CAMPAIGNING AGAINST SWEATSHOPS

The Summer 2004 issue of *Co-op America Quarterly* offers "A Guide to Ending Sweatshops." Corporate greed and global competition have intensified the pressure on producers, especially in poor countries, to lower costs by lowering wages and benefits, minimizing factory standards, and demanding greater productivity, in some cases through forced overtime, punishments and fines, intimidation, child labor, and other abuses. On the other hand people of concern are increasing their pressure on the entire supply chain from producers to consumers for greater justice for workers and their families.

Together, step-by-step, you and I are turning sweatshops around the world into workplaces that offer people living wages, decent conditions, and opportunities to create better futures for themselves and their families.

Thanks to the pressure consumers, investors, workers, and allied organizations are putting on major corporations, companies like Liz Claiborne, Bebe, the Gap, and Talbots are taking steps to monitor and improve conditions in the factories they contract with here in the US and around the world.

Workers around the world who face sweatshop conditions every day on the job are organizing . . . to demand safe working conditions, fair wages, and the right to self-determination. At the same time, US groups are still uncovering sweatshops from New York to L.A., and unions are fighting to preserve gains from overtime pay to health benefits.

Campaigns against sweatshops are organizing "NOT to close sweatshops and put already impoverished people out on the streets" but to turn them into responsible, healthful, and responsible workplaces. This means that companies must pay workers a living wage, "enough to meet their basic human needs and enable them to plan for a better future," allow education to enable workers and their families to learn about their rights and advocate for better conditions, and permit worker self-determination, "to freely associate and advocate for rights and improvements to their working conditions, pay, and benefits without fear of reprisal." Local, national, and international campaigns organize consumer demonstrations and boycotts against abusive companies and stores, shareholder actions by investors, investigation and monitoring of production facilities with codes of conduct to be upheld by wholesalers and retailers and subcontractors, union organizing to uphold worker rights, education of the public regarding responsible shopping and investing, etc.

Among the many organizations now engaged in this work are: SWEATSHOP WATCH (www.sweatshopwatch.org), CAMPAIGN TO ABOLISH SWEATSHOPS & CHILD LABOR (www.abolishsweatshops.org), NATIONAL INTERFAITH COMMITTEE FOR WORKPLACE JUSTICE (www.nicwj.org). These in turn have links to many others.

What are your concerns for the millions of factory workers around the world who are making the clothes we wear and many other things we need? Is this a spiritual matter? What can churches do?