

‘Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?’ Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. . . . Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. . . . Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?—Isaiah 58: 3, 4b, 6

End Sweatshops

Buy Sweat-free Apparel

Anyone who goes shopping knows that products sold in the U.S. come from just about every country on the planet. Workers around the world produce goods that are bought by American consumers. Meanwhile, corporations engage in a ceaseless search for ever-cheaper production sites with lower wages and less regulation of the workplace and environment.

Up until 20 or 30 years ago, most things purchased in the U.S. were also made here. U.S. law regulated the workplace and production processes, and protected workers and the environment. While the laws were inadequate and sometimes poorly enforced, they usually prevented severe abuses from occurring.

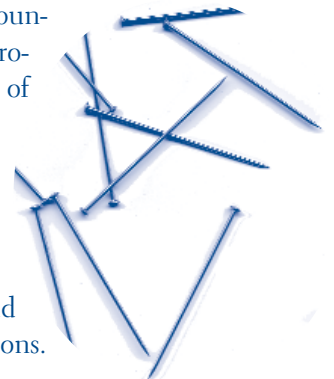
But things are different now in the era of economic globalization. While sweatshops exist throughout the U.S., they are especially prevalent in the global South where many of the goods we purchase are produced. In the global South, legal and regulatory safeguards are usually quite weak. Even when laws exist, they are often ignored or violated. When penalties are assessed, they are typically very small. Nonetheless, the expansion of trade and investment continues to bring more factories to these countries.

The prophet Isaiah spoke the words he heard from God—words that are as true today as in the past. God calls us to cease oppressing workers, to loose the bonds of injustice, and to break the thongs of the yoke. As we live into God’s reign, we must ensure justice for all God’s children—in the U.S. and around the world—who produce the goods we buy and use.

What Is A Sweatshop?

A sweatshop is a business, located in the U.S. or abroad, where employees are exploited by their employer and local laws governing the workplace are broken. The abuse could be related to very low wages, being forced to work an excessive number of hours, unsafe work conditions, or humiliating or degrading treatment, or harassment.

Labor standards vary across countries. But even the poorest countries usually have labor laws providing for a minimum wage (appropriate to local standards and cost of living), a cap on the number of hours that an employee may work per week, and other protections. Abuses arise because corporate greed overrides fairness. Corporations violate their fundamental responsibility to treat workers with dignity and justice. Global competition among corporations encourages a search to find locations where legal protections for workers are inadequate, authorities fail to monitor and enforce existing law, and inadequate penalties fail to deter violations.





What We Can Do About Sweatshops

International labor standards—A treaty establishing international labor standards has been adopted by nearly every nation in the world (see International Labor Organization <http://www.ilo.org/>). But existing international organizations lack the power to enforce these standards. International trade agreements like the North American Free Trade

Agreement (NAFTA) could rigorously enforce labor standards but nearly without exception they do not. Any protections that are included are typically relegated to “side agreements” that lack the enforcement and oversight mechanisms used in the main body of the treaties. Future trade agreements must include strong labor standards.

Labor unions—One of the most important ways in which workers around the world can prevent abuse and improve their working conditions is to form or join a labor union. But the right to organize, a fundamental human right under the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is not well protected in trade agreements or the laws of many countries. In many nations, including the U.S., workers may be discouraged or blocked from forming unions and leaders in the struggle to organize may be illegally fired. In some countries, union leaders are even killed. In countries around the world, the right to form a union must be strengthened and protected.

Supply chain responsibility—Large multinational corporations operating around the world could be a force for improving labor conditions. These companies often contract with other, usually smaller, firms for products and in today’s global economy, these firms are often outside the U.S. For example, Nike and Adidas contract with a firm in Indonesia for athletic shoes. Even if a large multinational company pays its U.S. workers a living wage, provides good fringe benefits, and operates in ways that safeguard the environment, its suppliers may not.

Consumers are asking that multinational corporations accept their supply chain responsibility and require that their suppliers treat workers and the environment in just, humane, and sustainable ways. A large corporation sets the terms of its contract with a supplier firm often including detailed specifications that govern the materials and production processes to be used. But usually these contracts are silent regarding labor and environmental practices. Consumers concerned with workers and the environment are encouraging corporations to establish codes of conduct for their suppliers, specifying the standards to be met. Independent monitors then observe the suppliers to ensure their compliance.

Avoid products made in sweatshops—Consumers are also using their buying power to send an anti-sweatshop message. Roughly two million apparel workers located in 150 nations make products for American retailers. Some 80% of them are working in conditions that systematically violate international or local labor laws. About half of all apparel available for purchase in the U.S. is made in a sweatshop—including the t-shirts that churches and other settings of the UCC often use to promote their events. There is an alternative to apparel produced in sweatshops. Clothing, including sweat-free t-shirts and other promotional items, are available from a variety of vendors, often at prices similar to those of sweatshop-produced goods. Check out the list of vendors that are sweat-free.

Maquiladora Workers in Central America

In Central America’s maquiladora factories in special tax-free zones, forced overtime, very low wages, exposure to dangerous fumes, verbal abuse, public humiliation, and suppression of the right to form a union are “standard working conditions.” (National Labor Committee—

www.nlcnet.org/campaigns/archive/behindclosed/intro.shtml)

Female Factory Workers in Bangladesh

Women in some Bangladeshi factories labor 12 to 14 hours a day, seven days a week with just one or two days off a month. During busy times, 20-hour, all-night shifts are mandatory. Workers are slapped, punched, and even hit with sticks. Talking is forbidden and permission is needed to go to the restroom. Severance pay and paid maternity leave, required by Bangladeshi law, are not provided. Wages are far below Bangladesh’s legally required minimum. Any attempt to form a union results in illegal mass firings. All of these abuses violate Bangladesh’s own labor laws. Workers say they could move from lives of misery to ones with some dignity (although still deeply mired in poverty) if they were paid 34 cents an hour. This would mean, for example, that instead of receiving just 1.6 cents for each baseball cap they sewed, they would earn about 3 cents. The caps are sold for \$17 in the U.S. An additional cost to consumers of 1.4 cents per cap would not even be noticed but it would make a world of difference to young women in Bangladesh. (National Labor Committee; [Bangladesh: Ending the Race to the Bottom](#)).

Apparel Workers in Cambodia

Apparel workers in Cambodia are as young as 12 years of age, live in rat-infested dormitories without running water, and endure physical abuse, forced overtime, and seven day work-weeks—all for 21 cents an hour. (Behind the Label—

<http://www.behindthelabel.org/pdf/Retailindus.pdf>)



Where To Get Sweat-Free Apparel

The Co-op America Green Pages (<http://www.greenpages.org>) and The Clean Clothes Connection (<http://www.cleanclothesconnection.org>) are two on-line services that allow browsers to find local retailers that sell sweat-free products. There are also firms selling online.

American Apparel

"American Apparel sees all of its employees as long-term investments. . . . [and] is committed to paying fair wages to its workers [who] are considered to be some of the highest-paid apparel employees in the country."

<http://www.americanapparel.net/>

American Apparel

747 Warehouse St
Los Angeles CA 90021
Phone: (213) 488-0226
Fax: (213) 488-0334
E-mail: info@americanapparel.net

Justice Clothing Company

"Justice Clothing is meant to be a one-stop shop for union-made and sweatshop free apparel."

<http://www.justiceclothing.com/thereis/justice/>

Justice Clothing Company

10 Harlow St
Bangor ME 04401
Phone: (888) 661-0620 (10 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays and Sundays)
E-mail: info@justiceclothing.com

Maggie's Functional Organics

"Raw materials that are grown organically and sustainably. . . . and workers who have control of their lives."

<http://www.organicclothes.com/>

Maggie's Functional Organics

306 W Cross St
Ypsilanti MI 48197
Phone: (800) 609-8593
Fax: (734) 482-4175
E-mail: maggies@organicclothes.com

No Sweat Apparel

"Our clothing is produced by independent trade union members . . . the most viable response to globalization is a global labor movement. . . . No Sweat . . . support[s] independent trade unions—the only historically proven solution to sweatshops."

<http://www.nosweatapparel.com/index.html>

No Sweat Apparel

14 B Felton St
Waltham MA 02453
Phone: (877) 992-7827
E-mail: sales@nosweatapparel.com

Plain's T-Shirt Co.

"All of our employees are [union] members . . . and all our fabric is made from 100% U.S.A. products and knitted here in Pennsylvania."

<http://www.plainstshirt.com/products.htm>

Plain's T-Shirt Co.

10 Sarah St
Plains PA 18705
Phone: (800) 634-2602
Fax: (570) 822-8224
E-mail: PlainsTs@aol.com

Platinum Sportswear

"Garments made in the U.S.A. from fabrics made in the U.S.A." http://www.geoffreydrewmarketing.com/Platinum_Sportswear/home_page.htm

Platinum Sportswear

1600 Old Country Rd
Suite 207
Plainview NY 11803
Phone: (800) 839-2929
Fax: (888) 329-6287

Shop Union Made

"Justice Clothing Company"

<http://www.shopunionmade.com>

E-mail: ulstd@unionlabel.org

(These products are only available online)

T.S. Designs, Inc.

"Our mission is to build a sustainable company that simultaneously looks after the People, the Planet, and Profits."

<http://www.tsdesigns.com/>

T.S. Designs

2053 Willow Springs Ln
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Union Jean & Apparel Company

"All products are union-made and American-made."

[http://www.unionjeancompany.com/index.php?](http://www.unionjeancompany.com/index.php?Session_ID=)

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Union Jean and Apparel Company

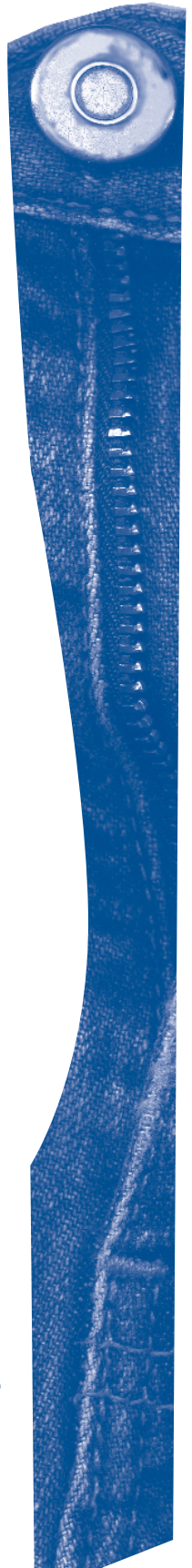
2149 Arcanum-Ithaca Rd
Arcanum OH 45304
Phone: (877) 692-8009
Fax: (937) 692-8495
E-mail: info@unionjeancompany.com

Unionwear

<http://www.unionwear.com/>

"Unionwear.com . . . promote[s] union label wearables to unions, political campaigns, government agencies, and socially responsible organizations."

(Their products are available only through a nationwide network of distributors—enter your zip code on the Web site to find a local retailer.)



At this time, there is no source for sweat-free athletic shoes.

Sweatshops DON'T Have To EXIST

Additional Resources

Behind the Label: <http://www.behindthelabel.org/>
Campaign for Labor Rights: <http://www.campaignforlaborrights.org/>
Clean Clothes Campaign: www.cleanclothes.org
Corpwatch: www.corpwatch.org
Fair Trade Federation: www.fairtradefederation.org
National Labor Committee: www.nlcnet.org
NikeWatch (info on many makers of athletic apparel)
<http://www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/nike/>
United Students Against Sweatshops:
<http://www.studentsagainstsweatshops.org/>

Share What You Are Doing to End Sweatshops

If your church, youth group, social action board, or other group is working to fight sweatshops, please let us know what you're doing. Send a one- to three- paragraph description (including pictures would be terrific) with contact information for someone who could answer questions or provide more information. Send by e-mail to jwm@ucc.org with "Our Anti-sweatshop Work" in the subject line.

Countering Common Arguments

Sweatshops are not just a necessary stage in economic development that a country passes through.

By denying workers fair wages and healthy work conditions, sweatshop firms block economic development. Countries with sweatshops often see wages fall and worker-consumers have a decline in their purchasing power. These conditions do not contribute to economic development. Sweatshops also exist in the U.S.—one of the most economically developed countries in the world.

The choice is not between a job in a sweatshop and no job.

Sweatshops do not need to be put out of business. Workers need jobs. But multinational corporations and their suppliers need to know that sweatshops are not tolerable. Firms need to set up factories and do business in a particular country for reasons other than low wages and weak environmental laws. Otherwise, the firms will leave the country as soon as the level of economic development improves, that is, when wages begin to rise or environment standards begin to improve.

Corporations don't have to exploit workers to meet consumer demands for low-priced goods.

Most consumers don't want to buy goods made in sweatshops. Moreover, a higher wage for low-paid workers has a negligible impact on the retail prices of products. For example, a shirt made in a maquiladora in Mexico retails for about \$32. Of this, the workers get about 52 cents. Workers' wages could double—and the price of the shirt would rise from \$32 to \$32.50 (Co-op America; *Guide to Ending Sweatshops*, page 4).

www.ucc.org/justice



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OF CHRIST**

