August 2011

LAUNCHING OF THE TEXTILE AND CLOTHING WORKERS' UNION (SOTA)

After having submitted their documents to the labor ministry in order to receive legal recognition, the executive committee of the Textile and Clothing Workers' Union (SOTA, in Creole) held a press conference with the Batay Ouvriye May First Union Federation (ESPM-BO, in Creole). This press conference was held in the offices of the Platform of Haitian organizations for human rights (POHDH).

With us were representatives of national human rights organizations, such as POHDH itself and the Haitian Platfom for an alternative development (PAPDA), as well as the cabinets of certain lawyers involved in the defense of workers' rights (Defense of the oppressed – DOP, and the Office of international lawyers – BAI, in French). Also present were delegates of organizations in struggle, particularly the Democratic Popular Movement (MODEP).

There was also a delegate unionist of the National Confederation of Union Unity (CNUS) from the Dominican Republic, Dr. Antonio de Jesús Aquino, who is responsible in this federation of the workers' demands and rights section, which is also in charge of defending Haitian workers in the neighboring country. The AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center delegated Lauren Stewart, who is responsible of the Haiti-Dominican Republic program and Ose Pierre, permanent delegate in Haiti. Both, with Victor Baez, Secretary General of the Union Confederation of the Americas (CSA), affiliated with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

Each of the representatives gave their total support to this new union, pointing out that they will follow more closely the situation's evolution since they know very well the repressive aspect characteristic prevalent in this branch of the capitalist industry in which the bosses, with the support of the State, fully disregard the workers' rights, particularly the right to organize in unions. In this respect, Dr. Aquino read the articles 87 and 89 of the International Labor Organization's convention, which highlights the rights all workers have to organize and obtain collective conventions in the factories where they work, an international convention that Haiti supposedly signed.

THE STRUGGLE HAS JUST BEGUN!

August 27, 2011

BATAY OUVRIYE

Dear All,

As we informed you of the founding of a new labor organization by the name of SOTA (Sendika Ouvriye Takstil ak Abiman) to defend the rights of the textile workers in Haiti two weeks ago, 5 members of the executive committee were dismissed and were told to go to the Regional Bureau of Social Affairs and Labor to receive their severance pay. We are not surprised by this reaction as we know already that most of the factory owners or managers are union busters in their nature. They used all kind of false reasons or intimidation tactics to accomplish their goals so the workers cannot use their right to organize for the defense of their interest.

At the One World Apparel factory owned by the former presidential candidate Mr. Baker, the secretary of SOTA was fired because he was distributing a leaflet outside informing the workers about the existence of SOTA and inviting workers to join.

At Genesis factory owned by Gerald Apaid, the treasurer who was sick went to ask for permission to go home, the human resources person refused and give him an ultimatum of either staying until 5:30 p.m. or return his badge.

The next working day, after three members of the committee accompanied with a member of ESPM-BO went to discuss the case with the Human Resources person by the name of Mrs Garcon in the morning, they were fired at the end of the day. They were threatened, sequestrated, their bags were searched and papers taken and management called a policeman to intimidate them and menacing them. It's after that a member of ESPM BO called Mrs. Garcon to tell her that what was happening was completely unlawful and we will inform Better Work and the contracting company Gildanwear about the situation, the three SOTA members were able to leave the plant and were told that they were fired and they should go the MAST for their severance pay.

We are calling upon you to act against those union busting tactics on the part of managements of both companies. Send a powerful statement to Mr. Apaid and Mr. Baker about our following demands:

- The reinstatement of all 5 workers and recognize the SOTA union as representing the textile factory workers;
- Management and SOTA Executive committee to discuss the list of demands of the workforce in both factories;
- The minister of social affairs and labor to take appropriate steps to ensure that the right of workers to join a union is protected;
- The Gildanwear company requires its suppliers in Haiti to issue a statement to the workforce both verbally and in writing, stating that workers have the right to join union and to bargain collectively with management.
- Both companies to stop blacklisting workers.

SACKINGS AND REPRESSION!

During the days following the dismissal of 5 members of the executive committee of SOTA (the Textile and Apparel Workers' Union), the firings are continuing even worse. In several factories, now the bosses are attacking union members and all other workers close to them with arbitrary dismissals.

Worse yet: last Tuesday afternoon, while we were continuing the distribution of the May First Union Federation- Batay Ouvriye pamphlets announcing SOTA's establishment and the following repression, a large police force arrived in front of the same Apaid factory (Genesis), armed to the teeth, with anti-bullet jackets and some of them even hooded!!! They spread terror in the entire area, stopped all distributions, and there were people inside the factory taking pictures.

We had no other choice than to leave.

Recall that SOTA, the textile and apparel union, is a legally recognized union, with its registration documents from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, and affiliated with the May 1st Union Federation- Batay Ouvriye (ESPM-BO), also legally recognized and the same documents.

So we ask: up to what point are these arbitrary boss actions going to arrive? Till what point will this open anti-worker repression arrive? Or: is the bloody Duvalier era restored? Or: is this the "dictatorship of the Rule of the Law"?

DOWN WITH UNION REPRESSION!

DOWN WITH INTIMIDATIONS AND RETALIATIONS AGAINST COMBATIVE WORKERS IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY!

FORWARD THE WORKERS' STRUGGLE TO DEFEND THEIR RIGHTS!

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FOLLOW UP on Press Release No. 1 – Letter to be sent to the companies:

We've been informed of the union busting tactics that your company , a member of ADIH (Association of Industries of Haiti) have been involved lately. Freedom of association is recognized in the Haitian constitution and the Labor code. Workers should be able to join union of their choice. SOTA (Sendika Ouvriye Tektil ak Abiman) is legally recognized by the Ministry of Social affairs and Labor. As one of the owners of the assembling factories where workers were harassed, intimidated or dismissed because either they are members or sympathizers of the initiative of forming a union to defend their rights, we are calling upon you to cease those practices and comply with the Haiti's legislation regarding labor relations and the code of conduct of the companies producing in your pants, notably the Gildan Activewear corporation. We demand the following:

- The reinstatement of all SOTA executive committee members and other members and the recognition the SOTA union as representing the textile factory workers;
- Management and SOTA Executive committee to discuss the list of demands of the workforce of all the factories involved;
- The minister of social affairs and labor to take appropriate steps to ensure that the right of workers to join a union is protected;
- The Gildan company requires its suppliers in Haiti to issue a statement to the workforce both verbally and in writing, stating that workers have the right to join union and to bargain collectively with management.
- All textile companies, members of ADIH to stop blacklisting workers.

Please send your letter to the following addresses and cc to batay@batayouvriye.org:

1) Mr. Gerard APAID/GENESIS – gapaid33166@yahoo.com
2) Mr. Charles Henry BAKER/ONE WORLD APPAREL – chbaker@pbapparel.com
3) Mr. Richard COLES/MULTIWEAR - rcoles@multitex.com
4) ADIH - **administration@adih.ht**