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JOURNAL TITLE: Humanity & society

USER JOURNAL TITLE: Humanity & society.

ARTICLE TITLE: Tactical Innovation at the Point of Consumption: Workers and Consumers in the Anti-Sweatshop Movement

ARTICLE AUTHOR: Dreiling, Michael

VOLUME: 27

ISSUE: 1

MONTH:

YEAR: 2003

PAGES: 67-88

ISSN: 0160-5976

OCLC #: 77079160

Processed by RapidX: 4/23/2020 6:58:47 AM



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TACTICAL INNOVATION AT THE POINT OF CONSUMPTION: WORKERS AND CONSUMERS IN THE ANTI-SWEATSHOP MOVEMENT

Michael Dreiling and Brian Wolf
University of Oregon

REFLEXIVE STATEMENTS

(Dreiling) In 1999, my attention was drawn to the antisweatshop movement on campus. Students were successfully pressuring our University administration to join the Worker's Rights Consortium. The University of Oregon did join and later, after a series of debacles and countermovement reactions, withdrew membership from the WRC and joined the Fair Labor Association. Phil Knight's - CEO and founder of Nike - reaction to his alma mater joining the WRC led him to renege on his commitment of \$30 million to the University. This no doubt influenced the outcome. My own involvement in the issue, as well as many former students highlighted the need for the movement to learn and anticipate responses by the apparel industry. Following the events, it became clear that efforts to use University-buying power - or any other consumer based strategy - to support worker rights would require sustained, strategic thinking. I hope this paper helps sustain that discussion.

(Wolf) This work represents more than two years of inquiry into the nature and dynamics of the antisweatshop movement. This research has put us into contact with people, actions and ideas that have been simultaneously moving, frustrating and empowering. This movement has both inspired and been inspired by other campaigns for global justice. The transnational solidarity and tactical innovations exhibited by the antisweatshop movement serve as a model for other movements to advance social and economic justice around the world. At the same time, I share Dr. Dreiling's view that point of consumption strategies against a political economy and cultural vernacular dominated by the money and ideology of mass marketing, require strong and coordinated efforts by worker advocates. I believe that more complete information and an honest debate about the goals and tactics of this movement can facilitate efforts to advance workers rights in the US and abroad.

INTRODUCTION

By all measures, the American consumer has the most voracious appetite in the world. Between 1980 and 2000, American consumers spent trillions of dollars on products and services. Over \$160 billion are spent annually in the U.S.A. on apparel products alone (Howard 1997). Workers plugged into a complex network of geographically diffuse multinational corporations and international labor markets produce these garments. Across most industries, name brands, from Nike, Ford and The Gap to Starbucks and Sprint mark the spread of economic activities across the globe. Untold numbers of workers are involved in extracting and refining raw materials, producing products across multiple industrial sectors, delivering commodities, disposing the waste of commodity production and consumption, and communicating via information channels stretching between peoples and communities the world over. Above it all, corporations and subcontractors pinch and squeeze economies at an ever-tightening cost margin, seeking to cut costs, expand market share and boost profit margins.

All of these dynamics give shape to what is generally called globalization. For the apparel sector, the sweatshop and its notoriously miserable labor conditions are but one consequence of corporate cost-cutting in a deregulated world (See Klein 2000; Piore 1997). Yet, the image associated with the consumption of most commodities in no way reveals the faces of those involved in producing (or disposing of) the product. In the case of apparel production, the images of fashion hardly reflect the inhumane work and living conditions faced by millions of mostly female garment workers. Mystified by social, physical and cultural distances, the origins of consumer products as well as the labor conditions under which they are produced remain far from clear.

Added to these complex phenomena is yet another layer of activity that obfuscates the production, distribution and disposal of commodities: *mass commercial advertising*. In 2000, over \$247 billion was spent on advertising in the U.S.A. alone (U.S. Census Bureau 2002: Table 1253). To put this in perspective, the federal government spent \$85.5 billion on all levels of education and related programs in 2000 (ibid: Table 201). Every day roughly 3000 commercial messages flirt with the consciousness and symbolic horizon of each individual in America (*Business Week* 1991). Leslie Savan (1995: 1) estimated "16,000 ads flicker across an individual's consciousness daily." On the conservative side, this means that an estimated "12 billion display ads, 3 million radio commercials and more than 200,000 TV commercials are dumped into North America's collective unconscious" per day (Lasn 1999:19).

How do people develop the political and cultural tools to uncover what seems an invisible realm of commodity production? How, in particular, do consumers discover the "sweat" behind the fashionable images of garments and

then fight for workers rights globally? Our paper investigates this question by exploring the changing political alliances and strategies of labor rights advocates at the "point of consumption" in the 1990s.

We maintain a sense of the global significance of this work as well as discover some concrete political dynamics of the contemporary anti-sweatshop movement. Specifically, we explore the evolution of and ingredients to a movement that has strategically challenged - with the hope of expanding worker rights globally - the brand names of popular fashion and exposed apparel manufacturers as sweatshop "rats."¹ The various campaigns associated with this movement have targeted the "image" of apparel products in order to reveal the opulent images of fashion beneath an inhumane exploitation of workers. Furthermore, we identify the way in which labor-consumer-based activism is oriented toward demystifying the commodity *and* improving international labor rights. The movement activism behind these efforts, we observe, are self-consciously evolving toward *a goal of shaping not only how consumer goods are made but perceived.*

BEHIND THE IMAGE: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INTERNATIONAL APPAREL PRODUCTION

Sixty-percent of all garments sold in the US are imported, mostly from Asian countries, followed by Latin American and Caribbean countries (Ross 1997). In 1980, seventy percent of all apparel purchased in the U.S. was produced domestically (Kernaghan 1997). Today, production in the apparel industry is truly a global affair. In fact, no other industry approximates the apparel sector in conjuring the image of 'globalization.' Competition is intense among the tens of thousands of global contractors seeking markets through the large retail chains and corporate name brands. Highly mobile factories in search of the lowest wage seek to expand their profit margins amid the squeeze between the high-profit demands of global retailers and the constraints of local labor markets. Throughout the world, companies in hundreds of countries actively export apparel products to a few importing countries. Driven by the retail giants of the world, the fates of millions of workers across the globe are sealed by the command exercised by corporations like Wal-Mart over the internal consumer markets of rich importing countries.

Large-scale forces that undermined the post-world war II "accord" between apparel sector unions and garment manufacturers in the U.S. establish the structural background under which the global sweatshop thrives. The first indicator of global restructuring in this industry was the shift of apparel manufacturing jobs from industrial countries of the global North to the global South. In the decade of the 1980s alone, over 850,000 apparel manufacturing

jobs were lost in the industrial North. Most of this job loss occurred in the U.S. while a roughly equivalent number of apparel sector jobs were created in the developing world, mostly Asia and the Caribbean (Mandle 2000). It was during this period that apparel unions in the rich countries experienced radical membership hemorrhage. In 1969, the largest apparel union, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), had a membership of 457,000. By the time the ILGWU merged with the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) in 1995, their combined membership was less than 200,000 (Ross 1997).

At the same time, the U.S. government, through various international aid and regional development programs, began funneling billions of dollars into the development of "investment friendly" export processing zones and industrial parks throughout the Caribbean and Central America. These efforts were buttressed by the structural adjustment policies of international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, that pressed an export-oriented framework on third world economies while also emphasizing cuts in social spending, fiscal austerity, and macro-economic deregulation. Coincidentally, many developing countries shifted national economic policy away from import substitution industrialization and toward an export-oriented model of development, also encouraged by U.S. trade policy.²

An example of this process occurred in the 1980s as a precursor to the NAFTA and the FTAA. The Caribbean Basin Initiative opened investment in the islands while also encouraging the reorganization of those island-economies to serve as export platforms for U.S.-based multinationals. At the same time, political and military conflicts in Central America sought to contain leftist movements and consolidate "investor friendly" nations in the region, presaging the expansion of export processing zones throughout Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and more recently, Nicaragua. It was these arrangements that brought workers from the devastated rural sectors of these countries to the expanding industrial parks that produce goods for U.S.-based and other foreign corporations. In sum, as one seasoned activist put it, the U.S. role in the region "went from small scale wars fought with guns to large scale economic wars fought with the dollar."³

The stabilization of authoritarian regimes after the regional wars, first in Asia and then in Central America, created the political institutions that readily succumbed to the pressures of international financial institutions and multinational corporations. Moreover, many authoritarian regimes, from Indonesia, Burma, and the Philippines to Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, all worked closely to ensure that the export processing platforms would operate free from independently organized labor unions. Massive rural migration and economic desperation following the violence and civil wars that struck so many

of these countries insured a regular supply of labor.

The role of U.S. military intervention and support for right-wing authoritarian regimes, it is important to recall, was part of a larger, concerted anti-communist strategy directed at much of the Third world. Part of that effort, ironically, involved U.S. labor, the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Following WWII and throughout much of the Cold War, the AFL-CIO purged its own radicals and developed a working relationship with the State Department to orchestrate the American Institute for Free Labor Development (See Sims 1992). The AIFLD merged the worst practices of business unionism in the U.S. with the CIA and U.S. government Cold War agenda. ⁴ These efforts systematically undermined independent and left wing labor unions and contributed to the exploitation of already vulnerable workers in many Third World labor markets. The possibility for international unionism as a force to prevent the proliferation of sweatshops was cut short partly from within the U.S. labor movement.

Ironically, the AIFLD's indirect help in creating oppressive labor conditions and supporting right-wing dictatorships, proved highly attractive to U.S. corporations seeking a "friendly investment climate" where extremely low labor costs and malleable workforces are virtually guaranteed. U.S. apparel manufacturing investments skyrocketed, moving billions of dollars in capital to the Caribbean and Central America each year for two decades. Meanwhile, between 1979 and 1992, an average of 41,400 textile and apparel jobs were lost each year in the U.S. with U.S. apparel employment falling nearly 20 percent and real wages in that industry falling 17 percent (Kernaghan 1997). Today, the average garment worker in the U.S. earns less in real wages than in 1955. While U.S. apparel unions responded with a 'Buy American' campaign, U.S. corporations eagerly sought to boost their profit margins with cheap labor in new investor friendly export processing zones, accelerating disinvestments from U.S.-based apparel manufacture (See Frank 1999). In a misguided attempt to halt this disinvestment and sway consumer preferences, the union leaders in the ILGWU and other AFL-CIO unions promoted a 'Buy American' campaign in response to the rise in imports from the very countries where U.S. manufacturers were moving. Pitching country against country, workers and their unions were placed under the thumb of cost-cutting investors seeking to attract the lowest bid for sewing clothes (or other products). Reinforcing this situation throughout many countries was a repressive political system, a desperately hungry, land-displaced populace, a very weak or non-existent independent labor movement, and the competitive pressures of the industry.

It is in this context that the sweatshop has been replicated on a vast, global scale. Squeezed beneath the markets and investments are the workers - mostly young women, mostly subordinate ethnic groups in the various countries,

mostly non-unionized. Labor repressive governments, authoritarian management styles, the demands for greater profit and market share by the mass retailers, and ever-shifting, advertising-driven tastes of consumers, make for extremely hostile environments for workers. The National Labor Committee (1997), for example, reported a common dilemma faced by sweatshop workers the world over. Located in a U.S. government financed, duty free "Industrial Park," workers at L.V. Myles sewed Pocahontas shirts for Disney. Their average daily wage amounted to less than \$2.30. Employee cost for transportation into and out of the "Park" is about \$.37 a day. The average cost for two very modest "meals" per day was \$1.22. After these expenses, workers took home about \$.70 per full day of work. About 50 shirts were assembled by each worker each day, selling for nearly \$11.00 a piece at Wal-Mart, meaning that the worker, making less than \$2.30 per day produced shirts grossing \$550 in the U.S.

Sweatshops exist to "minimize the cost of labor by whatever means necessary, to appropriate every penny of value" (Howard 1997:156). A recent case cited by Howard (1997) in Honduras highlights this cost-cutting imperative of the sweatshop. In 1996, sweatshop workers sewing shirts for Wal-Mart, paid at \$.20/hour, were found to have been imported from Bangladesh. These workers, living as indentured workers - like the El Monte Thai workers found under slave conditions in California in 1995 - earned a few pennies per hour less than the typical Honduran worker found throughout the export zone did. Why import Bangladeshi workers to Honduras? As in the 19th century, so it is now, "the difference between cheap and cheaper labor... is the organizing principle of the sweatshop" (ibid 156).

NEW POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNVEILING THE SWEATSHOP

Today, unlike 30 years ago, the top 40 retail firms control approximately 80% of the U.S. apparel market (Ross 1997). As Frundt (1999) points out, this makes the garment industry particularly vulnerable to bad publicity and consumer boycotts. Walmart's reaction to a 1992 *Dateline* story is a case in point. Reports exposed Wal-Mart's widespread use of child labor in their contracted sweatshops and embarrassed the company that touted a "Buy American" image (See Frank 1999). The public relations efforts by Wal-Mart and many of its allied merchandisers revealed a desperate attempt to uphold a positive "American" image of consuming at Wal-Mart. A few years later, activists revealed that the Kathy Lee Gifford line at Wal-Mart was made under grossly exploitive sweatshop conditions, arousing a PR backlash by Wal-Mart.

It is in these types of campaigns that activists appeal to public sympathies, arousing a moral distaste for the practices of sweatshop production. Much of the power in the term "sweatshop" is drawn from its century-old

association with images of child labor, exploitation of young women, and the brutal authority of sweatshop managers. In this way, the reservoir of meaning about sweatshops offers a potent historical and cultural legacy for use by labor rights activists. Activists in our case studies often appropriate this cultural legacy as a resource to frame contemporary activism and build support for labor rights. Images of young women and children cast against the backdrop of large factories and shantytowns in the third world reveal a pervasive and disturbing presence of inhumane work conditions. In addition, when contrasted with the images of fashion - often eroticized and sexualized - the concept of sweatshop inverts these meanings by conveying an image of gendered exploitation.

Survey results reveal that these moral concerns over the sweatshop are not limited to a narrow band of the population. In November 1995, researchers at Marymount University in Virginia, found that "78 percent of U.S. consumers would avoid retailers if they knew they were dealing in sweatshop goods. Nor is this just talk. Seventy-five percent of the working poor (families earning only \$15,000 a year or less) said they would dig into their pockets and pay \$1.00 more for a \$20 garment to be sure that it was not made in a sweatshop" (National Labor Committee 1996: 1).

In sum, the moral and gendered language of the "sweatshop" may betray the fetish over fashion, undermining the full effect of multi-million dollar corporate marketing campaigns. Contemporary production, distribution and marketing of apparel products thus hold within it a contradiction that may be utilized by anti-sweatshop activists. Ultimately, these conditions create an image-dependent market vulnerable to movement strategies aimed at the point of consumption.

UNIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND STUDENTS

As the ILGWU and ACTWU declined in membership, new strategies began to emerge. The AFL-CIO and many of its affiliated unions - mostly business unions - began to flirt with aspects of social unionism. Social union practices reflect a greater willingness to forge non-labor alliances, to develop internationalist agendas, and engage in non-conventional political practices. Bonacich (2001) examines the development of new strategies among unionists and worker rights advocates in the L.A. garment sector. Among these strategies are corporate campaigns, community organizing, and the creation of workers centers that offer numerous services to aid workers, irrespective of union membership. These strategies are not purely a local affair either; as the main apparel sector union in the U.S., UNITE! has deliberately set course for a more activist unionism both within the U.S. and abroad.

These developments within the U.S. labor movement, and apparel

unions in particular, coincided with changes in middle class human rights activism in Central America. As the civil wars subsided in Central America in the late 1980s and early 1990s, many human rights groups shifted their energies to the conditions faced by workers in the growing *maquila* sectors of the region. Along these lines, labor rights organizations such as the Campaign for Labor Rights formed to work with unions and other human rights groups. The battle over NAFTA expanded labor's alliance base and brought new constituencies into the struggle for global economic justice. The student left, progressive religious organizations, some left-leaning environmentalists, and human rights activists all found areas of increasingly common concern in the intersection of labor rights and the global movement of corporations. These new alliance structures opened opportunities to advance strategies against sweatshops (and other issues involving economic globalization) at both the point of production and point of consumption.

WORKER AND CONSUMER ALLIANCES IN THE ANTI-SWEATSHOP MOVEMENT: FOUR CASES

In this paper, we analyze four cases where worker and consumer alliances in the apparel industry challenged sweatshops during the 1990s. We do this using a wide range of data, including in-depth interview, newsletters, newspaper articles and other primary and secondary sources. Leaders of labor unions and labor and human rights groups were interviewed, including people from UNITE, USLEAP, NLC and USAS. In all, 8 interviews were conducted in person and by phone between February 2001 and April 2001. Our sources enabled us to reconstruct the history for each case and make comparisons across the cases on salient dimensions. The interviews were informal, with a few standardized, structured questions. The selection of cases for this study was done with an eye for capturing both real historical developments and posing analytically useful contrasts. Our depiction of each case includes a brief history of each campaign and its significance to a broader movement that aims to expose injustices in sweatshops and build alliances to advance worker rights globally. Each of the cases offer an important window into labor movement strategies that use the power of the "consumer" to strengthen international labor rights and unveil the conditions of sweatshop production. Our definition of the consumer, and the point of consumption, is broader than the typical use of that term: we consider consumption as both an institutional action as well as a behavior of individuals. Movement strategies that focus on the point of consumption thus target not only individual consumers, but also the institutions that mediate the consumption act. Figure one summarizes our four cases and the main actors involved in the study.

Figure 1: Labor-Consumer Action, Allies, Target and Opponents

Case	Workers	Allies	Consumer/Target	Opponents
Philips Van Heusen (PVH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ UNITE (Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees) ☐ PVH Workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ US/Labor Education in the Americas Project (USLEAP/USGLEP) ☐ Citizens and Laity Concerned (CALC) ☐ Human Rights Watch ☐ Cmte. in Solidarity with Central American People (CISCAP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ US Consumers ☐ PVH Retail Outlets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ PVH ☐ Apparel Industry
The Gap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ UNITE ☐ Gap Workers ☐ Unions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ Global Exchange ☐ Religious Groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ US Consumer ☐ Gap Retail Outlets ☐ Gap Corporate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ The Gap
Universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ UNITE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ University Purchasing ☐ Bookstores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ Fair Labor Association (FLA) ☐ Apparel and Shoe Industry
Cities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ UNITE ☐ AFSCME ☐ Labor Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ City Council ☐ Mid-Class Constituency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ City Government Procurement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ Non-Union Industry ☐ Mayor's Office

FROM SHOP FLOOR TO DEPARTMENT STORE: ADVANCING WORKERS RIGHTS AT PHILLIPS VAN HEUSEN

Guatemala is a very popular country for the apparel industry to locate factories; it features a very disciplined workforce in a political economic climate of low wages, minimal taxes and a government very cooperative with the needs and interests of factory owners (Armbruster, 1999; Frundt and Peterson, 1992). As neoliberal reforms of structural adjustment, trade liberalization and draconian economic and governmental reforms took hold, Guatemala became ripe for the setting up of free trade *maquilas*⁵. Phillips Van Heusen contracts with hundreds of suppliers in dozens of countries (Elevenson-Estrada and Frundt 1995). After years of sweatshop abuses in the *maquiladoras* of Central America, the workers at a factory owned by a PVH approached US/Labor Education in the Americas Project (US LEAP, then USGLEP) for ideas on organizing workers at PVH

maquila plants in 1991. Shortly after the PVH workers began to organize into a union, the corporation responded with a swift and powerful anti-union campaign (Peterson, 1992; Armbruster, 1999). Management's tactics included targeting and bribing, firing, intimidating and otherwise punishing union leaders and supporters. Despite the barrage of anti-union tactics and difficult legal challenges, the union persisted, meeting all government requirements for union recognition in 1992. Even though winning the legal requirements for recognition, PVH faced no legal recourse for failing to acknowledge the union and refusing to bargain with the workers. Though PVH was able to crush the fledgling union's earlier actions, a larger, more coordinated effort was brewing with help from international labor groups in the North (USLEAP, 1999).

A second drive began on Labor Day (US), in 1996 with advice from UNITE and under the direction of USGLEP. The PVH union, USLEAP, and UNITE developed a brand new "coordinated crossborder organizing model." This model was a coordinated labor-organizing blitz that was international in scope. It included traditional shop floor organizing actions in Guatemala, trade pressure in Central America and international consumer pressure (Armbruster, 1999). As the PVH union was organizing workers in Guatemala, a series of actions were taking place in the US. During the holiday season of 1996, US/GLEP, Witnesses for Peace, CALC and others were conducting actions at the point of consumption, targeting JC Penney and other retailers. These actions were designed to raise consumer awareness of the labor conditions at PVH and pressure PVH to negotiate with the union (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, in Guatemala, amid overt repression and apathy from the Guatemalan Labor Ministry, the PVH union maintained a lower profile and limited members' actions at the point of production. The principal aim of this new organizing effort was to embarrass, discredit, and morally degrade the image of PVH in the US so that workers in Guatemala could secure more leverage in their contract negotiations.

Faced with international pressure, and amidst a barrage of criticism, the campaign had seriously compromised the image of PVH. US/GLEP planned a demonstration at a Human Rights Watch (HRW) fundraising event in New York. PVH CEO Bruce Klatsky just happened to be a board member of Human Rights Watch (Frundt, 1999). The connection of PVH to HRW was more than just a fluke irony. The success of the PVH brand was dependent not just on pure marketing savvy, but also billing itself as a socially conscious corporation that embraced socially progressive ideals. PVH was in the business of looking good, not just in product lines but in their corporate image. To maintain their solid image as a good "corporate citizen" PVH CEO Bruce Klatsky had been involved with Human Rights Watch among other "socially progressive" organizations (Armbruster, 1999). Under scrutiny, PVH was pressured by HRW to agree to an independent review conducted by the organization. However, much to PVH's

irritation, the HRW report validated the workers concerns and found the allegations of the PVH union to be true, forcing PVH to negotiate with the union.

After four months of negotiations, PVH workers won substantial pay increases, grievance procedures, control of work conditions and a host of other benefits. The case set a precedent in showing the potential of a worker-consumer, international alliance in demanding independent monitoring of labor conditions as a means to advance labor rights globally. Other brand name manufacturers witnessed these events with concern. Many sought to preempt a similar assault on their corporate and apparel product images. In 1998, for example, Liz Claiborne agreed to carry out independent monitoring of its contractors (Frundt, 1999). The gains, while important in the short term, were not permanent as PVH pulled out of Guatemala in late 1998. This move shows the difficulty groups have in forcing companies to comply with labor standards in a world of increased capital flight without any international accountability. While hardly a decisive victory, PVH has been targeted again in Honduras and other regions, as it has not been able to shake the "sweat label." More importantly, the PVH struggle signaled an important victory to human rights and labor activists to build global solidarity and advance the rights of workers. The campaign and its successes and failures, served as a model for several successor campaigns. ⁶

The traditional worker organization and mobilization models were crucial to the success of the PVH campaign. However, amid a brutal and repressive political economic climate they were hardly enough. Results came about only when transnational alliances were built and coordinated through labor and human rights groups who then targeted consumer sentiments and the image of the corporation. The success of the PVH campaign resulted from the unity and coordination of consumer actions in the United States with labor actions in Guatemala. Activists in the U.S. understood that by associating a corporation and its brand imagery with sweatshop production, its sales are likely to suffer, hitting the company where it hurts the most, the bottom line. Strategically uniting tactics at both the point of consumption as well as the point of production, the PVH campaign highlighted the continuing importance of linking consumer boycotts to worker organizing. While this case represents innovations - or resurrections of older tactics - in the anti-sweat movement, the withdrawal of PVH from Guatemala in late 1999 also highlights the difficulty of achieving permanent gains amidst a climate of heightened capital mobility. While companies can change locations and move capital around the world to avert worker mobilizations, the brand itself is highly vulnerable to concerted efforts between workers and consumers to link the label to inhumane working conditions until worker grievances are addressed. The campaign continues against PVH as UNITE, consumer groups and human rights advocates demand permanent change in the apparel industry.

THE HEGEMONY OF HIP: THE POWER OF MARKETING AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE GAP CAMPAIGN

The Gap case described here highlights how the political economy of apparel production exhibits a gap between product image and production realities. This is evident in the campaigns against The Gap and the contract system of sweatshops that make clothing with The Gap's label. The anti-sweatshop movement has exploited the corporate dependence on image and labels to expose the conditions in which their products are made. In doing this, the movement has tied the label of "sweatshop" to the marketing image corporations invest heavily in creating and promoting. In these campaigns, new tactics have emerged that aim to reveal not only the relations of production in The Gap sweatshops, but to demystify the mass marketed images associated with The Gap's aggressive, ultra-hip marketing tactics. From these efforts, The Gap, and its four billion-dollar apparel empire, have found that a sweatshop label is one that does not market well. The Gap owes its massive profit margins to a combination of super cheap labor and aggressive marketing tactics. Yet The Gap, like many apparel brands, actually operates few factories and is responsible for little in the manufacturing of clothing. Instead, The Gap contracts with local sweatshops, and focuses most of its efforts on marketing, public relations, and manufacturing an in-vogue public image. As the founder of Campaign for Labor Rights, Trim Bissel, points out, "The Gap is not in the business of selling clothes, they are in the business of selling an image."⁷ Indeed, The Gap between product and image is quite large. In defining what it means to be cool in America, The Gap has created a corporate image that sells billions of dollars worth of clothing. Saturating youth culture with images of cool and hip throughout the industrialized world, The Gap's multi-million dollar advertising campaigns prop up sales and profits, though leaving the image-dependent GAP quite vulnerable to revelations of misdeeds associated with their label.

The Gap's "For Kids" line of clothing has more than one meaning, depending on what side of the border you are on. American teenage girls are the target of million dollar-advertising campaigns and a leading market demographic and source of clothing consumption. In contrast, the Central American girl is a principle source of surplus labor for clothing manufactures. The average age of a Central American apparel factory female worker is aged 17 and works shifts that last longer than 16 hours, usually 6 days a week (USLEAP). At *maquila* plants in Central America, the average pay given to a young woman who makes a shirt for The Gap is 18 cents per shirt. That shirt sells for 20 or more dollars at The Gap in the US, making the wages paid for each shirt less than 1 percent of the total price of the shirt (Figueroa, 1996). These impoverishing wages, not to mention the conditions they are forced to work under, is the epitome of hyper-

exploitation under globalization.

In 1993, workers at a Taiwanese-owned apparel plant in an El Salvador *maquiladora* known as Mandarin attempted to form a union. At the time, it was reported that most workers were under age women earning less than 60 cents an hour (Cassel, 1999). Mandarin workers, who are mostly women, labored up to 16-hour days making shirts for retailers like The Gap, Liz Claiborne, Eddie Bauer and other major name brands. Mandarin was quick to repress the union, illegally firing union leaders and locking out the work force. As if that was not enough, many workers were beaten by ex-Salvadoran militiamen led by a former Salvadorian military colonel (Cassel 1999). These actions were hardly noticed in the US, while The Gap posted record sales and continued to define the notion of hip across the malls. When asked by reporters about possible abuses in the Mandarin factory, CEO of The Gap, Donald Fisher, earning a \$127 million salary, denied the allegations stating that they could find no employee who had been subjected to harsh or inhumane working conditions (National Labor Committee, 1998). In a country where death squads roamed freely only a few years before, its no wonder people were afraid to speak out.

Things changed in 1995 when, UNITE, with the help of NLC, the Campaign for Labor Rights, human rights groups and religious leaders mounted a nation wide campaign to expose the sweatshop abuses in The Gap's factories, especially those abuses at Mandarin. NLC organized a speaking tour of a former Mandarin worker and issued press releases. UNITE staged leafleting campaigns and storefront protests. This further exemplifies the expanding role of social unions like UNITE in forming alliances beyond labor. Religious and human rights groups joined in condemning the actions at the factories where gap apparel was made. National media attention was brought the plight of workers at the Mandarin plant, and public concern was voiced to The Gap. By April of 1995, Bob Herbert's articles exposing the sweatshops at Mandarin were appearing in the *New York Times*. Coordinated and uncoordinated consumer responses began to seriously affect The Gap's corporate reputation, and bottom line. Charles Kernhagen sums up the effect best:

[When] "The Gap stated to get hundreds and thousands of letters from people, and students especially, The Gap broke down, they couldn't take it. They didn't want to get letters from 200 high school students a day . . . We had high schools return grants they had gotten from The Gap saying they did not want the grant until The Gap to care of the people in El Salvador. Once you start going it just expands" (Corporate Watch, pg. 3).

The Gap could no longer ignore the problem, as their public image was spiraling downward. The Gap proudly sent executives and Spanish speaking employees to investigate the situation, not surprisingly reporting that they had found no violations. The campaign continued, and more and more groups began to protest. Seeking to avoid further conflict, and citing "unanswered questions about working conditions in several factories," The Gap cancelled all orders from the Mandarin factory, effectively shutting the factory down. "The Gap totally missed the point" writes Doug Cassel. "The goal was not to cut off El Salvador: that would only show the workers that their efforts to organize had, indeed, cost them their jobs. Instead the goal was to use The Gap's leverage to push for acceptable working conditions at Mandarin and elsewhere" (pg. 1). The actions against The Gap continued, and more reports of abuses from Salvadoran and other Central American factories continued to pour in. The Gap, finally realizing that it could no longer ignore or dismiss the allegations, adopted a Corporate Code of Conduct, requiring the contractors it does business with to abide by the labor laws of the country they operate in.

The monitoring at the Mandarin factory continues and represents a battle won in a much larger conflict against the global proliferation of sweatshops. As the apparel industry has gotten more sophisticated in generating product-line images, the anti-sweatshop movement has adopted strategies to deconstruct them. In 1998 a 20/20 expose on sweatshops with the "Made in USA" label was broadcast showing Asian workers toiling for hours making clothing for The Gap for pennies on the island of Saipan, a US possession.⁸ According to a report by the US Department of the Interior on the labor and trade conditions on the island, workers are routinely subjected to physical and verbal abuses, payless paydays, harassment, job "finders fees" and a host of other abuses (DOI, 1997). Though workers were at a US installation, they were routinely denied labor and human rights guaranteed to U.S. citizens. Laborers were brought from China, Indonesia and the Philippines to make clothing at starvation wages. They were denied basic freedoms afforded to any other US resident and US labor and civil rights laws were violated. At the same time, the island's status as a US possession enables The Gap to produce clothing there free from trade restrictions and tariffs, and still legally carry the "Made in USA" label.

In response to these new exposures of abuses by The Gap a new campaign, spearheaded by Global Exchange began to target The Gap where it really hurts - this time they went directly after their marketing image, not just their public image as a faceless corporation. Global Exchange and others began to subvert and "jam" the hip and cool imagery associated Gap - running ads that use The Gap's marketing imagery to tell the world how they abuse human rights and profit from sweatshop labor. One ad features a model wearing the latest Gap

merchandise with labels depicting the retail price, how little was paid to the worker who made the garment. Others depict images and pictures of sweatshops with The Gap logos and slogan, "Is a living wage too much to ask for?" reads a caption of one "subvertisement" depicting a Gap sweatshop. It is an in your face approach to humiliating the corporation while undermining the marketing and images that define the look and feel of the particular product.

Like the PVH campaign, the campaign against the sweatshop abuses by The Gap is one that is constantly evolving. While money, marketing, public relations and pure business savvy can avoid answering questions of cutthroat business practices and human rights abuses, the anti-sweatshop movement is one that innovates tactically in their efforts to stop some of the most atrocious sweatshop abuses by a corporation. The Gap campaign demonstrates the importance and strength of worker and consumer alliances. It also reveals how powerful campaigns directed at the image of a corporation can be. "Targeting the image of a corporation and their ties to sweatshops is a very effective weapon in an anti-sweatshop campaign..." says Tom Weatly of NLC. "When Kathy Lee Gifford appears on national television crying because it was revealed that her clothes were made by children in sweatshops . . . it undermined a million dollar marketing campaign, spelling near death for her line of clothing and Wal-Mart has yet to fully recover." ⁹

UNIVERSITIES AND SWEATSHOPS

The history of the student anti-sweatshop movement is one of broad alliances, innovative tactics, and many hard lessons learned. United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) grew out of a Union Summer program organized by UNITE in 1997 that helped student interns learn how to organize on campus. In July of 1998, at a nationwide anti-sweatshop conference, with activists from more than 30 different schools, USAS was formed as an informal alliance working for international solidarity to form Codes of Conduct, an independent monitoring system, and to facilitate cohesion between students and other labor and anti-sweatshop activists. Less than a year later, more than 100 schools had USAS chapters, and visible outrage about the various universities' reluctance to respond was growing. In the winter of 1999 a wave of sit-ins and other campus-based actions across the United States and Canada brought increased attention to the connections between university apparel and sweatshops.

In attempts to abate student criticism of universities and apparel manufactures, manufactures, universities and NGO's worked with the Clinton Administration to form the Fair Labor Association (FLA). Other companies, such as Nike and Reebok conducted internal audits of factories, but refused to make them public. Yet, despite the efforts of the apparel industry to sanitize the

image of their industry, the public's awareness of sweatshops and abuses continued to grow. In 1999, dismayed with the Clinton Administration's inability to draft a comprehensive proposal on monitoring apparel manufactures and ending sweatshop abuses, USAS formed the Workers Rights Consortium (WRC), as an independent monitoring group of apparel manufactures. Leaders of the USAS have been very suspicious of the ties between the FLA and the apparel industry.¹⁰ The WRC was founded as an independent factory-monitoring group to force university apparel suppliers into disclosing the locations of their factories and abandoning their reliance on sweatshops to make their products. USAS and its supporters feel that only throughout the independent monitoring provisions will the goal of sweat-free apparel be realized.

Today, both the FLA and the WRC maintain an important role in the apparel industry. Though university apparel is a small part of the total market (less than 2 percent), it still constitutes a vital area of a multi-billion dollar market to assert leverage through the combined institutional purchasing power of universities. Taken together, university clothing is one of the largest single markets for apparel in the country, and has begun to affect a small but growing sector of the apparel manufacturing industry (Lee and Bernstein 2000). Furthermore, USAS and the student sweatshop movement have been very effective because the apparel industry is very concerned about its image as perceived by the "youth market" (Moberg 1999). As university students have allied themselves with workers rights groups and labor unions, they have been able to successfully question and challenge the way their schools do business with corporations. Though critics routinely dismiss the efforts of students as futile, the efforts of students and USAS instigated small but important changes in how the industry operates. Nike, for instance, was forced to release the contents of its internal review of factories, though it continued to defend its manufactures and marketing practices. Similar companies have been placed on the defensive, moving from making symbolic overtures to sweatshop activists to implementing major changes. The student anti-sweatshop movement has also led to the increased exposure of corporations that profit from sweatshops and licensing of university apparel.

As of February 2003, the WRC had 112 schools at affiliated schools and has conducted 8 inspections of factories since 1999. It has conducted 8 inspections of factories that make apparel and goods bearing universities' logo. The outcomes of the campaign has had some very notable successes in advancing the rights of workers, including getting Nike to support amnesty for striking workers at the Kukdong factory in Mexico and, more recently, at a BJ&B factory in the Dominican Republic (Gonzalez, 2003). Moreover, the largest success of the students against sweat campaign has been in showing that brand names can and should be held accountable for the labor practices of

subcontractors. "The factories monitored by the WRC serve as a model for the entire apparel industry," says Agatha Schmaedick, an inspector for the WRC ¹¹. While many schools remain reluctant to sign on to the consortium, universities and even some industry officials have become more comfortable with the monitoring process as it gives the products a sweat-free label. While USAS and the monitoring process it has championed had been an effective model, like many other movements, campus activism has waned. For the 'no sweat' campus movement to continue and remain effective, it must revitalize the grassroots support that made USAS, UNITE and the WRC an effective intermediary between activists at the point of consumption and workers at the point of production.

CITIES AGAINST SWEATSHOPS

As students have challenged the purchasing and licensing procedures of their universities, some activists have begun to pressure their local governments into adopting purchasing laws that keep public dollars out of the hands of businesses that profit from or use sweatshops. Using the combined purchasing power of a local government to advance the rights of workers, city-purchasing ordinances have some potential as a mechanism to discourage sweatshops and human rights abuses abroad. Generally more responsive to concerns of citizens than state and federal governments, local governments have become an innovative leverage point to advance workers rights (among other progressive causes in the last five years, such as resolutions against the WTO or the Patriot Act). The purchasing power of local governments have become a new target of activists who wish to ensure that millions of dollars are kept from manufactures and contractors who profit from human and labor rights abuses. For example, more than two dozen cities, and the State of Massachusetts have passed Burma purchasing laws that place restrictions on purchasing goods and services from companies that do business in Burma (Myanmar). While many companies profit from setting up shop in authoritarian and oppressive countries, some citizens and consumers have asked their local governments to stop rewarding companies that profit from oppressive governments and exploitive working conditions. These laws have the dual of effect of both stopping public dollars flowing to suspect companies, but also identifying companies who fail to comply with the ordinances.

In this final case, UNITE launched the "Cities Against Sweatshops" campaign, which aimed to create "Union Cities" to adopt procurement ordinances that keep public dollars from going to apparel makers who use sweatshops. ¹² New York City's anti-sweatshop ordinance is one recent example. This case demonstrates how trade unions like UNITE have come full circle in acting strategically to advance the interests of unionized apparel workers at home

while curtailing worker exploitation internationally.

The New York ordinance outlines three main provisions somewhat similar to the provisions outlined for colleges in the WRC. One that ensures no tax dollars to 'corporate criminals', or apparel companies that have violated labor and safety laws. A second provision states that no public money may go to producers that pay below the poverty line for a family of four. A third provision stipulates that companies have no hidden factories and disclose the location of each of their subcontractors' and suppliers' factories. Hennefeld adds, "The ordinance will ensure that not a single police uniform, hospital linen or firefighter's boot in New York City will be made with sweatshop labor."¹³

This ordinance was conceived and crafted by UNITE and Council Speaker Peter Vallone, but relied extensively on the support of the city employees union AFSCME, the New York Labor Council and their affiliated unions to raise awareness of the sweatshop issue and encourage others to support the ordinance. UNITE also tapped a coalition of City Councilors, led by Vallone, who have a record of being sensitive to human rights and labor issues.¹⁴ On March 14, after a year of lobbying and coalition building, NYC Council overwhelming passed the ordinance. On its passage, UNITE President Jay Mazur said:

This legislation sends a very clear message that the City of New York will not allow taxpayer money to be used to support sweatshops. Not only will this new law become a useful tool in the fight against sweatshops, but it also will level the playing field for responsible New York City garment manufacturers that have, for too long, been subject to unfair competition from sweatshops (UNITE 2001: 1).

In other words, companies that operate sweatshops at home or abroad are ineligible for public money from New York City. New York City government spends over \$70 million on apparel and textiles for police officers, firefighters and hospitals. "A sizable chunk of money is lost to any company that thinks they can save a few dollars by using sweatshop labor" adds Hennefeld.¹⁵ Hennefeld also explains that the sweatshop ordinance is one that is so strict, with provisions for living wages and human working conditions, that it is probable that only suppliers with UNITE or other union contracts are the only businesses that will be eligible to supply NYC with apparel.

Tactically, a city purchasing ordinance is a simple, yet effective way to both send a message to purveyors of sweatshops by denying public money to them, while rewarding manufactures that recognize workers rights and provide a living wage to employees. Still, there are some problematic elements with this type of campaign and some suspicious benefactors of such a purchasing

arrangement. Apparel manufacturer's with UNITE or other union contracts, for obvious reasons, supported the campaign.¹⁶ While the measure does not overtly restrict apparel from overseas, the measure's implication is that only US suppliers stand to benefit since they are under a UNITE contract and meet the procurement ordinance's definition of a living wage. While the spirit of the sweat-free city campaign aims to limit the proliferation of sweatshops abroad, the ordinance has protectionist elements. Hence, it does not share the cross-border spirit of the aforementioned campaigns. Though city sweatshop purchasing ordinances show great promise in curtailing corporate sweatshop abuses, UNITE and the campaign organizers must generate broader grassroots and transnational support.

While this tactic may produce pragmatic gains for active stakeholders in the apparel sector, it not likely to sustain the interests of middle class human and labor rights activists. Absent this support base, union interests will seek allies within an industry that has repeatedly failed them. This has the potential of slipping back into the old 'buy American' protectionist strategies that deflated unions in the 1980s. In contrast, one of the key goals set by the labor rights movement in the 1990s was to move toward institutions that guarantee sweat free working conditions everywhere, not to keep apparel production in the US (or what little is left). Without backing by a constituency of working and middle class allies capable of targeting numerous "consumer niches" the Cities Against Sweatshop Campaigns lacks the cultural and economic critique of consuming sweat made products. It is this critique that also has the potential to unveil corporate practices that distort meaning of products on the side of consumption and perpetuate exploitation in sweatshops on the side of production.

CONCLUSION

The political and economic climate of globalization has revived the 19th century sweatshop on a massive scale. Worker organizing, as a weapon against the sweatshop, remains a crucial step toward creating institutions to protect human needs. But corporate-led globalization - with the hyper-mobility of apparel factories - poses a problem for the feasibility of workers organizing alone. At least in the short term, workers in the hyper-exploitive export processing zones of the global South face extremely tough obstacles to sustaining independent worker organization, much less successful mass strikes. Along with the proliferation of global capitalism has been a crippling of workers abilities to demand higher wages and better working conditions at the point of production. Despite the hyper exploitive tendencies of global capitalism and mass marketing that obscure the relations of production, new opportunities have formed to challenge these arrangements. While the power and leverage at the point of

production has diminished on the shop floor, new opportunities for disruption have emerged at the point of consumption. Allies at the "point of consumption," we contend, are important fixtures for the advance of worker organization and rights globally. Like the support provided by progressive era, middle class suffragists to the mass strikes and struggles of working class immigrant women following the tragic Triangle Factory fire in 1911, today's struggle against the sweatshop may involve a cross class alliance that is also global in scope. Overall, the movement dynamics that we have observed include an emergent strategy that combines cross border worker solidarity with a strategy of disruption aimed at the image of the corporation and its products.

ENDNOTES

¹ Labor and human rights activists invoke the term "rats" in reference to employers who undermine workers rights and livelihoods.

² Item 807 of the U.S. tariff code was created in 1963, allowing apparel manufacturers to import duty free items whose cloth was cut in the U.S. but assembled offshore. This trade policy was revised and expanded dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s, encouraging investment in offshore garment production. The Caribbean Basin Initiative further directed U.S. corporate investment in the emerging industrial parks and export processing zones in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and elsewhere in the Caribbean.

³ Authors interview with the late Trim Bissell, founder and director of the Campaign for Labor Rights. Eugene, OR, February 1, 2001. Trim Bissell's decade long career in founding and directing the Campaign for Labor Rights is deeply appreciated.

⁴ Business unions are often described as relatively exclusive in their membership, non-critical of the status quo political economy and promote, in general, an organizational identity that views unions services, such as collective bargaining, as a service to dues paying members. Social unionism tends to be more inclusive in membership and more critical of the status quo political economy. See Dreiling & Robinson (1998) for a thorough discussion of union types.

⁵ Maquilas are factories that operate within free-trade zones financed with international capital, which rely heavily on low wage workers that are very often women and children.

⁶ In 1998, the PVH contractor closed shop, leaving the workers unemployed and the union dead.

⁷ Authors interview with the late Trim Bissell, founder and director of the Campaign for Labor Rights. Eugene, OR, February 1, 2001.

⁸ Phone Interview with Tom Weatly (NLC), Feb. 26, 2001.

- 9 Phone Interview with Tom Weatly (NLC), Feb. 26, 2001.
- 10 Interview with Sarah Jacobson, February 18, 2001, Eugene Oregon.
- 11 Interview with Agatha Schmaedick (WRC), April 17, 2003, Washington DC.
- 12 Phone interview with Dan Hennefeld (UNITE), Feb. 19, 2001.
- 13 Phone interview with Dan Hennefeld (UNITE), Feb. 19, 2001.
- 14 Phone interview with Dan Hennefeld (UNITE), Feb. 19, 2001.
- 15 Phone interview with Dan Hennefeld (UNITE), Feb. 19, 2001.
- 16 Phone interview with Dan Hennefeld (UNITE), Feb. 19, 2001.

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