

This Holiday Season, Remember the Workers

Inhumane and unconscionable conditions are allowed to flourish in globalization's sweatshops. How we can allow this to happen?

- In India this past October, kids as young as 10 were found making clothing for **GapKids** to be sold during the holiday season. Hungry and tired, the children were reportedly beaten if they cried during the 16-hour days. For their efforts, many were not even paid.
- The conditions under which many Barbie and other Mattel toys are made should startle holiday shoppers. This fall, more than 5,000 Chinese workers were found putting in standard 14 ½ hour days making products for the world's largest toy manufacturer. Mandatory overtime at the plant even exceeds China's legal limit by 260 percent. In 2006, workers practically lived at the facility, working 105 hours a week.
- When Alcoa decided to move operations from Mexico to Honduras, they told the Mexican workers, "we can hire two or three Hondurans for every Mexican." Today, the Hondurans toil in abusive conditions – and, as Alcoa promised – are paid below-subsistence wages for the auto parts they make. When the workers stood up and formed a union earlier this year, Alcoa swiftly moved to fire nearly 90 percent of the union's founding members.
- Crucifixes and sweatshops should never go hand in hand, however recent news from China shows just that. Young women, many just 15 to 16 years old, routinely work from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 or 11:30 p.m. seven days a week making the crucifixes bound for U.S. church gift shops and other stores. Even longer shifts (such as the 25-hour shifts to meet production deadlines) aren't uncommon. Workers receive just half of China's legal minimum wage for their work, and are required to live in filthy and crowded company housing.
- The Olympics should be a time for recognizing worldwide achievement. But, the goods many athletes will wear at the next games represent the opposite. Speedo gear is made by Chinese workers that oftentimes go for months without a day off. These workers are also held to grueling production mandates where workers fear they will be maimed by equipment if they slow down for even a moment. As one worker reported, "What lies in front of us is a blanket of darkness. We have no hope."



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