

University

Sweatshop workers help end contract

by Tamara Conrad

Honduran sweatshop workers touring the country, years of protest plus a week of antics on campus appear to have finally reached the Penn State administration, which late last month announced it was canceling its contract with Russell Athletics after two investigations found the company had shuttered its Honduran factory because workers had formed a union.

Two of those workers were in State College just days after they and 1,800 of their co-workers were thrown out of work.

Moises Bovado and Norma Castellano, along with thousands of others, were responsible for making collegiate apparel for the Jerzees de Honduras factory operated by Russell Athletic. They were responsible for producing the Penn State sweatpants, T-shirts, sweatshirts and other Penn State apparel students and fans wear to football games and throughout campus.

Bovado and Castellano are the president and vice president, respectively, of Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Empresa Jerzees de Honduras, the employees' union

at Russell.

Wrapped in new winter coats, the two factory workers stood nervously in front of the 100 people gathered in a university lecture hall to tell their story through an interpreter.

Castellano said later, smiling and pulling her coat tighter, that this was the first time she had ever seen snow.

Their factory had shut down Jan. 30, just three days earlier, after the union asked for a minor wage increase in reaction to the increased production demands imposed by the factory. Workers were making \$40 per week on fixed salary and \$60 per week based on production, Bovado said.

"What you spend for one of those items [we made] is one week's pay," Castellano said.

"We decided to ask for a wage increase rather than a decrease in production rate



Norma Castellano

because that would hurt the company," Bovado said.

Brands are putting pressure on factories for production, and the burden of meeting these demands rests on the shoulders of factory workers, both workers said.

The company increased quotas and demanded production of different clothing styles, Castellano said. She said workers were pressured to come in early, cut lunches, and work overtime without pay.

"People gave up lunches and took only 15 minute breaks to meet quotas," Castellano said. "In order to keep their job, workers are making these sacrifices," she said.

The factory produces 1,200 items per day, Castellano said.

When the government announced minimum wage, assembly workers were excluded, Bovado said.

"The government is supporting businessmen and not workers," Bovado said.

With 4 million people unemployed in Honduras, workers are desperate for jobs, but they don't appreciate being exploited and taken for granted. Although creating a union and demanding fair pay is a human

right, the factory owners shut down the factory entirely rather than negotiating with workers.

"Many employees couldn't contain their tears the day the factory closed," Castellano said.

Bovado works to feed and support his wife, daughter, mother, and sister. Castellano's takes care of her two children, husband, aunt, and mother.

"Eighteen hundred jobs lost means 1,800 families without food," Bovado said.



Moises Bovado

After the closing

Bovado also said, contrary to the practice in the United States, when Hondurans lose their jobs they receive no government assistance.

The factory's closure has resulted in

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Women leaders take on secretary of state role

by Lindsay Chew

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton returned from her first mission abroad in February, and the most notable "first" of her trip was that she chose Asia.

It is no longer news that the secretary of state is a woman, a glass ceiling broken in 1997 by Madeleine Korbel Albright, who spoke recently at Penn State.

Albright not only made great strides to better America's position in the global community as the first female secretary of state, but also cleared the way for both Condoleezza Rice and Clinton to become influential figures in future presidential cabinets.

"It looks like it's become a pattern to see the secretary of state in a skirt," Albright joked with her Penn State audience.

Jump starting her political career, Albright served as chief legislative assistant to Sen. Edmund S. Muskie, D-Maine, from 1976 to 1978. She followed her political ambitions to a position as a staff member on the National Security Council as well as a

White House staff member from 1978 to 1981.

In 1993, Albright became the Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations. Four years later Albright found her political calling in President Bill Clinton's cabinet as the first female secretary of state, the highest ranking woman in the history of the U.S. government.

During her five-year term, Albright involved herself deeply in U.S. policy on a global level. One of her first acts was to begin a peace mission in the Middle East. This focused around Israeli-Palestinian relations. She met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem that September according to a report published by the U.S. Department of State.

Making a mark on history again, Albright met with Kim Jong-il in 2000, which made her one of highest level Western diplomats to ever meet the communist leader of North Korea.

Also during her term, Albright expanded and modernized NATO. She fostered peace talks in the Balkans and worked on reduc-

ing the nuclear threat in Russia.

Albright was an advocate for human rights and democracy. She promoted the expansion of democracy within Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America which she highlighted in her secretary of state address at the Sept. 12, 2000 United Nations General Assembly.

Condoleezza Rice, the first black woman secretary of state, followed in Albright's footsteps, but she had been on the rise in the Republican Party for many years.

Rice served as the senior director in the George H.W. Bush administration from 1989 to 1991.

In 1997 she was appointed to the Federal Advisory Committee on Gender-Integrated Training in the Military.

Climbing the political ladder, Rice next took the position of National Security Advisor, which ultimately led to her becoming the second female secretary of state, serving from 2005 to 2009.

Starting off her term with a high note, in August 2005 Rice was able to obtain White House approval for a diplomatic parlay with

North Korea according to a report published by the U.S. Department of State. This marked Rice's tone through her entire tenure.

Rice also took a run at peace talks between Israel and Palestinian. Though the Bush administration was frequently criticized for its lack of attention to that region, in 2005 Israel receded from the Palestinian settlements in Gaza and the West Bank.

Also in 2005 Rice ran a campaign in the United Nations stating that the production of nuclear weapons in Iran was unacceptable outlined in her address at the Sept. 17, 2005 United Nations General Assembly. As a result Rice was able to gain the support from China, France, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Rice reformed and restructured the department with the idea of Transformational Diplomacy, which focused on the United States working with the global community to create and facili-

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Cancer survivor thankful for research fundraising

by Zac Taylor

When Brandon Meyer, as a high school junior, climbed out of the pool after the Allegheny County Swimming Championships in 2005, the last drops of water from his suit formed a small pool at his feet as he stood waiting for the results of the final heat. He didn't know that he had swum his last race.

Two weeks later, Meyer was hospitalized with a swollen throat. At the time, doctors thought Meyer had contracted a severe case of mononucleosis—he had all the symptoms. Doctors took blood samples, and when they were not satisfied with the results from the blood work, they tested Meyer's bone marrow.

Meyer said his marrow was so thick that the needle used to extract it snapped in half when it went into Meyer's hipbone.

After the tests, doctors told Meyer he had leukemia.

"At first I didn't believe it," Meyer said, thinking back to the day he was lying in the hospital bed as the doctor told him his diagnosis. Meyer said he could not grasp the

Accomplished swimmer Brandon Meyer was not able to dance at this year's Penn State cancer fundraiser Thon due to knee damage caused by his chemo treatments, but his hunger pangs during those treatments have redirected his college career toward hotel and restaurant management.

thought of contracting a terminal illness when just weeks before his swimming career was at its height.

Fast-forward four years; Meyer is a junior at Penn State University, and an active contributor to Penn State's mega cancer fundraiser and dance marathon: Thon.

Meyer however, didn't dance in the February event. The leukemia has been eradicated from his body, but not without its cost. The chemotherapy Meyer underwent weakened the bones in his knees. Eventually his knees became so weak that the decision was made to remove the weak bones completely and insert replacements. Meyer's replacement knees prevent him from participating in strenuous physical activity.

Still, Meyer is optimistic. According to a 2004 report by the American Cancer association, the five-year survival rate of white people diagnosed with leukemia stands at 48 percent. (The rate for black people is 39 percent.) Meyer is approaching the fourth anniversary of his diagnosis. The leukemia shows no signs of coming back.

"I try to find the good in it," Meyer said, adding that his struggle with leukemia has come to help him build his own character.

In high school, before his diagnosis, Meyer was an accomplished swimmer and water polo player. In water polo he broke several of the school's scoring records, a feat that attracted the attention of college recruiters. Meyer even had aspirations to go to the air force academy, and become a

pilot.

But Meyer said that despite the prospects he had, his fight with leukemia has helped him discover what he wanted to do in life. In fact, with the help of one drug he had to take for his treatment, Meyer has found a new calling: cooking.

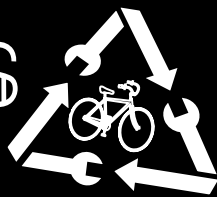
"I had to take a steroid," Meyer said, explaining that one side effect of the steroid was hunger, which incidentally, gave him a heightened interest in food. "I would watch the food network twenty-four-seven," Meyer said.

Meyer's father noticed his son's newfound interest in food and asked a family friend, a master chef, to pique Meyer's curiosity. Because of this experience, Meyer chose to major in hotel and restaurant management at Penn State.

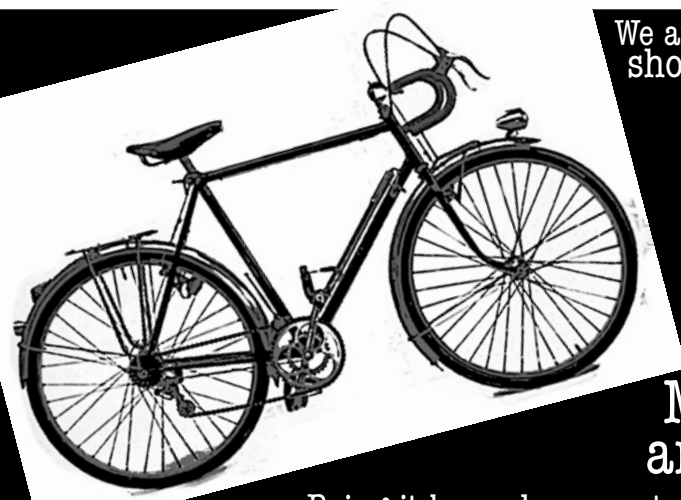
Despite the effect leukemia has had on his life, Meyer looks back on his battle with the disease as a positive experience. He advises other kids fighting cancer to look at it the same way.

"Staying positive is the best thing you can do," Meyer said, "Learn from the experience and don't feel sorry for yourself."

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Celebrating Darwin's 200th Birthday



Photo by Rupesh Kariyat
Biology professor Andy Stephenson was a presenter at a February event celebrating Charles Darwin's 200th birthday. The event consisted of three lectures, a Victorian tea party and some hamming it up with Darwin-esque beards.

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death threats and the blacklisting of union members. The names and pictures of union members have been circulated on the Internet, Bovado said.

"When we look for jobs they tell us, 'You're not qualified,'" he said. "When we ask, 'Why?' they say, 'You're someone who works in a special area.'"

Castellano and Bovado said workers complain of carpal tunnel, lung problems, and other bone problems from working in the factory.

At one point, the drinking water on site was contaminated, so the union organized to request potable water from the employer. Without a union, the workers would not have had drinking water, or a say in wages and working conditions. It was the union's unwillingness to settle that unnerved Russell Athletic and factory managers, the workers said.

Russell said the factory was not closed because of the union, but Castellano challenged that.

"This is a lie," Castellano said. She said

As a result of this investigation, along with the workers' tour across the United States, nine universities including Duke, Rutgers and Penn State, are not renewing contracts with Russell factories. Penn State ended its contract after initially putting Russell on probation early February.

there are numerous factories in Honduras that could have been closed and the corporation did not hide the fact that it was singling out the Jerzees de Honduras factory, the only one with a union. The company has been saying the plant was closed because the apparel being produced at their particular plant wasn't selling because demand was low," she said.

Castellano said if this were true, the workers could have been put to work assembling other clothes instead.

"The workers are capable of making other things," she said.

The Fair Labor Association has been investigating the closure of Jerzees de Honduras. Although the FLA reported the factory closure was not because of the

union, a more independent Worker Rights Consortium's investigation report agrees with Bovado and Castellano. The WRC said the closure was indeed because of the union.

The FLA, has been criticized for its handling of the investigation after permitting factory managers to attend interviews with workers, violating confidentiality.

"The FLA is getting criticism from universities because it messed up the investigation," said Megan Quinn, member of United Students Against Sweatshops.

The workers asked the FLA to do interviews privately during its second investigation.

As a result of this investigation, along with the workers' tour across the United

States, nine universities, including Duke, Rutgers and Penn State, are not renewing contracts with Russell factories, Quinn said. Penn State ended its contract after initially putting Russell on probation early February.

Quinn said Penn State has been relying on FLA reports to justify its contract with Russell, but now that the FLA is under scrutiny, there is little justification for the contract.

The workers who were fired will likely emigrate or work the land because employers are exploiting them, Castellano said.

Lack of employment has also reduced enrollment in higher education, Castellano said, because there is not enough money to afford school, creating a continued cycle of inadequate human development.

The union workers hope their tour promoting solidarity with universities and the students who purchase these products will pressure Russell to adhere to human rights.

"We would like the universities to join us and be advocates for workers against Russell," Bovado said.

"We request help," Castellano said. "We have children. We have no jobs. We're hoping this factory will reopen."

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tate a democratic atmosphere which she outlined in an address at the 2007 Private Sector Summit of Public Diplomacy.

Rounding out this female political powerhouse is the newly-appointed Hillary Rodham Clinton.

In 1993, Clinton became the first lady of the United States and with this position she became motivating force behind many reforms in the United States. One reform was healthcare, a firestorm that ended with her receding into the background of her husband's presidential role.

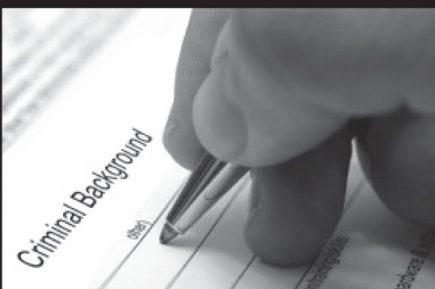
Clinton pursued her political ambition by

first running for and winning a seat in the U.S. Senate representing New York. Then she ran a historic race in the 2008 presidential elections that pitted the first major party female candidate against the first major party black candidate in the Democratic Party primary.

Clinton was then chosen by President Barack Obama to serve as the 67th secretary of state.

Starting her term off, Clinton visited Asia in her first effort to ensure the global community that things are going to change for the better.

These are three notable women making history in the United States in what Albright called a pattern of women in power.




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