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HISTORY > Triangle Shirtwaste Fire

If you go back to the Triangle Shirtwaste fire in 1911, that was an incredible shock to the country when 146 women were trapped, many of them leapt to their death, blood ran in the streets. But the interesting thing is, after the Triangle Shirtwaste fire on March 25, 1911, 100,000 people marched in the funeral procession. 400,000 people lined the streets. There was outrage. And the motto was, who is going to protect the working girl? Who is going to protect the working woman? We've lost that. And, in fact, sweatshops have come back.

Sweatshops were wiped out of the United States in 1938. They are back now, with a vengeance. 65% of all apparel operations in New York City are sweatshops. 50,000 workers. 4,500 factories out of 7,000. And we're talking about workers getting a dollar or two an hour. So it's back and back with a vengeance because of the global economy. We're talking about people working 100 hours a week.

LABOUR > Worker Rights, Yeah Right

Technically, the definition of a sweatshop is violation of wage and hour laws. But that doesn't put the human face on it. So when you're talking about sweatshops in a place like Bangladesh, for example, you're talking about young women, 16 to 25 years of age, locked in factories behind barbed wire with armed guards. You're talking about people working from 8:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night, 7 days a week, 30 days a month, for wages of about 8 to 18 cents an hour. And if those women try to defend their rights they're immediately cut down and fired and blacklisted. And it gets even worse.

These women, they come in when they're like 16. They work to about 25 at which point they're fired because they're used up. They're worn out. Their lives are already over. And the company has replaced them with another crop of young girls. So I mean, when you really put a face on the sweatshop issue, that's what it's like. And living conditions, we've been to the homes of young women who made our clothing in Bangladesh and Honduras, but I'll use the example of Bangladesh, - young women who make our clothing. And we went to a woman's house, she had just worked 120 hours that week. In fact, in the last three days she'd worked 64 hours. All night shifts three days in a row.

You go to her house and she lived in a dirt floor, 8 by 10 foot hut made out of thatch and cardboard. And there was a dirt floor. Four people lived in that little tiny hut, about 8 by 10. There was one bed right in the dirt. There was one wardrobe right in the dirt. And she told us that when it rains they piled up dirt

around the edge of the hut because sewage races through their house when it rains. Then she said at night when it rains you have to sit up all night under an umbrella because there's no dry spot in the house. Now, this woman makes our clothing. She's working 120 hours a week. And yet she lives in these conditions of utter, utter misery.

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE > Tactical Intelligence Acquisition

I know when Wal-Mart had this buy American campaign you know they said that the stuff in their stores was made in United States and of course if you go into a Wal-Mart it's very patriotic.

There's flags banners, stars and stripes banners over the cashiers and everything. Made in the USA, bring it home to the USA, Support American manufacturers that support American jobs. So I called Wal-Mart and I said them how many of your goods are made in the United States? They wouldn't answer they said we don't know, of course they know.

So we went into Wal-Mart and we decided to start counting all the products and what countries they were from. And it was hilarious because we found out Wal-Mart may look out of control but they've got hidden cameras. So the minute you take out a notebook all of a sudden your arms go up and you're led out of the store. You cannot write in Wal-Mart. They think you're a competitor I guess, I don't know what.

But then we tried to take some pictures. You can't take pictures in Wal-Mart they throw you out. It's against company rules. So we found out though that you can act really weird in Wal-Mart and no one would say a single word. So we put hidden tape recorders in our pocket and just spent months talking out loud to ourselves in Wal-Mart stores. Not one single person ever said anything.

So I'd walk over to the Kathy Lee Gifford rack of clothing and I'd say oh look at this blouse is from Malaysia. Look 30, 1, 2, 38 blouses from Malaysia \$18.00. Oh look at these sweaters from China. We did that for months on end. Going to Wal-Mart stores and to all different states and did our survey and found out of course that only 17% of the goods were made in United States and 83% were made off shore.

We found a statement that Wal-Mart had, Wal-Mart has an unprecedented commitment to purchase American made goods. And I wanted to sue them for false advertising until we looked at the small print. Wal-Mart has unprecedented commitment to purchase American made goods whenever they can meet the pricing available off shore. So if you work for nine cents an hour in the United States Wal-Mart will purchase your goods.

But just the lies, the hypocrisy. And I just see, when I see the corporations I see organizations that have lost their moral compass. Who don't care and who can only be reached through, through massive social pressure.

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE > Sweatshops Will Not End Unless...

If we're doing whales and penguins we would be taking money in right and left. If you're talking about worker rights of young women - forget it, everybody runs away. So given the lack of resources and given the small scale you have to focus your work. And you have to, but the challenge becomes a successful campaign will generalize. You know you run a good campaign and it's Coles, Gap, you know Nike, everybody is watching. Nobody wants themselves to be the target of a campaign.

... So many different facets come into any decent campaign. And you can't rely upon the media that's one avenue. You have to, you know, rely upon good corporate campaigning out on the streets, the leafleting, the research. I feel very strongly that campaigns are research driven.

And I would never enter a campaign unless the research was solid. And you have to put a human face on this issue so you have to have the picture, the photographs, the clothing, the wage slips, where the workers live. You have to go through all of that.

... So now say looking at a campaign for worker rights, enforceable worker rights standards and global trade that the 16 year old is going to have every bit the same protections as the label does. I think you just keep that campaign as simple as that and you bring it out to the American people and as this wave starts to grow, as hundreds of thousands as millions of people sign these petitions that the rights of the 16 year old are going to be protected.

You're going to see the administration, 'cause the petitions will be directed towards the administration or towards congress. But I don't think you're going to get anything out of this congress or this administration without enormous popular pressure. And so you do your job and you keep an eye on Washington.

But, but the long range, in the long range you will not end the sweatshop economy. The global sweatshop economy will not be ended without enforceable human rights and worker right standards. It can't be done. It will never be done on the back of voluntary codes and privatization and monitoring never. It has to be laws.

But in the past we weren't strong enough to move for those laws. You had to build the movement first so it's, it's starting. I mean now it's time to move for the enforceable laws absolutely.

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE > DON'T Boycott Sweatshops

No worker we have ever met anywhere in the developing world has asked us to boycott their jobs. No not once. And this will even sound harsher: every single

worker in the developing world will tell you it's better to be exploited than to have no job at all. But they stop there. No worker has ever said we need more sweatshops.

They've never said that ever. They wouldn't even dream of saying that. But the part that moves, moves me the most is that the demands of these workers around the world are so modest so reasonable. Like workers would tell us in Bangladesh just like in El Salvador they would say to us look if you could double our wages we could climb out of misery and into poverty.

So the wage would go from maybe 17 cents an hour to 34 cents an hour. The labour costs of the cap would go from 1.6 cents to 3.2 cents. It's nothing, 3.2 cents of labour in a seventeen dollar and fifty cent baseball cap. It's less than 2/10ths of 1% of the retail price. So what I find most moving is that the demands are so reasonable. And workers will sell you, tell you they'll say look we're a poor country you know, we need these jobs.

We'll work hard. We'll work ten hours a day. We'll work we'll give our blood for these, these companies but we wanted to be treated like human beings. And we don't want to be forced to work twenty hours, or twenty-four hours we need to go home to our kids. You know what they asked for in Bangladesh they said do you think the American people would help us get one day a week off because they're working seven days a week.

And they said to you our families are collapsing. We're not home with our kids. Our kids are alone they're sick. The mother is exhausted too, working seven days a week you know, fourteen hours a day. So they said do you think the American people will help us win one day a week off.

... After she tells us her story about working you know, seven days straight, 120 hours, this kid bounds over, this beautiful child comes bounding over because a crowd started to gather around us. And she says I work making clothing for the US companies also, for the US she says. So I said to her how old are you? She says I'm eleven or twelve. And I said how do they treat you in the factory?

And this little kid looks up and she says, sir I cannot possibly put into words to express how they treat us. And I had chills up and down my spine. A little eleven year old kid talking like this and they, they afterwards she told us that they were hit in the factory with sticks. The supervisors took their shoes off and hit the kids with it, screamed at them.

Then her mother comes over and her mother says, yes my daughter comes home at midnight every single night, seven days a week. This eleven year old kid or twelve year old kid was working seven days a week until ten or eleven o'clock at night then traveling through these dangerous slum areas back to her home. We can do better than that. We can demand our corporations do better than this.

And at one point I turned to take a picture of this hut, just to document these 8 by 10 foot thatched huts. And this kid leapt to get into the picture cause she was still a child. Like a deer she leapt from where she was standing right in front of the

hut so she'd be in the picture. And it was, there was such life in this kid but her life is being stolen from her.

And you know when American people see these things I think the reaction is going to be quite strong. But we do have to find other ways than boycotts because boycotts are not, not what are necessary. It's not going to help.

... I have a sort of a, a good feeling about the American people. That if they're given the information, if they actually see the human face of the global economy, they see these young kids. They see the living conditions they will never accept it never, never not in a million years.

And so our job is not to beat up on the corporations we don't have to do that. What we have to do is bring the reality together the brand, the swish we'll bring it together with the young women who make, who make these garments and these sneakers in the conditions under which they live and work.