

Students Against Sweatshops

activists' bulletin



February 2007

★INSIDE: CAMPUS WEEK OF ACTION AGAINST SWEATSHOPS, 12-18 FEBRUARY

DEFEND JOBS AT BURBERRY!

February 14th is synonymous with slushy cards and expensive gifts but this year it has been declared as International Day Against Burberry.

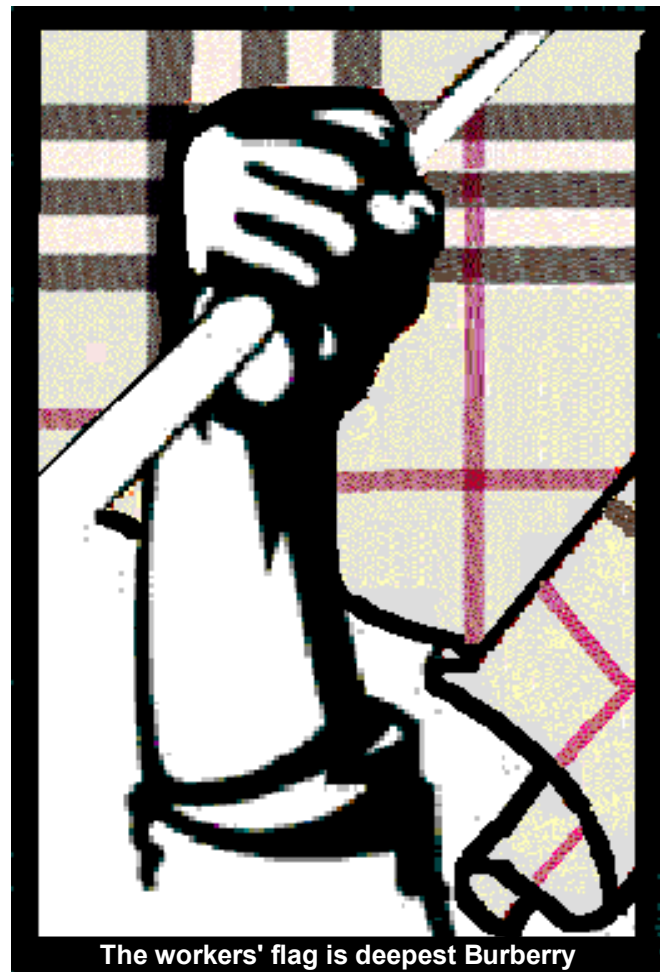
The prestigious clothing and accessories company have recently come under fire in reaction to their plan to axe 310 jobs by moving production from their South Wales factory to China. The bosses hope to take advantage of China's repressive labour laws and non-unionised, ultra-cheap labour.

BAFTA severed ties with its high profile sponsor under the threat of a black-tie protest outside its annual reception event. Mervyn Burnett, GMB Officer dealing with Burberry in South Wales said "GMB are pleased that BAFTA will not now be associated with Burberry. The GMB ruling Central Executive Council meeting in London on February 13th will consider how to step up and intensify the campaign against the Burberry decision to move these jobs to China".

The GMB's campaign has already won a significant success by pushing Burberry to keep the factory open until March to ensure workers security over the festive season and into the new year but that is not the end of the fight; GMB have vowed to fight to keep production on the site permanently. We do not however raise the GMB's slogan "Keep Burberry British" - fighting job cuts must be combined with genuine international workers' solidarity.

Burberry's vast profits will be increasing if the move goes ahead, as the current production cost of £11 for a polo shirt will fall to only £4 made by super-exploited workers in China. At home the story is far more grim with the redundancy offer made to the workers at Treorchy standing at £1000; not even enough to buy this season's hottest catwalk accessory, the Beaton handbag, priced at a lucrative £1095.

On January 27th No Sweat activists wrapped up



The workers' flag is deepest Burberry

the front of the Burberry store on Regent Street, central London, watched by a large posse of press and helped by a group of Burberry workers. With brown paper and fake second class stamps we "posted" Burberry to China.

Another protest at the Regent Street store has already been organised, on February 14th, from 5-6pm. For more information contact Mick on 07904 431159.

Heather Shaw. Manchester No Sweat

www.studentsagainstsweatshops.org.uk

CAMPUS WEEK OF ACTION

The week of action against sweatshops is taking place from the 12th to the 18th of February.

We've got a packed schedule of protests, pickets, meetings and film showings in order to raise awareness of the massive exploitation which takes place under modern globalised capitalism.

In the face of exploitation carried out by multinationals, workers' solidarity is key - supporting workers fighting for their rights both at home and abroad. But what exactly are we up against? Here's a few examples of the companies we'll be taking on during the week of action;

Apple - iExploitation

- **Founder Steve Jobs has fortune of \$3billion whilst workers earn as little as £27 a month**
- **iPods made in factory "compounds" in China with populations larger than Newcastle!**

With Apple's iPhone set to be the gadget of the year, its predecessor the iPod has become iconic. Over 2 million people in the UK own one and in 2005 22.5 million were bought internationally! It is no surprise that with all this, Apple founder Steve Jobs has accumulated a fortune of \$3billion.

In June 2006 newspapers in the UK ran the story that Apple Corporation were using Chinese sweatshop labour in the production of their best selling product. Apple refuted the claims, saying "Apple is committed to ensuring that working conditions in our supply chain are safe, workers are treated with respect and dignity" but agreed to investigate further.

When journalists from *The Mail* visited some of the factories in China they found huge compounds, housing up to 200,000 workers, a population larger than Newcastle's! One factory, Foxconn's Longhua plant, has workers living in dormitories within the compound, sleeping 100 to a room with a bucket of water in which to wash their clothes. Security on the compound is tight and visitors are forbidden, employees are searched on their way in and out of the factories in an attempt to thwart any industrial espionage. Working for 15 hours and being made to perform military-style drills before their shifts, the workers are paid the equivalent of £27 a month, about half of what weavers earned in factories in the North land in 1805, allowing for inflation.

Foxconn is one of the world's largest IT companies and is investing £31million to take advantage of the cheap workforce in China, where a fifth of its workforce is deployed working on Apple products. Apple's investigation into the allegations was predictably lacking, claiming that Foxconn were compliant with their codes of conduct "in most areas" and that they were "taking steps to correct the violations we found". One of these violations was "excessive" hours which Foxconn say they have reduced to a "normal" 60 hour week. Trade unions criticised the report for its bias and lack of



independence, as it interviewed only 100 of the thousands of workers.

Tesco - Every Little Hurts

"Farming is on its knees and food processors are issuing repeated profit warnings as they struggle to meet the demands of the Tesco monopoly"

- *Brian Revell, Transport & General Workers' Union national organiser for food and agriculture.*

Supermarkets in the UK are getting bigger and hungrier with chains exchanging worker rights for lower prices and increased profits. Through their supply chain these companies can exert huge amounts of pressure on processing plants both in the UK and abroad to produce goods in larger quantities and at lower costs. This leads to job losses and poor conditions for many workers. Food processing plants cannot produce goods at the prices that Tesco and their competitors demand to pay!

In Chard, in 2006, local GMB activists organised a demonstration outside Tesco when the company withdrew a contract from a local employer resulting in 850 job losses in the South West, and 500 in Chard alone.

Tesco's £2.21 billion profits can be seen as a direct result of the suppliers and workers who have been squeezed dry. The T&G has set up a national co-ordinating committee to bring together workers from across the Tesco empire.

The new union initiative is the first step on the road to fighting for jobs and decent pay, terms and conditions in the country's top supermarket. Workers are reporting pressures to make efficiency savings as well as demands to give up hard won pay and working conditions in order to be admitted into the Tesco pension schemes.

Ron Webb, T&G national secretary for transport claims, "Unbelievable though it may be, Tesco is actually looking to make job cuts on the day it claims to be the consumers' friend. We do not accept these cuts are either necessary or ethical. How can a multi-billion pound outfit attack the pay, terms and conditions of those people it relies on to get its goods to the stores?"

AGAINST SWEATSHOP LABOUR

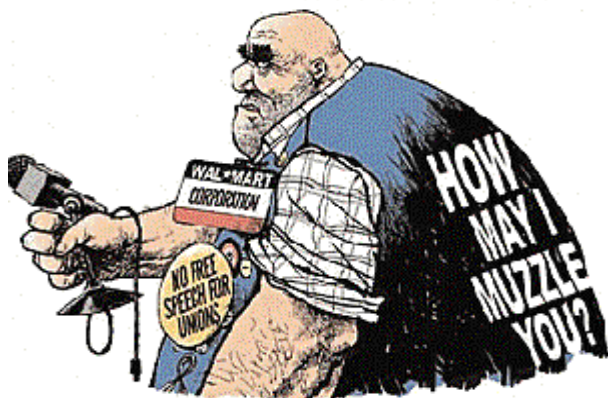
Asda Wal-Mart, global experts in exploitation

Asda workers get minimum wage whilst Wal-Mart CEO rakes in \$17.5million in one year!

Child Labour Law violations, no breaks and anti-union policies in the USA

"Asda Wal-Mart makes a big deal of its low prices, but behind the bargains exists a trail of exploitation and hardship. Asda Wal-Mart is riding roughshod over workers on a global scale" - Louise Richards, War on Want

Wal-Mart is the world's largest retail company and its constant drive for profits has led to poverty wages and sweatshop conditions for its workers. Wal-Mart management are threatening the rights of the workers even further by cutting breaks, removing grievance mechanisms and reducing workplace health and safety standards.



Although the company's CEO, Lee Scott, was paid more than \$17.5 million during 2004, workers' wages are on average 20% lower than the standard in the industry. Managers are told to keep labour costs at less than 8% of instore sales and they must also be reduced by 0.2% annually. This drives managers to over-stretch their workforces to cover chronic staff shortages, and in some cases, to break the law by employing children and undocumented migrant workers.

One audit of 25,000 employees in 128 Wal-Mart stores in the USA found 1,371 violations of child labour laws, such as working too late, too many hours and during school time. It also found 60,000 cases of workers being forced to work through breaks, and 16,000 through meal times.

Wal-Mart's anti-union policy is central to keeping down their costs. Wal-Mart equips managers with its 'Manager's Toolbox to Remaining Union Free', which states: 'Staying union free is a full time commitment. Unless union prevention is a goal equal to other goals and objectives in the organisation, management will not devote the necessary day in, day out attention and effort.' If there is any evidence of moves towards unionisation, managers are ordered to phone the Wal-Mart union hotline immediately.

For more info about the week of action and how you can help, visit the website at www.nosweat.org.uk, phone Heather on 07969 597521, or email her at centre_stage_red@yahoo.co.uk

Oaxaca activist comes to Britain

2006 saw a massive upsurge of popular resistance in Oaxaca, Mexico, where a teachers' strike organised by radical trade unionists spiralled into the occupation of the city by workers, peasants and students, and the establishment of the "Oaxaca Commune", the city under the democratic control of the APPO (Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca).

Demanding the satisfaction of the teachers' demands as well as the resignation of the right-wing governor Ulises Ruiz, the movement was brutally suppressed by thousands of federal police. Having invaded the city to break the Commune, they used further violence to suffocate the massive demonstrations which took place in resistance to state terrorism. At least 4 people were killed, including an Indymedia reporter. Hundreds of demonstrators were arrested.

And, as part of the anti-sweatshop week of action, Mexican activist Andres Aullet is coming to Britain to talk about the huge struggle of the people of Oaxaca.

He works with the Committee of Relatives of Political Prisoners of Oaxaca. Along with other activists, he is helping to set up a nation-wide body to coordinate the struggle for the release of all political prisoners in Mexico.

Andres was an activist during the strike of UNAM (Universidad Autónoma de México) in 1999, from which he graduated as a lawyer. His meeting dates are listed below - the meetings will also feature unique footage of the Mexican teachers' struggle and film from the frontline, inside Oaxaca.

Sunday 11th February: 5.00 at the Cowley Club, 12 London Road, Brighton (more details: 07904 431 959)

Monday 12th: 6.30 in Arts 01.02, on UEA Campus, Norwich (more details: 07876 663659)

Tuesday 13th: 1.00 at the Bowett Room, Queens, Cambridge University and at 7.30 at the International Community Centre, Mansfield Road, Nottingham (more details: 07779 328 418)

Wednesday 14th: at 6.15 in G/020, Goodricke College, York University

Thursday 15th: 1.00 in Basement, Dover Street building, Dover Street, Manchester University, and at 7.00 in Lecture Theatre 2 in the Arts Tower at Sheffield University (more details: 07961 040 618)

On **Friday 16th**, at 12 noon we'll be handing a petition in at the Mexican Embassy, London

And Andres Aullet will be speaking in London at 2.00pm on **Saturday 17th** at SOAS, off Russell Square, central London.

Students Against Sweatshops is a student activist network which fights against the bosses of sweatshops worldwide - campaigning in solidarity with exploited workers.

We demand an end to

- Child labour
- Unsafe conditions
- Forced overtime
- Harassment of female workers

We fight for

- A living wage and reasonable hours
- Safe working conditions
- Independent trade union organization

We believe that the way to bring an end to exploitation in sweatshops is to build practical solidarity with workers' and students' organisations, and to work with the anti-capitalist movement in the UK and abroad.

Students against Sweatshops support locally organised trade unions in every way possible. We provide financial support by organising fundraising events and we also raise awareness of international struggles for workers rights by building links with union organisers and bringing them to the UK to share experiences and help us learn from the ongoing struggle.

If you would like to submit an article or report for the next issue of the Students Against Sweatshops bulletin, please contact davidthetrot@googlemail.com

STRIKE WAVE IN ZIMBABWE

On February 5th teachers across Zimbabwe began an indefinite general strike for pay and conditions, joining doctors and nurses already taking action against poverty pay.

With inflation running at over 1,200% (the worst in the world), dictator Robert Mugabe is keeping public sector workers' wages down in order to have enough money to keep his regime afloat.

With as many as 80% of Zimbabweans unemployed, the poverty and health situation is dire. But the pay of hard-pressed medical staff is falling sharply - they have now been on strike for six weeks in reaction. The army has been brought in to supervise student nurses.

Teachers, paid just £9 a month, are often unable even to afford the bus fare to work - their wage is barely one-fifth of the government's own figures for an income on which an ordinary family could meet its basic survival needs. Teachers are fighting bravely to obtain a living wage - this in the face of a government determined to crush any sign of a workers' movement.

In one recent incident, 22 miners' wives in the village of Shurugwi went to a police station to ask permission to hold protest about the miners' wages. Their request rejected, the women started to walk back towards the bus stop. Before they got there, the police chased them down, arrested them and locked them up in the cells for the night.

The miners' wives — several pregnant and some with babies — were let out the next morning after paying "admission-of-guilt fines".

The police alleged that "the women walking together to the bus stop constituted an illegal demonstration".

In this atmosphere, the regime is heavily reliant on the military's support if it is to "keep order". But even the recent 800% rise in army pensions and the



relatively high wages of soldiers (army privates are paid twice as much as teachers) are not preventing chronic desertion and absenteeism from the armed forces. Soldiers are increasingly unwilling to defend the government against the people whose poverty they share.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions - 15 of whose members are demanding compensation for being tortured by the regime after a demonstration last September - has given the government until February 23rd to address pay grievances of doctors and teachers or face a general strike by workers across the country. It is clear that the country faces an explosion of popular anger against the tyrannical regime and its economic chaos.

Alabama 3 benefit gig for No Sweat

Fri Feb 23, the Jamm, Brixton, 8pm - 5am
country-acid-house - as heard on *The Sopranos*
£6 - Get tickets from www.nosweat.org.uk

For more information about Students Against Sweatshops,
call Laura on 07890 209479, or email laura_schwartz2003@yahoo.co.uk
Visit our website - www.studentsagainstsweatshops.org.uk