

READER ACTION

Disney's Dirty Laundry
by Robert Krzewinski

Wander into the Disney Store at Briarwood Mall and there is an impression that everything is fun and happy at this corner of the world. From the peppy music, non-stop videos and cheery staff, everything just seems so great. And best of all (for Disney that is), there is much to buy so people can take a portion of the excitement home.

While children may have a hard time making the distinction, adults should realize that the Disney world is largely a fantasy. But many grown-ups may not realize how far Disney goes to promote their image to make the most profit. A starting point for adult shoppers could be to look at the tag or stamp on merchandise for sale indicating the country of origin. Don't expect to see the words "USA", but instead expect to see products made in China, the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

While you may expect to pay a premium price for a Disney stuffed figure, the people making the items in Haiti receive pay as low as 28 cents per hour. This differs a little from Disney CEO Michael Eisner's pay which is estimated at being \$97,600 an hour (no, that figure is not a misprint when you take in his total compensation). At the same time, workers in Haiti making Disney products work in extreme heat (90-95 degrees), are given impossible quotas to reach, encounter threats as well as abuse and are laid off on a whim to accommodate shifts in demand. Workers wanting to improve conditions by forming a union are swiftly fired. The situation works out to be a classic sweatshop scenario.

Some corporations may want the public to think that living costs are lower in Haiti and that 28 cents an hour, or \$2.25 a day, is good money in that country. According to the National Labor Committee, the reality is that Haitian workers spend three-quarters of their wages just to pay for their own transportation and food, leaving them almost nothing to pay for their rent or for child care. The estimated minimum daily wage for a Haitian worker to meet basic needs is around \$6.00 a day or 75 cents an hour.

As if things could not be any worse, workers at Disney subcontractors also face the elimination of their jobs altogether due to cheaper labor becoming available in other countries. One Disney supplier, H.H. Cutler, has threatened to close all of its Haitian plants and move operations to China and Indonesia where they could pay workers as low as 13 cents an hour. Cutler at one time did manufacture Disney items in the U.S., paying a workforce of nearly 2,500 an average wage of well over \$7 an hour. Funny, even with the cheaper labor used to make their products, the price of the products at a Disney Store hasn't really dropped.

For a number of years the Disney/Haitian Justice Campaign has been working to bring justice to Haitian workers and in the process to bring some very unfavorable publicity to the land of Mickey. Specifically the Justice Campaign is looking to insure that Disney subcontractors pay a wage of at least \$5.00 a day, improve working conditions, end worker abuse, stop indiscriminate layoffs and guarantee the right for workers to organize unions without repercussion.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



Area Service Organizations

Aid In Milan	54 W Main	York Twp	439-8420
American Red Cross	2729 Packard	Ann Arbor	971-4300
Ann Arbor Community Ctr	625 N. Main	Ann Arbor	662-3128
Ann Arbor Hunger Coalition	306 N. Division	Ann Arbor	662-4060
Catholic Social Services	4925 Packard	Ann Arbor	971-9781
Community Action Network	2724 Hikone	Ann Arbor	973-1183
Friends In Deed	64 N. Huron	Ypsilanti	484-4357
Interfaith Hospitality Network	1917 Washtenaw	Ann Arbor	668-8823
Manchester Family Services	356 Schaffer	Manchester	428-8852
Ozone House	1705 Washtenaw	Ann Arbor	662-2222
Peace Neighborhood Ctr	1111 N. Maple	Ann Arbor	662-3564
SOS Community Crisis Ctr	114 N. River	Ypsilanti	485-3222
Saline Social Services	131 E. Michigan	Saline	429-4570
Salvation Army	9 S. Park	Ypsilanti	482-4700
Shelter Association	411 N. Ashley	Ann Arbor	662-2829
Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels	1110 W. Cross	Ypsilanti	487-9669

Disney has definitely felt the heat from accusations of having connections to sweatshops and to the companys credit, a Code of Conduct for manufacturers has been enacted. The trouble is, however, until Disney starts vigorously and verifiably following its Code, the Code is largely a fantasy. Even with the Code in place, two workers at a Haitian Disney subcontractor (Megatex) received death

threats for union organizing while the workforce as a whole was told their jobs may be eliminated. While no boycott of Disney products has been endorsed by the Disney/Haitian Justice Campaign (DHJC), individuals are urged to write Disney CEO Michael Eisner (500 South Buena Vista Street, Burbank, CA 91521) asking

for an end to Disney subcontractor sweatshops and for full monitoring by local human rights organizations. Disney/Haitian JC sblm@erols.com. (212)592-3612, P.O. Box 748, Village Station, NY, NY 10014

**AGENDA
WELCOMES
YOUR
FEEDBACK!**

But please pardon all our rough edges ...

We are just learning how to make this darn printer work.

ROSE KNOWS

The Spirit of Giving
by Rose Martin

[Editor's Note: Rose, Director of the Peace Neighborhood Center, invites letters for her advice column.]

In just a few weeks it will be Christmas, the time of year famous for family gatherings, gift giving, making amends, and showing one's appreciation for prosperity by sharing with others less fortunate than ourselves. It's really great to find so many people in the mind set of giving. A great number of people who think they know how to give to benefit the poor really don't know how. It is very important as a "have" to give to the "have-nots" with dignity and respect for them and their situations. This is not done by selecting what they will eat or wear. Because one is in need of a helping hand does not constitute robbing one of their freedom of choice. Allow the less fortunate to make choices for themselves when assisting with food and clothing needs. For example, do not present a needy family with food that you've selected or raised from your cupboard that housed the items for months and months. On the contrary, give a food gift certificate from the local supermarket. Needy people need to be in on the selection process when deciding needs for themselves or their families. Such things as brands of foods and colors when referring to clothing are very important choices to make especially when it is the receiver and not the giver who will be eating the foods or wearing the clothes.

Let's learn how to really and truly show love this holiday season by serving the poor and not ourselves. This is a huge job and something difficult to embark upon when ego, self-centeredness and control are present in many cases when we give (sometimes consciously and sometimes not so consciously). If you are going to give then do it right. Needy children just love getting toys for Christmas that they wanted rather than what someone else wanted to give them. The mere fact that someone cared to meet their needs exactly how they wanted their needs met means more to an under privileged child/person than most who "have" can imagine. There are so many injustices that the "have-nots" have to face daily that receiving just one thing exactly as requested gives them self-esteem and a proven example of self worth.

Although it is written that the "needy will always be with us" it is important that we do not determine their fate. What a person does with what you give them is unimportant. It is the "spirit" in which we give that is of the most importance. Beware, lest the need for control prevent those who will give this holiday from attaining their unselfish goal. The "have-nots" desire a legitimate reason to be in the hustle and bustle of Christmas. This can be done by providing them with the financial means to do so. Just like the giver loves to go to stores and be swept away by the lights, decorations and holiday shopping specials, so does the receiver.

I know that in many cases when the "haves" have done what they think is correct to do regarding giving it was without forethought of disrespect. This column is being shared for those who wish to improve their spirit of giving, therefore getting more bang (if you will) for their bucks. I remain in service to you for our community. ☑

