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Sweatshop Activists Make Pitch to Allegheny County Airport Authority

For Immediate Release: April 9, 2008
Contact: Kenneth Miller 412-241-1339

11AM - Friday, April 11
Pittsburgh International Airport

Pittsburgh - On Friday April 11 at the Allegheny County Airport Authority's Board meeting members of the Pittsburgh Anti Sweatshop Community Alliance (PASCA) will present a policy that would prohibit the procurement of uniforms made in sweatshops. The policy will be similar to the Anti Sweatshop Ordinances in adopted by the City of Pittsburgh in 1997 and Allegheny County in 2006. Should the Airport Authority adopt a policy it will be the second transportation hub in the country to do so, coming after an October 2006 resolution by the LA Board of Harbor Commissioners.

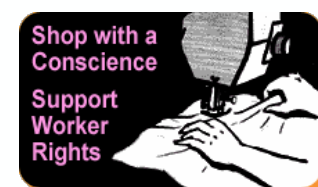
The effectiveness of the City and County anti sweatshop ordinances is questionable. At this time, bidders on apparel contracts only need to affirm that they have no knowledge of sweatshop conditions. A good faith effort from the City and County to enforce the ordinance will require bidders to list the factory locations where their apparel is produced and disclose the wages that are paid, as other cities are requiring.

The county has been procuring Hanes t-shirts from Latin American manufacturing facilities through multiple contracts. Julio Castillo and Manuel Pujols are former Haneswear workers from the Dominican Republic and recently toured colleges and universities across the United States to discuss the working conditions that drove them to try and organize a union, for which they were then fired.

Both Castillo and Pujols reported unfair treatment from their management, including breaching of their labor contracts. They said workers there are forced to work more hours, aren't paid on time and are paid less than what is agreed upon.

Pujols said the TOS Dominicana factory forces employees to work 12-hour shifts, even though Dominican labor laws don't allow normal workdays to exceed eight hours. Pujols added that with no paid overtime, lower than agreed upon wages and no benefits, the factory owed workers more than \$850,000 in American dollars.

Castillo also said that the factory's unsafe working environment and materials cause severe respiratory, lung and other health problems for workers. He claimed the factory's enclosed spaces and loud machinery have damaged his hearing and that he needs reconstructive eardrum surgery. The surgery, which will not be covered by his health insurance, is too expensive for Castillo to afford. Money does not even cover what is needed to provide for a family, he said.



Pujols described tactics including bribery, illegal firing, installation of cameras and constant harassment, being used by factory management to stop the formation and continuation of the unions.

PASCA is prepared to work with the county to identify the specific factory where the Hanes t-shirts it procured came from and further develop our sweatshop policy to remedy procurements made from sweatshops such as those where Castillo and Pujolos worked.

“We believe that the Mayor and Chief Executive both understand the mandate of these ordinances and have every intention of implementing them in good faith. The longer we go without requiring the factory locations and wage data the more contracts we are going to need to remedy. The fact that the City and County are merging procurement functions should streamline the policy process and make it easy for the boards and authorities to access implementation tools.” says PASCA co-founder Kenneth Miller.

The Allegheny County Airport Authority Board is an obvious place for PASCA to bring an anti sweatshop policy. It is Dan Onorato’s responsibility to implement an effective the anti sweatshop ordinance in the County and it is he who appoints members of the Airport Authority. In addition to asking the Airport Authority to adopt an anti sweatshop policy at the earliest opportunity, PASCA has specific “asks” for three of the board members:

- Professor Murrin, would you please draw on the resources of the Workers rights Consortium, of which Duquesne University is a member?
- Mr. Stannizo, would you please review the “tripartite agreement” from the National Garment Workers Union in Bangladesh which is similar to the system of certified payroll which you and the Building Trades are so familiar?
- Representative Stevenson can you please reach out to the State’s procurement office which is working to implement its own anti sweatshop policy?

“With this level of resources and specific expertise immediately available to the Board,” says PASCA co-founder, University of Pittsburgh Professor and veteran of the struggle to ban Apartheid South Africa from the Olympics Dennis Brutus, “I see the potential for a real breakthrough. As a region, we are concerned with Human Rights. Human Rights have got to be a defining part of Pittsburgh’s 250th birthday. We are going to do a better job of being part of the Global “Families” and demonstrating for the world what solidarity looks like.”