundreds of clothing labels that had been collected by Vancouver-area students.

After the luncheon, the No Sweat activists had four minutes with the Minister, during which they urged him to meet with national ETAG representatives to discuss the factory disclosure proposal. Rock's office now claims there is no need to meet with ETAG since he has already met with its supporters in Vancouver.

### Companies on Board

Since December 2001, Students Against Sweatshops groups in Toronto, Saskatoon and Vancouver have been leafleting Roots stores demanding voluntary disclosure and support for the ETAG proposal.

In response to the store protests, Roots Canada CEO Marshall Myles met with members of ETAG and Students Against Sweatshops on April 1, and agreed to support ETAG's proposal. Unfortunately, as of May 30, ETAG had not received written confirmation of Root's endorsement.

Roots, a Canadian retail success story whose profile increased dramatically when it was selected to provide uniforms for both the Canadian and US teams in Salt Lake City Olympics, is the first major brand to support the proposed changes to the

### Textile Labelling Act.

On April 25, delegates to the Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) annual general meeting in Vancouver debated two non-binding resolutions calling for improved reporting to co-op members on the results of third-party audits of factory conditions, voluntary disclosure of factory locations, and support for ETAG's proposal to the federal government.

MEC is a Canadian sportswear and outdoor gear retailer with an environmentalist ethos.

While rejecting the voluntary disclosure resolution, MEC members overwhelming supported the resolution for increased transparency in reporting, and, by a vote of 97 to 22, endorsed a second resolution calling on the Co-op Board to write a letter to Minister Rock in support of ETAG proposed changes to labelling regulations.

In spite of MEC management's initial opposition to the motion, MEC CEO Peter Robinson promised that the MEC Board would take the members' decision "extremely seriously."

American Apparel, a leading North American T-shirt manufacturer, has also endorsed the ETAG proposal.

For more information on the No Sweat Campaign including camera-ready copies of the "Stop Pulling the Wool Over Our Eyes" petition, information about the Cut It Out labels campaign, and how to order our new "School Uniforms" action kit - visit: [www.maquilasolidarity.org](http://www.maquilasolidarity.org)

# THE JOURNEY OF A JEA

## NO TO TOXIC FASHIONS

**M**any of the jeans worn in Canada and the US start their journey in Mexico. The lure of low wages and lax enforcement of labour and environmental laws, combined with the elimination of tariffs under NAFTA and a weak peso, has attracted US jean manufacturers across the border.

The northern Mexican city of Torreon has replaced El Paso, Texas as the continent's blue jean capital. In 2000, Torreon produced an average of six million garments a week, 90% of which were exported to the US and Canada.

Farther south, in the state of Puebla, Tehuacan is another Mexican jean manufacturing centre, with 60% of its 400 garment factories producing jeans for the US market.

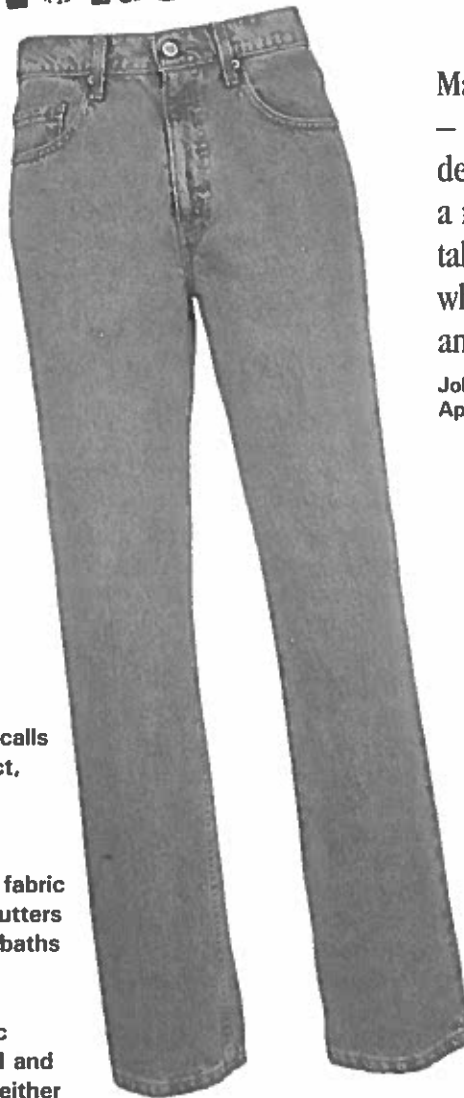
Labels like Guess, Levi's and Gap are stitched onto jeans of all shapes, sizes and styles churned out by Mexico's maquiladora factories.

### Toxic Fashions

The latest wave in jean fashion calls for a highly labour intensive product, dipped in layer upon layer of toxic chemicals.

**T**he journey of the jean, from fabric mills through the hands of cutters and sewers to the chemical baths of laundries, takes its toll on both workers and the environment.

Once the fabric weight is selected and the yarn is spun, either in Mexico or in the southern United States, the dyeing process begins. Chemicals are used in making blue dyes, and the darker the jean the more chemicals are involved.



Manual labour – and lots of it – is required to produce the desired vintage look... and, as a result, much of the finishing takes place in countries where the labour is cheap and the dollar is strong.

John McCurry, industry analyst,  
April 2000

For designer jeans, textile companies use sulphur treatment and mercerization (which involves treating the cotton in a caustic soda solution, and then neutralizing with acid to improve dye absorption).

Tinting - in which beige and yellow dyes are padded onto finished fabric by hand - is one of the latest fads. Hints of purple and green "overdyes" add another stage of chemicals to the mix.

Mexico's lax enforcement of environmental laws allows companies to dump dyes into surrounding bodies of water, polluting the groundwater that feeds nearby farms. The deep blue of the creeks surrounding jean factories in Tehuacan is the dangerous result of such unregulated dumping.

If kids knew the impact of their fashion statement on workers and the environment, they would realize toxic jeans are very unfashionable.

US health and safety expert  
Dara O'Rourke

Below: Dara O'Rourke snaps a photo of a stream coloured bright blue by dyes in Tehuacan, Mexico



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The dyed denim is then snipped by cutters. Though some factories use computerized machinery to precisely slice their denim, many capitalize on the inexpensive labour Mexico has to offer for this very labour intensive step.

The same is true for sewers who carefully feed the sectioned pieces of heavy denim through machines for up to 12 hours a day. Young women who sew at high speeds to meet unrealistic production quotas often suffer repetitive strain injuries, back problems, and eyestrain.

Once the jeans are assembled, they are sent to laundries for additional chemical treatments.

Tinted, "dirty" vintage jeans add new labour intensive steps to the finishing process. Jeans are "crunched" by hand to create wrinkles in the dye, rubbed manually to remove the indigo, and sponged to add colour.

More expensive styles are first "dipped" in dyes, then baked in resin to keep the indigo dark and provide an aged, rigid denim look.

Another technique involves bleaching and stonewashing with enzymes to destroy the indigo. For instance, amylase is used to shrink the jeans and soften the fabric. Cellulase weakens the cotton fibre before the jean is thrown in a stonewashing process with pumice stones or other abrasive objects.



Above: What's the real price of these GAP jeans?

Laccase is replacing bleach in stripping the indigo dye from the jeans to give them an aged look. At this stage in the process, tinting and "overdyes" can be done by hand on the single garment rather than on the bolt of fabric.



Chemicals used in the laundries often end up polluting local waters. In many regions, the sheer volume of water used by laundries cannot be accommodated because of arid conditions and low water levels. Torreon is said to be one of the few Mexican cities with

a sufficient water supply, however a water shortage is on the horizon.

The last toxic step is the drying and baking. The large dryers, heaters and ovens present a final

problem. Mexican laundry workers are seldom protected from the toxic fumes released by huge dryers, heaters and ovens.

All that's left is for workers to "tag" the jeans, and the transformed denim is plastic wrapped, packed and shipped off to retailers and distributors in the US and Canada.

The cost of the latest hand-finished jeans is more than the figure on the price tag in a brand-name designer store. Lax enforcement of health and safety and environmental laws is poisoning workers and communities in Mexico's jean producing capitals.

Maybe it's time to say, "No to toxic fashions."

Every day we're exposed to toxic substances – fumes from caustic soda and chlorine, contact with enzymes, detergents, peroxide, oxalic acid, sodium bisulphate, etc.

Tehuacan laundry worker

# news & notes

## Nike workers win wage increase

On April 1, workers at the Mexmode garment factory in Atlixco, Mexico signed a new collective agreement providing a 10% wage increase, a 5% increase in benefits and an attendance bonus. The new contract signed by management and the independent union, SITEMAX, will increase workers take home pay up to 40% more every week.

The plant, formerly known as Kuk Dong, manufactures sweatshirts for Nike and Reebok. Last September, after a nine-month struggle, workers founded the only independent union with a signed collective agreement in Mexico.

Also in April, following an international solidarity campaign in which over 6,000 letters from around the world urged Nike not to cut and run from the factory, Nike announced that it would resume orders from the factory.

On May 11, the Worker Support Committee (CAT), which has been supporting the efforts of the union, premiered a new play, "La Maquina" (The Machine), which features four MexMode workers. The play launches the group's popular theatre program.

## Gap supplier closes factory in El Salvador

On April 26, management at the Tainan garment factory in El Salvador announced that workers who had been suspended since the beginning of April would not be rehired and that the factory was closing.

In July 2002, workers had won legal recognition for their union, STIT. When management announced the closure of

the factory, the union was submitting a notice to the Ministry of Labour to initiate collective bargaining for improvements in wages and working conditions. Key issues were forced overtime, harassment, and low wages.

Tainan claims the layoffs and plant closure are the result of a lack of orders from North American brands, and blames the union for the drop in demand from its

primary customer, the Gap. Gap denies that it cut orders because of union organizing.

Tainan Enterprises has factories in China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Taiwan and El Salvador. An international campaign is calling on Tainan Enterprises to re-open its El Salvador factory, rehire the workers and negotiate in good faith with the union.



Left: A banner attacking union leader Raquel Espinoza hangs inside the Pung Kook factory fence

## Pung Kook blocks union leader's reinstatement

Management at the Pung Kook factory in La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico is refusing to reinstate independent union leader Raquel Espinoza in contravention of a recent labour board ruling. Espinoza was fired in June 2001.

On April 29, the Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board (JLCA) ordered Pung Kook to reinstate Espinoza within 72 hours, with full back pay. However, Pung Kook, which produces sports bags for adidas, Patagonia, Land's End and Dana, has so far refused to comply with the order and appears to be preparing to appeal the ruling.

Since the reinstatement order, factory management and the company union have been stirring up opposition within the factory and in the local media against Raquel, the independent union, and the union's legal advisor, Tito Pineda. Workers have been told that if Espinoza is allowed to return to work, clients will cancel orders and the factory will close.

In a public statement of support published in local La Paz newspapers on May 13, the Maquila Solidarity Network, along with other Canadian, US and Mexican organizations called for Raquel's peaceful reinstatement. MSN and others are also calling on adidas and other Pung Kook customers to pressure Pung Kook to comply with the JLCA's decision.

The Pung Kook Corporation is based in Seoul, Korea and has four factories in Mexico and other plants in Vietnam and Sri Lanka.

## Wal-Mart charged with suppressing US workers' rights

Wal-Mart is facing charges of violating workers' rights to union representation in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The US National Labor Relations Board has amassed a year's worth of evidence that the retail giant is coercing, intimidating and retaliating against workers looking to join the United Food and Commercial Workers Union.

A hearing is set for June 25.

## Alcoa workers support independent union

Workers at an Alcoa Fujikura maquila factory in Piedras Negras have decided to leave the "official" union affiliated with the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) and form their own independent union.

At an April 30 rally workers cheered as their democratically elected union committee signed a charter for a new independent union, the first step in the union registration process.

The decision comes in response to a concerted CTM campaign against the recently re-elected democratic workers committee and the Border Workers Committee (CFO), which has been one of the key supporters of their struggle.

The company employs over 15,600 workers in 13 factories in Piedras Negras and nearby Ciudad Acuna.

## Workers win big in Saipan cases

On May 10, a US judge gave preliminary approval to a groundbreaking US\$8.7 million settlement to 30,000 garment workers in the Western Pacific US Commonwealth island of Saipan. Also on May 10, the same judge ruled that 13,000 workers can proceed with their class action lawsuit against several other retailers and their contract factories. Retailers were trying to prevent the workers from launching the suit as a class.

Nineteen retailers and brand merchandisers, including Sears Roebuck, Tommy Hilfiger and Liz Claiborne, have agreed to the settlement. The settlement will provide funding for an independent monitoring program of a common code of conduct, and payment of \$4 million to the workers. The Gap, Levi Strauss, Talbots, Abercrombie & Fitch and J.C. Penney still refuse to settle.

The retailers and their suppliers are accused of perpetuating a system of indentured labour in which "guest workers" from China and other Asian countries are forced to pay back recruitment fees of US\$2,000-\$8,000. Other violations include unpaid overtime, 12-hour shifts, and dirty and unsafe working conditions.

"It's a tremendous victory because the Gap has been trying to stall the settlement for years," says Nikki Bas of Sweatshop Watch. "The message to remaining retailers who still refuse to settle is that the lawsuit is valid and will hopefully pressure those retailers to finally settle."

*We Are Not Machines*, Timothy Connor, Oxfam Community Aid Program, March 2002. Assesses conditions in Nike production factories in Indonesia. Visit: [www.maquilasolidarity.org](http://www.maquilasolidarity.org).

*The Workers' Story: Labour Rights Violations at Hudson's Bay Supply Factories in Lesotho*, Gary Phillips and Jantjie Xaba, TURP and ETAG, March 2002. Visit: [www.maquilasolidarity.org](http://www.maquilasolidarity.org).

*From The Household To The Factory: Sex Discrimination in the Guatemalan Labor Force*, Human Rights Watch, January 2002. Visit: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org).

*Report on the Working Conditions of Soccer and Football Workers in Mainland China*, Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee, April 2002. Documents conditions of workers producing for Puma, Wilson, Umbro and adidas. Visit: [www.cleanclothes.org/ftp/china.PDF](http://www.cleanclothes.org/ftp/china.PDF).

*Wearing Thin, The State of Pay in the Fashion Industry, Labour Behind the Label, 2000-01*. Reports on wages, Europe's ethical trading initiatives and company responses to European campaigns. Visit: [www.labourbehindthelabel.com](http://www.labourbehindthelabel.com).

Looking for news updates? Analysis? Action tools? Contacts? Keep informed. Get involved. Visit the Maquila Solidarity Network web site: [www.maquilasolidarity.org](http://www.maquilasolidarity.org)

# Positive developments in Lesotho

— continued from page 1 —

compliance with its code of conduct and local laws. Worker rights violations in Lesotho were highlighted in the resolution.

Marasiane was to be accompanied on his tour to the US and Canada by Marashalane Ramaliehe, a 24 year-old shop steward at the Nien Hsing International factory, but her visitor visa was refused by the US government.

Ramaliehe literally bears the scars of that company's worker rights abuses. During a March sit down strike in the plant, she was stabbed in the neck with a pair of scissors by the company's Managing Director.

Nien Hsing International and its sister plant C&Y Garments produce 'Cherokee' brand jeans for Zellers, which is owned by the Hudson's Bay Company, as well as products for the Gap and others.

According to Maraisane, the stabbing is only the latest incident in a long list of worker rights violations at Nien Hsing and other garment factories in Lesotho.

## Abuses Come to Light

The HBC's link to sweatshop abuses first came to public attention in March when ETAG released a report on worker rights violations at three Hudson's Bay supply factories in Lesotho - Nien Hsing Interna-

tional, C&Y Garments, and Sun Textiles.

Worker interviews carried out by the University of Natal's Trade Union Research Project (TURP) on ETAG's behalf identified a number of serious abuses, including poverty wages of US\$50 a month, forced overtime and 75 hour workweeks, verbal and physical abuse and sexual harassment, locked emergency exits, child labour, and harassment and firings of union supporters.

## Positive Developments

Maraisane came to Canada with news of positive developments. After workers staged an in-plant protest, on March 15, management signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the LECAWU, addressing many of the violations at the factory. It also agreed to recognize the union if the LECAWU could demonstrate that it represented more than 50% of the workers.

According to Gary Phillips, a co-author of the TURP report, the Agreement is the "first significant sign of change at Sun

Textiles." Sun Textiles makes Zellers' 'Truly' label shirts.

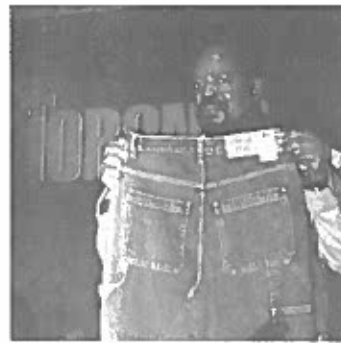
Since that date, LECAWU has signed up 80% of the workers at the factory. However, management has repeatedly delayed the signing of the union recognition agreement.

## Will HBC Do the Right Thing?

While Maraisane was pleased to have an opportunity to present his case to the Hudson's Bay Company, he was disappointed with their unwillingness to make

a public commitment to continue placing orders with the factories.

"The Hudson's Bay has to make a choice," said Maraisane. "It can be part of the problem or part of the solution. If it wants to be part of the solution, it should use its buying power to convince Sun



Maraisane shows Zellers jeans made in Lesotho

Textiles to make good on its commitments, and pressure Nien Hsing to respect its workers' right to organize. The worst thing they could do is to cut and run from Lesotho."

# Women organizing in Juarez

— continued from page 2 —

Officials claim that the victims, described as thin, long-haired, dark-skinned young women and girls, were prostitutes who brought the crimes upon themselves by being out alone late at night. In fact, many of the women were walking home from late shifts at several of Juarez's 300 maquilas. They were among the thousands of migrants drawn to Juarez to find work, who now live in shantytowns at the city's edge.

Esther Chavez, Juarez activist and

director of Casa Amiga, the only women's shelter in Juarez, believes the maquila owners should be held accountable and should provide more security to ensure workers' safety, including door-to-door bus service. Instead of providing better transportation, the Maquiladora Association recently began sponsoring self-defence and karate lessons for women.

Local officials complain there are no funds available to provide housing and safe streets for maquila workers and their families. Last year, Ciudad Juarez received

only US\$1.5 million in support from a voluntary tax paid by the maquilas, while maquila exports from the region totalled over US\$10 billion.

Activists are demanding action by the local and federal governments, the police and the maquila owners to put an end to the Juarez murders.

MSN is participating in the *Ni-Una-Mas* (Not Another Death) Coalition, which includes groups from Ciudad Juarez, the state of Chihuahua, Mexico City, the United States and Canada.