

Sweatshop Labor Issue Team Report

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Chair – Al Prendergast

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The most exciting news about the sweatshop labor movement is that we have heard from several sources that the effort here in the US is having an impact on the working conditions in developing countries. Visits to shopping malls and to corporate board meetings do move the companies to change their buying behavior.

We agreed to work closely with the National Labor Committee (NLC) on the Bangladeshi garment workers tour this year. Our objective was to involve more Family of Mary members in the sweatshop labor effort. The tour is still going on at this time and has been very successful. We were successful in bringing the tour to Moeller HS (1000 students attended), Ursuline HS (600), Xavier University (200), Purcell Marian HS (100), all in Cincinnati: University of Dayton (400); a collaborative event with five St. Louis high schools: Vianney, Chaminade, Visitation, Ursuline, and Clayton (500); and Marquette University. All of these events were arranged by us through letters, emails, phone calls and direct visits. Follow up will help us gain new members to the collaborative.

We had one of our early efforts bear fruit. Four years ago we were able to collaborate with Dr. Mark Ensalaco at UD to start the Human Rights Curriculum at UD. So far 50 students have graduated with this emphasis in their degree. One was Debbie Hirt, daughter of team member Bill Hirt, and another was Amanda Teckman. Amanda was the president of United Students against Sweatshops on the UD campus and was a summer intern at the National Labor Committee last summer. MSJC funded that internship. Amanda was hired upon graduation as a full time employee at the NLC. She has been instrumental in helping us get the most from this year's Bangladesh Workers' Tour.

We brought Junaid Khan from Bangladesh to the US to discuss the status of the Worker Owned Factory. He was very well spoken and touched all of us with his stories of working conditions in Bangladesh. He also said that the export factories are cleaning up their act around working conditions. We got the same feedback from Fr. Dave Fleming on his last visit to India. The NLC said that some factories are cleaning up their act but others are only cleaning up when inspectors from the company come to the plant. There is more work to do. The Worker Owned Factory in Bangladesh is progressing, but slowly. We are dependent on Fr. Bill Christensen and IRRD to help start up the factory. The strategy, funding, staffing and the expiration of the US importation quotas must be considered as we continue to work to evaluate the feasibility of building this factory.

Wages in factories in developing countries are still a problem. They continue to slide and with the World Trade Organization insisting that the US let trade quotas expire at the end of 2004, we will see further wage pressure when production shifts to the cheaper labor rate countries, e.g., China, India and maybe Bangladesh (if they fix their infrastructure).

This year we learned how many people in the Family of Mary network are interested in the sweatshop labor issue. We received many requests for the workers' tour to visit Marianist high schools, colleges and parishes. We also received over \$1200 in contributions to support the tour. MSJC will make a contribution of \$3000 (including the \$1200) to the NLC to offset the cost of the tour and to help them focus on actions to combat the wage slide problem.

Collaboration is a key component of our work. We will continue to collaborate with the NLC and are working to develop a relationship with Co-op America. We also have a relationship with the Center for Economic and Social Justice (Norm Kurland's organization which is highly influenced

by Fr. Ferree). We also collaborate with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR). Steve O'Neil, SM, one of our MSJC Sweatshop Labor Team members, has just been appointed by the Marianist Province USA as their representative to ICCR. We believe this is a great way to collaborate with ICCR to increase our leverage with target companies.

We need to expand the membership of our team. We have an opportunity to communicate with people who attended one of the Bangladesh Workers Tour presentations at Marianist locations. Participants filled out a card which the NLC will put in their database and we will have access to the ones from Marianist institutions.

We have a presentation on MSJC and specifically the sweatshop labor team at UD on October 26th as part of their Human Rights week. Additionally, we will be meeting with the Dean of the School of Business to see how we can collaborate with the UD School of Business to educate business majors on the affect of their decisions in the early part of their career. Young business graduates are the ones who will become the corporate buyers of the clothes that go into the stores in our neighborhoods. We hope to influence them early in the education process.

There are so many things to do on the sweatshop labor team that help is needed. We need some administrative help. We will discuss possible ways of dealing with this need at our next meeting.

We hope you agree that we are making progress and that our work makes a difference in both the lives of workers and in the lives of Family of Mary members.