

Sweatfree San Francisco? I Don't Think So

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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Corporations continue to drive policy in San Francisco while ignoring labor rights around the world

Co-authored by Mayor Newsom and Supervisor Ammiano, the San Francisco Sweatfree Procurement Ordinance was unanimously passed by the Board of Supervisors on September 6, 2005. The ordinance prohibits the city government from purchasing goods made in sweatshops. Now, two years later, there has yet to be one city contract that complies with the ordinance.

The city has already or is about to grant waivers for the first five contracts that should be covered by the law — Sheriff (two contracts), Fire, Muni, and Parking and Traffic. These contracts make up the majority of garments that the city purchases. With these blanket waivers, the companies supplying the city of San Francisco, paid for by our taxes, will not be held accountable for their likely sweatshop abuses for the next three and, most likely, five years (the contract terms are 3 years with 2 one-year extensions). Additionally, the waivers will set an unfortunate precedent for contracts to come.

Not only is San Francisco undermining its own ordinance, it will be dragging down standards for the rest of the country. There are over 170 cities, states and school districts around the U.S. that have passed or are working to pass similar sweatfree ordinances. Many are watching to see how the most progressive city can handle an ordinance charged to improve working conditions internationally.

"After all the work we put into writing and passing a strong ordinance in order to fight sweatshops I think it is unfortunate that the City cannot yet meet this important commitment," expressed Supervisor Tom Ammiano. "There is unfortunately a gap between our goals and our actions as a city on the sweatfree front, but I look forward to working to bridge that gap during the remainder of my tenure here at the Board."

Mayor Newsom promised an ordinance "with teeth" two years ago when he allocated funding for an independent, non-profit monitor to investigate the supply chain of the city purchases. The city could have prevented much of the current crisis of the ordinance by officially signing the contract already awarded in December, 2006 to the Workers Rights Consortium (WRC). The WRC is the same monitor that the city of Los Angeles has hired to investigate the chain of suppliers. The fact that it has taken over nine months to become official has merely been blamed by the city on "bureaucracy."

"San Francisco never should have negotiated these exemptions without first having a monitor empowered to request disclosure and investigate factory sites." says Tom Hayden, former CA

state senator and San Francisco Sweatfree Advisory Group member. "With this decision to avoid compliance of the historic sweatfree ordinance, San Francisco risks losing its standing as a global leader and instead sets a negative example for other cities."