

11 Facts About Sweat Shops

1. A “sweatshop” is defined by the US Department of Labor as a factory that violates 2 or more labor laws and regularly violates both wage or child labor and safety or health laws.”

2. Sweatshops often have poor working conditions, unfair wages, unreasonable hours, child labor, and a lack of benefits for workers.

3. In developing countries, an estimated 250 million children ages 5 to 14 are forced to work.

4. America has stronger labor laws than most undeveloped countries, but it is not free of sweatshops. Many slip under the radar of the US Department of Labor.



5. Products that commonly come from sweatshops are shoes, clothing, rugs, coffee, chocolate, toys, and bananas. Service companies that use sweatshop labor often include call centers.

6. A study showed that doubling the salary of sweatshop workers would only increase the consumer cost of an item by 1.8%, while consumers would be willing to pay 15% more to know a product did not come from a sweatshop.

7. Sweatshops do not alleviate poverty. The people who are forced to work must spend the majority of their paycheck on food for their families to survive.

8. According to the National Labor Committee, women sewing NBA jerseys make 24 cents per garment that will eventually sell for \$140

9. Men and women alike are subjected to verbal, physical, and sexual abuse in factories from their managers and supervisors. They are sometimes trapped in the factory and forced to work overnight or across multiple shifts.

10. In 2000, more than 11,000 sweatshops in the US violated the minimum wage and overtime laws, while over 16,000 had broken health and safety laws.

11. Because women make up 85 to 90% of sweatshop workers, employers force them to take birth control and routine pregnancy tests to avoid supporting maternity leave or providing appropriate health benefits.

Sweatshop Fact Sheet

1. INDONESIA

Workers in Indonesia have been organizing for their rights. The minimum wage was raised, but according to human rights observers the average Nike shoe worker in Indonesia still makes only \$1.25 per day, working sometimes as long as 10 or 12 hours per shift. According to the Clean Clothes Campaign, this wage is still only about two-thirds of what is necessary to cover basic needs for a single person. In 1997 Nike spent \$978 million on advertising, including big contracts with the national Brazilian soccer team and U.S. basketball stars like Michael Jordan. Nike currently pays Tiger Woods \$55,555 per day to be their spokesman.

Sources: *Clean Clothes Campaign* www.cleanclothes.org.

2. HAITI

A garment worker in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, paid the legal minimum wage and working 50 hours a week, would need to work 8.8 hours in order to purchase 5 pounds of beans; 4 hours to purchase 5 pounds of rice; 6.7 hours for 1 pound of yams and 5.6 hours to purchase 1 pound of charcoal for cooking. In Haiti, half a week's pay is required to purchase just these four essential items! Most factories pay their workers on a piece basis, though they are required by law to pay at least the minimum wage of 36 gourdes per day — about \$2.17. In violation of the law, workers in some factories do not earn the minimum wage if they do not reach their production quota.

Factory workers told Christian Peacemaker Team delegation members from Italy that \$2.17 is not enough money to live on. When asked what would be a fair wage, workers generally replied that \$4.50 would be acceptable. Source: Go to www.citino.it/associazioni/CNMS/archivio/strategie/assemblyfact_haiti.html.

3. UNITED STATES

Instead of going to school, hundreds of thousands of children work in the fields of California and other agricultural states picking fruits and vegetables. They get paid more than kids around the world, but things cost a lot more in the

United States. Sometimes they work in the fields 12 hours a day, six days a week. They get paid by the amount of baskets they fill with strawberries or other fruits and vegetables. For example, in 1998, Sani H., then sixteen, picked chile peppers at the rate of 50¢ per bag (about the size of a bushel). He worked from 7:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. and earned about \$20 a day, for an average hourly wage of \$2.50.

Source: www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2000/frmwrkr.

4. VIETNAM

Seventeen-year-old women work 9 to 10 hours a day, seven days a week, earning as little as 6¢ an hour in the Keyhinge factory in Vietnam making giveaway promotional toys — especially Disney characters for McDonald's. At the end of February 1997, 200 workers fell ill, 25 collapsed, and three were hospitalized as a result of acute exposure to acetone. The wages earned by the women don't even cover 20% of a worker's daily food and transportation costs.

Source: *National Labor Committee*, www.globallabourrights.org.

5. EL SALVADOR

At the Hermosa factory in El Salvador, workers are paid about 60¢ per hour working up to 70 hours per week. At peak times they have worked a 19.5 hour shift (6:30 a.m. to 2:00 a.m.) with workers forced to sleep on the factory floor. They get paid 29¢ for each \$140 Nike NBA shirt they sew; 30¢ for each \$100 pair of NBA Nike shorts they sew. The drinking water at the factory is contaminated — bacteria levels are 429 times greater than internationally permitted norms. Women raise their babies on coffee and lemonade because they can't afford milk.

Source: *National Labor Committee*, www.globallabourrights.org.

6. EGYPT

Ten- and eleven-year-old girls work at looms making carpets. They work from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. in violation of Egypt's labor laws. They work six days a week and make \$5 per week. (Hint: figure out their hourly wage by doing something other than multiplication.)

Source: *U.S. Department of Labor*.

7. BANGLADESH

At the Beximco factory in the Export Processing Zone of Dhaka, Bangladesh, young women sew shirts and pants for Wal-Mart and other retailers. The workshift is from 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week. The one-hour lunch break is not paid. Sewing operators make 20¢ an hour and helpers make 9¢ an hour. Even though the law requires it, Wal-Mart and its contractor do not pay overtime premiums (extra money after 48 hours). There is no maternity leave and no health care provided workers. In Bangladesh's Export Processing Zone unions are outlawed.

Source: Wal-Mart's Shirts of Misery, by the National Labor Committee. <http://www.globallabourrights.org/reports?id=0281>.

8. GUANGDONG, CHINA

At the Ming Cycle factory in Guangdong, China, workers aged 17 to 25 work in four factories making Wal-Mart Mongoose bicycles. The base wage is 20¢ an hour, but with overtime pay it increases. One pay record shows a skilled assembly line worker in April 2000 working 84 hours a week, and earning 30¢ each hour. At the factory, if a worker is caught dozing off, exhausted by the long hours, he or she is fined a half day's wages and can be fired.

Source: National Labor Committee, www.globallabourrights.org.

9. QINGDAO, CHINA

At the Daesun Electronic Corp. in Qingdao, China, workers make top-of-the-line Alpine car stereos, some costing up to \$1,300 each. They are made by young women who are paid an average (according to the company) of 27¢ to 31¢ an hour. (Starting pay is 20¢ to 22¢ an hour.) They sit hunched over, staring into microscopes nine-plus hours a day, six days a week, soldering parts of the stereos. Above the women is an electronic scoreboard that monitors their progress toward the daily production quota of 720 units.

Source: Made in China, a report by the National Labor Committee, www.globallabourrights.org.

10. HONDURAS

At the Evergreen Factory in the Rio Blanco Industrial Park, 630 workers sew McKids Wal-Mart's children's clothing and Arizona clothing for J. C. Penney. The majority of workers are

young women of 14, 15, and 16. They are forced to work overtime: Fourteen-hour shifts Monday through Friday, as well as nine-hour shifts on Saturdays and Sundays. In one four-month period in 1998, there were constant, mandatory seven-day work weeks. The workers earn approximately 43¢ per hour.

In some Honduran factories, workers do up to 14-hour daily shifts and occasional mandatory 24-hour shifts, working right through the night. If a worker cannot stay for the overtime, she is suspended without pay or fired.

The 43¢-an-hour base wage meets only 54% of the cost of survival. Workers sewing Wal-Mart clothing cannot afford to purchase milk, juice, meat, fish, fruit, cereals, or vitamins for their children. Nor can they afford to buy new clothes. Source: www.globallabourrights.org.

11. AMERICAN SAMOA

Clothing is produced for J.C. Penney and other retailers at factories where workers are beaten. Food was so inadequate that workers were "walking skeletons," according to a U.S. Department of Labor report. The factory belonged to Daewoosa, a small Korean-owned clothing manufacturer.

Three hundred workers, brought from Vietnam, were fed watery broth of rice and cabbage, and kept 36 to a room, with two workers to a 36-inch-wide bed. Workers earned about \$400 a month, but were forced to pay \$150 to \$200 a month for food and rent. Workers were sometimes beaten with pipes. Workers' net pay was approximately \$1.22 an hour. Samoa has a minimum wage of \$2.60 an hour.

Source: "Beatings and Other Abuses Cited at Samoan Apparel Plant That Supplied U.S. Retailers," by Steven Greenhouse, The New York Times, Feb. 6, 2001.

12. MEXICO

In January 2001, workers in the Kukdong factory in Atlixco, Mexico were making \$30 for a 45-hour week. They make Nike sportswear (sweatshirts, T-shirts, etc.) for University of Oregon, University of North Carolina, University of Michigan, Michigan State, Georgetown, Penn State, and others.

Source: Campaign for Labor Rights, www.clrlabor.org.

— compiled by Bob Peterson



Associated Press/Kathy Willens

A 15-year-old factory worker in New York's Chinatown (left) talks to a state labor standards investigator (standing right) about working conditions at the factory.

Sweatshops Are Us

BY JOANN LUM

It has become fashionable to talk about sweatshops these days. Unfortunately, the public discussion is dominated by a removed, self-righteous, and paternalistic stance. It's those poor women and children in Third World countries being exploited by Nike and Disney. Meanwhile, we turn a blind eye to the sweatshops flourishing right here in the United States. And when those outside of poor communities do notice the sweatshops, too often they think they have nothing to do with them.

But the rising number of sweatshops in Los Angeles or North Carolina or New York is part of an intensification of work and underemployment that affects almost everyone, regardless of their race, ethnicity, geographic location, trade,

or class. Those who want to support workers stuck in sweatshops might start by considering that the conditions these workers face — longer hours, lower wages, and job insecurity — are problems they may be experiencing themselves.

It is true that the Chinese community, along with many other immigrant groups and communities of color in this country, has suffered the brunt of the expansion of what appears to be a global sweatshop. In Chinatown, New York, Chinese immigrant women are toiling in garment factories under illegal, inhuman conditions, even though most shops are unionized. Hours are rising, workers are continually threatened with replacement by cheaper labor, and work is increasingly contracted out

to middlemen for whom labor law does not exist. In garment factories and restaurants in New York, Chinese workers — documented and undocumented — are forced to work 70 to 100 hours a week without receiving benefits, overtime pay, or even minimum wage.

The impact of such harsh working conditions is brutal. Garment workers, for example, report a mounting number of job-related injuries. They cannot sleep, they have no time for their children or spouses, and they have no energy for community or civic activities. Children as young as eight work in factories to supplement their families' income.

But what is happening to working conditions beyond these sweatshops? Violations of basic labor laws — governing minimum wage, child labor, overtime, safety, and health — are spreading, even as the inspectors who are supposed to enforce them are downsized. And work days are growing longer and longer as people try to make up for their declining wages.

Sweatshop conditions are most obvious in domestic work, agriculture, hotel cleaning, and meat processing. But firms in all types of industries increasingly rely on subcontracting networks similar to those used by garment makers to evade responsibility for poor conditions. Workers in full-time positions with benefits and pensions are being laid off and replaced with contract labor. Recently, the nation's largest job-finding company for laid-off white-collar workers made an agreement with Manpower, Inc., the nation's largest temp company and the nation's largest employer, to place such workers — managers, engineers, accountants, lawyers and bankers

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— when it can't place them in permanent, well-paying jobs. One estimate puts the total number of contingent workers (including part-time, temporary, and contract workers) at 35 million, 28% of the civilian labor force.

These related national trends of overwork and underemployment are creating a desperate climate in our communities, where workers must compete relentlessly for jobs, and we are constantly compromising our basic needs. Yes, we need to challenge the global sweatshop and the multinationals mining the globe for cheap labor. But not without starting with ourselves, right here in this country. We need to address the conditions here, rather than frame it as a Third World problem or marginalize it as an immigrant or low-wage workers' problem.

We need to talk about how much work — or the lack of work — is taking over our lives, controlling our time, reducing us to machines, depriving us of time with our families, friends, communities. How many of us are working 50, 60, 70, and more hours a week to keep our jobs? How many of us are working two or even three jobs? How many

of us are suffering from aches and pains and stress related to work? How many of us have looked for a job for ages? If we embrace the idea that control over our time is a human right, then conversations about organizing to end the sweatshop system will be about us too and we will construct the alternative. ■

JoAnn Lum formerly worked for the Chinese Staff and Workers Association, an independent workers center in New York City active in national mobilization efforts against sweatshop practices. She now works with the National Mobilization Against Sweatshops (NMASS), on the web at www.nmass.org. This article was first published in Dollars and Sense magazine.

Indictment

You are responsible for the dehumanizing working conditions and the environmental and cultural destruction caused by the growth of the global economy. You stand accused of the following crimes:

- Paying workers in poor countries less than a living wage.
- Forcing workers to labor long hours with insufficient or no breaks.
- Allowing child labor.
- Intimidating workers with physical and emotional abuse.
- Subjecting workers to hazardous work environments with inadequate lighting and ventilation, exposure to chemicals and pesticides, unbearable temperatures, and other substandard working conditions.
- Destroying rivers and other bodies of water with toxic waste.
- Polluting the land with pesticides and herbicides.
- Polluting the air with poisonous gases.
- Deforesting the land.
- Harming the cultures and values of non-Western peoples.