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**Prompt: Do sweatshops and factories benefit communities and workers in developing countries (and even in the United States)? Or are they detrimental? How so?  Can we possibly defend sweatshops? Explain your position. (See Kristoff & Wudunn; Klein; Hendricks)**

Turbid air, dim light, loud noises, and a dirty environment were my first expressions of a leather factory in Dongguan, China, when I was 10 years old. My father has a company that trades with many cooperative foreign companies. I was always on a business trip with my father when I did not have classes. One time, my father took me to the leather factory to meet the manager. The factory processes all kinds of leather goods and exports them to the Middle East and Europe. It was my first time directly seeing how much effort these workers make just to feed their family and stay alive. Before this experience, I did not know the goods that we use so casually are manufactured mostly by a group of people working in such a poor environment.

This leather factory is not a special case. Actually, there are a number of factories in Dongguan or in developing counties that are run in the same way and produce goods with which we are very familiar, such as famous shoes and clothes brands Nike and H&M. While these brands provide job opportunities in developing countries and sell their products with low prices, these “benefits” are all based on low wages, poor working conditions, and inadequate facilities for the workers. Some workers even have to endure unequal treatment to keep their jobs. Since we are all consumers and enjoy the products made from workers’ “sweat,” we should respect them; there should be more international organizations to help defend the rights they deserve.

Sweatshops are companies that have bad working conditions and low wages, and most of them are located in Asia. These factories produce clothes, shoes, electronic products, and other goods that people use in daily life. The great majority of workers in sweatshops are from low-income families, and working in sweatshops seems the best choice for them to earn money. However, working in sweatshops is dangerous, and the workers have very long days to make as much money as they can. They are usually tired when they are working, which even increases the risk of working there. People from different worlds have different perspectives about this phenomenon. People from the Western world, sitting in their living room or enjoying a nice dinner, cannot understand the difficulty of the poor laborers in Asia. Nonetheless, the Asian workers themselves do not think the sweatshop provides unequal treatment to them; on the contrary, they are happy to have this opportunity to make money and improve their standard of living.

The extensive number of sweatshops in developing countries has its persuasive reasoning. The tens of factories run like sweatshops provide thousands of jobs for the more than 200 million unemployed worldwide. These factories also improve the local economy. The statistics that Kristof and WuDunn (2000) stated in their *New York Times* article show China as a good example:

Partly because of these tens of thousands of sweatshops, China’s economy has become one of the hottest in the world. Indeed, if China’s 30 provinces were counted as individual countries, then the 20 fastest growing countries in the world between 1978 and 1995 would all have been Chinese. (p. 3)

Most workers in sweatshops are from rural villages. Their traditional lifestyle is farming and feeding themselves. They do not usually go out of the village. With the increasing number of factories, more and more people from villages want to have a look at the outside world if they have this opportunity. They can make more money compared to farming, and they can bring the knowledge they learn in the cities back home to develop their hometown.

However, the sweatshops jobs are definitely different from the work these people are used to doing. Poor working conditions, low wages, and unequal treatments are three representative phrases that describe the workers’ life in the sweatshops. Thousands of workers left their hometowns to work in these factories because they have to make money to feed their families. The workers have no choice because most of their families have lost their farms. The farms were displaced by botched land-reform laws and export processing zones. The factory owner think they are saving the workers and providing them opportunities. They think that “working inside an enclosed factory is better off than being outside” (Author, Year, p. X).

In reality, the workers feel wronged and indignant. These factories treat workers with contempt because they are “migrant factories”; they can move their operations any time they want. What they bring to developing countries are thousands of jobs and a major impact on the local economy. Therefore, the government has to compromise. As time goes on, the factories have more and more power; they may have low taxes or even lobby the government to loosen regulations. The government has to agree because they have to compete with other labor zones to keep these factories in their country. Although workers are in a bad environment with low wages that are not up to standard, the government can no longer regulate them.

Klein (2000) discussed the problem of low wages in a chapter titled “The Discarded Factory.” Because of the government’s collusion, workers’ wages are usually even lower than minimum wage. The workers’ original intention was to make money and send it home to feed their family. However, they cannot afford even a basic life in the cities:

The problem with this theory is that the zone wages are so low that workers spend most of their pay on shared dorm rooms and transportation; the rest goes to noodles and fried rice from vendors lined up outside the gate. Zone workers certainly cannot dream of affording the consumer goods they produce. (Klein, 2000, p. 210)

An example in Hendricks’ (2000) article showed an excessive case of a polluted working environment in a Mexican sweatshop or *maquiladoras*. The pollution from *maquiladoras* are effecting people’s health. One worker said:

I sometimes feel as though I cannot breathe properly—that I cannot get enough air and that I’m gasping. . . . If I get a lot of glue or solvent on my hands, it causes skin burns. My eyes get very irritated, and I get terrible headaches. (as cited in Hendricks, 2000, p. 45)

This is one grievance from working with glue. However, the effect of toxic waste is not limited to the adults but also to little children. Many cases have shown that children die from diseases caused by pollutions, as well as anencephaly of newborns. The workers are afraid to fight back against their employers because they could be fired at any time if they don’t listen to instructions or attempt to organize a union to protect their rights. Although the Mexican government has complete laws about the environment and protection of labor rights, they are strong only on paper—more and more workers are suffering from the influence of *maquiladoras*.

The unequal treatment of female workers is one of the most notable aspects in our readings. Every woman has a right to become pregnant and have a child; however, Klein (2002) stated:

Women are often fired from their zone jobs in their mid-twenties, told by supervisors that they are “too old.” . . . This practice is a highly effective of minimizing the number of mothers on the company payroll. [Pregnant female workers are still] required to work the night shift, or to take on exceptionally long hours of unpaid overtime and physically strenuous tasks. . . . A pregnant worker is forced to choose between having a healthy, full-term pregnancy and keeping her job. (p. 222)

Workers comprise the largest group of people in the world. The clothes, the shoes we wear every day, electronic products, kitchen utensils, and all the other goods we use daily life are made by workers. Workers do the hardest work and get paid the lowest wages, just because their growing environment and education level do not give them opportunities for alternative choices. We must admit that sweatshops provide many jobs for the people who come from villages, and they also promote the economy in developing countries. However, workers dedicate their sweat to the society to make people’s lives more convenient. They deserve equal treatment and basic human rights, just as others with different jobs. Although different jobs pay differently, workers should get equal treatment as human beings, and there should be more organizations globally to specify workers’ minimum wages and standardize a good working environment.

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**END OF SAMPLE**

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