

Ontario Public Interest Research Group MCMMASTER

# WORKING GROUP

# Year End Report



## 2004-2005

## WORKING GROUPS

This year saw the highest number of working groups in OPIRG McMaster history – 19 groups were approved. They were:

- Colombia
- Community Volunteer Action
- Employment Opportunities for the Blind
- Food Not Bombs
- Food Security Hamilton
- Flyering Squad
- Guatemala
- Hamilton Accompaniment Team
- Health in Hamilton
- McMaster AIDS Outreach
- Mac Sexual and Reproductive Health
- Make It Fair
- Non Violence Now
- Radio
- Recycle Cycles
- Recycling Our Rain
- Transportation for Liveable Communities
- Student Math Action Research Team
- Waste Reduction

A large number of working groups doesn't necessarily mean more activity over previous years, as some groups struggled to attract new members or encountered difficulty in achieving their goals.



**Monthly Working Group Meetings** were not always well attended. Not all working groups attended the mandatory workshops on **CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING** (September 27, 2004, February 7, 2005 ) and **ANTI-RACISM** (September 27, January 25, 2005).

We had excellent facilitators for Consensus Decision-Making: Rae Mitchell, and Anti-Racism: Michelle Cho, Jane Mulkewich.

Despite the ever-present difficulties in trying to achieve positive social and environmental change between classes, papers and exams in a busy school year, it proved a productive year overall for OPIRG McMaster Working Groups, as the following working group summaries reveal.

*–Randy Kay, Volunteer Coordinator*

## **WORKING GROUP SUMMARY REPORTS:**

### **COLOMBIA**

- OPIRG's COLOMBIA working group held a COLOMBIA NIGHT, October 21, 2004 with Ray Rogers, North American Director of Stop Killer Coke Campaign. Also, a report on a visit to Colombia as part of Caravan for the Life of Colombian Trade Unionists. We also showed a video made by the food and beverage workers of Colombia SINALTRAINAL telling of their struggle to survive as a union and as individuals. Co-sponsored by Vive Colombia Working Group, Department of Labour Studies and Amnesty International Group 1, Amnesty International - McMaster Chapter.
- Participation in the Labour day march.
- Speaking at the Campus Choice (to open up the Coke contract on campus so other brands can be here) rally in front of MUSC.
- Speaking to Faculty Association regarding Coke contract.
- Monthly meetings at MUSC, mainly to coordinate actions on Colombia with emphasis on Coke campaign.

### **COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER ACTION GROUP**

Community Volunteer Action Group (CVAG) is a network of teams of McMaster students who volunteer weekly at social agencies in Hamilton, mainly in the downtown.

- This past school year we had 28 teams at the following agencies:
  - Adventures in Art
  - Benetto Public School (3 groups)
  - Canadian National Institute for the Blind (2 groups)
  - CHOICES
  - Conway Group Homes
  - Friendship Centers (2 groups)
  - Inasmuch Women's Shelter
  - Learning And Fun (LAF) after-school program (4 groups)
  - North End-Breakfast Club (3 groups)
  - Ontario Early Years
  - Ontario March of Dimes (2 groups)
  - Wesley Centre Soup Kitchen (7 groups)
- This year 270 students volunteering a collective 17,000 hours throughout the year (at minimum wage this represents over \$125,000 worth of service to the Hamilton community).
- One of the goals of CVAG is to educate students about social issues such as poverty, so the facilitators of each volunteer team are give training on how to facilitate discussion and reflection within their team. This helps people to see the link between the work that they are doing and social justice. We had several meetings with the facilitators during the year to provide this training (there were approximately volunteer team 40 facilitators).
- Some of the events that we sponsored this year were a showing of the video "Room at the Inn" and hosting a guest speaker from the Hamilton Housing Help Centre (it was poorly attended, with only

4 people). We held several events designed to bring together students from the various volunteering teams to share and reflect on their volunteering experiences (average of 30 people at each meeting). As well, CVAG helped to plan the "Hungry for Change" dinner, which was an awareness raising event about poverty in Hamilton as well as a fundraiser for the Wesley Centre homeless shelter (attended by about 25 people).

Some quotations from students who participated:

- *"Volunteering with this group opened up new questions for me about the Hamilton community – what the situation is like for new immigrants and those living in poverty."*
- *"Volunteering allowed me to see the very different standards of living within the same city and learn that the world truly is not equal opportunity."*
- *"Volunteering with kids at risk and being educated about poverty in Hamilton reinforced my goal to pursue a career where I can continue with similar work."*
- *"Volunteering made me realize how one small impact can effect a child's life and made me wonder what other things I can do to help more people."*

## **EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BLIND**

Employment Opportunities for the Blind is designed to help those who are unable to access equal employment opportunities, motivate and advocate for changes in legislation to insure adequate training programs and accessibility in the workplace. We have

- held several meetings,
- advertised in the Hamilton Spectator and electronic mailing lists to get members to attend.

As of now, we have five members and plan on working through the summer taking trips to various employment agencies and advocate groups. The group is coming together slowly, but it is a working group that has potential to achieve a great leap forward in social justice.

## **FLYERING SQUAD (AKA Anti-Poverty)**

- Attended a SLEEP-OVER AT QUEEN'S PARK to support the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC) in the fight against homelessness
- Helped promote the Poor And Homeless Co-Op from Toronto
- Attended Finance Committee Budget hearing to support the TDRC
- Attended local Flu-Shot clinics for the homeless and public and provided controversial literature

## **FOOD NOT BOMBS**

- we had a serving once a month, the first Saturday of the month
- we served food at WUSC and at a peace studies movie night, as well as gore park once a month.
- we had our first serving in October at christeen's Hemp store on Locke for her 2nd yr anniversary, where we collected many students email addresses and interest in helping
- we got most of our food donated by Buttrum's at the market and Weils gave us some bread closer to the end (in march). we hope to get weils and plan b to donate more this summer.
- in total there were about 7 servings.
- there were about a dozen people helping every month - though not usually the same people. some dedicated fnbers: rebecca, matt leiss, mike smith, lisa b, jonathan ames, and myself.
- we were in the Spectator sometime in February and on cable 14

## GUATEMALA WORKING GROUP

- Wednesday, October 27, 2004. GUATEMALAN WOMEN SPEAK OUT! Chester New Hall, Lounge 607, McMaster University. The Reality of Violence & Discrimination against Indigenous Women in Guatemala with visiting speakers Dina Mazariegos and Victoria Cumes Jochola of Nuestra Voz. This presentation dealt with the struggle to counter violence and discrimination against indigenous women in Guatemala. The speakers also discussed the impacts of the Peace Accords, globalization and neoliberalism on women
  - **Dina Mazariegos:** leader of the Movement of Guatemalan Women for more than 10 years, Social worker and popular educator, Coordinator of the Women's Collective Nuestra Voz.
  - **Victoria Cumes Jochola:** · Community worker and popular educator, Diploma in Indigenous Rights, Kaqchikel linguistic coordinator for the department of Chimaltenango in the National Women's Forum, Participant in the Non-Violence Network, Workshop facilitator for Nuestra Voz in her native tongue Kaqchikel
- Wednesday, February 16, 2005, The Dominican Faith Experience, with support from OPIRG's Guatemalan Working Group present: THE OTHER SIDE OF PARADISE: REALITY IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, WITH JUAN RIVAS: SOCIAL JUSTICE WORKER FROM THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC exposes problems facing Haitian sugar cane workers in bateys, Coffee growers of Los Cacao, Free trade zones. KTH Room 712
- Thursday, March 10, 2005, INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY BENEFIT FIESTA DANCE (Two articles with photos, plus photos with brief commentary appeared in the Spectator) A fundraiser in support of grassroots women's projects in Guatemala. Women's Political Affairs Commission of the URNG and Nuestra Voz Women's Collective. Held at Las Brisas, 157 Main Street East. Organized by Companer@as North-South and co-sponsored by the Guatemalan Working Group of OPIRG McMaster
- Sunday, March 20, 2005 -.LEOCADIO JURACAN, MAYAN ACTIVIST, Sky Dragon Community Development Co-operative Centre. Land, and Justice. Leocadio is national president of the Campesino Committee of the Highlands (CCDA), which is mandated to peacefully defend the rights of workers on large coffee, sugar and cotton plantations in Guatemala; recover ancestral lands stolen from the Mayan communities over the past century; promote organic and traditional Mayan agriculture; protect the cultural rights of Guatemala's Mayan majority  
Café Justicia, produced by the CCDA available for sampling and sale.
- Film screening: "The Man We Call Juan Carlos" A one-hour Canadian film which chronicles the history of the CCDA through one man's odyssey from peasant agricultural organizer in the 1970s to guerrilla fighter in the 1980s to Mayan priest in the late 1990s. Sponsored by the Guatemala Working Group, the Sky Dragon Community Development Co-operative Centre, and the British Columbia Central America Student Alliance
- Saturday, April 2, (UNDER) MINING 'DEVELOPMENT' IN HONDURAS AND GUATEMALA: GOLD, GREED, AND COMMUNITY RESISTANCE - A RIGHTS ACTION TOUR, Sky Dragon Community Development Co-operative Inc.  
A presentation and discussion about Canadian-US transnational mining corporations; "development", concessions, licenses; global impunity, repression; indigenous rights violations; and community-based struggles. Tour organized by Rights Action, sponsored by OPIRG's Guatemalan Working Group and Companeras North-South
- April 2005 PUBLIC DECLARATION: NO TO NEO-LIBERALISM...YES TO LIFE  
(see appendix)

## **THE HAMILTON ACCOMPANIMENT TEAM (HAT)**

HAT has been operating for over 3 years, but just became an OPIRG working group in January. Since then, in addition to monthly organizing meetings, we have accompanied 6 people to their appointments at the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs. Being on social assistance can be a harrowing experience. People usually report better treatment during meetings when accompanied, and sometimes get more favourable decisions, more helpful information, etc.

HAT members also attended a meeting of a Burlington youth group to discuss HAT's work, issues of poverty, stigmatization and various forms of oppression that become apparent to us in our work.

## **HEALTH IN HAMILTON**

Health In Hamilton had two meetings in first term and five biweekly meetings in second term. We had up to ten members in our group, and were able to create a Learnlink folder for discussion and planning (although for the most part we relied on mailing lists).

This year is best summarized as an orientation and research year for Health In Hamilton. A lot of the first term was spent learning and contacting different facilities that aid in the provision of Health Care for disadvantaged individuals, from the homeless, immigrants, etc. Second term was spent networking with the Hamilton Urban Community Health Center through Kojo Chinto. I believe that this was a success, as it enabled us to learn about the experiences shared in the HUCHC, as well as to make contact with some clients.

A presentation of our group was also made to the Community Mental Health Promotion Program, and interdisciplinary working group that looks at health promotion among disadvantaged individuals. This led to connecting with Niki Gately of Hamilton Public Health who runs the Hospital Shelters Working Group (HSWG), another interdisciplinary working group focused on hospital discharge of homeless clients. This is a very exciting opportunity for Health In Hamilton, and provided everything works out in the summer, we should be able to help plan walkabouts that orient undergraduates and the general public with the shelters and facilities available to individuals in need.

## **MAKE IT FAIR (FAIR TRADE)**

- Jeff made a presentation on sweatshops with question and answer, March 17, 3:30 - 5:00, T28/001, co-sponsored by Political Science Dept. and Canadian Inst. for International Affairs, Estimated attendance: 170. Outreach through e-mails to TAs doing global political economy and development courses, posters to all dorms, MUSC, and through mail to all departments.
- collected over seventy e-mail addresses subsequent; writing to them netted six that "want to keep informed" and twenty-one that would "do something like pass on e-mail survey forms"
- latter group sent survey out over 320 emails to "activist" Profs (mostly in U.S.)
- Profile article "Hamilton's Sweatshop Crusader" in Hamilton Spectator, April 14, 2005 (see appendix)

## **RADIO** (started in second term)

- The Radio working group has released 400 copies of a Zine entitled "Trans-mission"...This tie-in to the "Trans-mission" Radio show which appears weekly on CFMU's Morningfile, is an alternative transportation-themed publication which features contributions from the Hamilton community. Issue #1 has articles on walking, bicycling, Go-Transit, and The HSR to name a few. Poetry, personal stories, artwork and photography enhance this first issue of hopefully many.....

## **RECYCLE CYCLES**

- We continue to refurbish bikes to sell to largely low income people for modest cost. This provides enough cash flow to pay the rent and to replenish tools and spare parts. We continue to encourage people to come down and work on their own bikes using our tools and space. We used to charge a modest flat fee for this but now it is just on a donation basis if one can afford it...mostly it's gratis.
- We continue to partner with Parkview High School to provide them with excess bikes free of charge that their students can work on in shop. This has worked out great as we have been getting more bikes than we can rebuild. There is a rumour that the Parkview project might be canned which would be unfortunate. It seems as though the city is going ahead with their own recycling yard which will be run by one of the large non-profit groups...perhaps the Amity. This will probably see us loose a good source of bikes this year...but overall it is probably a good thing if lots of stuff can be recycled back into the community.
- Last Christmas we donated a couple of dozen small, mint condition bikes, that we refurbished, to women's shelters. Many of those bikes came through the City's waste recovery project. Unfortunately, during the presentation the mayor took most of the credit for "another fine initiative from the city". The bikes got to needy children which was the most important thing.
- We also donated a dozen bikes to Christian Veterinary Missions of Canada for their project in Sierra Leone...officially the poorest country in the world.
- We have four steady volunteers and a couple that come from time to time but could use another wrench turner or two. We have talked about perhaps doing something with a storefront operation in the core, perhaps teaming up with some other groups, but at the moment none among us regulars have the time nor energy to attempt to change our space or way of doing business.

From the cozy basement of Erskine Presbyterian Church, Dean Carriere, Volunteer.

## **SMART – STUDENT MATH ACTION RESEARCH TEAM**

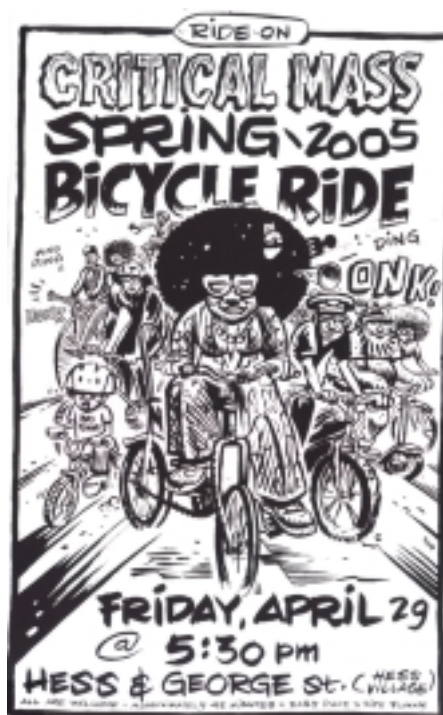
- SMART attended the on TV presentation at the Hamilton Spectator's Open Forum on the Drive Clean Program that SMART attended to speak out about the significance of the damage that vehicles are doing to the environment and the very little value/significance Drive Clean is contributing to reduce that damage. Actually the amount of pollution that is caused by the program largely wipes out any savings from this very expensive and poorly planned program.
- SMART will attend a Natural Resources Canada conference in Montreal on May 5th. The conference title is: Adapting to Climate Change in Canada 2005: Understanding Risks and Building Capacity.
- SMART submitted an abstract titled *Adaptation Options in Transportation: Building community capacity through investments in ITS* (Intelligent Transportation Systems) by SMART (OPIRG) McMaster. This abstract resulted in an invitation from the NRCan conference organizers to present

a poster at the conference. It is expected that approximately 250 people from around the world will attend this conference with most being from across Canada and the US and Australia.

- As a result of this presentation, we expect that many people will be requesting copies of our final SMART Factor Report that we hope to conclude in just a couple of months. We are expecting that NRCan will distribute a copy of our research to all who attend the conference on a conference summary CD after the conference. We also expect to be distributing our final research paper around the world via the Internet.

## TRANSPORTATION FOR LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES

- TLC MONTHLY MEETINGS at McMaster University - (Media S. 2 Spec article quoting TUG and TLC spokes-people on “Stalling our car addiction.”)
- CAR FREE DAY 2004 - TLC held a week of events - (Media - Spec, S.14, Mac Daily News, monkey biz, IMC)
  - Monday S.20 - Guided Bus ‘n Hike from McMaster to Spencer Gorge (12-15 people) (Media - Spec. S 20 - mayor worried)
  - Tuesday S.21 - Guided Bicycle Tour HarbourFront Trail w/Brian Henley (\$\$) (12-15 people)
  - Tuesday S.21 - Car Free Art, Poetry, Music and Film (Run Lola Run) night at Staircase (100 people) (Media - Spec. S. 21 editorial)
  - Wednesday S.22 - CAR FREE DAY - Street Parties (West Ham.)( 100 people)/Road Hockey (Dundas) (20 people) ACT office held events on campus
  - Thursday S.23 - Bike/Walk Drive-In Movie (ET) at Gage Park (100 people)
  - Friday S.24 - Critical Mass bike ride (50 people)
  - Saturday S.25 - Reclaim the Street Party (King William between James and Hughson) (150 people)(Media CHTV, SIL)
  - Sunday S. 26 - Guided Hike in Cootes Paradise w/ Brian McHattie (and two uniformed police officers...) (8 people)
- Randy Kay produced Car Free Day radio spots/ads (15 sec, 30 sec. 60 sec.)
- Gord Pullar produced a Car Free Week poster (\$100)
- CRITICAL MASS - monthly rides well attended
- FORTINOS - RAIL-TRAIL - TLC successfully saw the rail trail integrated into the new Fortino’s Grocery store parking lot - as well as Bike Parking. TLC Letter Oct 31, 2004.
- AIR QUALITY - TLC letter to city re SMOG action (prompted by record setting -103- smog day October 26, 2004)
- TLC’s Feb 2003 request for a Hamilton City web presence for cycling finally achieved [www.hamilton.ca/public-works/Roads-And-Traffic/cycling.asp](http://www.hamilton.ca/public-works/Roads-And-Traffic/cycling.asp) (Dec. 2004)



- CHURCHILL PARK - TLC supported the project - but the city failed to provide a bike path through the park due to local NIMBY opposition.
- CITY CYCLING INITIATIVES REPORT (Dec. 2004)- advocated/supported by TLC (letter)- (Media, Spec. June 8, 2004)
  - Recommendation Updates (as of December 20, 2004)*
  - York Boulevard - Environmental Assessment scheduled
  - Sterling Street - implementation completed
  - Hunter Street - Environmental Assessment scheduled
  - Bike Racks - installations in progress
  - Longwood Road North - implementation completed
  - Bikeway and Trail Maps - distribution completed
  - King Street East - under construction
  - Upper Paradise Road - implementation completed
  - Stonechurch Road - implementation completed
  - Canal Lift Bridge - design completed
  - Canadian Pacific Rail Trail - design stage in progress
- COOTES CROSSING (at SANDERS) - TLC letters and meetings with city prompted by safety concerns at this busy crossing led to a study and a report recommending a pedestrian activated traffic light being installed (Jan. 2005). City council approved the budget for the project which will be installed this year (2005)
- McMaster FRONT ENTRANCE - TLC representatives on Front Entrance steering committee forced changes in the design to make it more pedestrian and cycle friendly (Media S.23 article in Spec)
- TLC WEB SITE [www.hwcn.org/link/tlc](http://www.hwcn.org/link/tlc) - redesigned, updated links.
- PUBLIC EVENT - ALT. TRANS IN HAMILTON, Feb. 2, 2005 - w/Brian McHattie (Ward 1 councillor) and Mary Lou Tanner (Senior Planner w/City) (45 people) Co-sponsored with ACT, TUG, Mac Cycle (Media - Spec, Feb 2, 2005)
- TRANS-MISSION Radio on CFMU 93.3 fm (began as a TLC radio show)
- TRANS-MISSION 'ZINE'- TLC contributed \$30 toward publication of 400 copies of a Hamilton sustainable trans zine TRANS-MISSION (March 2005)
- TLC Members have met with DUNDAS COUNCILLOR Art Samson to discuss alt trans issues.
- CROSSWALKS - TLC letter to City re loss of pedestrian crosswalks in Dundas (March 18, 2005)
- TLC member registered to support the YES side in the McMaster REFERENDUM on the HSR BUS PASS - voted-in overwhelmingly.

## WASTE REDUCTION

- Meetings -> began approx. 1.5 mos. ago. Meetings have been consistently every 2nd week since the group finally got some new members. Meetings have been really productive and everyone's working extremely well together.
- Our plan for the rest of this year & next year is to develop a place for a permanent clothing exchange. The main issue we've been having is one of space - Kevin at Skydragon has seemed receptive to the idea, but we are also checking out space on-campus and hoping that the OPIRG storefront happens.
- Public Events -> a clothing exchange/info session April 14 in the student centre. Unfortunately, due to limited numbers of people, this is all we've accomplished. Many meetings

were held earlier in the year with the hopes of recruiting more people, but unfortunately it was only recently that anyone started showing up to them.

## APPENDIX:

### Hamilton's sweatshop crusader

MEREDITH MacLEOD, Hamilton Spectator, April 14, 2005

Tucked away in a grad student residence at McMaster is one of the pioneering crusaders in a battle to get Nike to pay its offshore labourers a fair wage for the work that made the company more than \$1.1 billion in profits in 2004.

Yesterday, more than a dozen years after Jeff Ballinger wrote a watershed article in Harper's Monthly about the plight of workers in Indonesian factories, the world's biggest sporting-goods company disclosed for the first time the names and locations of more than 700 Third World factories that produce its sports equipment.

Industry experts said the disclosure makes the running shoe giant the first major apparel manufacturer to voluntarily reveal its entire supply chain.

Ballinger, who is pursuing his PhD in political science at Mac, says it was far from voluntary. The company has been under fire for years for doing business with sweatshops that underpay workers, force them to work overtime and subject some to physical and verbal harassment.

He saw conditions inside Nike factories first-hand. Ballinger was a union training officer for the U.S. labour powerhouse AFL-CIO and lived in Indonesia from 1988 to 1992. In the Harper's article, he exposed that workers were paid 86 cents a day and had to work huge hours of overtime just to survive.

Many were cheated out of wages and faced physical and verbal punishment. Nike contracted eight factories in the country, some employing as many as 16,000 workers.

One of the most startling facts he pointed out was that a worker stitching shoes or shirts would have to work 44,000 years to make as much as Nike paid its top celebrity endorsement at the time, basketball star Michael Jordan.

Yesterday, Nike acknowledged abuses continue. A two-year audit found that about between 25 and 50 per cent of the contracted factories in South Asia restrict access to toilets and drinking water during the workday. Normal work hours topped 60 hours a week in more than half.

Activists have been demanding for years that major companies reveal where their contract factories are so that independent observers could assess conditions. The companies have held off, saying trade secrets and advanced products could be leaked to rivals.

Ballinger, who founded a non-profit group called Press for Change that lobbied against worker exploitation, says the contract list "is good information to have, but does it solve the problems for workers? No."

He said at least 90 per cent of Nike's factories are in countries where unions "don't have a chance." The small factories contracted to make products work on such tight profit margins that abuse is rampant, he says.

Ballinger, 52, grew up in another steeltown, Gary, Ind., and got swept up in union activism as a teenager. After getting a law degree, he travelled the world trying to spark activism in workers. He says much of Nike's professed dedication to social responsibility is "window dressing."

He says if the executives were truly committed, they would pay back wages to 24 workers - mostly women - who were fired six years ago for protesting working conditions.

"It would cost them about \$80,000. That's less than half a second of a Super Bowl ad but they won't do it."

Ballinger decided early on to focus on just one company, even though many multinationals, including Wal-Mart, Disney, Mattel and Reebok have been accused of exploiting workers.

Nike was his best target.

"They were slapping the swoosh on everything that moved. It was everywhere. You couldn't escape it."

Economists lauded Nike's outsourcing efficiency but consumers weren't so impressed.

Nike's reputation took a huge hit and sales flattened for more than six years.

"People figured out they were paying \$70 for shoes when they cost \$1 for labour. They knew it was wrong."

Nike has rebounded quite nicely. Profits were \$273 million US in the first quarter of 2005, up 36 per cent over the same period last year.

But Ballinger says the effects have been greater than profits. Indonesia now has a higher minimum wage and a stronger labour movement, partially due to the "shaming of Nike," he says.

And consumers have woken up to the fact that their purchasing decisions have global implications for impoverished workers.

Ballinger co-founded a company called No Sweat ([www.nosweatapparel.com](http://www.nosweatapparel.com)) that sells shoes and clothes made in unionized shops in North America and developing countries. No Sweat products are primarily sold over the Internet. Sales

were less than \$150,000 in 2003 but grew to \$700,000 last year. A flyer in a box of sneakers tells buyers that the shoes were made by workers in Jakarta who make at least \$90 US a month. That's 20 per cent higher than the minimum wage.

[mmacleod@thespec.com](mailto:mmacleod@thespec.com)

905-526-3408

## **PUBLIC DECLARATION NO TO NEO-LIBERALISM... YES TO LIFE**

We, the undersigning organizations of this declaration declare the following:

1. Neo-liberal globalization deepens the levels of poverty and extreme poverty in all the countries of the world, while uncontrollably exploiting natural resources, destroying our environment, imposing anti democratic systems, provoking wars, death and misery, as well as attempting against thousand-year-old cultures and the self-determination of peoples worldwide.

In the Americas, specifically in the Peten (Guatemala) and Chiapas (Mexico), neo-liberal policies are expressed through different projects and trade agreements such as: the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), the Plan Puebla-Panama (PPP) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

These plans and policies support the interests of the corporate agenda as well as that of "Western governments", and in our region, especially of the United States government, in order to:

control, exploit, and appropriate themselves of both natural and energy resources such as oil, natural gas, water, minerals, etc. Some of which will be used to produce electricity.

privatize knowledge through bio-piracy, intellectual property rights and patents.

privatize public services, and control and monopolize national and international markets, benefiting multinational corporations.

the exploitation of cheap labour in our region, provoking unemployment, temporary employment, the loss of job security and labour rights, miserable salaries, migration, etc.

the destruction of our local campesino farmer economy, the land appropriation on behalf of large corporations and land-owners enriching the agro-export industry, putting at risk the food sovereignty of our people.

2. We are especially concerned by the imperialist plans to control strategic resources such as fresh water sources while the planet faces a serious crisis: today, 1 300 million people don't have access to clean water; thirty one (31) countries are considered to be facing water shortages; and by the year 2025, the demand for fresh water will outstrip the supply by 56%.

Within the PPP framework, the creation of the Regional Electrical Market (SIEPAC is its Spanish acronym), is designed to attract private investment to the large central electricity generators of the regional market. During the next decade, in the Central America region approximately 700 million US dollars will be invested in energy generation alone.

It is precisely within this context that hydroelectric dams are being reintroduced and planned for the Mesoamerican region, as an integral part of the neo-liberal strategy. The electrical transmission plans presented in the Plan Puebla-Panama are designed to create conditions to attract private investment in the energy market, while creating large reservoirs and gigantic private fresh water reserves and channels to be used by the United States.

Within this framework, hydroelectric dams are planned in the main rivers in Chiapas and the Peten, with five central dams in the Usumacinta River.

3. We strongly reject neo-liberal policies, imposed in almost the whole world through international financial institutions (World Bank WB, International Monetary Fund IMF, International Development Bank IDB, etc.), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), western governments, the corporate agenda and the US military force.

We are completely against and condemn the privatization of water, the planning and construction of hydroelectric dams,

especially those scheduled in the Usumacinta River.

We demand information, transparency, and respect on behalf of the Guatemalan and Mexican governments, as they are putting at risk the future of thousands of families, of land destined for future generations, the virgin rain forest and ancient sacred Mayan temples.

We demand that international financial institutions (especially the WB and IDB), the Guatemalan and Mexican governments, and the United States government cancel the implementation of the projects contemplated in the PPP and the Free Trade Agreements, respecting the self-determination of our peoples.

We are struggling together to build a better world, free from exploitation, destruction, poverty, injustice and discrimination.

## STARTING A WORKING GROUP

[http://opirg.org/mcmaster/WG\\_directive.htm](http://opirg.org/mcmaster/WG_directive.htm)

Each fall and winter term OPIRG McMaster takes applications for "working groups" on environmental and social justice issues.

**What is a working group?** Working groups are semi-autonomous groups of students and community members who organize around specific issues. Working Groups receive funding from the OPIRG office, as well as ongoing support and training. Working Groups use the CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING model to ensure equal access to power within groups, and are expected to take an ANTI-RACISM workshop.

**How do I start a working group?** OPIRG accepts applications for Working Groups in the fall and again at the start of the winter term. APPLICATIONS are reviewed by our Board of Directors who meet with applicants to ask questions about the proposal before deciding which groups will be accepted. One page application forms are available at the OPIRG office.

The Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) McMaster  
McMaster University Student Centre Room 229  
P.O. Box 1013, 1280 Main Street West  
Hamilton Ontario L8S 1C0  
phone: 905.525.9140 ext. 27289 or 26026  
24 hour events line ext. 27090  
Fax: 905.523.0107  
Web: <http://opirg.org/mcmaster>  
E-Mail: [opirg@mcmaster.ca](mailto:opirg@mcmaster.ca)