

MAINE TRADE POLICY COMMISSION

Thanks to the Commission for holding a Public Forum to listen to ordinary individuals speak to trade issues. I went to Bangor to testify but upon seeing all the speakers I decided to listen. I didn't realize, prior to the forum, that there were so many people that had grown tired of this country's loss of manufacturing jobs.

I grew up in a town called Wilton, ME. That town was the former home of G. H. Bass and Co. In the company's heyday they were a respected company that treated their employees with dignity and compensated them for their hard work. G. H. Bass was also known for their quality shoes and other footwear. My Dad worked at the shoe company as many folks in the town did. As my brothers and I grew older we also worked at the plant after school and sometimes during the summer break. If you didn't work at Bass Shoe you were probably employed at the other manufacturing plant in town known as Forsters Manufacturing. Growing up in this small Maine town was very special to many people. There were stores busy with people - a drug store, a five and dime store, Western Auto, two shoe stores, barbershops, a clothing store, restaurants, and many other places of business. Both Forsters and Bass have moved and most of the other businesses are gone today. They left with the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs to other countries (Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic to name a few). The town has become a suburb with no real manufacturing base and most of the people work in neighboring towns or commute to one of our cities. This is how it impacted my town. And there are thousands of towns just like mine all over the United States.

We all know the reasons that these jobs went to these countries. Basically because these countries provide labor for minimal wages and no benefits. The conditions that these people have to endure to hold a job are poor at best. The majority of the labor force in the Dominican Republic is poverty stricken. Some reports state that an Assembler in the Dominican Republic makes US \$ 140.00 per month. I visited Dominica four years ago and traveled through the villages and mountains and met with many families. I can tell you that the majority was far below \$ 140.00 per month and that one family with three children was under \$ 90.00 per month. I did not get to witness their work places but their living arrangements were very poor with wind blowing through the "house" and though they did have electricity, it was very scary to witness.

If we are going to advocate for Fair Trade, not free trade, we must address all the issues. We must first, find a way to use our labor force in the United States and maintain a manufacturing base here. We have in our own country one of the smartest, hardest working, dedicated work forces in the world. We must challenge corporations to find ways to remain competitive here, prior to exploiting labor forces in other countries that have no laws to protect them. And we should watchdog these corporations and hold them accountable to treat all labor forces with respect and dignity and compensate them a fair wage and benefit for a fair day of work.

And finally, we must hold our elected Representatives accountable to ensure that the playing field is level should corporations choose to move overseas. Rewarding companies that outsource our manufacturing jobs is not the answer.

Thank you,

C. Patrick Carleton

