



## BCGEU Equity and Human Rights

### Information from Canadian Labour Congress' Stop Sweatshop Abuses Web Site

#### About Sweatshops

**Sweatshop** is a word that brings to mind slave labour conditions from centuries ago. But as more and more people learn of the miserable conditions endured by the workers in the clothing industry, outrage has grown and, increasingly, consumers want to know where and how their clothes are made.

Big companies in the garment industry are looking all over the world for the cheapest labour. Canadian companies are also taking advantage from abusing the rights of workers in developing countries. But we believe that we have to take a stand against sweatshop abuses and exploitation and ensure better jobs and working conditions for everyone. No Sweat campaigns' main objective is to hold retailers, brands and manufacturers accountable for the conditions under which their products are made.

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) is involved in a national campaign with its partners in the Ethical Trading Action Group (ETAG). The No Sweat Campaign also calls for changes in the regulations of the current Textile Labeling Act to include full disclosure of names and addresses of factories where our clothes are made.

In Canada, labour councils, federations of labour and CLC-affiliated organizations are working with student associations and other social partners across the country to promote No Sweat Purchasing policies for public institutions. We are also involved in No Sweat Municipal campaigns to ensure that taxpayer's money is not used to purchase uniforms and provide public services made by workers forced to work in appalling conditions.

#### ETAG and MSN

The **Ethical Trading Action Group (ETAG)** is a coalition of faith, labour, teacher and non-governmental organizations advocating for government policies, voluntary codes of conduct and ethical purchasing policies that promote humane labour practices based on accepted international labour standards. ETAG promotes greater public access to information on where and under what conditions clothes, shoes and other consumer products are made, and greater transparency in monitoring and verification of company compliance with international labour standards and local laws. The Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) acts as the secretariat for ETAG.

The **Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN)** is a Canadian-based labour rights and solidarity organization committed to decent work and wages for garment workers worldwide.

MSN's program combines policy advocacy, corporate campaigning and engagement, coalition building, international networking and solidarity.

#### Boycotts: Is boycotting the solution?

Ethical shopping is not about boycotting. It's about doing the right thing, making the right choices and acting on informed decisions about the products we buy. Whether or not to call a boycott is a decision that needs to be made by the workers the boycott will affect.

Sometimes boycotts can hurt the people we want to help. The decision to call a boycott should be made by the workers involved. It's their life—their jobs—their decision.

Effective pressure can be brought to bear on the retailers without taking the step of declaring a full-fledged boycott. Many responsible consumers decide not to buy from a particular company or retailer. This is their choice and companies care when consumers tell them that they won't buy their products until they solve the problems and stop abusing workers in sweatshops.

### **Public Education Is the Key**

Instead of organizing boycotts, we do prefer to educate consumers about the problems faced by millions of workers in the apparel and sportswear industry around the world.

As a responsible consumer, you can have control over the products you want to buy. More and more consumers are now shopping with a conscience and ask questions about labour conditions in factories where their clothes are made. Many are even willing to pay more to buy "sweatshop-free" clothing because they believe it is the right thing to do. Are you an ethical shopper?

### **Ethical Shopping**

**Every day, millions of women, men and children work under sweatshop conditions, with low pay, long hours and no benefits.**

Being an ethical consumer - choosing to buy items that are not made in sweatshop conditions - might be one of the best gifts of solidarity Canadians can offer to sweatshop workers in Canada and other countries.

One major problem facing people concerned about sweatshop abuses is not knowing where our clothes are made. The garment industry works hard to keep this information out of the hands of consumers, mainly because they don't want to be held responsible for the conditions under which their goods are made.

Ethical shopping would be easier if retailers were required to provide information on where and by whom their clothes are made, or if a recognizable label indicated which clothes are produced under humane conditions. But why wait until such a system is in place?

### **What can I do?**

**Ask questions. As a consumer, tell them what you think!**

Tell the manager that it matters to you to purchase clothes that are made under fair conditions.

- How do I know your clothes are produced under humane conditions?
- Can I get the name and address of the contractors and subcontractors who produce your clothes?
- Does your company have a code of conduct for its contractors & sub-contractor?
- May I have a copy?
- How do you check whether your contractors abide by your code of conduct?

### **Sweatshop**

For more information on Sweatshops, visit the CLC site <http://sweatshop.clc-ctc.ca>.

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