



Leo W. Gerard
International President

July 20, 2007

VIA FAX

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

I write today to bring your attention to a critical piece of legislation, The Decent Working Conditions and Fair Competition Act (S.367). This legislation has the power to incorporate the values of dignity and respect for human rights in our trade relationships. The bill will ban sweatshop goods from entering our markets and prevent our government from purchasing sweatshop goods with taxpayer dollars.

For far too long, our trade agenda has focused on corporate protections while ignoring the lives of human beings toiling within the global economy. As a result, products reaching American soil often come with the taint of being produced in inhumane conditions. Many workers making products destined for the United States do not have the option of rejecting forced labor, unsafe conditions, indecent pay, discrimination, or other violations of their rights. Instead, because of their poverty and desperation, they are the victims of a global trading system that allows, if not encourages, horrendous working conditions to swell corporate bottom lines.

In just one example, an investigation by the New York Times found that sweatshops in Jordan were making products for sale in the United States under horrific conditions – including forced 20-hour shifts, deprivation of food, and frequent beatings – and these products were entering the United States duty-free, under the U.S.-Jordan Free Trade Agreement.

American workers are forced to compete with products made under these conditions resulting in downward pressure on wages and benefits, lost jobs and destruction of entire communities.

The United States currently prohibits the importation of products made with prison labor, but does not similarly prohibit the importation of products made in sweatshops under slave-like conditions. What's more, if a U.S. retailer finds that one of its competitors is importing products made in a foreign sweatshop, it has no recourse in U.S. courts, and is placed at a competitive disadvantage.

We can do better— and we must.

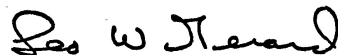
Consumers have a right to know the products they purchase are not produced in sweatshop conditions. Businesses have the right to compete fairly, and not with companies that engage in worker abuses. Shareholders have the right to invest with the knowledge that they are not supporting sweatshop practices. And, most importantly, workers around the globe have the right to earn a living without the degradation of toiling in inhumane conditions.

The Decent Working Conditions and Fair Competition Act simply states that if products are made in sweatshop conditions, they are not welcome in our markets. A product is considered a sweatshop good if it is produced under conditions that do not meet core labor standards. Those standards include the right to associate, organize and bargain collectively, a prohibition on forced or child labor, and basic conditions of work including wages, safety and health protections, and hours of work.

This bill is rooted to previous legislation called the Dog and Cat Protection Act of 2000. That Act prohibits the importing or exporting of dog or cat fur products into the U.S. market. The goal of this Act is to deter the brutality and suffering inflicted upon dogs and cats, whose fur was being used for products such as coats that were entering the U.S. Is it not time to extend these same protections to human beings?

This is not about free trade or protectionism, but rather what are the rules that should be in place to insure just and fair competition? The Decent Working Conditions and Fair Competition Act is a proactive step we can take to bring justice to our trade relationships. I hope you will join me and over 850,000 Steelworker members in supporting this legislation. Please show your support by becoming a co-sponsor today.

Sincerely,



Leo W. Gerard
International President

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