

Rights Action
September 6, 2015

Repression in Honduran at Sweatshops Producing for 'Fruit of the Loom', 'Jockey International', 'Petralex'

As the U.S. and Canadian-backed regime in Honduras is engulfed in a corruption scandal at the highest levels of government, ... more repression related to global corporations.

- **What to do?:** see below
- **Rights Action Delegation to Honduras:** information below

Employees of U.S.-Owned Sweatshop Companies Protest Corruption and Privatization of Social Security Institute

By Karen Spring, September 4, 2015

<http://www.karenspring.com/2015/09/employees-of-us-owned-sweatshop.html>



Photo caption: Protest outside of ZIP Bufalo by sweatshop workers, September 2, 2015. Photo by Radio Progreso

In the early morning on Wednesday, maquila workers set up a roadblock in front of Import Processing Zone (ZIP) Bufalo in the city of Villanueva, just outside of San Pedro Sula, Honduras' second largest city and industrial center. Over 2000 sweatshop workers maintained the blockade for approximately three hours

before the Honduran police and Military Police moved in to violently evict them.

ZIP Bufalo is one of many “free” trade havens that have flourished under the CAFTA “free” trade agreement and is home to many foreign-owned and operated sweatshops. It houses factories owned or leased by U.S. companies Fruit of the Loom (Confecciones Dos Caminos), Jockey International, and Petrallex (automobile parts), amongst others.

Radio Progreso [reports](#) that Honduran regime forces tear-gassed, beat up and repressed protesters for over four hours. The sweatshop employees were demanding the annulment of the new Social Protection Law and an end to government corruption. The approval and implementation of the law that the protesters are rejecting, was a central demand of the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustments under a loan signed with Honduras in December 2014.

The new law [comes into effect](#) today (September 4) and replaces the Social Security law that manages healthcare and pension funds for public and private sector employees under the Social Security Institute (IHSS). The law will have tremendous impacts on maquila workers' health and safety as it essentially [privatizes](#) the public institute accessed by over 600,000 public and private sector employees.



Photo caption: Protest outside of ZIP Bufalo, September 2, 2015. Photo by Radio Progreso

For many sweatshop workers, the IHSS acted as a mediator of health and safety concerns of employees (the majority of which are women in the garment

industry) and large Canadian and U.S. owned companies with horrific track records of abiding by health and labor standards. Workers paid monthly contributions to the IHSS that allowed them access to medical specialists inside the public institute, particularly important in an industry where workers are at high risk for industrial accidents and repetitive strain injuries.

The new law will likely force sweatshop workers to become more dependent on employer-run and administered healthcare services inside factories that are often understaffed, biased, inefficient, and lacking in specialists, or make co-payments and seek medical attention from private healthcare providers. Although the IHSS services were not always perfect or efficient, it was a much better option for sweatshop workers to receive the best, most economically viable treatment for their healthcare needs.

The IHSS was almost forced to bankruptcy when government officials - linked to the current party in power, the National Party - stole over \$300 million from the Institute between 2012 and 2015.

The blockade in Villanueva was one of many blockades organized around the country as part of the indignados [indignant] movement against corruption, the looting of the IHSS, and demanding the installation of an International Commission Against Impunity (CICIH). The indignados movement began taking to the streets in early May when evidence was published about the gradual and well-planned scheme to steal millions of dollars from the IHSS. On [Tuesday](#), maquila workers from ZIP El Porvenir in El Progreso also occupied the road outside the sweatshop complex where other foreign-owned companies are located and were violently evicted by Honduran police and military as well.

Delegation to Honduras, November 7-15, 2015 ~ “Connecting the Dots from the Global to the Local: Understanding the Environmental, Human Rights, Poverty and Impunity Crisis in Honduras”

Rights Action and the Mir Centre for Peace at Selkirk College invite you to join this trip.

- Flyer: <http://rightsaction.org/action-content/honduras-education-seminar-trip>
- More info: info@rightsaction.org

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