

April 10, 2008

A step toward the sweat-free sweatshirt: BMC endorses labor-practices proposal

At the urging of student activists, Bryn Mawr has joined the ranks of colleges and universities endorsing the Designated Suppliers Program, an ambitious new framework for collective action against sweatshop labor practices, President Nancy J. Vickers and the BMC Sweatshop-Free Coalition have announced.

For nearly a decade, the College has required the companies that produce Bryn Mawr apparel, including athletic uniforms, to commission goods only from factories that will agree to abide by a code of conduct regarding fair labor practices, says Chief Administrative Officer Jerry Berenson. But the College lacked monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance.

Bryn Mawr will now become a dues-paying member of the [Worker Rights Consortium](#) (WRC), a group of 181 colleges and universities that pool resources and purchasing power to investigate working conditions in clothing factories around the world and pressure corporations to buy from factories that respect workers' rights.

But the proposed [Designated Suppliers Program](#) (DSP), which has just over 40 signatories so far, goes beyond the WRC's current protocol. The WRC plans to implement the program when the number and market power of signatories reaches a critical mass sufficient to have an impact on clothing-industry giants.

"The problem with the current model is that there are so many factories, and international corporations freely move their business from factory to factory in a constant search for cheaper labor. Once factories offer better working conditions, they can no longer compete with sweatshops" says Diana Tung '10, who founded the BMC Sweatshop-Free Coalition, an alliance of six student organizations.

"Clothing factories are under intense pressure to produce cheap goods. At the moment, garment workers are paid so little that a factory might be able to double its workers' wages and increase the price of a \$40 sweatshirt by only 75 cents, but that 75 cents per shirt often means that a corporation will withdraw its business and find cheaper labor elsewhere." Tung explains.

"So the agreements don't really have teeth unless we can impose some conditions not only on the factories, but also on the corporations that buy from them. The DSP will prevent corporations from dropping suppliers that respect workers' rights in favor of suppliers that exploit workers to achieve marginally lower prices," Tung says.

Under the new system, factories will still be required to adhere to a workers' rights code – one that is stricter than the current code in that it includes a living wage. But the corporations that buy from them will in turn be required to meet certain obligations to their suppliers, to make it possible for factories to maintain compliance. The three most important conditions, in the language of the proposal:

- Licensees [companies licensed to sell clothing bearing the logos of member schools] are required to pay a price to suppliers commensurate with the actual cost of producing under applicable labor standards, including payment of a living wage
- they are required to maintain long-term relationships with suppliers
- they are required to ensure that each supplier factory participating in the program receives sufficient orders so that the majority of the factory's production is for the collegiate market.

The Sweatshop-Free Coalition (which comprises One World Activists, BMC Greens, Batten House environmental collective, the Office of Intercultural Affairs' Community Diversity Assistants, and the Bryn Mawr chapters of Amnesty International and Students for a Democratic Society) began its campaign for the College's endorsement of the DSP on Valentine's Day at Vickers' office in Taylor Hall. The students delivered a letter and a collection of 40 balloons, one representing each of the 40 schools that had already signed on.

According to Tung, they found a receptive audience in Vickers.

"No one at Bryn Mawr wants to support companies that engage in abusive labor practices," Vickers says, "and I am eager to endorse efforts to prevent such abuses. The tricky part is identifying an effective strategy to achieve that goal."

"The students made a convincing argument that the current anti-sweatshop framework is inadequate to counter the market pressures on factories that agree to our code of conduct. The new proposal appears to promise far better chances of success in improving the working conditions of the people who make Bryn Mawr-themed clothing."

Next, Vickers referred the student activists to Berenson for a discussion of the nitty-gritty details of the program.

"I had a lot of questions," says Berenson. "I wanted to know more about how it would work -- who would sign the contracts, who would determine what a living wage was, and how it would be monitored. And of course, I was concerned about how much it would increase the cost of the apparel."

"The students did some more research and got back to me right away with the answers to my questions, including an economist's analysis of how much it would raise prices, which was only a few percent," Berenson continued.

According to Nancy Steffan, the WRC's assistant director of policy and communications, "Student activists have played a critical role in bringing the sweatshop issue to the attention of universities. [United Students Against Sweatshops](#) proposed the Designated Suppliers Program initially."

Tung attended the USAS conference this February and came back invigorated and ambitious.

"It made me realize that students really do have a lot of power during our four years of college, if we act collectively," she says.

Q&A: Enrique Sacerio-Garí on Cuba

Next Wednesday, April 16, Dorothy Nepper Marshall Professor of Hispanic and Hispanic-American Studies Enrique Sacerio-Garí will deliver the final talk in the ["Our Neighbor, Cuba" lecture series](#) sponsored by Main Line School Night. Sacerio-Garí, a Cuban immigrant who advocates reconciliation between his homeland and the United States, recently returned from a trip to Cuba. His lecture will take place at 7 p.m in Room 2 of Dalton Hall. It is free to Bryn Mawr students, faculty, and staff; members of the general public may enroll in the course through [Main Line School Night](#) at a cost of \$19. Here, Sacerio-Garí briefly answers a few questions for *Bryn Mawr Now*.

Q: Your lecture is titled "Cuba's Struggle for Freedom." Can you expound on that?

A: I take the title from "en la lucha" (in the struggle, often of everyday life), also from "la lucha continua" (the struggle continues) that refers to the persistence struggle of smaller nations to be free of the economic and political manipulations of colonial powers, and finally I recall the title *Cuba's Great Struggle For Freedom*, published in 1895 by Gonzalo de Quesada. Quesada contextualized the Cuban revolutionary war by presenting Latin American and Cuban historical information that went beyond what the "yellow press" was dishing out at the time.

Needless to say, the Cuban people are "en la lucha" to perfect their system of government and to negotiate longstanding socioeconomic issues from the "special period" that followed the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the implosion of the Soviet Union. Of course, those who struggle for more democracy and human rights in certain countries around the world must be ever-watchful and suspicious of the

U.S role, for we know too well the history of U.S intervention in Latin America, not to mention more recent initiatives in other regions. The U.S. intervened in 1898 with the objective of excluding Cuban participation, not in defense of Cuban independence. Obvious still are the objectives of the U.S: an economic embargo that has been internationalized and codified by Congress, a blockade against which 184 U.N. members voted last year.

Q: If that much of the world is against the blockade, how is it still effective?

A: The economic embargo still affects Cuba deeply, especially as a result of the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 and the Helms-Burton Act of 1996. Both were passed in presidential-election years, and they ring with electoral concerns. In 2004 the travel regulations were intensified, eliminating the people-to-people programs that were established during the second Clinton administration, limiting family visits by Cuban-Americans to once every three years, and prohibiting visits to aunts and uncles or cousins.

The Helms-Burton Act states that any company that "traffics" with confiscated Cuban property could be sued in United States courts by their former owner. Cuba enacted a law to prohibit collaboration with these U.S. activities. Some of the dissidents who were jailed in Cuba in 2003 were summarily tried under these articles of law.

Q: The Act also talks about the human rights abuses in Cuba. What do you say to those who argue that the U.S. needs to take a hard line because of those abuses?

A: Cuba will change because of legitimate internal pressure. Human-rights and economic-rights abuses should stop in every place of the planet that requires it, including the United States. But the U.S reserves for itself the right to issue reports on which countries are fulfilling the human-rights aspirations of their peoples. I surely would like to see a few passages on the abuses brought to us by the U.S. in Guantánamo.

Engagement is what the U.S. avoids in its failed Cuba policy. For Cuba everything is negotiable except its national sovereignty and its independence, the island's right to determine which political and economic system is most desirable. Once true dialogue begins between the governments and Cubans and all Cubans residing abroad, a just reconciliation would be possible.

I have met with the Cuban government (including Fidel) on three different occasions to discuss ways to improve relations with all Cubans abroad, to decrease absurd regulations such as having to request a visa to return to the country of my birth with a Cuban passport, to discuss political prisoners and the need to respect dissidents, and to represent in Cuba the values of American democracy and liberal education. In 1993, the most difficult year of the special period, I was invited to read my poetry at the Casa de las Américas in La Habana. At the end of 2004, the most important publishing house in Cuba published an expanded edition of my book *Poemas interreales*.

U.S. news reporting on Cuba focuses relentlessly on dissidents. How many articles have we seen about the Cuban advances in medicine or about the nearly one million free cataract operations Cuban doctors have performed in Latin America? How many articles about the expanding Cuban economy? What about all the spaces that have been conquered by Cuban critics on the island who speak out and refuse to accept oppressive policies? I could easily enumerate over one billion three hundred million reasons why the same treatment does not apply to China. ... and indeed, the economic transformations that are currently taking place in Cuba are modeled somewhat after Viet Nam and China.

Q: What's your take on the current presidential candidates and how they might approach Cuba if elected?

A: U.S. election years are not usually good for Cuba's citizens. If you notice, both of the laws I mentioned earlier were passed in election years. Florida is almost always a swing state and the Cuban hardliners are coveted by the candidates. Bush proposes to turn the screw on Cuba until it surrenders; McCain looks to be more of the same. Both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are in favor of returning some rights to Cuban-Americans, allowing more travel and remittances to Cuba. If you look at the policies of the first Clinton White House, Hillary may be more willing to ease some restrictions. Obama is the real unknown whose ideals would best match a vision of the world that lets Cuba be Cuba. He has expressed willingness to talk to "enemies" of the United States, but when pressed on the issue of Cuba has trotted out the usual rhetoric about the need for political reforms before the two countries can reestablish a full relationship.

I can tell you that on my recent trip to Cuba there was a lot of excitement about the possibility of an Obama presidency. One friend said he might have to visit the United States and see "what this new country is like" should Obama be elected. I certainly hope visas will again be available for Cubans to visit the U.S. without having to give up their political identity.

Africana Studies conference: the changing meaning of black identity in the United States

The presidential campaign of Barack Obama, an African American who is not descended from American slaves, has brought unprecedented public attention to the complexities of black identity in the United States. What does it mean to be black in the United States today?

Next Friday, April 18, and Saturday, April 19, the Africana Studies Program will explore that question with a conference titled "The Changing Meaning of Black Identity in the United States." The program begins with a keynote address by noted critic, memoirist and documentarian Manthia Diawara, an

African expatriate who chairs the Africana Studies Program at New York University, on Friday evening at 7:30 p.m.

A panel discussion the following morning at 10:30 a.m. will feature Miriam Jimenez Roman of NYU's Institute of African-American Affairs, a scholar of Black Latino identity; Temple University African American Studies Professor Molefi Asante, a native of the United States who studies the African American experience from an Afrocentric perspective; and University of Massachusetts scholar Michael Farewell, who will explore the ethnic West Indian perspective. Both events will take place in Thomas 110 and are free and open to the public.

"We now live in an American society where we can no longer make assumptions about the cultural background of persons of African ancestry based on their physical features," says conference organizer Kalala Ngalamulume, an associate professor of history and Africana studies. "Nor can we assume that blacks in the United States today share a history of white racial prejudice and discrimination and of struggle for their civil rights—key experiences shaping black identity in the past."

"These experiences do not reflect those of recent black immigrants. Often coming to the United States from nations plagued by poverty, civil strife, and political instability, they tend to see the United States not as a place of racial oppression but as 'the promised land,' a place affording them unprecedented economic opportunities, freedoms, and personal security. Though they possess an African ancestry and black physical features, their experiences—and their cultural outlooks—are likely to diverge sharply from those of native-born blacks," Ngalamulume notes.

"The objective of the conference is not to advocate or propagate a particular conception of black identity, but rather to provide an occasion for exploration and discussion," Ngalamulume says.

Keynote speaker **Manthia Diawara** is a professor of comparative literature and the director of the Africana Studies Program and the Institute of African-American Affairs at NYU. Born in Mali, Diawara was educated in France and the United States. He is the author of the memoirs *We Won't Budge: An African Exile in the World* (2003) and *In Search of Africa* (1998) and the monograph *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (1992), and the editor of *Black American Cinema: Aesthetics and Spectatorship* (1993). He has published widely on the topic of film and literature of the Black Diaspora. Diawara also collaborated with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in making the documentary *Sembene Ousmane: The Making of the African Cinema*, and directed the German-produced documentary *Rough in Reverse*.

Around the Bi-Co this weekend: Tenure, the movie; Choosing sides: GLBT people of color; Jumping Off Bridges screening and discussion; Berlioz Requiem; Creative Writing faculty reads

Tenure, the movie: Throughout the next week, Bryn Mawr will be playing the role of Gray College in *Tenure*, a film scripted and directed by Mike Million. Joining the Bryn Mawr campus on the cast are Luke Wilson, David Koechner, Gretchen Mol, Sasha Alexander, and nearby Rosemont College. A number of Bryn Mawr students are serving as extras in the film.

"The movie demands a beautiful college campus," producer Paul Schiff told *The Philadelphia Inquirer* last week. "We considered Connecticut, New York and New Jersey, and we just really fell for the environment that Rosemont and Bryn Mawr have." After three days of filming at Rosemont, the crew began a week of shooting at Bryn Mawr on Thursday, April 10, just as the week's earlier overcast lifted and the cherry trees on the path out of Rockefeller Arch reached a glorious peak.

Diversity Conversation: Choosing Sides. On Friday, April 11, the Office of Intercultural Affairs' biweekly Diversity Conversation in the Multicultural Center will focus on ways LGBT people of color approach sometimes-competing alliances to their ethnic and sexual identities. "Defining oneself and choosing sides: LGBT people of color" will take place at noon; lunch is provided.

Jumping Off Bridges: Film Screening and Discussion. This Friday, April 11, Active Minds, the Bryn Mawr Counseling Service and the Main Line chapter of the National Alliance on mental illness will host a screening of the acclaimed independent film *Jumping Off Bridges*, which explores the lives of a group of teenagers as one comes to grips with the suicide of a family member. The screening, to be accompanied by a pizza dinner, will take place in Dalton 300 at 6 p.m. After the screening, Ilene Rosenstein of the University of Pennsylvania's Counseling and Psychological Services will lead a discussion. Rosenstein is a member of the national board of directors of Active Minds, Inc.

Bi-Co Chorale Sings the Berlioz Requiem: On Sunday, April 13, at 3 p.m., the 150-voice Haverford-Bryn Mawr Chorale and Chamber Orchestra, under the direction of Thomas Lloyd, will perform Hector Berlioz's *Requiem*. Student soloists include two Bryn Mawr students: Collette Young '11 and Elizabeth Bielinski '10. The performance will be held in Roberts Hall, Marshall Auditorium on the Haverford College campus and is free and open to the public. For more call information (610) 896-1011 or e-mail nmerriam@haverford.edu.

Creative Writing Faculty Reads. This Sunday, April 13, at 7 p.m., four members of Bryn Mawr's creative-writing faculty will share their work with the College community and prospective students who will visit Bryn Mawr during Open Campus Days this weekend. The reading will take place in Ely Room of Wyndham Alumnae House. On the program:

- Karl Kirchwey, Associate Professor of the Arts and Director of the Creative Writing Program, is the author of five books of poems, the most recent of which is *The Happiness of This World: Poetry and Prose* (Putnam's, 2007). He is also the author of a verse drama based on the

Alcestis of Euripides entitled *Airdales & Cipher*, and recently completed a translation of Paul Verlaine's first book of poems, *Poems Under Saturn*.

- J.C. Todd, Lecturer in Creative Writing. Todd's volume of poems *What Space This Body*, published in 2008 by Wind Publications, gathered work that had appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Drunken Boat*, *The Paris Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere. She is also the author of the chapbooks *Nightshade* (1995, 2000) and *Entering Pisces* (1985). She has published translations from the Spanish, Lithuanian and Latvian.
- Daniel Torday, Lecturer in Creative Writing. Torday's fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *Esquire Magazine*, *The Kenyon Review* and *The New York Times*. A former editor at *Esquire*, he received his MFA from Syracuse University, where he was the winner of the Peter Neagoe Prize for the short story. Torday is currently completing his first novel.
- Rachel Wetzsteon, Jane Flanders Fund Poet and Lecturer in Creative Writing, is the author of three books of poems, *Sakura Park* (Persea, 2006), *Home and Away* (Penguin, 1998), and *The Other Stars* (Penguin, 1994), as well as a critical study, *Influential Ghosts: a Study of Auden's Sources* (Routledge, 2007). She is at work on a fourth collection of poems, *Silver Roses*.