

2008 Wal-Mart Sweatshop Workers Speaking Tour ROUND-UP



OHIO and MICHIGAN – From April 7-18, 2008 workers from factories and fields abroad visited communities in Michigan and Ohio to raise awareness about labor conditions in Wal-Mart's supply chains. The tour was organized by the **International Labor Rights Forum** and **Sweatfree Communities** and included a Cambodian garment worker and a Costa Rican pineapple picker.



Didier Leiton, from Costa Rica, worked for 17 years on pineapple and banana plantations and has worked for two years as a union organizer for SITRAP (Sindicato de Trabajadores Agrícolas y Plantaciones, or Union of Agricultural and Plantation Workers), organizing workers on plantations that supply fruit to Wal-Mart stores. He has been 'black listed' by the plantations for his activities with the union.

“ I was fired because I wanted to fight for my rights. I wanted to be part of a union. ”

- Didier, at a tour stop in New Philadelphia, Ohio

While he recalls working 12 to 15 hours a day, six to seven days a week for \$5 a day, Didier had the opportunity to visit a Wal-Mart store in Kalamazoo, Michigan where Costa Rican pineapples are sold. At Wal-Mart, Didier picked up a pineapple priced at \$2.48. He informed a Wal-Mart shopper buying a pineapple about the pesticides they used which have made him and others sterile, caused birth defects and contaminated the water around the plantations. Didier shared his story with communities across Ohio and Michigan, asking them to urge Wal-Mart to enforce humane labor practices in its supply chains.

Savin Phal, from Cambodia, spent many years working in garment factories, where she sewed clothing for Wal-Mart. A mother of five, she was recently fired for trying to form a union, and is now vice president of her local union in the King's Land Garment Factory. Her local union is an affiliate of the Coalition of Cambodia Apparel Workers Democratic Union (C.CAWDU). Savin directly experienced labor abuses by factory management, including being forced to work long hours and facing intimidation in response to her organizing activities.

“ I would like to ask Wal-Mart and people in the U.S. to put pressure on the owner of this factory, King's Land, to negotiate with our union and respect Cambodian labor laws and our rights. ”

- Savin, at a tour stop in Dearborn, Michigan

Often working 14 hours a day in a hot factory in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh, on average Savin would make \$1.50 a day, struggling to feed her five children and pay for other basic living expenses. At the same Wal-Mart in Kalamazoo, Savin picked up a pink shirt similar style to those she used to make before being fired. Savin explained that she would earn two cents for every 12 tasks she performed, including stitching size tags and collars onto shirts. The pink shirt at Wal-Mart was priced at \$8.84. Like Didier, Savin told her story to communities throughout Ohio and Michigan, and asked that Wal-Mart enforce its Code of Conduct.

“ Wal-Mart is the biggest corporation in the world and therefore has the most responsibility to ensure that the workers who provide their products are being treated and paid fairly. ”

Trina Tocco, International Labor Rights Forum

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

EVENTS ~

The two-week tour kicked off at Goshen College in Indiana and included stops in Ohio in Cincinnati, Columbus, New Philadelphia, and Cleveland. The tour moved onto Michigan during the second week with stops in Dearborn, East Lansing, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Traverse City. Events were attended by students, community members, church-goers, union members, and others. One of the events in Dearborn included a workshop at the *Labor Notes Conference* on April 13th. The tour also managed to spare a few extra hours to show support to striking UAW workers in Three Rivers, MI who are demanding decent pay and healthcare from their boss American Axle.

MEETINGS WITH POLICYMAKERS ~

In addition to speaking with communities, the tour also had the opportunity to meet with policy makers in Michigan and Ohio. These meetings focused on ending tax dollar support for sweatshops. Savin and Didier connected abusive labor practices in supply chains to government purchasing of products such as uniforms for public employees like police officer, firefighters, and parks service employees. The speaking tour was able to gather widespread support for the passage of SweatFree policies both at local and state levels. A few of the policymakers also committed to sending letters directly to Wal-Mart requesting it respond to the issues raised by the workers and immediately take action. SweatFree campaign kick-off events are being planned for July 1 in Ohio and Michigan. Learn more at www.sweatfree.org or contact Vicki@sweatfree.org

PRESS CONVERAGE ~

- * [Sweatshop Laborers Back Unions](#) *Goshen News* (Goshen, IN), April 7, 2008
- * [Workers Tell All - Former Sweatshop Employee Recounts Experiences During Tour Stop](#) *Times-Reporter* (Dover-New Philadelphia, OH), April 10, 2008
- * [New Wal-Mart Spurs Opposition](#) *Arab American News* (Dearborn, MI), April 11, 2008
- * [Sweatshop Workers Speak Out, Creating Awareness](#) *Goshen College Record* (Goshen, IN), April 11, 2008
- * [Wal-Mart Sweatshop Workers Tour at GVSU](#) *Media Mouse* (Grand Rapids, MI), April 17, 2008
- * [Group Focuses on Working Conditions](#) *Kalamazoo Gazette* (Kalamazoo, MI), April 18, 2008
- * [Groups Discuss Alleged Ills of Wal-Mart Purchasing](#) *Press & Guide* (Dearborn, MI), April 20, 2008

SPONSORS ~

The speaking tour couldn't have happened without the incredible support of universities, unions, organizations, and individuals in every city visited. SweatFree Communities and International Labor Rights Forum are so grateful for the amazing organizing for the speaking tour events. The sponsors include: Columbus Central Labor Council; Goshen College Bible, Religion and Philosophy Dept.; Goshen College Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies Dept.; Goshen College Women's Studies Dept.; Greater Columbus Jobs with Justice; InterReligious Taskforce on Central America; John Carroll University, Campus Ministry; Metro Detroit Central Labor Council; Ohio AFL-CIO; Ohio Conference on Fair Trade; Toledo Central Labor Council; UFCW Local 1059; UFCW Local 1099; UFCW Local 911; UFCW Local 951; UNITE HERE Ohio State Council; USW District 1; USW Local 2737; Xavier Students Against Sweatshops; Wake Up Wal-Mart Downriver; UFCW Local 876; CWA Local 3034; South Central Michigan Central Labor Council; Michigan State University School of Labor and Industrial Relations; Eta Eta Sigma of Western Michigan University



International Labor Rights Forum

2001 S Street NW, Suite 420, Washington, DC 20009



A Network for Local Action Against Sweatshops