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Mobilizing Consumers to Take Responsibility for Global Social Justice

By
MICHELE MICHELETTI
and
DIETLIND STOLLE

This article studies the antisweatshop movement's involvement in global social justice responsibility-taking. The movement's growth (more than one hundred diverse groups) makes it a powerful force of social change in the new millennium. The rise of global corporate capitalism has taken a toll on political responsibility. As a response, four important movement actors—unions, antisweatshop associations, international humanitarian organizations, and Internet spin doctors—have focused on garment-production issues and mobilized consumers into vigilant action. The authors examine these actors, their social justice responsibility claims, and their views on the role of consumers in social justice responsibility-taking. The authors determine four paths of consumer action: (1) support group for other causes, (2) critical mass of shoppers, (3) agent of corporate change, and (4) ontological force for societal change. The authors find that the movement mobilizes consumers through actor-oriented and event-specific (episodic) framing and offer a few results on its ability to change consumer patterns and effect corporate change.

Keywords: responsibility-taking; political consumerism; antisweatshop movement; effectiveness

Over the past decade, the political consumerist antisweatshop movement has become a major political claim maker and transnational advocacy network. Not only have the number and kind of actors, networks, and organizations included in it diversified, matured organizationally, and grown in number and strength, but with the help of the Internet, it has professionalized its activities and strengthened its potential to frame its claims, mobilize support, and push change on corporations. It can even boast a series of victories. Through its framing of the sweatshop problem and its information campaigns, the movement is increasingly convincing consumers that sweatshops are social injustices and that certain actors have responsibility to solve sweatshop problems. In so doing, it challenges conventional views of political responsibility by going beyond government and calling

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on citizens and on corporations to play their part. The movement is thus expanding the arenas and spheres where global political responsibility is practiced to include the market. Although experts debate its effectiveness in solving sweatshop problems, it should be considered a significant movement in the new millennium and part of a more general political process of creating new forms of responsible governance locally, nationally, and globally (Micheletti 2007; Smith and Johnston 2002).

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Global Social Justice Responsibility-Taking

Severe violations of human and workers' rights have been found in the global garment industry. Watchdog fact-finding offers long lists of labor violations in facto-

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ries used by well-known global garment logo giants. A 2004 report on outsourcing in China documents, for instance, that young women work a double shift seven days a week to sew clothing for an average wage of 22 cents (USD) an hour, sixteen-year-old girls apply toxic glue with a toothbrush and their bare hands to build shoes for the Western market, garment factory temperatures are often over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and garment workers are threatened and coached to lie to factory auditors asking about their working conditions (see National Labor Committee, www.nlcnet.org/campaigns/archive/report00/introduction.shtml). These and other violations of workers' social justice are the reasons for the existence of an encompassing claim-making activist antisweatshop movement whose strategy, tactics, and support are explained by the fact that governments across the board are unable or unwilling to act effectively.

Government inaction on global social justice responsibility is of central interest in political science. It shows that existing political institutions charged with caring for the world are not proving that they can successfully take responsibility for global problems. "Earth has no CEO. No Board of Directors. No management team . . ." is how the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, World Bank, and World Resources Institute (2003) summed up the general situation. This discouraging conclusion suggests that traditional government political responsibility, which is premised on the existence of state authority (jurisdiction) for problem solving and identifiable actors that can be made legally accountable for their specific actions, are ill suited to take charge of solving pressing complex global problems. The traditional political responsibility process seems only to work well when government is mandated to enact strong laws that allow it to establish who is to blame for intentional wrongdoings concentrated in time and room (Jordan, Wurzel, and Zito 2003). However, in global garment making as well as other areas alluded to in the quote above, these aspects of good government are seldom in place. It is difficult to prove intentionality of injustice and wrongdoings by the numerous and often hidden commodity chain actors involved in the global production, sale, and consumption of affordable fashion. Even if good laws are in place, governments in developing countries for different reasons may not have the capability or willingness to prosecute transnational garment corporations for wrongdoings. And without good laws, it is not even possible to hold wrongdoers legally accountable for their actions (International Council on Human Rights [ICHRP] 2002).

Corporations use opportunities opened up by economic globalization and free trade to lower their costs and improve their consumer markets. In itself, this is not a problem. However, in weakly regulated settings as in global garment manufacturing, corporate conduct frequently creates social justice and environmental problems. Time and time again, corporate conduct has been shown to be harmful and morally dubious but not necessarily illegal and, therefore, not really solvable through national and international law (ICHRP 2002). Numerous are the examples of transnational garment corporations shaking off reports about unsatisfactory working and environmental conditions in the countries where they are operative. When first asked about their role in causing and treating the

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problems that have developed because of their presence in other countries, corporations have answered that they are unaware of the problems and that they lie outside their scope of responsibility. Although this kind of corporate blame avoidance has lessened because of concerted civil society and consumer action, responsibility-taking is still debated and in need of institutional formulation and implementation. These developments show the difficulty in applying conventional models of responsibility-taking because their logic of accountability assumes (1) a governmental regulatory framework and (2) an intimate link between problem cause and problem solving that allows government and citizens to bring wrongdoers to court and be sanctioned and forced to right their wrongs (Young 2006).

Weaknesses in the conventional model of political responsibility and increasing disappointment with the World Trade Organization (WTO) policy on free trade have led scholars, policy analysts, activists, and consumers to develop new ways to fill the responsibility vacuum created by government inaction and corporate negligence. They may use public law and pressure governments to enact better laws. However, their mission focuses more on improving corporate policy and practice as well as changing the consumers' worldview about the role of consumption in society as a whole. This strategic and conscious choice is explained by the more structural nature of complex global social justice problems, which is "a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting in pursuit of their particular goals and interests, within given institutional rules and accepted norms" (Young 2006, 114). This ambitious responsibility-taking mission demands creative cooperation among a vast array of actors and a highly innovative repertoire of skills, communication, and arenas for action. For the antisweatshop movement, it means turning to global capitalism and logo corporations.

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Today, large garment corporations are vulnerable targets for antisweatshop activism. Their buyer-driven character forces them to survive in highly competitive markets. To make a profit, they must compete with other sellers over increasingly

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fickle (non–brand loyal) consumers looking for good-quality clothing at very affordable prices. To maintain and even improve their market shares and profit margins, they outsource their manufacturing to countries where labor is inexpensive and devote considerable resources into competitive logo and image marketing. In the weakly regulated setting of outsourced garment manufacturing, worker welfare is jeopardized by fast and flexible production needed to keep up with fashion-craving consumers (Smith 1997; Gereffi 2001). This creates serious social justice problems. At the same time, the antisweatshop movement can use the vulnerable and competitive image situation of the buyer-driven corporate world to push to improve garment workers' rights and social justice. Wanting profits and a good image among consumers, logo garment corporations are now forced to address sweatshop problems.

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Development of Antisweatshop Political Consumerism

The metaphor "sweatshop" was coined in the late 1800s to call attention to problems at workshops or factories using "sweated labor" (people who worked long hours with poor pay and conditions) to produce goods. Even then, the piecework tailoring trade was singled out as a mode of manufacturing open for "sweaters" to employ vulnerable workers and treat them badly. Particularly "sweatable" groups were children and especially women immigrants working in the garment trade in large cities. Reformers, as antisweatshop activists were then called, made political claims about sweatshop wrongdoings. They criticized workplace safety and low workers' wages, demanded that institutions and individuals involved in these industries take responsible action, and offered a few highly innovative solutions that used the market as an arena for politics. Early on, they emphasized the role of consumers. New York working women lobbied Josephine Shaw Lowell, charity reformer and founder of the New York Consumers' League in 1891, who testified publicly that consumers were behind "some of the worst evils from which producers suffer" and that they had the duty "to find out under what conditions the articles they purchase are produced and distributed, and to

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insist that these conditions shall be wholesome and consistent with a respectable existence on the part of the workers" (quoted in Boris 2003, 205). In similar fashion, Florence Kelley used her platform as general secretary of the National Consumer's League to formulate a new model of political responsibility that gave consumers a central role: "No one except the direct employer is so responsible for the fate of these children as the purchasers who buy the product of their toil" (quoted in Sklar 1998, 27).

Antisweatshop reformers used a variety of tactics to promote their cause. They investigated sweatshops, informed and educated the public, publicized sweatshop problems, offered "buycott" or best-practice shopping guides, pressured government to purchase "no-sweat" wear for its employees, mobilized public support for political responsibility-taking, supported unionization, entered partnerships with business, and even established a very early innovative no-sweat labeling scheme (the U.S. White Label Campaign 1898-1919) (Boris 2003; Sklar 1998). The rich scholarship on the history of sweatshops shows that their main goal was to pressure government to take political responsibility and enact government-enforced labor standards to stamp out sweatshops (Stott 1999; Rosen 2002).

This happened. Scholars of American history agree that the "New Deal Order" with its focus on federal regulatory authority took political responsibility to end sweatshops. It promoted unionization, legislative labor standards, and consumer preference for union-made goods. Something else happened. Corporations sought ways to avoid regulation. Many of them dodged unionization by moving their manufacturing to southern states where unions were weak. Later, they moved their manufacturing abroad—first to Latin America and then Asia. Corporate handling of sweatshop responsibility provoked unions whose initial response was protectionistic and involved blocking imports and supporting economic nationalistic calls on consumers to "buy American." They even tried to hide the fact that sweatshops existed in the United States (Boris 2003, 212). Once garment manufacturing was outsourced, the third world movement became involved. Its cause was not protectionism but third world solidarity through fair trade shopping. The alternative trade movement began in the 1950s with third world stores (now world shops) selling goods from developing countries. Perhaps surprising given their different reasons for engaging in antisweatshop activism and even showing current tensions in the movement on how to solve sweatshop problems, unions (that first promoted protectionism and later with outsourced manufacturing broadened their cause to global solidarity) and third world groups wanting to advance global solidarity through shopping form the root of today's antisweatshop movement.

Contemporary antisweatshop activism came to a boil in the 1990s. Two events in 1995 were crucial formative events in North America: the establishment of the amalgamated Union of Needle, Industrial, and Technical Employees (UNITE! and now UNITE HERE!) and the police raid of domestic sweatshops in El Monte, California. UNITE triggered a new union activism that used consumer power to pry open space for organizing. The El Monte raid was a wake-up call for U.S. civil society and created a media sensation with ripple effects far into the

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future (data not shown). In Europe, clothing became high civil society politics a bit earlier and in a different way. The formative event was a lockout of women workers demanding a legal minimum wage in a clothing factory in the Philippines, which startled European international solidarity activists who had not previously considered the politics of clothes, the plight of women workers in developing countries, and the potential to hold Western consumers and producers responsible for bad working conditions in foreign garment factories. People in Europe expressed their outrage publicly; the media became interested. This led to the establishment of the leading European antisweatshop organization, the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) in 1990. CCC states retrospectively that the lockout "struck a nerve" and that "campaigning for 'Clean Clothes' provided a concrete way of taking up the political demands of women's and labour organizations in the south and, at the time, of changing the behaviour and the policies of TNC's [transnational corporations] and governments in the North, since they are responsible for the way people in the south live and work" (Ascoly and Zendenrust 1999).

Shortly afterwards, the antisweatshop movement gained momentum. Old, established civil society organizations learned to spice up their traditional social justice message with the help of spin-doctor, PR-oriented Internet-based advocacy groups like Global Exchange (from 1988). Global Exchange used its media talents to focus public and media attention on celebrity corporate leaders—in particular, Nike CEO Phil Knight and Kathie Lee Gifford, U.S. talk show host with her own brand name clothes—whose corporations were key targets of antisweatshop activism (Bullert 2000). This concentration on logos and CEO celebrities used buyer-driven corporate vulnerabilities well and gave the sweatshop problem cultural resonance by showing the relationship between important consumer symbols in the cultural environment and social justice responsibility-taking (cf. Kubal 1998). Validation of the movement's hook into popular culture came and comes in a variety of forms, two of which are the Doonesbury comic strips in 1997 on outsourced Nike manufacturing in Vietnam that triggered a wave of university student activism and a joke by Jay Leno about Nike sweatshops on the Tonight Show in 1998. Within a few years, culture jamming with the encouragement of Adbusters Media Foundation, a global network of artists, activists, writers, pranksters, students, educators, and entrepreneurs wanting to advance what it calls the "uncooling of consumption," would exploit corporate vulnerabilities more fully by expressing antisweatshop sentiments in more humorous and radical ways.

Old and new civil society teamed up in the antisweatshop cause. Figure 1 shows that the movement globally includes more than one hundred organizations representing church groups; student groups; think tanks; policy institutes; foundations; consumer organizations; international organizations; local to global labor unions; labor-oriented groups; specific antisweatshop groups; no-sweat businesses; business investors; and international humanitarian and human rights organizations, networks, and groups. Several antisweatshop actors (particularly the ones from old civil society) have a broader agenda than antisweatshop political consumerism. For them, political consumerism is one strategy to reach their general

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FIGURE 1
CONTEMPORARY ANTISWEATSHOP MOVEMENT'S MAIN GROUPS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND NETWORKS

Academic Consortium on International Trade
Adbusters
Alberta Nike Campaign
American Center for International Labor Solidarity
American Apparel
Asia Monitor Resource Center
Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational Accident Victims
Attac

Behind The Label (UNITE)
Boycott Nike

Campaign for the Abolition of Sweatshops and Child Labor
Campaign for Labor Rights
Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs
Catholic Institute for International Relations
Child Labor Coalition
Child Labor Bulletin
Christian Aid
Clean Clothes Campaign
Community Aid Abroad "Just Stop It"
Co-op America
CorpWatch

Development and Peace
Diamond Cut Jeans

Educating for Justice
Ethical Consumer
Ethicalshopper.net
Ethical Threads
Ethical Trading Initiative
European Association of National Organisation of TextileRetailers
European Fair Trade Association
Fair Labor Association
Fairtrade Foundation

Fair Trade Center
Fair Wear
FLO-International (Fairtrade Labelling Organizations Int'l.)

Gapsucks.org
Garment Worker Center
Get Ethical
Global Alliance for Workers and Communities
Global Exchange
Globalise Resistance
Global Solidarity, Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Global Solidarity Dialogue
Global Unions

HomeNet
Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee
Human Rights for Workers: The Crusade Against Global Sweatshops
Human Rights First

International Committee for Trade Union Rights
International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
International Federation for Alternative Trade
International Labor Organization
International Labor Rights Fund

Just Act: Youth ACTion for Global JUSTice
Just Do It! Boycott Nike!
Just Shoppers'Guide to Sport Shoes

Labour Behind the Label
LINK Etc.
LINK-label

MaisonInternationaal Huis (MINTH)
Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network
Maquila Solidarity Network
Multinational Resource Center

National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice
National Labor Committee for Worker and Human Rights
National Mobilization Against Sweatshops
Nike Wages Campaign
Nike Watch (Oxfam, AUS)
North-South Institute
No Sweat: The UK Campaign Against Sweatshops
No Sweat Shop Labeling Campaign

Olympic Living Wage Project: Starving for the Swoosh (2001)
Oxfam's campaign "Make Trade Fair" -involved in Fair Play at the Olympics

Peace Through Interamerican Community Action
People-Centered Development Forum
People's Global Action
Play Fair at the Olympics
Press for Change

Responsible Shopper, Co-Op America
Resource Center of the Americas

SA 8000 (Social AccountabilityInt'l.)
Scholars Against SweatshopLabor
Smithsonian Sweatshop Exhibition
Stichting Onderzoek Multinationale Ondernemingen (SOMO,Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations)
Students Against Sweatshops, Canada
Sweatshop Journal
Sweatshop Watch
SweatX (union cut and sew shop)

TCFU Australia
Thai Labor Campaign
Transnational Information Exchange-Asia (TIE-Asia)
Transnationale Organization

Union Label and Service Trades (part of AFL-CIO)
Union Mall
Union Wear
Unite! Union of Needle trades, Industrial and Textile Employees
United Students Against Sweatshops
US/Labor Education in the Americas Project (US Leap)

Verite (non-profitsocial auditing)
Vietnam Labor Watch

Witness for Peace
Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing
Women Working Worldwide
Workers Rights Consortium
World Development Movement
Worldwide Responsible Apparel Production

SOURCES: Individual websites; http://depts.washington.edu/ccce/polcommcampaigns/nikecampaignsites.htm
NOTE: The snowball method was used to collect information from Internet searches, information from individual Websites and their linking functions, and previous research. Many of the movement actors were accessed over a period of four years. The figure does not include actors with corporate social responsibility as their main theme, e.g., Amnesty Business, the United Nation's Global Compact, and European Commission's Social Agenda. Neither does it include personal blogs, individuals' Websites nor European country-specific groups affiliated with pan-European ones as the Clean Clothes Campaign. It includes all movement actors focusing on social justice responsibility-taking in the global garment sector, though many of the groups have goals as well.

goals. Many of the newer groups focus on the market as an arena for politics and have "clean clothes" as a main focus while others concentrate exclusively on unsatisfactory conditions in the garment industry. The groups dedicating themselves entirely to garment sweatshops have robust, creative, and expressive names. Some are Behind the Label, Ethical Threads, Sweat Gear, and the "Just Stop It" campaign, which is a culture jam of a famous Nike marketing slogan.

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Noteworthy is the less common cooperation between unions and consumers, as illustrated by the UNITE and the National Consumers League's Stop Sweatshop campaign that reached out to more than 50 million consumers globally (Golodner 1997) and the coalition between the AFL-CIO, UNITE, and students that led to the establishment of the United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS from 1998), now a central actor in the antisweatshop movement. USAS's time-consuming and at times violent struggle to get college and university procurement officers to use their shopping choices to ensure that academic sports equipment and college products are sweat-free is glorified in *The Nation*, media reports, journal articles, books, and on the USAS Web site. USAS (2006) formulated its role in social responsibility-taking this way: "Many universities directly profit from the exploitation of the women and men around the globe who make the clothes that bear their logo. To stop this cycle of indignity, we, as students, started to demand that our universities take responsibility for the conditions under which their licensed apparel is made by adopting Codes of Conduct to regulate the behavior of their manufacturers."

Sweatshop concerns and the need to develop innovative tactics and solutions for global social responsibility-taking is giving new life to social-justice-oriented old civil society, whose methods and missions were out of touch with younger generations (Levi 2003; Ascoly and Zendenrust 1999). Creative forms of individualized collective action, attention to the role of production and consumption in global politics, and use of the Internet facilitate the building of bridges and coalitions between traditional membership groups and those groups whose legitimacy and support are crafted online. This lets the movement reach out to heterogeneous groups of consumers—from inner-city youth to blue-collar workers, soccer moms, university students, film and pop music stars, and government procurement officers. With the help of innovative campaign framing and methods, it reveals the policies and practices of global garment corporations and asks consumers to consider how their seemingly private consumer choice is connected to and, therefore, responsible for garment workers' labor rights and safety. Once this consciousness-raising about the politics of clothes is in motion, the movement then offers supporters ideas about how they can take social justice responsibility for their choices of clothes and shoes, resources to pressure corporations to take social justice responsibility, and information to reconsider how they value consumption as part of their social lives.

Role of Consumers in the Antisweatshop Movement

Consumers are important actors for all parts of the antisweatshop movement. However, a study of documents and interviews with key movement actors (UNITE HERE!, Global Unions, CCC, USAS, Oxfam, Global Exchange, and Adbusters Media Foundation) representing important parts of the movement (unions, specific antisweatshop associations, international humanitarian organizations, and Internet spin doctors) shows that these organizations mobilize

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consumers to play different roles in the antisweatshop struggle.[1] We identify and discuss four distinct consumer roles below. They are (1) support group for a broader cause, (2) critical mass of fair trade shoppers, (3) "spearhead force" of corporate change, and (4) ontological agent of societal change.

What unites the heterogeneous organizations into a movement is their agreement that the common goal is improved workers' rights in the global garment industry. This does not mean that there is no disagreement or tension within the movement. Currently the movement is debating whether unionization, codes of conduct and independent monitoring, or "no-sweat" clothing is the best way to go to end sweatshops (Ballinger and Connor 2005; Johns and Vural 2000). The consumer role is part of this tension.

For unions, consumers are supporters that help them to solve sweatshop problems through increased unionization, which they argue will empower workers and give them a formal platform to negotiate with employers and sign collective agreements that guarantee decent wages and working conditions, thus making sweatshops history. Consumers are a "broad, ideologically benign community" that can be used in a political strategy "to make the struggle for justice for workers more palatable to the public in an antilabor climate" (Golodner 1997). Unions ask consumers to join union-called boycotts of corporations, support their urgent appeals, and follow union-formulated good purchasing practices. With this amassed consumer support, they believe that unions will be able to harness globalization and develop themselves into a countervailing power forceful enough to challenge sweatshop work and corporate globalization (Global Unions 2000). To get consumers on board, North American unions have even established a special unit. UNITE's Behind the Label (see http://www.behindthelabel.org/about.asp) multimedia news magazine and online community (sponsored by an alliance of clothing workers, religious leaders, human rights advocates, consumers, and students) has as its mission to raise consciousness about sweatshop abuses and get consumers to buy union-made apparel. Thus, contemporary unions (as their historical cousins) want consumers to let corporations know they are being watched through a union lens.

Even though most other antisweatshop activists support the union cause, they also want consumers to play a more dynamic and independent role. For them, consumers—not unions—can become the countervailing power to corporations. The consumer role of critical shopping mass is cultivated by international humanitarian and human rights organizations as well as USAS to accomplish this. For them, when consumers better their consumer practice, they promote the development of a market for sweat-free goods and indirectly influence corporate policy and practice. These organizations believe that critical mass shopping is an important step toward a more equitable world. Oxfam International (2006) stated that aware and mobilized consumers can "use their purchasing power to tilt the balance, however slightly, in favour of the poor." It asks consumers to help alleviate poverty by using fair trade labeling schemes, participating in fair trade holiday shopping campaigns, and becoming involved in different online and offline

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campaigns to show garment corporations the seriousness of their mission (Oxfam Australia 2006a, 2006c). The international human rights group Global Exchange (2006), which harshly criticized the WTO for "systematically [undermining] democracy around the world" in its free trade policy and creating a situation where consumers are confronted with "products at the store [that] may seem like a bargain, but they come with a very high human price for the workers that made them," now uses its spin-doctoring talents to sell fair-traded consumer goods and to mobilize sweat-free communities because "organizing communities of consumers can make sweatfree purchases dynamic and effective" (Global Exchange 2005; Moller 2006). For USAS, educational institutions can become critical mass "no-sweat" consumers. Its efforts in mobilizing students to pressure procurement officers first made global garment corporations mad. Over the years, they learned to respect USAS's knowledge and ability to change higher education's procurement practices. USAS's efforts are now imitated by other antisweatshop actors.

An even more independent and dynamic role is consumers as a spearhead force of corporate change. This role is an important fundament of the CCC, identifying itself as a European consumer pressure group and consumer campaign whose strength comes from consumer power and people becoming a "community of consumers" rather than just "autonomous shoppers" (Golodner 1997). Buyer-driven corporate vulnerabilities are very consciously and explicitly used as good opportunities for spearhead consumer action to hit corporations where it hurts most, because "brand name companies compete intensely for consumer loyalty, and therefore consumers can influence how these companies operate" (CCC 2006). Interestingly, the CCC did not plan this consumer role. Rather "using the consumer angle to raise awareness . . . worked far beyond our original expectations" and "holds true for all the countries that the campaign has spread to" (Ascoly and Zendenrust 1999; Merk 2006). It also acknowledges that consumers can support trade unions, but spearheading political consumerism is the most dominant role. Now it even stresses the importance of government as a consumer of work wear in its clean clothes communities campaigning. Here its focus differs from the critical shopping mass perspective because government consumers are seen as a role model (a spearhead) for individual consumers to learn how they can directly take responsibility for the impact of their consumption on the complex global garment commodity chain (Clean Clothes Communities 2005).

The most independent, forceful, and radical consumer role is found in the part of the antisweatshop movement wanting most to "shake up consumer culture" (Lasn 2006). For Adbusters Media Foundation, consumers as an ontological force for paradigmatic societal change means that a transformation in their predispositions and worldview about consumer culture and corporations will facilitate grand social and political reform. Its founder Kalle Lasn is convinced that new consumer thinking about consumption can shift present power alliances, shake up governments, and force corporations to change. Without contacts with other parts of the antisweatshop movement, Adbusters dedicates itself to reaching this goal by helping consumers liberate themselves from their "media-consumer

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trance" and "megacorporations," which are identified as "the largest single psychological project ever undertaken by the human race" (Lasn 2000, 19). Only enlightened and reformed consumers can play this powerful role because unions are stuck in "an old leftist paradigm" that promotes workers' self-interests and unsustainable economic growth and are therefore unable to solve pressing global problems, and mobilizing consumers into a critical mass of fair trade shoppers only "scrapes at the surface" of the problems created by corporate globalization and overconsumption (Lasn 2006).

Rounding Up Consumers: Global Antisweatshop Movement Campaigning

No matter what the consumer role, the movement uses two types of frames, episodic and thematic, to get consumers to see and act on the connections between their apparel choices and the realities of outsourced manufacturing for garment workers (cf. Iyengar 1999). Episodic campaigns focus on particular issues and put responsibility claims on specific wrongdoers. They aim at triggering consumers to take immediate action. Thematic campaigns penetrate the underlying mechanisms leading to social justice responsibility vacuums, and they depict the sweatshop problem more broadly and abstractly by embedding it in the larger context of the pervasive role of consumption in our lives. They aim at changing consumer thinking about consumer society and culture.

Not surprisingly given the consumer roles characteristic of much of the movement, most antisweatshop mobilizing activism stresses episodic campaigning and focuses on high-profile specific events because, as CCC (2005, 36) explained, "It is by taking action in our everyday lives, by provoking consumers to question what they are buying and as they buy, that we will move forward." Antisweatshop movement actors believe that episodic consumer campaigning can convince corporations to accept unions and collective bargaining, improve their codes of conduct, allow for third-party monitoring of their implementation, and in the end help alleviate social injustices in the global garment industry.

Here, personalization of sweatshop problems is important to drive the message home to consumers. Workers' testimonials and video clips on key movement actors' Web pages ask consumers to take a good look at the individuals who sew their clothes and shoes and the corporations that hire them. A Global Unions (2006) spotlight feature started thematically by asking consumers rhetorically, "What's the link between the top brand of jeans you may be wearing and Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas?" It answered immediately that it is the "day-to-day exploitation of workers in the export processing zones of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, where they produce clothing for leading international brands." Then the frame becomes episodic. Consumers in three short minutes get to know union activist Haitian Georges Macès, who sews the hems of Levi's and other brand-name jeans. They see Georges riding his bike to work and then

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at his workplace, where he explains his situation, his union's efforts, and his need for a decent living wage. Toward the end of the clip, Georges "appeals to all those far away from Haiti who wear the jeans I make" and states that "it is important that customers know that our sweat and blood goes into these jeans." The aim of this and other episodic framing is to prompt individual consumers to participate in time-limited campaigns with urgent appeals drafted as e-mail letters ready to send to corporate executives, politicians, decision makers, or even other consumers to engage in organized demonstrations outside flagship retail stores and to use fair trade shopping hints for purchases at the holiday season. When all this happens, the movement has coordinated individualized and more organized antisweatshop collective action in a forceful way. The Nike Corporation and its retailers' Niketowns have provided particularly important opportunities for the movement to use episodic framing to promote both individualized and organized consumer collective action.

[P]ersonalization of sweatshop problems is important to drive the message home to consumers.

Targeting big sports is increasingly important for the movement. Millions of people follow these high-media-profile events, which antisweatshop actors use to play on the virtues of fair play and fair competition associated with sports (Oxfam Australia 2006b, 3) and which make sportswear companies easy targets "because the consumer link is even stronger—for example, they sponsor events" (CCC 2006). The Olympics and European soccer have been important antisweatshop arenas. Examples are Foulball (1997), following the publicity wave after *Life* magazine's article on child labor in a Nike soccer factory; Play Fair at the Olympics (Oxfam 2004); Play Fair in Europe (World Football Cup 2000); Sportwear Industry Still Not Playing Fair (World Cup 2002); Red Card to Child Labor (World Cup 2004); mobilizing efforts before, during, and after the 2006 World Cup resulting in the report "Offside"; and even now major league baseball (Zirin and Tyner 2006). Each campaign targets logo corporations showcased at the sporting events, presents documentation of their corporate wrongdoings, personalizes worker treatment with the help of pictures and testimonials, and offers consumers a toolbox of tips to take action individually and collectively as well as internationally and locally. About thirty-five countries participated in about five hundred innovative and conventional actions during the 2004 Olympics including press conferences, street theater performances, parades, bike rides to the

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Olympic city (Athens), worker testimonial tours, demonstrations outside the Olympic committee, petitions, reinterpretation of the Olympic torch-carrying event, intervention in sportswear corporate events, a "sew-in" near the Acropolis, student athletes displaying "playfair" symbolism, lobbying, politician contacts, Web site sweatshop sports computer games to attract younger people, and awards of gold medals to garment workers. In countries where outsourcing manufacturing takes place, activists held demonstrations outside Nike corporate offices, marched to parliament buildings, and even took garment workers to upmarket shopping malls to see the retail prices of their labor. The campaign is a trophy proudly displayed on antisweatshop Web sites.

For Adbusters Media Foundation, episodic campaigns, though moving corporations toward more responsibility-taking, are what its founder Kalle Lasn (2006) called antisweatshop "complaint-making." Today, Adbusters believes that episodic framing does not mobilize the true force of consumers and does not use capitalism effectively to change the corporate "genetic code" and consumers' predisposition and worldview. Although held in awe, supported by more than one hundred thousand registered culture jammers, and with about fifteen to twenty thousand Web visitors daily, Adbusters was criticized by Lasn in the same way. Its specific product and corporate culture-jamming memes (episodic framing) that recontextualize corporate messages in humorous ways to send "a chill down the spine of corporations" and its Buy Nothing Day asking consumers to stop shopping on one day each year are mere "tweakings of the king's nose" (Lasn 2006). After 9/11, President George W. Bush's reelection, increased disappointment with the WTO and other important globe-shaping events, Adbusters made the strategic decision to focus more on attempting to challenge corporations by "playing the capitalist game." It established Blackspot Anticorporation, a sweat-free shoe manufacturing operation that has sold twenty thousand pairs of sneakers as of September 2006, as its thematic campaign frame and hopes it will evolve into a local worldwide consumer cooperative "to reassert consumer sovereignty over capitalism" and combine "our passion for social activism with grassroots antipreneurial [*sic*] zeal and rearrange the ugly face of megacorporate capitalism" (Adbusters 2006). This thematic strategy is seen as a better way to change consumers' predispositions, downshift consumption, and promote sustainable development. It even includes mobilization of students to demand a new economic paradigm (true cost economics) in university economic courses as well as engagement in struggles for access arenas reserved for free (noncommercial) speech. With these efforts, Adbusters wants to reach its goal of creating space for consumers to reconsider the role of consumption in their lives to build up capitalism anew from the grassroots level.

Assessing Antisweatshop Activism

Is the antisweatshop movement mobilizing consumers effectively to take responsibility for global social justice and to pressure corporations to do likewise? Are corporations responding to this pressure? "No real impact" is the critics'

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answer. Garment sweatshops still exist. Consumer power cannot be harnessed effectively, and even if it can, this says nothing about how changes in consumer thinking and purchasing practices affect corporations (Vogel 2005). Other observers are less pessimistic. Prominent business scholars remind us of corporate vulnerabilities: "Skeptics may doubt that survey responses translate into choices at the shopping mall, but high-profile multinational corporations take the polling data seriously" (Fung, O'Rourke, and Sabel 2001). Antisweatshop activism can be powerful because buyer-driven brands have reputations at risk (deWinter 2001).

Measuring the effectiveness of political activism is always tricky. It is even more difficult when activism, as in the present case, is (1) controversial and understudied; (2) not solely collectively organized; (3) not delimited to one target, issue, and time frame; and (4) focused on corporations that, unlike many governments, are not required to reveal important information for scholarly assessments. To study market-based political activism, we need to develop measures of effectiveness that take these problems into account. This means assessing the entire activism cycle—from activists' problem formulation and problem recognition and mobilization among consumers, the media, and civil society to the ability of the antisweatshop movement to get their issues on the corporate policy agenda and incorporated in their policy making and implementation. Finally, it is important to assess the ability of the movement to create positive concrete outcomes for garment workers domestically and globally.

A few preliminary results on antisweatshop effectiveness are offered here. The antisweatshop movement has succeeded in formulating the sweatshop problem in a way that resonates well in Western democratic cultures. With the metaphor "sweatshop" as its common master frame, the movement has been able to communicate complex information in an easily understandable way. It has even developed innovative resources to convince consumers, journalists, civil society, and governments that sweatshop problems demand new models of responsibility-taking. Since the mid-1990s, numerous journalists have covered logo garment corporations' sweatshop problems closely; a peak of reporting on sweatshop issues accumulated around the year 2000 in the *New York Times* (data not shown; Greenberg and Knight 2004). The word *sweatshop* has also entered consumer thinking, as witnessed by the global resonance of the Nike Email Exchange, a culture jam that used the word *sweatshop* to toy with Nike's marketing image and, in doing so, made national and international news. These and other examples demonstrate the ability of the antisweatshop movement to create a "community of consumers"—individual, institutional, and governmental ones—and to convince them that they can become "a link in a chain of change which will lead to action" (Stolle and Micheletti n.d.). Survey data validates that citizens who use the market as an arena for politics find it to be an effective way to take personal responsibility and, therefore, facilitate societal change (Boström et al. 2004).

But the critics are right when they say that high visibility and recognition of sweatshop problems and even a mobilized consumer spirit up-and-ready for personal responsibility-taking do not automatically lead to corporate change. Other measures of effectiveness are necessary to make this assessment. Has the movement

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convinced garment corporations that sweatshops are *their* problem to solve? Has it led to changes in corporate policy making? Has corporate policy making been implemented in garment factories? Ongoing research finds that corporations are developing more antisweatshop friendly policies and practices. The movement has been able to force reluctant and formerly blame-avoiding corporations to take social justice responsibility and adopt codes of conduct. A good case in point is Nike, which after years of sustained antisweatshop criticism improved its code of conduct, issued its first Corporate Responsibility Report, opened up to independent monitoring, disclosed its outsourced factory locations, increased minimum wage requirements, and improved health and safety conditions (Arnold and Hartman 2005). Other logo garment corporations are slowly following suit or at least are moving to preempt antisweatshop movement targeting.

Still, these policy changes may just be "sweatwash," meaning that logo corporations change their policy to manage activism and dodge activist and media criticism. How serious are corporations about solving sweatshop problems? And, most important, has antisweatshop targeting and activism improved the working life of global garment workers? Here, findings are mixed and often refer to specific situations. Limited space allows, therefore, for only a few examples. Probably the most successful antisweatshop episodic consumer campaign was against child labor, which has basically disappeared in foreign companies in parts of the developing world that trade with OECD countries (Edmonds and Pavcnik 2006). In districts in Indonesia where activists concentrated their efforts on mobilizing consumer awareness on certain logo brands' treatment of workers, a 15 to 20 percent higher rate of compliance with the minimum wage is reported (Harrison and Scorse 2006). Other efforts are less successful. Codes of conduct are generally not implemented fully: workers are often ill-informed about their existence, monitoring of them is sporadic and often internal rather than independent, all corporations do not disclose their overseas factories, and there are few real attempts to improve wage levels (Fair Trade Center 2006; Applebaum et al. 2000; Gereffi, Garcia-Johnson, and Sasser 2001; Dirnback 2006). But it would be wrong to conclude that code implementation problems mean that working conditions have not improved. They have. Workers in outsourced factories manufacturing for logo garment corporations are better off because of antisweatshop activism and other developments like the legal frameworks associated with trade agreements (Edmonds and Pavcnik 2006).

The conclusion to date is that antisweatshop activism has bite—even if change comes slowly, unevenly, very incrementally, and if doubt still exists about both logo and particularly nonlogo corporations' dedication to social justice responsibility-taking. The question is how sharp antisweatshop's teeth are and how big of a bite it really can make into corporations. To succeed, the movement must continue to mobilize consumers as supporters, as critical shopping mass, as a spearhead force of corporate change, and as ontological agents of deeper structural societal change. Both episodic and thematic campaigns seem to be necessary to keep the sweatshop issue in the public mind and to create general public awareness on the social connections between consumer choice and global social injustices. The big

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difference from earlier decades is that these problems do not go unnoticed by consumers, civil society, the media, government, and most important, garment corporations themselves.

Note

1. Organizers were chosen with the help of a reputational influence method, that is, reference to them in academic and popular scientific publications as well as cross-references to them on other antisweatshop actors' Web sites. All represent main movement parts: unions (Union of Needle, Industrial, and Technical Employees [UNITE HERE!], Global Unions), international humanitarian organizations (Oxfam, Global Exchange), Internet spin doctors (Global Exchange, Adbusters Media Foundation), and specific anti-sweatshop groups (United Students against Sweatshops [USAS], Clean Clothes Campaign [CCC]). Information on them was collected from their own original documents, interviews with their representatives (telephone or e-mail in fall 2006), and secondary literature.

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