

Global labor standards



There is often a hidden story behind many of the items we use and take for granted each day. From the simple T-shirt to the complicated car, there is a tale to be told for the amount of labor and human resources involved in its mass production. There are Issues regarding labor rights, factory conditions, commodity chains, and company and government standards that go unseen by the consumer. These Issues often change geographically on an enormous scale due to globalization. Sometimes rights and standards can vary and sometimes the Issues are much far more complicated than how we perceive them in the United States.

In this essay, I will be evaluating the standards of labor regarding Nike shoes and sweatshop accusations towards them. I will also compare labor standards of the United States to labor standards of countries overseas. The United States has a strong code of labor standards and the citizens are able to live in a productive society mostly free from poverty and lack of employment. Largely this is due to the Industrial Revolution that completely changed our way of life as well as our way of labor.

Never before in history had we seen children being employed on such a large scale and never before had laws regarding labor been tailored to specifically protect the rights of the laborer. However, in developing countries often this is not the case. It is in this way of contrasting labor standards that we can see differences in labor among developed and developing nations. We can compare common standards of labor and governmental policies that dictate labor laws and economic policies. The labor standard debate is one entrenched in a country's economic stability.

Labor standards in developing countries are often vastly different from standards in developed ones. For instance in the United States we have policies that help to protect the laborer from being exploited and abused by the employer. However, in countries such as Cambodia where there are numerous unemployed and homeless " the central challenge in is not that sweatshops exploit too many people, but that they don't exploit enough. " (Christofis, 2009, 1). Here in the United States we often take for granted our ability to work and purchase goods.

We complain about our job market when there are countries that could not even compare to our standards. The problem with the poorest of countries and sweatshops is not that there are sweat shops run by poor people it is that " banning them closes off one route out of 2009, 2) The sweatshops are an integral part of their job market. The sweat shops are what help to lift people out of poverty by allowing them to make a small amount of money for their families. In countries where the population scours trash for recyclables sweatshops add a source of employment and stability to the people in that region.

A main argument against sweat shops is that the workers are often subject to ungenerous factory equipment and poor quality facilities. Sweatshops are often very hot and crowded workers, sometimes even small children, in rooms where they produce goods. The sanitation in the sweatshops is poor and the equipment can sometimes be dangerous to use. To the standards of the ILO, the working conditions children in factories and we frown upon them being exploited in part of a global commodity chain. However, on the

flip side of the coin a very different story can be told. In impoverished countries, employment is a luxury granted to a lucky few.

People are actually better off with a steady job in a factory and " a job in a sweatshop is a cherished dream. "(Christofis, 2009, 1) In a country where many people scavenge through trash to find cheap recyclables, a factory job is a huge improvement. To the worker in a sweatshop, their job is valuable and provides a source of sustenance and survival. Being exploited in the grand picture by the commodity chain they participate in is something completely out of their understanding. They have no concern over how cheap their labor is compared to the same labor done by those in the states.

Likewise, consumers in the states have little understanding of how their drive to buy the cheapest product actually influence poor global commodity chain standards. Due to exploitation of workers worldwide, many agreements have been made on international standards of labor. Due to poor conditions and unfair treatment laborers have sought ways to protect themselves. In this way, " labor protection results from workers, employers, or governments negotiating together. "(Versa, 2008, 1) Much has been done to initiate the protection of workers worldwide with a set standard of labor policies.

In this way it is hoped that workers across the globe will face fair labor standards. It is considered that, " International labor standards are viewed as a tool to uphold fundamental human rights across the globe. "(Versa, 2008, 1) However, often their measures of initiative are hard to implement and follow and sometimes impractical. There are people all over the world still

being exploited because labor standards are being ignored. This upsets many people who feel it is unfair the poor and impoverished are allowed to work in conditions deemed unsuitable for half the price willingly.

Many believe cheap labor and poor conditions only exacerbate the problem and in a way make it okay for sweatshops to exist. In fact, poor labor conditions encourage other firms to adopt similar strategies. It is recognized that, " Thus, in a globalized economy it is argued that poor labor standards in one country have negative consequences for the workers in other countries. "(Versa, 2008, 1) This cannot continue and has been recognized on a global stage, " developed countries became concerned that poorer labor standards, and lack of enforcement, create an unfair comparative advantage in labor trade. (Versa, 2008, 1) This is a serious problem because if labor can be done at a fraction of the price somewhere else it undercuts the local businesses. To thwart this from happening government agencies and trade agreements have sprung up to protect the worker as well as free trade. Agreements such as the Fair Trade Label and the International Labor Organization work to protect fair trade and workers from sweatshops and poor work treatment. In order to improve labor conditions, factories must " submit to inspections by the ILO. (Silversides, 2010, 2) Often if they perform well they are rewarded by being allowed to increase the amount of goods they produce. The above mentioned policies. The big problems are, " low wages, and forced overtime and those are still big problems today.

"(Silversides, 2010, 10) It seems the way factories are run has not changed much despite efforts to increase protection to workers. It will take a much

greater global effort and a much more standard level playing field for trade in order for the exploitation occurring now to discontinue.

For now, millions of poor are proud to work their sweaty factory job. In the near term workers all over the world will toil in substandard conditions to build the pyramids of globalization. The problem is far too complex to be solved by any single initiative. (Versa, 2008, 7) The global economy is huge and for one policy to be effective at essentially ending poverty while putting a higher demand on labor quality is highly implausible. There must be a collaboration among governments, organizations, and the workers in order for a sustainable solution to be accomplished.

Poverty and sweatshops go hand in hand, meet sweatshops are only a symptom of poverty, not a cause. "(Christofis, 2009, 2) Often it takes strong government initiative and sound economic for it to be possible for laborers to have good working conditions. On the global scale there is international competition over products, commodities, and goods. In a market of cheap alternatives there are often under cutters and cheats who try to make the most profit by selling low or paying their workers low wages.

The global economic crisis has not improved conditions for people already impoverished. If anything, " the current state of the USA economy has only worsened the picture for overseas labor. (Silversides, 2010, 3) Geography matters when analyzing things on a global scale because we can determine trade routes, resource locations, wealth, how suitable and hospitable environments are. On a global scale, geography is very integral to trading

and interconnectedness. Geography plays an important role in globalization of the world.

Firm strategies, government policies and consumer choices within that region influence whether global commodity chains have poor or good labor standards. Global commodity chains and labor standards are related to the international division of labor because often the economic rookeries of a country determines what type of labor workers will be involved with. Where it is cheap to manufacture goods, such as South East Asia, the integral part of the commodity chain will be the raw goods produced from there.

Due to economic hardship, labor standards may very well be compromised. However, due to the international division of labor it is often workers will be exploited and produce these good for the commodity chain at a very cheap price. In the case of Nikkei and the sweat shop accusations against them, a number of revelations and realizations have been brought forth regarding the situation. First off it has to be understood that Nike's business model is to outsource its manufacturing. The money it saves by doing this can then be used for aggressive ad campaigns.

However, because Nike outsource manufacturing it has the potential to acquire sweat shop like workers for cheap labor. It has been accused in the past for poor working conditions and cheap labor. This creates a problem for the image of Nike. In order to improve the image of Nike, the company has incorporated many changes in recent years. Nike raised the " minimum age of workers; significantly increase monitoring; and will adapt U. S. OSHA clean air standards in all Association which " established independent

monitoring and a code of conduct, including a minimum age and a 60-hour work week. (Businesslike, 2013, 1) The company also performed over 600 check ups on its factories between as well as revisits to problematic factories between 2002-2004. In recent years much of the flak Nikkei has received from utilizing sweat shop like conditions has been abated by sound business practices and organizations that look out for the worker. And government standards often go unseen by the consumer. It is a plight of poor workers in impoverished countries to be laboring in sub standard conditions forever, much has been done to protect their rights.

Many unacceptable practices have come to light and the exploitation of cheap laborers in the global commodity chain has been recognized. The only way to deal with these problems is have the government and other policies assess the situation and make sound legislation to protect laborers and consumers. Due to globalization, labor standards are now recognized on a global scale and it is the job of policy makers and trade agreements to make sure sweatshops are able to employ the poor in a safe and standardized condition.