



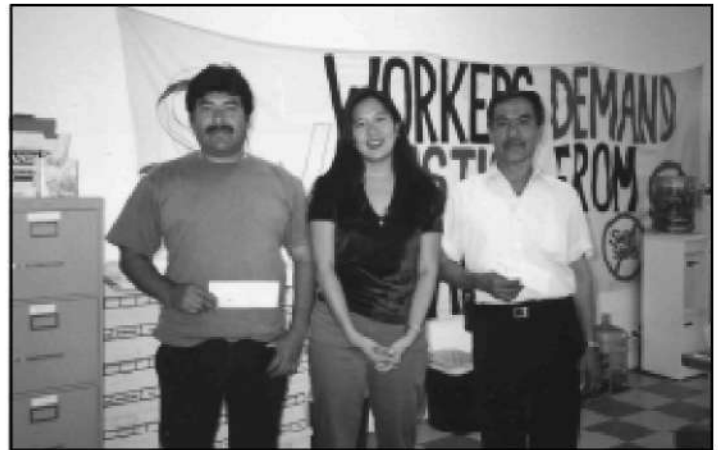
NEW GARMENT WORKER CENTER SCORES VICTORIES FOR LOS ANGELES WORKERS

Since its grand opening in January, the Garment Worker Center (the Center) in Los Angeles, California has been active in the fight against worker exploitation. The Garment Worker Center is an independent, multi-ethnic worker center whose mission is to empower garment workers in the greater Los Angeles area and to work in solidarity with other low-wage immigrant workers and disenfranchised communities in the struggle for social, economic and environmental justice. It is a collaborative project of Sweatshop Watch, the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles and the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates.

The Center has sponsored educational workshops, outreach efforts, worker meetings, actions, and press conferences. The ongoing workshops focus on topics such as wage and hour issues, where workers explain to other garment workers how to keep records of their hours, piece rates, labels, etc.; and health and safety issues, where workers map safety hazards in their factories and discuss health problems related to their work. The Center has also launched a *garment worker hotline* in Mandarin, Thai, Spanish and English, which has received over two hundred calls to date. Workers have sought assistance with unpaid wages, wrongful termination, harassment, unsafe working conditions and racial discrimination. Once connected to the Center, workers are invited to workshops, meetings and actions to introduce them to other workers, educate them about their rights and foster organizing among the region's garment workers.

Several workers who have come to the Center for assistance have already won their unpaid wages and are leading organizing efforts. Rather than provide traditional legal services, the Center uses a direct action model, empowering workers to demand justice from the corporations that exploit their labor. One example of a recent victory includes two Latino garment workers who were laid off in January. Working for a contractor named Winter Gear, these two workers sewed uniforms for the Los Angeles and New York police departments for national uniform manufacturer Fechheimer. One worker worked at this factory for six years and never received overtime pay. They were forced to falsify time cards, even though they worked up to 12 hours on weekdays and almost every Saturday. One of the workers, Candido Piñeda said, "We'd be on deadline and stay until 10 at night. From so much working, my back hurts now, and also my vision is screwed up. I can't see at night." The Garment Worker Center garnered support for the workers' claims from members of the Los Angeles city council and prompted the *Los Angeles Weekly* to investigate the case. Through public pressure, the workers were able to recover their back wages. In just a few months, the Center has helped workers reclaim over \$34,000 in back wages using this direct action approach. While this is a small step in a city where garment workers lose millions of dollars in unpaid wages each year, it is encouraging that workers are standing up for their rights, directly confronting the corporations who profit from their labor and organizing for better working conditions.

For more information, or to volunteer with the Garment Worker Center, call 213-748-5866.



Garment Worker Center organizer Joann Lo with garment workers Candido Piñeda and Ernesto Hernandez, who are holding their settlement checks. Photo courtesy of the Garment Worker Center, 2001.

Wish List

Help support the **Garment Worker Center** of Southern California by making donations of the following items. All donations are tax-deductible.

- CD burner
- Folding tables
- Digital or video camera
- Small (two drawer) file cabinets
- Worker protective gear: face masks, chair cushions

To make a donation, contact Kimi Lee at 213-748-5866 or klee@sweatshopwatch.org.

KUK DONG FACTORY WORKERS IN MEXICO FORM INDEPENDENT UNION SUPPORT STILL NEEDED TO ENSURE THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE

In mid-March, workers at the Kuk Dong factory in Atlixco, Mexico announced a major step forward in their struggle to win justice over their employer, Kuk Dong International, and big-name manufacturers including Nike, Reebok, and U.S. university labels. Meeting on March 18 to fulfill the legal requirements for establishing an independent union and to elect leadership, Kuk Dong workers took on the name of SITEKIM (Sindicato Independiente de Trabajadores de la Empresa Kukdong Internacional de Mexico, or the Independent Union of Workers at the Company Kukdong International of Mexico). An independent, worker-led union such as SITEKIM was among the demands called for by workers and the international community when the Kuk Dong struggle began earlier this year. [See Spring 2000 newsletter for background.]

The struggle to form a new union independent of the factory's state and employer-controlled union, the FROC-CROC, began in January when over 850 workers staged a 3-day long work stoppage. They were protesting the unfair firing of five co-workers who played key roles in the effort to establish an independent union. A number of labor rights violations and an eruption of violence in January by riot police against peaceful striking workers led four workers to file a complaint with the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC)—an organization founded to implement university codes of conduct. This led the WRC to conduct an investigation of Kuk Dong's treatment of its workers, and to bring widespread public attention to the workers' struggle.

Among its findings, the WRC found that Kuk Dong has unlawfully employed children, physically and verbally assaulted workers, paid wages that keeps families below the line of "extreme poverty," provided rancid food that has led to illnesses, and fired workers for taking part in unionizing activities. The FROC-CROC has a long history of mis-representing workers and allowing flagrant abuses of local and international labor laws, as well as university codes of conduct. In addition, FROC-CROC officials were involved—even in command—of the violent eruption in January that disrupted the work stoppage and sent several workers to the hospital with severe injuries.

More recently, the FROC-CROC continues to repress independent organizing by creating a workplace atmosphere of fear. On May 15, Ivan Diaz Xolo, a SITEKIM leader, was assaulted by CROC supporters on Kuk Dong premises in front of fellow workers. He received several blows to his face and back and consequently suffered scratches and bruises. There are also reports of CROC members attempting to bribe workers to resign from and oppose SITEKIM. As a result of the FROC-CROC's tactics, workers are expressing fear of being attacked for supporting the independent union, SITEKIM. The need to replace corrupt unions such as the FROC-CROC has become a driving force in the struggle to gain justice over sweatshop

conditions.

International pressure to hold accountable Kuk Dong, Nike, Reebok, and universities whose clothing is produced in Kuk Dong for human rights abuses has proven to be very important in helping workers to establish an independent union. The letters and support student groups and the general public have shown for the workers in Mexico sent a strong message to manufacturers like Nike. As a result of such pressure, for example, Nike's Corporate Responsibility Vice President, Dusty Kidd, sent a letter to the president of Kuk Dong in February asking that Kuk Dong reinstate the five fired workers as well as all other workers who had been demoted to lower seniority status. While Nike and other manufacturers claim that they are doing what they can to improve working conditions in their factories by creating codes of conduct, they must take the extra step in ensuring that their factories are adhering to these codes, as well as international human rights standards. The solidarity efforts by different groups and individuals with Kuk Dong workers lets Nike, Reebok and others know that they cannot turn a blind eye to what is taking place in their factories.

SITEKIM members are asking that supporters continue to put pressure on Nike, Reebok and Kuk Dong, as well as the Government of the State of Puebla and Atlixco's Local Labor Board in order to gain legal recognition of the newly formed union. With the recent attacks and bribe attempts made on SITEKIM supporters and leaders, members ask that calls or letters be made demanding that each party not only recognize SITEKIM as a legal, worker-representative entity in Kuk Dong, but also ensure a safe environment for independent union supporters. Sample letters and information are available through the U.S. Labor Education in the Americas Project at <www.usleap.org> or 773-262-6502. For background information on the Kuk Dong struggle, visit <www.workersrights.org> or <www.sweatshopwatch.org/headlines>.

VICTORY FOR WORKERS ON STRIKE AT HOLLANDER HOME FASHIONS

A 10-week long strike at the Los Angeles and Georgia facilities of Hollander Home Fashions has ended in victory. On May 21, 2001, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) and Hollander Home Fashions announced that 3-year renewable contracts will be implemented at the two production facilities. Implementing the demands made by workers and UNITE, the new contracts contain a 401-K retirement plan for production workers and wage increases of \$0.30-0.90 per hour. In a joint statement released by UNITE, both sides are said to be satisfied with the outcome and look forward to re-establishing a good working relationship.

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UNIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS TAKE ACTION AGAINST BURMESE SWEATSHOP ITEMS

A number of grassroots organizations and trade unions, including the Free Burma Coalition, Global Exchange, Sweatshop Watch, UNITE!, and the United Auto Workers are concerned by the alarming increase of apparel imports from Burma. Frustrated by the number of companies who profit from forced labor in Burma, twenty-three organizations signed onto a letter to corporations known to be selling Burmese imports to demand that they cease sourcing from Burma and sever all other business ties to the Burmese junta by May 27th - the anniversary of Burma's dishonored elections.

The issue combines concern for core labor standards globally, as well as for human rights and democracy in Burma (the illegal regime changed the name of the country to "Myanmar" in 1989 without the consent of the people. Free Burma supporters continue to use "Burma.") The junta in Rangoon continues to suppress democracy and flagrantly violates human rights even in the face of international pressure by many countries. This illegal regime currently is being penalized by many countries worldwide due to its intransigence on human rights issues and its refusal to acknowledge the results of free and fair elections in 1990. These elections saw the charismatic Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) party win a landslide victory, gaining 82% of the seats in parliament. The junta has never allowed the NLD to take power.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, calls for a halt of foreign investment to pressure the regime to change, saying that, "We want investment—at the right time, when the benefits will go to the people of Burma." To honor this request, in 1997 Congress influenced President Clinton to ban new U.S. investments in Burma.

The Rangoon regime has found a way to undermine the spirit of the investment ban, however, by setting up sweatshops. Apparel imports from Burma are skyrocketing, having increased by 272% since 1995. This is a significant source of revenue for the junta in Rangoon, which jointly or directly owns these factories, and which levies a five percent tax on all exports. Textile imports constitute over 80% of the total of Burmese imports entering the U.S., and were equal to \$325 million U.S. last year alone. Imports from Burma, however, are especially troubling considering that the International Labor Organization (ILO) took unprecedented steps last year in recommending that all ILO members review their relations with Burma to ensure that they are not contributing to systemic forced labor in

that country.

Human rights activists contend that the sweatshop industry in Burma perpetuates forced labor there, since the regime profits from the low wages in the factories—some of the lowest in the world—in order to purchase weapons and utilize troops to oversee projects involving forced labor. Workers in Burmese factories make as little as four cents an hour (USD) and trade union organizing is not allowed.

Activists around the U.S. have taken action against this

threat to labor rights. When students at the University of California-Berkeley and the University of Missouri-Columbia discovered apparel items in their campus bookstores with the "Made in Myanmar" label last semester, they drew campus media attention to the issue. The universities responded by pulling the Burmese-made goods. The retail company responsible for the products, JanSport, capitulated and announced that they will request all their "Made in Myanmar" items to be returned from campus stores.



Sweatshirts bearing JanSport and "Made in Myanmar" labels were recently pulled off UC Berkeley shelves. Photo courtesy of the Free Burma Coalition, 2000.

The company explains that their company policy is not to source from Burma.

JanSport is joining the likes of Levi-Strauss, which pulled out of Burma in 1993, stating that, "It is not possible to do business in Burma without directly supporting the military government and its pervasive violations of human rights."

But greedily, a number of retail clothing companies in the U.S. continue to sell items with the "Made in Myanmar" label, including Adidas, Kohl's, Warner Bros., Kmart, Jordache, and Federated Stores (which owns Macy's) – to name but a few. Companies like Kenneth Cole, which went on record last July stating that they will no longer sell Burmese products, still has "Made in Myanmar" items on their shelves. Wal-Mart Canada, which proclaimed they will not source "directly" from Burma, also was adamant that they would not take similar measures against "third party" companies that source from Burma. In other words, Wal-Mart was patting itself on the back for not operating sweatshops in Burma themselves, but was willing to buy mass quantities of Burmese sweat items from companies like Cherry Stix and By Design that import from sweatshops in Burma – as well as Jordache. Company policies, then, must exclude both direct and indirect purchases from Burma in order to take action against the country's military regime and human rights record.

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BURMA—*continued from page three*

But after receiving the sign-on letter, and being cut from the Domini 400 Social Index due to its sourcing from Burma, Wal-Mart says it will now refuse any products made in Burma.

The sign-on letter asked over 38 corporations to sever all business ties with Burma. The letter states, "Burmese textile factories are closely tied to forced labor. Many factories are owned by SPDC [junta]-affiliated companies, and profits from these factories facilitate the SPDC's projects in other areas which exploit forced labor," and "Workers inside Burma have no labor rights. Trade union activists are routinely persecuted, arrested, imprisoned, and tortured."

Circulated one month ago, the sign-on letter has already proven to be a very effective tool in forcing companies that are profiting from forced labor in Burma to reconsider their policies. Several companies, including TJX, FILA U.S.A., Inc, and Costco Wholesale responded favorably, announcing that they will cut their ties to Burma. While such responses are not total victories,

they do represent a step forward in changing corporate behavior with respect to Burma.

Sentiment against the import flood from Burma also extends to Capitol Hill. Senator Tom Harkin (D-OH) introduced a bill last Congressional session that would have banned all imports from Burma, and just introduced a similar bill this session, S 926. Congressional support for new pressure against the Burmese junta and for labor rights may grow—if constituents express support for the new initiative.

Says UNITE! Organizer Ann Hoffman, "This is the clearest test case for protection of labor standards. If the U.S. is not going to act now, when will it?"

Written by Dan Beeton of the Free Burma Coalition, Washington Office.

For more information on the campaign against Burmese imports, please contact Dan Beeton at the Free Burma Coalition, (202) 547-5985; dbeeton@freeburmacoalition.org, or see the Free Burma Coalition website at www.freeburmacoalition.org.

On International Workers Day Thousands March in Los Angeles to Support Immigrant Rights

On May 1st 4,000 people took to the streets in Los Angeles to march in support of immigrant rights, including workers from the new Garment Worker Center. MIWON, the Multi-ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network, launched Immigrant Worker Day, "A Call to Legalization," as a way to mobilize the immigrant community towards fighting for more rights.

The event was a huge success, not only for the numbers marching but also for the diversity of communities and issues present that day. Everybody from youth, Pilipino factory workers, Latino day laborers, Korean drummers, and university students marched in support of a legalization campaign for undocumented immigrants. The march went from a major street corner in Koreatown to MacArthur Park in the Westlake area, a large Latino immigrant community. At the park, marchers gathered for a rally and music from the Jornaleros del Norte, a band made up of day laborers.

A major goal of the march was to raise public awareness and support of the Employee and Family Unity and Legalization Act (HR 500), a bill introduced by Representative Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL) that would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to extend

the admission date for permanent residence for certain undocumented immigrants. It would extend the registry date from 1972 to October 12, 1996 and advance the date forward one year until 2007. The proposed bill would offer the more than 6 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. protection under the law and access to decent housing and working



Workers from the Garment Worker Center, along with students and other community members, show their support for immigrant workers' rights at the May 1 march in Los Angeles. Photo courtesy of the Garment Worker Center, 2001.

conditions, health care, and education.

Please contact your congressional representative to ask that they support HR 500. For more information, see "A Hand-in-Hand Struggle: Immigration and the Rights of Garment Workers" in Sweatshop Watch's Fall 2000 newsletter.

SWEATSHOP WORKERS WHO LABORED IN AMERICAN SAMOA STILL HAVE A CHANCE FOR JUSTICE

Thanks to the concern of many individuals and organizations, the Vietnamese garment workers who labored in a sweatshop on American Samoa may receive justice (see Spring 2001 newsletter for background). Since the wave of media and public attention to the workers' case, there have been some positive developments:

- The workers' court trial ended, and a favorable verdict is expected. However, collecting the workers' back wages from the factory Dawoosa Samoa, Ltd. will be difficult.
- The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is completing its investigation of the workers' case. The DOL will likely be able to collect the workers' back wages from the companies whose labels they sewed, such as J.C. Penney.
- The Department of Justice is investigating the workers' case and has paroled 140 workers to the mainland U.S. to serve as witnesses. The workers will be able to seek work and they will be able to apply for visas if they choose. Thanks to the many organizations and individuals who offered to host the workers.
- The Vietnamese government has agreed to arrange and pay for transportation for the workers who wish to return to Vietnam.
- Kilsoo Lee, the owner of Daewoosa Samoa, was arrested by the FBI on March 23 and will face criminal charges during a trial in Hawaii scheduled for September.
- In May, Daewoosa Samoa was fined \$78,500 by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for 28 alleged safety and health violations.

Much work is still being done to protect the workers who are returning home from retaliation; to help the workers now in the U.S. find work and apply for visas; and to ensure that the workers receive the money they are owed. For more information visit www.sweatshopwatch.org/samoa, www.vlw.org or www.samoa.saigon.com.

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RESOURCES

- ❖ "Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take on the Global Factory" is a new book by Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, which focuses on the pioneers of the growing movement against sweatshops, immigrant women workers, and reveals the winning strategies against global capital created by workers' centers. South End Press, 800-533-8478, www.southendpress.org.
- ❖ A new, paperback edition of "The Triangle Fire" by Leon Stein is now available. This classic book, originally published in 1962, documents the 1911 tragedy that helped win workplace protections. Cornell University Press, 607-277-2338, www.cornellpress.cornell.edu.
- ❖ "Still Waiting for Nike to Do It" is a new report by Global Exchange, which reveals that three years after Nike promised significant reforms, Nike workers continue to suffer repression and poverty wages. Global Exchange, 415-255-7296, www.globalexchange.org/economy/corporations/nike/stillwaiting.html.
- ❖ "Worker Rights in the Americas: A Rare Inside Glimpse" is a new report by the National Labor Committee which documents extensive labor abuses in Salvadoran factories that supply apparel for the National Basketball Association, Nike, Gap, Wal-Mart and several universities. National Labor Committee, 212-242-3002, www.nlcnet.org.

HOLLANDER—*continued from page two*

Five hundred production workers in Los Angeles staged a walk-out on March 8, 2001 when Hollander refused to offer UNITE members a fair contract. In solidarity with the Los Angeles facility, workers at Hollander plants located in Georgia and in Pennsylvania also staged walk-outs. During union contract negotiations workers had made several attempts to secure retirement benefits similar to those received by management and office personnel, but Hollander stubbornly refused such attempts, leading workers and union representatives to charge Hollander with practicing a double standard of providing pension plans to management and office personnel, but not to its production employees. UNITE argued that production workers—some with over 20 years service—are just as responsible for the success of the company as other employees and therefore deserve retirement benefits in their contract.

UNITE is North America's leading union of garment and textile workers, representing 250,000 employees in the United States and Canada. Hollander Home Fashions was established in 1955 and manufactures home and bedroom fashions for brands like JG Hook, Guess?, and Spring Air.

Editors: Nikki Fortunato Bas, Hina B. Shah.

Contributors: Dan Beeton/Free Burma Coalition, Joan Flores, Kimi Lee, Marissa Nuncio.

JOB OPENING—Administrative Assistant

Sweatshop Watch seeks a part-time (20 hours/week) Administrative Assistant to manage its Oakland office and provide administrative support. Previous non-profit office administration experience, strong computer skills and high level of organization required. \$10.50 - \$12.00/hour plus benefits. Start date: August 1. Send cover letter and resume to: Ms. Nikki F. Bas, Director, Sweatshop Watch, 310 8th Street, Suite 309, Oakland, CA 94607. Sweatshop Watch is an equal opportunity employer. For a full job announcement, visit www.sweatshopwatch.org.

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Sweatshop Watch is a coalition of labor, community, civil rights, immigrant rights, women's, religious & student organizations, and individuals committed to eliminating sweatshop conditions in the global garment industry. We believe that workers should be earning a living wage in a safe and decent working environment. ***Please join us by becoming a member.*** Either send in this form with a check or make a contribution from our web site with your credit card.

Yes! I want to join Sweatshop Watch. Enclosed is my \$20 membership.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Make checks payable and send to:

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