

Work as Key to the Social Question

The Great Social and Economic Transformations and the Subjective Dimension of Work



Sweatshops: An Evaluation in Light of Catholic Social Teaching with Special Reference to *Laborem Exercens*

by Paul Surlis

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Despite the attention given in the media in recent years to students, workers, religious groups and others organizing massive protests against sweatshops and their abuse of workers there is still much ignorance about how widespread sweatshops are in the global economy. Even some student activists, when questioned, say sweatshops are found only in Central America and far off places like Vietnam. They are unaware that sweatshops are widespread in the global economy and are found also in some of the world's wealthiest countries like the United States of America and in cities like Paris and London.

Robert Reich, Secretary of Labor in the Clinton Administration, estimated that over one thousand apparel operations in the United States were sweatshops that violated wage and labor laws (See "Fighting Against Sweatshops; An Interview With Charles Kernaghan," *America*, May 27, 2,000, p.12. Kernaghan, executive director of the National Labor Committee for Worker and Human Rights, began labor rights activities in Latin America in the early 1990's in El Salvador and Honduras. He has since been one of the most important voices on behalf of workers' rights, and he has been indefatigable in educating students and others on the issues).

Another widespread misconception about sweatshops is that they are found in the clothing and apparel trades only. Few realize that in fact sweatshops or conditions analogous to those found in sweatshops are found in food production industries like beef, poultry and pork, on the farms where food is grown and harvested and in some high tech industries as well.

A sweatshop may be defined as any workplace indoors or out of doors where workers are subject to extreme exploitation. This includes hazardous working conditions, arbitrary discipline, sexual harassment, and threats of violence, deprivation of the right to unionize and lack of a living wage, benefits, dignity or basic human rights. Indentured servitude and

child labor would be included.

Places where conditions for workers are even more degrading than in the worst sweatshops are countries where slavery is still practiced and in prisons especially in China and the U.S.A., where much manufacturing is now done, and in the sex trade, especially when children and women are kidnapped and held prisoners for sex tourists. Many domestic workers especially women who are smuggled into the USA and other countries and again kept as virtual or actual prisoners, experience sweatshop like conditions as isolated individuals rather than groups

Adjunct Professors

Much-neglected groups with which I wish to begin are adjunct professors who are employed even in major universities including some catholic ones across the USA. These professors work long hours often for pay that works out at less than the minimum wage when office hours, class times, time spent grading papers, and preparation times are taken into account. Where some corporations export jobs to take advantage of cheap labor abroad, universities achieve the same results while employing adjunct professors and remaining in the US. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) maintains that a “ A factory may be clean, well-organized and harassment-free, but unless its workers are paid a sustainable living wage, it is a sweatshop.”(ICCR 1997) Given the assembly line practices in some universities where classes of 200 are found and the fact that universities are corporations and increasingly behave like them where economics and bottom lines are concerned it is not too much of a stretch to speak of them as sweatshops, where treatment of adjunct professors unjustly, is concerned.

For example, at St. John’s University in New York, the largest Catholic university in the USA, and one that claims a Vincentian concern-for-the-poor tradition, and where I taught for the past twenty-five years, half the faculty in many departments is adjuncts. When President Donald Harrington was asked about this over a year ago at a public meeting he replied that the law of New York State allows this ratio of adjuncts. Apparently, what is legal is moral and in accordance with social justice. This is sometimes referred to as *the positive law theory of justice: whatever the law says is just*. New York State also allows abortion but a professor who publicly owned up to having had one would promptly be fired.

An adjunct professor gets \$1,600 per course per semester. In an academic year teaching four courses she will receive \$6,400.00. She receives no healthcare benefits, no pension funds and she has no security. She may well teach a total of two hundred students while a senior professor who has a graduate class and a research reduction will draw a salary of \$64,000.00 per year and may teach one hundred students a year. Thus for half the amount of work he receives more than ten times the salary as well as generous pension funds and health insurance. Of course, he is turning out research maybe on the courage of the Zapatistas speaking truth to power but he is doing it at an adjunct’s expense in time and labor and he will be careful not to speak out on behalf of just wages for adjuncts lest he

jeopardize the next semester's course reduction or the next grant. Some adjuncts who are married are forced to teach at two or more universities just to make ends meet. Some, but still too few, US students address the conditions of adjuncts or teaching assistants who are also similarly exploited. And at most universities adjuncts are afraid to talk of unions much less try to found them because they will not be hired the following semester or may even be summarily fired if they attempt to unionize.

Extent of Sweatshops

In 1911, a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company killed 146 garment workers in New York City. Many were burned alive in the locked workplace. Others jumped to their death in the street several stories below. Shock and revulsion at the carnage motivated 100,000 people to take part in the funeral procession up Fifth Avenue. Soon the Federal government introduced legislation guaranteeing new rights for workers and safer workplaces in the USA. Some people thought the end of sweatshops had arrived. However, sweatshops have proven impossible to eradicate.

In the 1980s what Newsweek called "vanquished old style sweatshops" reappeared in most major cities in the United States (Sharon Begley, "The New Sweatshops," *Newsweek*, Sept. 10, 1990, pp. 51-52). In 1989, the Government Accounting Office reported that more than half of the 7,000 apparel factories in New York City were sweatshops.

Sweatshops with workers in firetraps were reported in California where most of the workers were undocumented and so in no position to complain about conditions of work or being paid less than half the minimum wage.

It has been found that when apparel related sweatshops are closed in one location they quickly open in another. All that is needed are bales of cloth, sewing machines and workers who have no other option to earn a pittance. Too few inspectors are allocated to workplace supervision and the operators of sweatshops continue with impunity. When this leads to death in sweatshops that are firetraps we are dealing with criminal murder through negligence at several levels but it is never, or seldom, prosecuted as such as we shall see.

High Tech Sweatshops

The existence of sweatshops in high tech industries is not as widely known or commented on as their existence in apparel manufacturing. Many electronic assembly shops associated especially with computer production use toxic chemicals including lead, benzene and glycol ether thus subjecting workers to dangerous working conditions. Semiconductor workers suffer industrial injuries at a rate 3 times higher than the average for other manufacturing jobs. Women working in jobs where they must handle chemicals suffer increased miscarriage rates as a study sponsored by the Semiconductor Industry Association found.

Similar studies were conducted with similar results at DEC and IBM. Unions are non-existent in Silicon Valley's high tech contract shops and efforts to introduce unions are resisted by the industry.

A study by the Pacific Studies Center people of color hold 75% of manual jobs in Silicon Valley while whites hold 80% of management jobs. Men outnumber women by better than 2-to-1 in better paying job categories such as managers, professionals, technicians and sales. Assemblers of electronics are paid low wages. Business Week showed Andy Grove earning \$97 million in 1996. Now high tech companies are moving into the Southwest, to New Mexico, Arizona and Texas. Workers aided by religious groups have complained for years of health hazards caused by exposure solvents, acids and gases used in production of electronic equipment (Material obtained from www.corpwatch.org).

Forced Labor in The Commonwealth of The Northern Mariana Islands, a US territory : The Role of the State Acting on Behalf of Investors

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (US/CNMI) a US territory provides a particularly egregious example of sweatshops, which operate under the American flag and enjoy the protection of powerful friends in Congress. This area has become a center of international trafficking with connections to the People's Republic of China, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, Japan, Sri Lanka and Thailand. A report by the Global Survival Network (GSN) issued in 1999 states that the crime syndicates from Japan, South Asia and the People's Republic of China and Saipan reap enormous profit something in the region of \$160 million from the wholesale human trafficking. (See Report: *Trapped: Human Trafficking for Forced Labor in The Commonwealth of The Northern Mariana Islands*, 1999). GSN estimates that there are about 40,000 indentured workers in CNMI.

Workers are brought to CNMI under false pretenses they are told they will receive well paying jobs instead they find themselves in the most exploitative situations imaginable. Japanese crime groups sometimes based in Saipan operate sex tourism into which many children and women find themselves locked in CNMI.

The CNMI government has retained a prominent U.S. law firm (Preston Gates), paying over \$4.25 million for lobbying efforts to prevent implementation of federal labor and minimum wage laws in CNMI.

For several years Congressman Miller (D Calif) has been stymied in his efforts to bring about legislation that would address the series of abuses perpetrated against workers in

CNMI despite his having other senators and representatives supporting his work. Among the principal opponents of reform efforts are Tom DeLay (R-Tx) and House Majority Leader Dick Armey who repeatedly blocked the Clinton administration's efforts to raise the minimum wage in CNMI and to implement federal regulation of labor and immigration

laws. DeLay has been a visitor on gulf junkets to CNMI and has pledged the full support of the Republican Party to oppose labor reforms. Delay's role here should not be judged solely in terms of individualistic opportunism, he is also displaying brass knuckle Republican class war tactics against working class interests, workers and the poor. Class war is a taboo subject in the USA that does not mean it does not exist. Media reporters in the U.S. are too preoccupied with reporting sex scandals with prurient interest to bother with wholesale abuses of women, children and men in a territory over which the U.S. flag flies.

In June 2001 the Department of Labor issued this report:

During the three-year period that ended on June 1, 2001, nearly 60% of factories inspected by Wage and Hour division of the Department of Labor had wage violations, and in one case, a single US/CNMI corporation owed more than \$1 million dollars in back wages to its employees.

I have dealt with this case at some length because the CNMI sweatshops and sex trade exploitation are carried out in a U. S. territory and because if powerful, deeply committed, political leaders like Congressman Miller and his supporters have been unable so far to achieve reform it shows how difficult it will be to address sweatshop abuses in Vietnam, Indonesia, or Central America or wherever else in the global economy they occur outside the U. S. Protests in the streets help to raise awareness of the problems but solutions demand political and labor reforms on a world wide scale and even in the U.S.A., Congress, so far, has been unable to achieve these in face of opposition from powerful vested interests.

Bangladesh

In April (2001) the New York Times had a report by Barry Bearak, "Lives Held Cheap in Bangladesh Sweatshops," a report which is horrifying in the depths of misery it portrays.

Bangladesh has a population of 131 million –about half that of the United States- all packed into a country slightly smaller than Iowa. And in this impoverished country children go to work in sweatshops at age six, the age at which children in the U. S. start school.

The Times report states: "What Bangladesh has to offer the global economy is some of the world's cheapest labor- and what this impoverished nation has received in return is the economic boost of a \$4.3 billion apparel industry, the fuller pockets that come with 1.5 million jobs and the horrors that arise from 3,300 inadequately regulated garment factories, some of which are among the worst sweatshops to taunt the human conscience."

As a legacy of colonial days workers are considered to be slaves and because the supply of labor is abundant it is easier to continue abuses such as the lowest wages and dangerous conditions for work. Bearak writes: " For the most part, it is the wretched of the earth who do the world's tailoring. Made in Bangladesh competes with Made in Honduras, Made in the Philippines, Made in Macao, Made in Any steamy Reservoir of Third World

Unemployment: those places where plentiful labor lacks the leverage to command high pay, and the most pitiful thing about the jobs is how hard it is to get them.”

In November 2000 there was a fire at a sweatshop in Arsingdi, Bangladesh. Once again panicked workers trying to flee came up against locked gates reminiscent in its horror and wanton destruction of life of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire mentioned above. Fifty-two people mostly young women were burned or trampled to death. Ten were children. Bearak reports that since 1995 there have been thirty such fires, with seventeen involving fatalities. Bearak also tells us that Bangladesh’s garment industry is barely 15 years old but already it accounts for 76 per cent of the nation’s exports and nearly half goes to the United States.

Driving this sweatshop system (aside from other factors we shall deal with later) is that consumers in the stores want bargains, the retailers squeeze lower prices from suppliers and they in turn want the clothes sewn at the lowest possible cost, veritably a cycle of violence.

Some cosmetic reforms have been introduced in Bangladesh’s garment industry mostly by companies fearful for their image in light of the horrors exposed by the fires with their flames, stampedes, locked doors and children and women burned and trampled to death. Some of the companies whose garments are produced in Bangladesh are Tommy Hilfiger, J.C. Penney, and the Gap. In some of these factories better conditions obtain than in the filthy firetraps briefly described above. However, another fire caused by panic and in which 30 people were trampled to death in a sweatshop in Bangladesh, was reported in the US media on August 8, 2,001.

Nike

Because of students, labor rights activists and religious groups targeting Kathy Lee Gifford, Nike and other sportswear manufacturers, some of these corporations and their logos or brand names have become more notorious than others. In 1997 university students, prominent among whom was Tico Almeida, (then a student at Duke University and now happily in Congressman Miller’s office as a legislative aid) began a campaign to compel University Administrators and managers to stock only sweatshop free goods for sale in University bookstores. The students at times were faced with resistance but they persevered and the movement spread to universities across the United States.

The Chronicle of Higher Education (October 2,000, Section 2, p.18) reported the publication of a letter from about 200 scholars criticizing college presidents for working with two Anti-Sweatshop groups (“Economists Take College Presidents to Task for Joining Anti-Sweatshop Groups,” September 29). The two groups the scholars referred to are the Workers Rights Consortium (WRC) and the Fair Labor Association (FLA).

In a response to the scholars’ accusations I pointed out in a letter to the *Chronicle* that in equating the two anti-sweatshop groups the scholars were guilty of false evenhandedness since the FLA contains representatives of corporations being investigated and is unduly

influenced by them in its methods of investigation in a way that the WRC is not. The WRC is composed of students and labor and human rights activists and is completely independent of corporate influence. Obviously, this independent stance makes an enormous difference in selecting sites to be visited, and in interviewing workers who are intimidated when corporate representatives are known to be present.

By November 20, 2,000, 66 universities were members of WRC despite the fact that the Clinton White House backed the FLA. Romer-Friedman a WRC board member declared in summer 2,000 after students at the University of Michigan stormed an administration building in protest at the University's joining the FLA:

“The FLA is a sham. Speaking as a student: the FLA does not have full public disclosure, living wage (requirements) or true independent monitoring. The entire FLA monitoring system is corporate-dominated and biased toward apparel corporations that have a monopoly on the governance and board of the FLA. (Stew Harris: “Students Against Sweatshops”, *Multinational Monitor*, Jan./Feb.2001-Volume 22-Numbers 1&2, from the Internet).

In their letter to the *Chronicle* the scholars made the further accusation that the sweatshop issue had not been sufficiently studied for student actions to be justified. This of course ignores the evidence we have presented briefly above and the fact that students have traveled widely to study the sweatshop situation for themselves. In Central America, for example, students have made videos of factories that are more like concentration camps than work sites, guarded as they are by armed police and surrounded as they are by high walls topped with coils of barbed wire. At some of these factories in Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, workers spoke of being physically abused for even discussing the formation of unions.

Moreover, students and labor activists have brought workers from sweatshops to the US so that they could tell their stories directly on college campuses and at public demonstrations.

Scholars who make pretense of neutrality in a situation where workers especially women and young girls are exploited and suffer so that excessive profits may continue to be generated by Nike and other similar corporations are, in fact, taking the side of the powerful against the weak in another manifestation of class struggle. (Original letter partially expanded here was published in the *Chronicle* on October 27, 2,000: “Economists’ Objections to Anti-Sweatshop Activity.”) After the letter was published I received an admonition from the Chair of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at St. John’s University who informed me on behalf of Dr. Julie Upton, Provost of St. John’s University, that I was not entitled to sign myself *Emeritus* as I had done because the title had not been conferred on me by the Board of Trustees. In a triumph of form over substance Dr. Upton had no comment on the central points of my letter nor on the fact that St. John’s University, through its spokesperson on the Nike issue Fr. James Maher, C.M., had aligned itself with the FLA a not surprising development in view of the University’s association with Nike something to which we now turn briefly.

Opposition to Nike at St John's University

At St John's University in New York, a graduate student in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Patrick Tracey, asked in a letter to a campus newspaper in 1997 what Nike had to do with St. Vincent de Paul, whose legacy of concern for the poor the University was celebrating. He was alluding to St. John's athletic department receiving funds from Nike and compelling all its student athletes to wear the Nike logo in return.

James Keady, an adjunct soccer coach, then began to explore the issue in a paper he was preparing for a class I taught in social ethics. When Keady discovered exploitation of workers in Nike related factories in a textbook I was using with undergraduates and which I passed on to him (*Justice and Peace: A Christian Primer* by J. Milburn Thompson, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1997), he became morally disturbed at a Catholic university taking money ultimately made on the backs of the poor.

Keady, with my public support, went to various administration personnel demanding that they reject funding for athletes from Nike. The response he got was that the university was exerting moral pressure on Nike and was in a better position to do so as long as they maintained friendly relations with the corporation and continued taking its money. We rejected that rationalization, as did some students. Request for information as to what positive changes in workers' wages and workplace conditions were achieved as a result of University moral pressure on Nike were never answered. Subsequent changes--most purely cosmetic, made by Phil Knight, the multi-billionaire head of the Nike Corporation--in a few factories in Indonesia, and continued exposure of sweatshop conditions in factories producing for Nike, reveal the futility of efforts by university personnel or prominent athletes who seek to change the abuses from within rather than by public resistance. Ultimately, it is unlikely that significant changes on a global scale will be achieved unless the United Nations and especially Mary Robinson the High Commissioner for human Rights become involved. They, too, will encounter opposition from states and corporations. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace could perform a valuable consciousness raising role by providing a comprehensive encyclical or statement on Sweatshops but if this is planned there should be a detailed, global survey of the issue and direct input by exploited workers not just a statement about their plight but their own personal testimony. In other words, the document must not speak *at* the workers or *to* them but with due regard for protecting people's anonymity in politically dangerous situations workers who are exploited should be given their own direct voice.

At the height of the struggle against Nike at St. John's University from 1997 on, no other faculty person took a public stance in support of the protests against NIKE but many privately said they agreed with what we were doing and were glad we were raising the issue and creating a valuable teaching moment for students who, though attending a catholic university, had little exposure to Catholic Social Teaching.

In an interview I did with the student newspaper the *Torch* ("University Priest Knocks Nike

Deal,” February 2, 1998) at the beginning of the struggle I asked the University President, The Reverend Donald Harrington, C.M., to assure the university community that no student would be penalized for refusing in conscience to wear the Nike logo on his or her athletic apparel. The President ignored my request, but had he heeded it, he could have averted Keady’s departure from his coaching position with the soccer team, and he would also have avoided Keady’s relentless campaign against the university and its acceptance of funding for its athletic programs from Nike.

Ultimately, Keady felt he could not in conscience wear the Nike logo. He refused to drop the issue as his coaching superiors demanded, and he is now suing the university and Nike for alleged violation of his freedom of speech and on other grounds.

In the summer of 2000, Keady and a colleague, Leslie E. Kretzu, went to Indonesia, and having been unable to find a job in a Nike factory, they attempted to live on the wage given to workers but found they could not do so. They, with assistance from friends, opened a website where they recorded their daily experiences and privations (*Nikewages.org*). They have since spoken at universities across the United States, and they were received by Congressman Miller (D-CA) and his legislative aids to whom they presented an account of their findings. Congressman’s Miller expressed support for what Kretzu and Keady are doing, and this continues to be of enormous importance to them and their other supporters.

In retrospect it may now be seen as providential that St. John’s University stumbled in refusing to enable Keady to assuage his conscience and continue in the soccer program. Had he done so, the anti-Nike campaign might have lost his and Kretzu’s forceful voices. As it is, they are achieving national prominence as two of the most important campaigners against alleged sweatshop abuses in Nike controlled factories. A recent appearance on ESPN (“Outside the Lines” August 9, 2001 7 p.m., EST) gave their work important national coverage. Their presentation included an interview recorded on video by Leslie Kretzu, which, in a surprise move, Keady conducted with Phil Knight at lunch in the dining room of his posh, corporate headquarters in Beaverton, Oregon. In the confrontational encounter Knight, who has never set foot in Indonesia and is reputed to be worth five billion dollars, showed his barely concealed anger and discomfiture and repeatedly refused requests for a meaningful discussion of workers’ rights in factories producing for Nike. One wonders why he persistently refuses to disclose the locations of all factories producing for Nike unless the conditions in which workers find themselves are dangerous and the wages paid fail minimal standards of justice as has been alleged for years.

Nike in Vietnam

Lest it be thought that students and other activists in the USA are alone in targeting Nike as one of the worst corporations in the global economy, it should be noted that in March 1997, a Vietnam Labor Watch report documented labor law violations, low wages, unsafe working conditions, and sexual harassment at Nike facilities in Vietnam.

In 1997 Jeff Ballinger reported that “Nike, long in the vanguard of U.S. companies producing in Asia, is now leading Corporate America’s charge into Vietnam. Twenty-five thousand young Vietnamese workers currently churn out a million pairs of Nikes every month.” (“Nike Does It to Vietnam” in *Multinational Monitor*, March 1997, Volume 18, Number 3 from Internet, no pagination).

Ballinger pointed out why Vietnam was such an attractive option: the country’s minimum wage was \$42 a month at that time. At that rate labor for one pair of basketball shoes cost Nike \$1.50 and the shoes retailed for \$149.50 per pair. And even at that, Nike contractors cheated some workers out of the miserable pay agreed upon.

Ballinger reports that other labor violations were alleged against Nike workers in Vietnam such as verbal, physical and sexual abuse as well as overtime that was demanded even though it exceeded permissible limits. These abuses were attributed to Korean subcontractors and at a shareholder meeting in 1997 Nike Chief Executive Officer Phil Knight had to acknowledge that sex and physical abuse had occurred. Ballinger concludes his report by pointing out that the Vietnamese government, despite its eagerness for foreign investments, was less tolerant of abuse of workers than its counterparts in Indonesia and China.

Nike goes to China

In September 1997, the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee documented abuses at Nike factories run by sub-contractors in China.

Nike’s relocation of factories in China deserves special note. One of the arguments Nike and its beneficiaries advance in defense of low wages and unsafe conditions for its workers in Indonesia, for example, is *Without these jobs people would be worse off*. The argument implies that Nike does the poor laborers a service by providing jobs, however low the wages and degrading the working conditions.

However, it must always be emphasized that Nike and other corporations do not go to developing countries to provide jobs for the poor out of their beneficence and good will. Corporations transfer jobs abroad in search of cheap labor, cheap resources, slack or no environmental laws, and they seek out countries where unions are non-existent or if present are suppressed or restricted by violent tactics. *And they do all this in response to the iron law of capitalism, which is ever-increasing profit without regards to the human costs or environmental degradation.* Over the years Nike has transferred production from South Korea to Taiwan to Vietnam and now it is establishing a presence in what the *Multinational Monitor* calls “...the lowest denominator country, China, the world’s largest shoe maker.” (See “Beat the Devil: The Ten Worst Corporations of 1997” by Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman, *Multinational Monitor* December 1997, Vol. 18, Number 12, from Internet).

Nike's Propaganda Campaigns

One of Nike's early attempts to deny the charges leveled at it for sweatshop abuses was to maintain that false information was being sent out by fringe groups of activists on the Internet. However, in 1996, Nike hired Ernst & Young, one of the world's largest accounting firms, to conduct an audit of labor and environmental conditions inside its subcontractors' factories in Vietnam. The audit leaked to the press reported that workers in a Nike contractor facility in Vietnam were exposed to carcinogens that exceeded local legal standards by 177 times, and more than 100 workers in one part of a facility had respiratory ailments. One of the world's leading accounting firms could not be dismissed as a fringe group.

In 1997 *The New Republic* (September 15) published an article "The Young and the Feckless" in which it attacked a report published by Andrew Young (former United Nations Ambassador) on his findings in investigating alleged worker abuse in Asia. Young's report stated that "no evidence or pattern of widespread or systematic abuse or mistreatment of workers" could be found. Andrew Glass in *The New Republic* described Young's report as a "classic sham, marred not just by shoddy methodology but by frequent misrepresentations." Glass further argued that Young avoided the most important issue--whether Nike paid its employees fair wages--and he criticized Young for gathering testimony by relying on translators employed by the Nike factories.

Nike's Failure to Keep Promises

On May 12, 1998, Phil Knight, Nike's founder and CEO, announced reforms in Nike's policies on working conditions in its supplier factories. A New York Times Editorial described Nike's reforms as setting "a standard that other companies should match."

However, Tim Connor in *Global Exchange* (May 2, 2001), writes of "Still Waiting for Nike to do it," and he criticized Nike for treating sweatshop allegations as an "issue of public relations rather than human rights." Connor accused Nike of avoiding "key problems of subsistence wages, forced overtime and suppression of workers' right to freedom of association." He also states that Nike's "most significant promise to monitor its factories and release summary statements of that monitoring, has simply not been fulfilled." "Nike workers," Connor continues, "are still forced to work excessive hours in high pressure work environments, are not paid enough to meet the most basic human needs of their children, and are subject to harassment, dismissal and violent intimidation if they try to form unions or tell journalists about labor abuses in their factories." ("Still Waiting for Nike To Do It" *Global Exchange*, May 2, 2001).

U.S. Women, an Author and a Politician Protest Nike's Policies

In October 1997, 15 U.S. women's groups, led by author Alice Walker and Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA), told Nike CEO Phil Knight that "they were not fooled by a Nike advertising campaign which features women empowered by athletics." They added, "While the women who wear Nike shoes in the United States are encouraged to perform their personal best, the Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Chinese women making the shoes often suffer from inadequate wages, corporal punishment, forced overtime and /or sexual harassment." (Cited by Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman, "Beat the Devil," *Multinational Monitor*, December 1997, Volume 18, number 12, from Internet).

High School Students Protest Multiple Exploitations

In 1998 I met a group of students from a High School in Queens who had studied Nike sweatshop allegations under an inspired teacher. The students were all African Americans, and as a group they decided that Nike and its advertising were exploiting them in different ways. They expressed anger at Michael Jordan for accepting money from Nike, money they said was made on the backs of the poor. The students acknowledged that peer pressure from other style-conscious students forced them to pressure their parents into buying sneakers with the Nike logo for \$150.00 and upwards, a cost their working class parents could simply not afford. The students also argued that recruiters from colleges, who assured them they could play basketball and also receive a quality college education, exploited them. Investigation of this latter claim led the students to dismiss it as false. Only about 2% of college full time athletes made it to the major leagues; most others, they said, left college uneducated, and they tended to drift back to inner city ghettos where there were few, if any, jobs for them. Outraged at their findings, the High School students threw their Nike sneakers outside the store in Queens where they had bought them, and they embarked on a crusade to enlighten other students on the issues.

Teaching about Sweatshops

Bill Bigelow is obviously a teacher of genius. In "The Human Lives Behind the Labels," he describes in detail an imaginative method he has employed with brilliant success to bring his high school "Global Studies class" to see the *sweatshop* issue in terms of the suffering it causes to exploited workers and to see it as a systemic problem that is complex but also comprehensible and despicable. (Mr. Bigelow is a Rethinking editorial associate and teaches at Franklin High School in Portland, OR, see bbpd@aol.com and for a description of his class see http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/11_04/swetm.shtml, from which I take what follows).

Mr. Bigelow provided research projects, which enabled his students to appreciate the personal, social, and other costs of sweatshop exploitation. The account of his teaching

strategies and the students' responses are models for all teachers addressing these issues.

At the beginning of his class that was devoted to prying behind the soccer-ball-as-thing, Mr. Bigelow read and distributed Bertolt Brecht's poem "A Worker Reads History":

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?
The books are filled with names of kings.
Was it kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?
In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished
Where did the masons go? Imperial Rome
Is full of arcs of triumph. Who reared them up?

Young Alexander conquered India.
He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?

Each page a victory.
At whose expense the victory ball?
Every ten years a great man,
Who paid the piper?

The students got the point and began to explore imaginatively the stories behind the ball-as-product. Their achievements are impressive. One student, Cameron Robinson, wrote a poem entitled "Masks", which reads:

Michael Jordan soars through the air,
On shoes of unpaid labor.

A boy kicks a soccer ball,
The bloody hands are forgotten.

An excited girl combs the hair of her Barbie,
An over-worked girl makes it.

A child receives a teddy bear,
Made in China has no meaning.

The words "hand made" are printed,
Whose hands were used to make them?

A six year old in America starts his first day of school,
A six year old in Pakistan starts his first day of work.

They want us to see the ball,

Not to see the millions of ball stitchers.

The world is full of many masks,
The hard part is seeing beneath them.

Jonathan Parker constructed a wooden house inside a Nike shoe and wrote this poem to accompany his artwork:

There is a young girl
Who lives in a shoe.
Phil Knight makes six million
She makes just two.

When Nike says “just do it”
She springs to her feet,
Stringing her needle
And stitching their sneaks.

With Nike on the tongue,
The swoosh on the side,
She’s done for the night...

When will it stop?
When will it end?
Must I, she says,
Toil for Nike again?

I hope Bill Bigelow and his concerned and creative students will find a way to take their material on a national tour to shopping malls, to schools and universities, to churches and town halls, to public squares, to wherever this message needs to be heard and that is everywhere consumers eagerly purchase products made with so much blood, sweat and tears. Consciousness raising such as Mr. Bigelow and his class with their poetry, artwork and sculpture can provide, is a first step towards achieving global change in workers’ conditions and in eliminating sweatshops, a goal that must be pursued, however long it takes.

Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods Paid to Endorse Nike Products

Michael Jordan was once asked at a news conference about the propriety of his accepting a \$20 million fee from Nike for endorsing its logo-bearing sneakers, given that the money was extorted from the labor of mostly poor women and girls. Mr. Jordan said it was of no concern to him how the money was made, something for which he was described by a sportswriter as a *moral jellyfish*.

Tiger Woods is reported to have received a fee in the region of \$100 million for endorsing Nike golf equipment, something about which he has not, to my knowledge, been confronted publicly.

Open Letter to Tiger Woods

Dear Mr. Woods:

Because of your superb skills as a golfer and your always gentlemanly demeanor on and off the golf course you may be one of the most admired athletes in this country.

You well know that since you started to win tournaments so impressively many young people especially African American boys and girls aspire to emulate you and they have taken up golf enthusiastically. For all of them and for other golfers and athletes you are a role model of the highest caliber and for this many people especially parents and others who are engaged in formation of young people are very grateful.

There is one issue, however, which I wish to explore with you and about which I would ask you to search your conscience.

May I be permitted to explain why, briefly?

For some months now I have been researching the existence and nature of sweatshops in the global economy. A sweatshop is any place of work where people are paid less than a living wage, where workers are denied the right to unionize should they so wish, where the work environment may be toxic and where women and girls are sexually harassed and abused. Sweatshop workers are often forced to do excessive overtime and are often denied wages that are rightfully theirs.

I see your photo in the Sports pages everyday in the country's major newspapers and magazines, and you are regularly shown on TV.

And always you wear a golf cap and other apparel that bears the Nike logo. And you use Nike golf equipment.

You are in receipt of millions of dollars for endorsing Nike products.

You are perhaps aware that atop the Nike corporation pyramid sits its CEO Phil Knight, worth, it is said, \$5 billion? Mr. Knight has never, I believe, worked a single day in one of his own factories. He has never sewn a sneaker or glued on its sole or made any other of the products that sell for such high prices.

At the base of the Nike pyramid making sneakers and sports apparel for athletes, are thousands of women in Indonesia, Vietnam, China and elsewhere, and many of these

women work in sweatshops. Protests by athletes and labor activists have failed to persuade Nike to make full disclosure of where all its factories, operated by subcontractors, are located. Many of these subcontractors harass women and girls, subjecting some to physical abuse and forbidding unionizing of workforces where they can, they often pay less than a living wage to workers and dismiss workers arbitrarily.

In 1998 a group of High School students, mostly African American and Hispanic, returned to a store in Queens, New York City, and in disgust threw back sneakers they had felt pressured to buy or have their parents buy at prices from \$150.00 to \$200.00, prices working class families simply could not afford. Initially, the students had caved in to peer pressure and to the allure of advertising shots of their hero Michael Jordan wearing Nike sneakers. Perhaps you influence students in a similar way today.

When the students, led by an inspired teacher, studied the conditions under which Nike sneakers were being made, they were morally outraged. They then decided to act, and they performed their public protest. They also began to educate their peers about the issues involved.

Mr. Jordan also is in receipt of millions from Nike for his endorsement of its products. When questioned about the propriety of this Mr. Jordan is reputed to have said that it was not a concern of his, and for this Mr. Jordan has been called a *moral jellyfish*.

Students and activists aside, although their witness counts immensely, in 1997 a group referred to as KLD removed Nike from its Domini 400 list of 400 companies, referred to as DSI, because of Nike's failure to respect workers' rights and prevent its subcontractors from intimidating and abusing women in their factories as has often been alleged, and as even Mr. Knight had to acknowledge on one occasion.

KLD, is an abbreviation for Kinder, Lydenberg, Domini & Co., Inc. the most respected evaluator in the United States of corporations at home and abroad for their record on workers' rights and environmental and some other concerns.

The DSI is an index it publishes for the guidance of investors who wish to be shareholders only in companies that avoid sweatshop labor and respect workers' basic human rights.

Mr. Woods, the evidence is out there. You are accepting money ultimately made on the backs of poor women and workers who are exploited.

In the great African-American prophetic tradition you are now called on to speak truth to power. Demand that Phil Knight require all his subcontractors to respect all their workers' rights, especially their right to a living wage and the right to form unions. If he refuses, then shame him publicly by handing back your golf cap and other Nike logo-bearing golf equipment. Perhaps you could devote Nike's endorsement fees to charity.

You may then hold your head high and no one will call you a *moral jellyfish*. And you will help to achieve justice for exploited workers in Nike controlled factories and perhaps Wal-

Mart and other exploiting corporations, of which there are numerous examples, will take note and begin to give their workers their rights.

I admire your exceptional golfing skills. I now want to admire your moral virtue as a seeker for justice and as a spokesperson for exploited workers, as well.

Sincerely,
(Fr) Paul Surlis

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. : The Worst Actor in the Global Sweatshop Movement

On February 1, 2001, Kinder, Lydenberg, Domini & Co., Inc., (KLD) removed Wal-Mart Stores from the Domini 400 Social IndexSM (DSI), KLD's proprietary socially screened equity index which is described on the KLD web site as the first equity benchmark for social investors (www.kld.com/benchmarks/walmart.html).

KLD's move against Wal-Mart was made because the company was not taking adequate steps to ensure that its "domestic and international vendors operate factories that meet adequate human rights and labor standards."

KLD had removed Nike from the DSI in 1997.

KLD describes sweatshops as "factories that subject their workers to one or more inhumane working conditions such as forced, prison or child labor; physical and mental abuse; exceedingly long hours; unhealthy and unsafe working environments; and/or pay wages that do not support workers' basic needs" (Ibid).

Another grievance KLD had against Wal-Mart was its purchase of products made at factories in Myanmar, a military dictatorship accused of perpetrating grave human rights abuses.

Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the country's pro-democracy movement and winner of the 1991 Nobel peace prize, had called on companies to remove production from Myanmar (Burma) until the military regime was ousted. KLD has called on social investors also to endorse a boycott of Myanmar-based factories until the country returns to democracy.

KLD reports that Wal-Mart Canada no longer purchases from factories based in Myanmar, while Wal-Mart USA's position is unclear.

A more serious charge leveled against Wal-Mart by KLD is that it lied about its involvement with the Chun Si Enterprise handbag Factory, a sweatshop based in China.

The National Labor committee had accused Wal-Mart of contracting with this factory, which subjected its workers to 90-hour work-weeks, beatings by factory guards,

exceptionally low wages and, and prison-like conditions. At first, Wal-Mart denied its relationship with the factory until BusinessWeek investigated and confirmed the relationship of Wal-Mart with Chun Si through December 1999.

A third serious grievance KLD had with Wal-Mart was the corporation's refusal to use a third-party independent monitoring program (IMP) using local NGO's at its vendors' facilities in Central America. Religious, human rights activists, and labor groups agree that IMPs provide the best means to ensure that factories avoid labor and human rights abuses. Wal-Mart finally refused to agree to such monitoring despite its protracted negotiations with the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) a major player in the shareholder resolution process.

Wal-Mart is the largest retailer in the world. It wields considerable influence over its industry and as such, its failure to compel its vendors to pay its workers a sustainable living wage or allow them to bargain collectively sets low standards that other corporations then follow.

KLD points out that The Gap, Liz Claiborne, Nike, Timberland, and Reebok have taken steps to improve their records with reference to sweatshop and Myanmar controversies, while Wal-Mart has not.

KLD's stated policy is to proceed with caution in removing companies from the DSI for social reasons, preferring instead to engage in negotiations with companies in the quest for change and to monitor companies' efforts to improve. Wal-Mart's removal from the DSI is therefore evidence of its tolerance of egregious violation of workers' rights in its vendors. How to bring Wal-Mart and other corporations violations of laborers' rights to the attention of the public who purchase their products is a task we shall address later.

The Epitome of Capitalism

Leslie Kaufman published an article with the title, "The epitome of capitalism, its prices, and its reach, push Wal-Mart to the top" (*The Journal Record*, Oct. 30, 2000) The title says it all. Kaufman's analysis makes clear that Wal-Mart's exorbitant profits and the largely exploitative labor practices by which they are achieved represent not an aberration but the very epitome of capitalism. Kaufman begins: "Sometime before the end of the year, a milestone in American capitalism will pass. Wal-Mart Stores' annual sales are on track to exceed those of General Motors, the largest American company for much of the last half-century"(p.1).

This is an enormous claim; is it justified? Consider this from Kaufman: "Total annual retail spending in America, excluding automobiles and boats, is roughly \$2.3 trillion. Wal-Mart's domestic sales for the fiscal year ended in January were \$142 billion, or 6.2 percent of the total. To put it another way, Wal-Mart sells 19 million pairs of women's jeans a year and roughly 19,634 pairs of shoes an hour." Kaufman estimates that Wal-Mart relies on an army

of 65,000 companies for its products, and it always pushes its suppliers to become leaner and to account for every penny spent.

Wal-Mart relies on these tactics to keep costs down: “use of cutting-edge technology, masterful logistics, reliance on imported goods and a nonunion work-force,” and not only that but, Kaufman argues, Wal-Mart practices are becoming industry standards.

Wal-Mart was once widely criticized for driving mom-and-pop stores out of business, but Kaufman finds that Wal-Mart now is driving midsize, even large businesses to the wall and causing others to try to survive Wal-Mart’s devastating effects by consolidating.

In an understatement, Kaufman says: “And while Wal-Mart’s business policies are greatly emulated, they are often controversial. As Wal-Mart accelerates its drive to open stores in other countries, local groups have formed to protest the company’s operating practices.”

We have already seen that in February 2001 KLD removed Wal-Mart Stores from the DSI, the index it maintains of corporations that respect workers’ rights and environmental concerns. KLD prefers to negotiate with corporations and monitor their progress when promises are made. *Controversial* policies alone would never cause KLD to take the momentous step of removing a corporation from the DSI.

Kaufman acknowledges that advocates of workers rights in other countries have accused Wal-Mart factories and suppliers as having the very worst working conditions. Kaufman continues with a statement that labor activists in the United States should find alarming, if they did not already know it: “In addition, as Wal-Mart begins to compete with American businesses that are mostly unionized, labor unions, their members and some local governmental agencies are arguing that the company is big enough to exert downward pressure on benefits and wages across whole regions of the country”(p.1).

Kaufman quotes Carl Steidtmann, an economist with PriceWaterhouseCoopers and a student of the retail industry: “If you are an admirer of capitalism, they are the epitome of it. They are the prime example for the good and the bad”(p.1).

Kaufman cites Charles Kernaghan, executive director of the National Labor Committee (NLC): “In country after country factories that produce Wal-Mart goods are the worst. They will cut every single corner available.” And it was the NLC that helped expose the fact that sweatshops were making products for Wal-Mart’s Kathy Lee Gifford clothing line.

Many may recall that after the Kathy Lee Gifford expose on national TV (*Dateline*, NBC 1966), President Clinton set up the Apparel Industry Partnership (AIP) in 1966. The AIP is a group of religious, human rights, labor and business organizations that collaborated to develop a “no-sweat” code of conduct for company suppliers. In fact, it was the AIP that in turn formed the Fair Labor Association (FLA) to monitor programs for corporate members. We have seen that many student groups find the FLA to be overly influenced by corporations--the very ones the FLA is supposed to monitor--and in reaction the students

founded the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC).

With more than 1 million full-time and part-time employees, what Kaufman calls “Wal-Mart’s rabidly anti-union stance” is causing Wal-Mart to become a focal point for union-management disputes, especially over health benefits (p.3). Since Wal-Mart now controls 10 percent of grocery-chain sales food workers who are unionized expect to see their wages and benefits under attack, and standards reduced to the lowest levels possible. Wal-Mart under attack argues that it has improved quality of life for middle-income America in general. We may be forgiven for seeing here a blatant appeal to opposing class interests in a classic divide and conquer technique. This, notwithstanding the fact that some economists argue that the majority of Americans are working class, if class is seen in terms of power in the workplace, not income (See: *The Working Class Majority: America’s best Kept Secret* by Michael Zweig, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2000).

Students against Sweatshop (SAS) labor and religious activists and others do excellent work in targeting individual sweatshop operators like Nike and other corporations. However, until they learn that the real enemy is *capitalism* with its inexorable laws of destructive competition, its relentless seeking of ever-increasing profits at the expense of workers, their wages and benefits, and at the expense of environmental degradation, one fears that their efforts may be reduced to isolated victories against this or that sweatshop, but ultimately they are doomed to futility.

Prison Labor in the USA

One of the subjects most neglected politically, religiously, and academically in the U.S. is the prison system and the role it plays socially as a class control instrument that is vicious in its cruelty and multiple injustices, especially, but not exclusively, for poor people of color who live mostly in inner cities where they are deprived of educational and job opportunities.

It is estimated that the “United States incarcerates five to eight times more of its people per capita than Western European nations--though its crime rates for nonviolent crimes are comparable to those of Western Europe--and seventeen times more than Japan.” (“Prisons and Executions- the U.S. Model: A Historical Introduction” by the Editors, *Monthly Review*, Vol. 53, No. 3, July/ August 2001. The entire issue is devoted to prisons and related criminal justice issues. I shall cite it as *MR*, with page number. Above quote is found in *MR* p.1).

Before leaving office President Eisenhower warned in 1959 that the U.S. faced danger from what he called a “military-industrial complex,” by which he meant a coalescence of industrial magnates and militarists who would exploit weapons production, far in excess of national defense needs, as a source of vast profits for a group of corporations and their shareholders in a position to take advantage of the resources of the state for their own enrichment. Cold War rhetoric and hyped up fears of communist dangers helped to facilitate this development, which has actually taken place, and of which the most recent

manifestation is now the so-called nuclear missile defense shield, which has brought universities into the picture as developers of programs and software for this enterprise. Many argue that the U.S. has had a *permanent war economy* since the Second World War, and expenditures on weapons justify this view.

It now appears that analogous to what Eisenhower predicted there has emerged in the U.S. a “prison-industrial complex where corporations are using the prison system as a source of profits in a variety of ways” (*MR* p.128). It is often pointed out that the U.S. has built far more prisons than schools in the past few decades. It is also pointed out that it costs more to keep an individual in prison than it would to send that person to Yale or Harvard.

The U.S. federal, state and adult correctional population currently is in the region of 6.5 million people, the highest number in any western democracy. (Department of Justice report in *The New York Times* August 26, 2001).

“The United States locks up more of its citizens than any other prosperous country, and its current rate of incarceration would have been inconceivable to Americans a generation ago...between 1980 and 2000 the number of incarcerated jumped to 2 million.” (“Too Many behind Bars”, *Washington Post* editorial, August 20, 2001, p. A14).

Questions of racial justice are raised when it is considered that 9.7 percent of black males in their twenties are in prison, compared with 2.9 percent of Hispanic men and 1 percent of white males in their twenties. Part of the reason for this disparity is that higher prison sentences are mandated for crack cocaine, the drug of choice of black males, than for powder cocaine, a more expensive drug and one favored more by white males. This fact, however, provides only a partial explanation, when it is considered that for assault, burglary and drug crimes more white males are arrested than blacks. And yet more blacks are in prison for these offenses (*Washington Post*, P. A14)

Prisons are now being built in towns where jobs had become scarce or nonexistent after owners of corporations had moved jobs south for cheaper energy costs and to avail of non-unionized labor in the late 60's and 70's. Now jobs have been and are being relocated overseas to avail of still cheaper labor as we have seen with reference to Nike and Wal-Mart and other sweatshop using corporations.

Towns along the Canadian border, for example, welcome prisons, which provide well paying jobs for guards and other prison workers who receive decent wages, health care benefits and pensions after twenty years service.

The populations of these prisons often come from New York City, particularly its high unemployment areas in Harlem and on the Lower East Side of the city. This means that relatives of prisoners must travel eight hours each way to visit spouses and relatives who are in prison. Often, the prisoners are guilty of low level drug related offenses for which mandatory and severe sentencing ensures that the prisons remain at full capacity.

It is also becoming increasingly more common to turn prisons over to corporations, which

run them for profit. Prisoners must pay exorbitant rates for phone calls to family members, calls that are more necessary than ever, since so many prisoners are incarcerated so far from home. Naturally, corporations which are running prisons for profit will want to maintain the highest occupancy rates, and this may result in lobbying and political pressure to see imprisonment as *the* solution to criminal conduct without regard to the influence of poverty, unemployment, poor education and other social pathologies prevalent in inner-cities and their ghettos.

When politicians invoke the “war on crime”, they invariably mean the war on crimes committed by the poor and people of color, since white collar criminals often get off with slaps on the wrist or suspended sentences, even though their crimes are often related to insurance, real-estate, Medicare, Medicaid and other systemic rip-offs that cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars annually. Constant hype in the media creates fear of low-level street criminals, and politicians ride to election victory by being ‘tough on crime’ and remaining firm in support of the death penalty

Little or no rehabilitation is offered prisoners, even young ones, in a majority of U.S. prisons. A result of this neglect is that some prisoners, on release, often quickly resume lives of crime and some are even more violent as a result of abusive treatment in prison. Lately, the *Washington Post* has had reports about fears in the nation’s capital, Washington, DC, concerning the imminent release of thousands of prisoners for whom no jobs exist in the ghettos from which they went to prison years ago.

The *Washington Post*, however, has not called for halfway houses for prisoners who have no homes or families to return to. Nor is there any move in Congress to provide funds for job training for poorly educated former inmates or any talk of assisting those being released to acquire drivers’ licenses or to provide them with means of transport to jobs when these are available in the suburbs. Meanwhile, vast sums of money are spent building new prisons (\$25 billion since 1990) and putting thousands of extra police on the streets. The ‘war on drugs’, conducted on the basis of a military campaign, serves to provide ideological justification for all this, despite the failures of the military model at home and abroad for decades to have serious long term effects on reducing either production of drugs or the avid consumption of them--particularly by wealthy youth-- consumption which is the main engine driving this vast criminal, enormously destructive and profitable business. Recently, California has introduced a policy of treating drug offenders rather than sending them to overcrowded prisons on the basis of mandatory sentences, as is still the case almost elsewhere.

The *Washington Post* has recently also had a devastating series about police brutality and the murders by police of people being arrested on suspicion of crime (many of whom are unarmed) that are taking place in Prince George’s County, an area bordering the nation’s capital.

The alleged brutality and murders by police in Prince George’s County are the highest in the U.S., though frequent instances are reported from all other police jurisdictions, especially in inner cities where poor communities of people of color are still concentrated, leading some

analysts to talk of an emerging police state in this country. Unfortunately, former President Clinton shamelessly pandered to this hysteria over crime and endorsed extending to new areas of crime a pro death penalty policy during both his runs for the presidency.

By now everyone knows that President George W. Bush presided over an unprecedented number of capital punishment executions while governor of Texas. Despite his current pandering to Catholic voters to secure his reelection in 2004, he shows no signs of listening to the pope or the U.S. bishops who have moved to positions of near-absolute condemnations of the death penalty. Bush knows that a majority of citizens, including Catholics, support the death penalty. Coincidentally, the policies being implemented by the Bush Administration are the very antithesis of the emphasis on government for the common good and the orientation towards the special option for the poor in contemporary Catholic social teaching.

The above analysis is necessary to see that prisons in the U.S. serve as a major mechanism of social control and to place in context a brief analysis of prison labor in the U.S.

Prisons for Profit

We have seen that relocating factories to developing countries and employment of sweatshop labor produce enormous profits for the capitalist class and their investors.

In recent years prison labor is being exploited as a source of vast profits also. Workers in prisons often earn as little as twenty-two cents per hour. Costs of shipping or expenditures on building factories are minimal. And this for some corporations makes prison labor an attractive alternative to transferring jobs overseas.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) laws governing conditions in the workplace do not apply in prisons. As a result toxic, dangerous materials are often used in prison industries. Carcinogenic generating foams are used in some unventilated shops and in California furniture made from such poisonous materials and in lethal circumstances *must* be purchased by state agencies, schools, hospitals and libraries. The Prison Industry Authority (PIA) ignores warnings against use of these toxic materials issued by the California Furniture Association and no remedial legal action appears to be taken.

Prison laborers receive no health insurance or pension benefits; there is no sick pay, and unions are forbidden. Small wonder that some commentators describe this system as legal use of slave labor on a scale not seen since the conclusion of the Civil War (*MR* p.67).

Standards set by the International Labor Organization (ILO) stipulate that:

- All workers have the right to form and join trade unions and to bargain collectively (ILO Conventions #87 and #98).
- Workers' representatives shall not be the subject of discrimination and shall have

access to all workplaces necessary to enable them to carry out their representative functions (ILO Convention #135).

- Employment shall be freely chosen. There shall be no use of force including bonded or prison labor (ILO Convention #29 and #105).

Clearly, prison industries in the US violate all these ILO Conventions.

The Food Industries

The Food-Industrial Complex in the USA is rife with every imaginable type of corporate malfeasance. A whole spectrum of workers' rights is violated both on farms and in slaughterhouses. There is obscene cruelty to animals before and during the slaughter process. The health of millions of consumers is placed at risk by meat production and processing practices that allow meat that is bacteria infected and lethal in to stores and into the kitchens of restaurants and of families and individuals who use it for food.

Pig farms, or factories as they are now being called, generate a vast amount of waste that is environmentally destructive and is causing life-threatening health problems for persons, families and communities exposed to it. The evidence for these assertions is widely available in books, newspaper exposes, in magazines and on the Internet, yet government attempts to bring about substantial change in what are outrageous conditions are stymied by corporate lobbyists and their political supporters, especially Republicans in Congress and in state legislatures. Let us look at each of these issues in turn.

Violations of Workers' Rights

If the whole array of human rights abuses, fraud, violence, pesticide poisoning, and injuries untreated and leading to life time disabilities suffered by farm workers, including women and young children, were being visited with governmental approval on workers in Cuba, there would be incessant, clamorous condemnations of the evils of communism and calls for another invasion. If they were being perpetrated in Russia, there would be talk among U.S. militarists of the need to threaten a nuclear strike to bring that *evil empire* (Reagan in his Manicheistic mood) to a sense of shame and to the practice of minimal human justice. But these forms of physical and moral violence are perpetrated every day on thousands of farm workers in the U.S., and they receive only occasional, passing notice in the media, and no crusades are launched by advocates of the right to life or by state or federal officials who are criminally involved but who remain silent because of lobbyist pressures and because of the race and ethnicity of the people who are being abused and ground down under the heels of agribusinesses, farmers and the bosses they hire precisely to intimidate workers with threatened and actual violence, so that a series of interlocking abuses of animals, workers, consumers and land may continue, because it generates enormous profits .

As Eric Schlosser has said of meatpacking workers who are crippled and maimed in the workplace, if what happens to Mexican children, women and men farm workers was happening to “blond-haired and blue-eyed people, there’d be enormous public outrage. People wouldn’t stand for it “ (“Unhappy Meals”, an interview in *Atlantic Unbound*, Dec. 14, 2000).

Farm workers in the USA are predominantly men, women and children from Mexico. Sometimes these workers are undocumented, which leaves them vulnerable to lower wages than others receive, because employers know they are afraid of deportation and so will stay quiet. Others who receive the minimum wage find it is not a living wage.

The children of migrant workers are taken out of school each year as their parents follow the crops arriving in each new location at the best time to harvest the produce. More than half the farm laborers in the United States are under age 15. Children as young as 12 may work legally on farms; in all other industries they must be 14 before they can work legally. Women, men and children work from sunrise to sunset in scorching heat and at breakneck speeds as they follow machinery or under strict supervision. If they do piecework the pace is grueling as they seek to make a sufficient amount to cover living and travel expenses. Often no bathrooms or drinking water or hand washing are provided in the fields of farmers who employ fewer than ten employees, and this where whole families work side by side. This exemption is explicitly provided for in the law despite the very large share of farm goods still produced on these smaller farms.

Embarrassment causes women especially to retain urine and this leads to urinary tract infections. Many people of both sexes restrict intake of water, when some is available, and in the torrid heat this also leads to severe health problems

Not infrequently airplanes or helicopters spray whole stretches of farms with pesticides and other noxious chemicals directly over where whole families are working. Recently Ephraim Camacho, from a support group called California Rural legal Assistance, who has worked among migrant workers for 15 years, reported, “Twelve women were poisoned in a vineyard near Terrabella, California. A helicopter passed overhead spraying them with pesticides and two women were hospitalized.” Camacho asked: “Can you imagine having children out in that?” (Cited in “Victims of America’s Harvest of Shame: 800,000 Child Labourers Provide Big Profits,” by Nick Paton Walsh, *Observer* (England), June 25, 2,000 at 24).

Women report giving birth to children with severe birth defects, and the spraying and chemicals in the soil are seen as the cause.

Camacho sometimes sees workers urinating on cuts received from knives and tools in an effort to treat them in the absence of any first aid kits that are seldom or never provided by employers or bosses. Most workers are exposed to sulphurous pesticides in the soil, which makes them, especially young children, dizzy and nauseated.

Nick Paton Walsh reports, “Across the nation, the migrant dispossessed face varying hazards. In Washington state the harvesting of apples, asparagus and cherries runs nearly all

year from January to November. Workers arrive by the vanload from Mexico to face organophosphates--a poison rated in the deadly 'category one' by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)--and a variety of injuries" (Ibid).

Living accommodations for most migrant workers are atrocious. People would not keep animals where humans are forced to live. Houses, if one may call them that, are often dirty and rat-infested and have no indoor plumbing. Often families are forced to sleep on mats on the floors. Outdoor plumbing seldom works.

Some attempts at forming unions have been successful, but every effort is made to suppress union activity, and police and armed thugs are used to crush new attempts to unionize. Boycotts of grapes, lettuce, or other products work for a while, but then consumers forget, and the impetus for significant change in labor conditions is lost.

The Beef Industry

Four agribusiness firms control about 85 percent of the meatpacking industry in the USA today. They are: Iowa Beef Packers (IBP), ConAgra, Excel (a subsidiary of Cargill), and National Beef. While the meatpackers have grown more powerful, the unions meant to serve the workers in their employ have grown weaker. IBP with about half its workers in a union sets industry standards for low wages and dangerous, sub-standard working conditions. Given the high rate of turnover in the workforce annually maintaining union strength is extremely difficult. Additional difficulties arise when, as often happens, many workers are illiterate, non-English-speaking, undocumented, immigrants, often mainly from Mexico. Such workers may fear deportation and so are not likely to engage in struggles for better conditions or higher wages.

Eric Schlosser, a correspondent for *The Atlantic*, has published a devastating account both of beef production and of the fast-food industry, of food contamination, environmental degradation, suffering of animals, exploitation of workers and a host of other abuses connected to how the food we eat is rendered a health hazard and entails a series of interconnected violations of all aspects of food production, service and consumption. Schlosser's book, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 2001, cited as *FFN* with page), is hailed as the equivalent for our times of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, which caused such outrage when it was published in 1906.

Houghton Mifflin's legal department, knowing the propensity of the beef industry to sue critics, spent six weeks reviewing *Fast Food Nation* before its publication.

Sinclair famously remarked following the reception accorded *The Jungle*: "I aimed for the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach." Schlosser argues, however, that while Sinclair's book ignited a public-health scandal, which led to enactment of food-safety legislation, it did nothing to improve the plight of packinghouse workers. In the decades that

followed publication of *The Jungle*, labor unions gained power in the industry and helped win better benefits for their members, decent working conditions and more of a voice in the workplace. The jobs were still dangerous and unpleasant, but wages made them desirable, and waiting lists existed for them on some occasions.

Then, in the 1960's Iowa Beef Packers (IBP) began a downward trend in the industry. In a move later followed by chicken related industries and others, they opened plants in rural areas far from areas where unions were strong and where often there were few other jobs. Immigrant workers mainly from Mexico were recruited, and skilled butchers were dispensed with. Unions were fought relentlessly. By the late 1970's meatpacking companies that wanted to remain in competition with IBP were forced to follow similar anti-worker and anti-union tactics or be forced out of business by the ruthless logic of capitalism.

Schlosser reports that these tactics forced wages in the meatpacking industry to fall by as much as 50 percent, leaving meatpacking one of the lowest paid industrial jobs in the nation with one of the highest turnover rates. A typical plant may hire an entirely new workforce each year. With shortages of personnel the work is made even more dangerous ("The Most Dangerous Job in America," by Eric Schlosser, *Mother Jones*, August 2001, P.41 cited as *MJ* with page).

Many commentators point out how highly centralized the meatpacking industry has become, with a few large agribusiness firms--IBP, ConAgra, Excel (subsidiary of Cargill), and National Beef--controlling about 85 percent of the market, up from 21 percent thirty years ago. And this at a time when unions are much weaker, which allows companies like IBP to set industry wide standards for low wages and unpleasant, dangerous working conditions. Most workers are non-English-speaking and illiterate. Many are undocumented, and all this renders the workers fearful, docile and vulnerable, and they remain poor. Schlosser comments, "From the industry's point of view, they are ideal workers, cheap, largely interchangeable, and disposable" (*MJ*, p.42).

Meatpacking: The Most Dangerous Job in the U.S.

Profit in meat processing in the beef industry is directly related to the speed of the production line. Some line speeds today are about 400 cattle per hour, compared with 175 per hour 25 years ago. Because cattle come in different sizes, processing has not been mechanized to the same extent as in the poultry industry. While some workers use forklifts and saws, the majority use sharp knives as workers did one hundred years ago. Accidents involving lacerations are frequent, because so many people work at high speed and in such close proximity. Knife wielding workers may be required to make the same knife cut 10,000 times a day. Others must lift a heavy carcass every few seconds. Injuries to shoulders, neck and hands result from cumulative trauma and often involve lifelong impairments for one worker in ten. Carpal tunnel syndrome is common from repeating the same motion so rapidly and so often. Workers are given a brief lunch break and a 15-minute break or two each day. The number and extent of injuries is falsified to evade

insurance claims and so that supervisors may receive bonuses for low accident rates.

Schlosser documents horrendous accidents, leading to maiming and death, in detail that is distressing to contemplate. He comments: “The rate of cumulative trauma injuries in meatpacking is the highest of any American industry. It is about 33 times higher than the national average” (*MJ* p.42, *FFN* 163, 185).

As dangerous as work at the processing line is, cleaning the plant after a day’s slaughter is even more dangerous. Cleaners are considered ‘independent contractors’ and receive about one third of the wages paid to production employees. Schlosser says: “ The men and women who now clean the nation’s slaughterhouses may arguably have the worst jobs in the United States” (*FFN* p.177).

Cleaning crews have to clean up after the slaughter of three to four thousand cattle weighing about one thousand pounds each. The crew members use high pressure hoses that shoot a mixture of water and chlorine heated to about 180 degrees, and this causes the plant to fill with a thick fog. With visibility at about five feet, workers ride platforms fifteen feet off the ground and climb ladders to spray catwalks. Floors are deep in muck, cleaning out grease, fat, manure and scraps of meat. Machine noise prevents the crew from hearing each other, and they are blinded by fog, which causes them to spray each other with scalding chemical-laden water. In a typical incident a worker lost two fingers in an accident and went into shock. He was back at work the following week and was told by his supervisor that *if one hand was no good he should use the other* (*FFN* p. 177).

It is no surprise to read that even absent official statistics the “death rate among sanitation crews is extraordinarily high. They are the ultimate in disposable workers: illegal, illiterate, impoverished, untrained. The nation’s worst job can end in just about the worst way. Sometimes these workers are literally ground up and reduced to nothing” (*FFN* p. 178).

How do such conditions escape condemnation and rectification by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)? The brief answer is because OSHA is understaffed and underfunded. In 1980, when Ronald Reagan was elected president, OSHA had a staff of 1,300 inspectors who had responsibility for more than 5 million workers, and at this rate a typical employer could expect an OSHA inspector every eighty years. Despite this, the Reagan administration cut the number of inspectors by 20 percent and made a new policy of “voluntary compliance” the norm. The death of a meatpacker on duty costs his employer a negligible amount in view of over-all profits. Even at this, statistics for accidents, injuries and death were falsified and covered up. Schlosser cites Congressman Tom Lantos, whose subcommittee conducted a meatpacking inquiry, as naming IBP “one of the most irresponsible and reckless corporations in America” (*FFN* p. 180).

One of President George W. Bush’s first acts in office was to rescind an OSHA ergonomics standard on repetitive-motion injuries that had been sought for decades.

The heart of the beef industry is in Texas, where safety and other standards are applied very leniently, if at all. The industry’s most powerful protector in Congress is Phil Gramm (R-

Tex), and his wife, Wendy Lee, is on the board of IBP (*MJ* p.46). Between 1987 and 1996, Gramm received more money from the meatpacking industry than any other senator did (*FFN* p.210).

Cattle Feed and Disease

Modern cattle feed lots are considered highly unsanitary; cattle live amid pools of manure and are given dirty water and food. However the word *dirty* does not adequately describe the feed given to cattle. Cattle, though naturally vegetarian, are routinely fed dead pigs, dead horses, dead poultry and cattle blood. They are also fed sawdust and waste from poultry plants. In 1994, cattle in Arkansas were fed 3 million pounds of chicken manure, which often contains *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*, parasites, antibiotic residues and arsenic. Spillage from cattle intestines often contaminates gut tables, from which contamination may be spread to meat being processed. Some cattle (one percent in winter, as high as fifty percent in summer) bearing *E. coli* 0157: H7 are routinely found in feedlots. This mutated bacterium can cause severe illness and organ failure. So contaminated is ground beef today, that a kitchen sink where it has been placed may contain more fecal bacteria than the average American toilet seat, a claim that Charles Gerba, a microbiologist at the University of Arizona, has verified in a series of tests (*FFN* p.221).

In July 2001 health inspectors in Wisconsin concluded that Brianna Kriefall, a healthy preschooler, died after eating watermelon that workers in a Sizzler kitchen had inadvertently splattered with juices from tainted sirloin tips. The *Washington Post* reports that the meat came from a Colorado slaughterhouse where beef had repeatedly been contaminated with feces, a well known breeding ground for *E. coli*. Even though inspectors had known of problems at the plant for a long time, they had been unable to have them fixed. Five hundred other people were sickened by the outbreak that killed Brianna, an outbreak that was caused by systemic failures by government and industry that allowed potentially deadly microbes into food (“An Outbreak Waiting to Happen: Beef Inspection Failures Let in a Deadly Microbe” by Joby Warrick, *Washington Post*, April 9, 2001, p. A01 to be cited by date).

Cruelty to Animals

Aside from evidence assembled by Schlosser of cruelty to animals, *The Washington Post* has also documented in detail horrendous treatment of animals as they are being slaughtered. Cattle have been documented being dismembered while still alive at an IBP plant, but it happens at plants on a daily basis all over the United States. (“They Die Piece by Piece: In Overtaxed Plants, Humane Treatment of Cattle is often a Battle Lost” by Joby Warrick, April 10, 2001, p. A02 cited by date). Warrick writes of the government taking no action against a Texas beef company that was cited 22 times in 1998 for chopping hooves off live cattle and for other violations. An animal health technician was fired at a Florida

beef plant because he reported that cows were being skinned alive (*WP* April 10).

Warrick notes that this is more than a matter of cruelty to animals: “Industry groups acknowledge that sloppy killing has tangible consequences for consumers as well as company profits. Fear and pain cause animals to produce hormones that damage meat and cost companies tens of millions of dollars a year in discarded product, according to industry estimates” (*WP* April 10).

Warrick writes: “But pathogens remain a major concern. The USDA estimates that salmonella is present in 35 percent of turkeys, 11 percent of chickens and 6 percent of ground beef. Each year, food borne pathogens cause 76 million illnesses and 5,000 deaths, according to the CDC” (*WP* April 9).

There is also the issue of the ethical imperative to treat animals with compassion as the right thing to do and something that American consumers are coming to demand as they become aware of the immorality of inflicting unnecessary pain on any animals, especially on food animals.

Hog Factories

North Carolina is now the hog capital of the world, home as it is to massive hog factories where hogs are warehoused, often under the most cruel conditions. Hogs are often kept in small, narrow cages where they have no room to turn, stand up, and scratch or do the things hogs that are free like to do. Some hogs, especially sows about to farrow, appear to go insane from confinement and chew on the metal bars of their cages. In slaughter houses, hogs prove difficult to stun, and many are observed being lowered into scalding water while still alive and screaming. (See www.Hogwatch.org for numerous references to Hog Factories).

A principal concern with hog factories is the massive amounts of environmentally destructive waste that they produce. In North Carolina hogs produce 19 million tons of feces and urine a year, or over 5,000 tons every single day. Many of North Carolina’s hogs are concentrated in the eastern coastal region, which contains ecologically important and sensitive network of rivers, wetlands and coastline.

Evidence is now mounting that industrial hog and chicken farms have polluted wetlands with animal waste, giving rise to vast microbial blooms, called *red tides* that kill fish and vegetation and deprive the ocean of oxygen

Currently, hog waste is collected in open-air pits euphemistically called waste lagoons. Hog waste contains massive amounts of nitrogen and phosphorous nutrients that cause overgrowth of algae and rob water of oxygen and kill fish when too much is concentrated in the water. Drinking wells are frequently contaminated, and harmful elements leach into the

water table.

Air is polluted by huge amounts of ammonia, which settles on soil and waters downwind.

Respiratory illnesses from breathing contaminated air are common near the waste lagoons, and many neighbors report that their quality of life is destroyed by noxious fumes.

In a manifestation of what is called *environmental racism*, massive waste deposits are situated near rural communities where poor people of color live and where less organized resistance to extensive pollution and noxious fumes is anticipated.

The pork industry in North Carolina is a \$2 billion a year enterprise that proves almost impossible to regulate.

Lately Meta hog enterprises are appealing for federal funds to help them clear up environmental pollution, as are cattle and poultry industries as well. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) appears ready to grant the food giants' wishes. However, environmental groups and advocates for small farms charge that this is a clear case of corporate welfare and one that reflects the power of agribusiness on Capitol Hill, and they see assisting the large corporations as threatening the existence of family farms.

Smithfield is the world's largest pork producer and last year earned \$75 million profit on sales of more than \$5 billion. Now environmentalists are wondering why taxpayers should bear the cost of helping Smithfield manage the waste its hogs produce. Congressman Lucas, Smithfield's principal sponsor in Congress, argues that the idea of government extending a helping hand to industry is not unique to agriculture. "There are no pure segments in the American economy," Mr. Lucas says. "Whether it's the things we do to subsidize airports or highways, we are subsidizing industries all across the board." (John Lancaster "For Big Hog Farms, Big Subsidies: Taxpayers May Foot the Bill for Environmental Cleanup" *Washington Post*, August 17, 2001, pp.1, 8,9). One may be forgiven for seeing in all this retaining massive private profits while socializing the costs, which is also endemic to capitalism.

Poultry Industries

Eric Schlosser argues that the poultry industry was transformed by a wave of mergers in the 1980's with eight chicken processors now controlling about two-thirds of the American market (FFN p.139). Chicken production spans an area in several states stretching from the eastern shore of Maryland to Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia and Mississippi an area known as the "Broiler Belt". This dispersal of chicken factories did not happen by accident. It was deliberately achieved by industrialists who shifted operations to the rural South, where the workforce is mainly poor women of color, where unions are non-existent or weak, and where small farmers desperately wish to stay on their land. Conditions in chicken factories

are harsh, and the work is unsanitary and unrelenting.

Salmonella contagion is a constant danger, and pollution is all around. Women standing in chicken fat, blood and waste must make 60 plucking motions per minute as birds come at them on a conveyor belt that never slows down or stops.

Carpal tunnel syndrome injuries are common, as are other traumatic conditions caused by stress and lack of breaks. Women who complain or are injured at work are often verbally abused and summarily dismissed. Frequently the chicken factories provide the only jobs at the minimum wage available for poor, illiterate women who often have families to support.

On September 3, 1991, in Hamlet, North Carolina, a chicken factory run by Imperial Foods caught fire. Many of the exit doors were locked. Twenty-five of the 200 workers in the plant were burned alive, and a further 56 were seriously injured. The chicken plants in North Carolina had not been inspected in years, nor had those in other states, although many fires had been reported, and an injury rate three times the national average had been reported. What this amounts to is criminal homicide in the case of the fire deaths, although no one was prosecuted or punished. Plant bosses, owners, state and federal officials who were negligent are complicit in the crime.

David Harvey, Professor of Geography at the Johns Hopkins University, comments: "There are a number of compelling reflections which this incident provokes. First of all, this is a *modern* (i.e., recently established) industry whose employment conditions could easily be inserted as a description into Karl Marx's chapter on 'The Working Day' in *Capital* (published in 1867) without anyone noticing much of a difference. It surely bodes ill for the 'free market' triumphalism to which we are currently exposed when looking towards the east, that such a miserable equation can so easily be made in the west between nineteenth-century levels of exploitation in Britain and employment conditions in a recently established industry in the most powerful advanced industrial capitalist country in the world (*Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference*, Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p.336).

Coincidentally, when the women were burned to death in the Hamlet chicken plant, no significant protest was made, aside from one by Jesse Jackson. At the time of the fire many feminists were in Washington, DC, supporting Anita Hill in her denunciations of Clarence Thomas, then a nominee to the Supreme Court for alleged sexual harassment. The women in the chicken plant were poor workers, and their class made them invisible, and this was surely one of the intentions of locating chicken plants in small rural towns. In terms of their being no protest, the plan paid off.

And so, as we complete this survey of some of the industries employing sweatshop labor, we are brought back to the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire of 1911, in which 146 employees died. For workers, not much has changed in the intervening century.

Are There White-Collar Sweatshops?

Jill Andresky Fraser thinks there are. Ms Andresky Fraser, finance editor of *Inc.* magazine and a general editor of *Bloomberg Personal Finance*, writes that for millions of upper-level, mainly white-collar workers, life at the office has become a corporate nightmare. Due to being constantly on call to answer cell phones, faxes, and e-mails, workers are putting in longer, more stressful hours. For many employees, salaries, pensions and benefits are reduced, and many workers lack job security.

There is widespread absenteeism; stress related medical costs and poor morale are manifest. (*White-Collar Sweatshop: The Deterioration of Work and Its Rewards in Corporate America* by Jill Andresky Fraser, W.W.Norton & Company, New York, London, 2001)

Now these and other concerns discussed by Ms Andresky Fraser are real, and the problems she deals with are worth addressing, but they do not constitute sweatshop conditions, nor are white-collar, upper-level workers victims of sweatshop conditions in any way similar to those we have discussed and which concern poor women and girls and male workers, mainly people of color in former colonies, and undocumented immigrants in the USA and elsewhere.

The insidiousness of Ms Andresky Fraser's attempt to co-opt the label *sweatshop* for white-collar workers and their woes is that the real victims of real sweatshops will once again become invisible. Workers who suffer from lethal work environments, who are subjected to the lowest wages, who suffer injuries and death in the workplace and who are subjected to all the other indignities we have documented, will be reduced to positions of silence, vulnerability and powerlessness in the workplace, which is exactly what the capitalist captains of industry want. This must not be allowed to happen, and Ms Andresky Fraser's attempt to make it happen must be rejected before it properly gets off the ground. There are no white-collar sweatshops, according to the accepted definition and its standard applications.

Evaluation in Light of CST and Laborem Exercens

A quick evaluation is to say that sweatshops violate every moral and social justice principle contained anywhere in Catholic social teaching. LE proclaims a "gospel of work" and time and again reiterates that work is for the human person, not the person for work. There is no gospel of work in receiving the lowest wages, in working in hazardous conditions and in being deprived of the right to unionize. Work in sweatshops is more like a prison sentence, one that must be undergone simply to survive. Everywhere sweatshops exist they manifest the priority of capital over labor, not what LE proclaims, which is the reverse. Sweatshops are neither mentioned nor envisaged in LE, but no suggestion is being made that this omission was deliberate, as they were not uppermost in human consciousness in the late 70's the way they are today.

LE advocates that workers become co-owners and co-policy makers in their industries. That simply will never happen the way the global economy is structured and organized today with the emphasis on the 'free market' and ever-increasing profit which accrue to the richest elements in the richest countries, never to the creators of the wealth, most of whose rights are violated.

The pope calls on the poor, exploited workers to enter into solidarity (LE #8), and he calls on Christians who are richer to support them in this, but at present only a few workers, religious activists, students and others are attempting this solidarity. Most others are unaware of the plight of sweatshop workers and their suffering.

LE speaks eloquently of the indirect employer (LE #17-20). Governments at local, national and state or federal levels are part of what is envisaged here, but only rarely does any branch of government intervene on behalf of workers' rights and safe working conditions. Everywhere government is on the side of capital and the prerogatives of owners of the means of production, and this to such an extent that it would be fully warranted to speak of a capitalist power and political structure system locally, nationally and transnationally. To the extent that schools, transport, health-care and housing for the poorest workers are the responsibility of society itself as indirect employer, where is that verified? Nowhere. And when attempts are made to give the needs of the poor priority over the wants of the rich, welfarism is invoked, and the poor are denounced as lazy and unworthy.

The majority of workers in most sweatshops, and the most exploited and most subject to sexual harassment and violence, are girls and women, but as elsewhere in CST, they and their needs are substantially absent.

Sr. Amata Miller, IHM, and other feminist scholars have pointed out the coherence between women's concerns and the concerns of workers (mostly male, it is assumed) endorsed in CST. Sr. Amata has pointed out that when *Rerum Novarum* was promulgated in 1891, already in the USA alone, more than 400,000 women worked outside the home, and 300,000 of them were girls under 15.

Another quarter of a million women were employed as physicians, surgeons, healers and medical service workers, but all are completely absent from *RN* and the ever-increasing number of women in the workforce remain absent from *CST* and from *LE*, despite wage and other discriminations suffered by women workers down to our own day (Amata Miller, IHM "Catholic Social Teaching-What Might Have Been if Women Were not Invisible in a Patriarchal Society" *The Journal for Peace and Justice Studies*, Vol.3, Issue 2, 1991, pp.51-70).

Nowhere perhaps are the limitations of a patriarchal institution and its patriarchal power structures more glaringly evident than here, and the situation is one of *social sinfulness* despite all the efforts made to whitewash it or cover it up. Seeing women as homemakers with husbands who are the family earners is not only anachronistic today, it is inexcusable and a source of deep pain and offence to women. Until women are recognized as full co-equal members of all church, ministry and power structures, this scandalous situation is

likely to continue.

Women as supporters of families and as workers outside the home as a matter of economic necessity need living wages, access to health care, to day care, and they have a right to spouses who share all the tasks of child raising and home making all as matters of social justice that is not blind to their very existence and needs as workers. Instead of all this, what we see are women exploited as workers with a double work load, the job and the home, and poor women of color are doubly and triply exploited when they are paid less than white women and when they are consigned to the lowest, most demeaning jobs on the basis of their race, color and class. When women are made invisible and degraded in religious institutions--and they are, everywhere--why should male controlled social and labor institutions proceed any differently?

In his social teaching and in public discourses, the pope has repeatedly condemned *savage capitalism* by which he means a system operating without moral, legal or political restraints, which is exactly how the capitalist system operates globally today.

In his Apostolic Exhortation of the Synod of America (AESAs), January 1999, the pope, under the sub-heading *Social sins which cry to heaven*, spoke about *neoliberalism*, a term some use to disguise the *laissez faire* capitalism promoted by the WB, the IMF, and the G-8 countries, especially for the countries whose labor is exploited by sweatshop industries. It is only strong unions and a vigilant labor movement that prevent neoliberal policies being implemented in western European countries as they are elsewhere.

The pope said: "More and more, in many countries of America, a system known as 'neoliberalism' prevails; based on a purely economic conception of man, this system considers profit and the law of the market as its only parameters, to the detriment of the dignity of and respect due to individuals and peoples. At times this system has become the ideological justification for certain attitudes and behavior in the social and political spheres, leading to the neglect of the weaker members of society. Indeed, the poor are becoming evermore numerous victims of specific policies and structures which are often unjust" (#56).

Bishop Miguel Hesayne, in a letter to the president of Argentina, went much farther than the pope in condemning neoliberalism and in making a drastic proposal to denounce what he sees as an intrinsically evil system. The bishop threatened to deny President de la Rúa Holy Communion on the basis of a catechesis on the Eucharist, which derives from the Apostolic tradition as enunciated in 1 Cor 11:17. (Here, let us recall, Paul takes a prophetic stance on behalf of the oppressed and the voiceless as he discusses the social dimensions of celebrating Eucharist. The text does not refer to worthiness individualistically conceived, as it was later interpreted when the social dimension was lost).

Bishop Hesayne does not believe that the president is worthy to receive Holy Communion, because he implements in Argentina the neoliberal ideology "that causes a situation of death for millions of inhabitants, deaths of babies recently born, speeding up the death of the elderly, and the slow death of generations of youth of weak health, etc., etc." The bishop asks: "Is this not the 'crime of abortion' for the already born?" (" Bishop Threatens

President with Excommunication” in *Houston Catholic Worker*, May-June 2001, pp. 1, p.8, to be cited as *HCW* with page).

Bishop Hesayne calls the socioeconomic measures adopted by the Argentine government in making legal payments (on loans from the WB and the IMF, it is understood) legal payments which the Bishop sees as unjust.

The bishop says there are alternatives, and people should be called together to find them. There are, he says, “feasible programs which prioritize life and not financial interests” (*HCW*, p.8). “All the acts of the government,” the bishop charges, “have been in favor of the markets--principally foreign markets--and against the people” (*HCW*, p. 8).

Bishop Hesayne reminds the president that what matters for the God of Jesus Christ is the “man in the concrete, the human person.” He further suggests that political leaders should be ready for martyrdom if they wish to be governmental leaders and continue to be Christian, and he reminds the President that St Thomas (More) is patron saint of politicians. (*HCW*, p.8).

Returning to his theme of a socially conscious Eucharistic catechesis, the bishop says, “We have to end the scandal inside the Church, in which the victimizer and the victim both go to Communion” (*HCW*, p. 8). The bishop concludes this extraordinary letter with the hope that all may be converted to the Gospel of Jesus (*HCW*, p.8).

The Wall Street Journal recently described Argentina’s economy as “highly fragile” and announced that the WB had approved a \$400 million loan, while the IMF increased its lending pact with Argentina to \$22 billion from \$14 billion, leaving the country with a debt burden of \$130 billion (“World Bank Report on Argentina Warns of Fragile Economy,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 29, 2001, p. A6). As interest on the debt escalates, the nation may well find itself subjected to *structural adjustment programs (saps)* by the IMF and the WB. This means that the interest on the debt will be paid mainly by workers and the poor. Wages will be stagnant or decrease, food prices will increase, and money that should go for healthcare, education and housing will be siphoned off and end up in the banks of the wealthiest nations and in affluent shareholders’ pockets.

I have already suggested that the P.C.J.P. should consider addressing the Sweatshop issue as a concern for the whole church. Many of the poorest Catholics, especially in Central America, in South-East Asia, in Vietnam, in Mexico, Haiti and in the USA itself are victims of sweatshop exploitation.

The P.C.J.P. has already produced an excellent document, *Towards a Better Distribution of Land: The Challenge of Agrarian Reform* (1997), which describes how small peasant farmers and indigenous people are deprived of their land holdings and title to them by violence and fraud. These dispossessed people then have no option except to migrate to the perimeters of large cities, where they are then fodder for sweatshop factories. This document could be combined with one on the global economy and sweatshops to powerful effect.

Members of the great world religions, especially the poorer, weaker member--of whom a majority are women and girls--are also exploited. Does this not provide a unique opportunity for the Catholic Church, the WCC and people from the great religions of the East to collaborate in addressing the great human suffering caused by exploitation, and to bring to bear their liberative traditions in addressing this global problem?

Within the Catholic communities, national Conferences of bishops could commission justice and peace groups to find the information on where sweatshops are located, and what conditions in them are like. The best model for producing a document adequate to the problems and systemic abuses represented by sweatshops would be to have widespread consultation and collaboration and a series of drafts, as the US Bishops did when producing *The Challenge of Peace* (1983) and *Economic Justice for All* (1986). Above all, such a document should give voice to exploited workers and enable them to tell their stories. Otherwise, the document will speak *at* and *to* the victims of the global economy, but it will not enable them to speak for themselves. Moreover, the document must have equal participation by women and girls, poor men and youth if it is to have prophetic resonance in the church. And then it needs to be brought to all parishes, especially affluent and middle-class ones where consumers for cheaply priced goods produced by sweatshop labor help keep the system profitable and in place.

Sweatshops are driven by corporate greed, by the free access of capitalist enterprises to locations where labor and resources are cheap, where there are slack or no environmental laws and where unions are excluded or harassed by states and their police.

Above all, sweatshops are not something separate from capitalism. Dr. John Sarich, who teaches economics at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York City, has repeatedly emphasized this point to me as we exchanged e-mails about sweatshops. He writes, "Sweatshops are part of the ebb and flow of the accumulation of capital as it relates to the armies of labor, class struggle and primitive accumulation (especially today in places like China, Bangladesh, the former Soviet Union and elsewhere)."

The sweatshop phenomenon indicates that the time has come for CST to see capitalism as an inherently exploitative system that today commits white-gloved genocide, in Bishop Hesayne's memorable phrase. Capitalist enterprises are also wrecking the planet in the interest of ever-increasing profit and obscene wealth for the few, while 1 billion people go to bed hungry every night and another billion are underhoused, underemployed, underfed, uneducated--a vast reserve army who are compelled to take the lowest paying, demeaning jobs in sweatshops where they produce stylish goods at low prices for the affluent.

What is an economy for? Is it to force children, women, and men into dangerous work environments where they are virtual slaves to production quotas while their own children are without education and health care and are hungry? Is not an economy a means of providing all persons with food, clothing, shelter, health care, education and a minimally decent standard of living which respects air, earth, water and planet earth, our only communal home, and which respects other species who share this home with us (and which

today we abuse so willfully)?

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