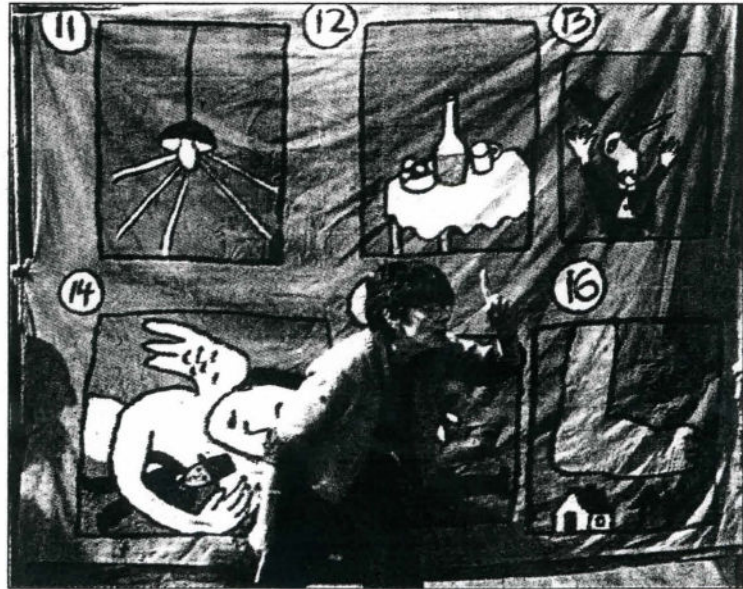


# 300 challenge use of sweatshop, child labor worldwide



RAJ CHAWLA, *Free Press*

Bread and Puppet theater's Linda Elbow narrates a skit titled "The Foot" during a protest on Church Street in Burlington against the use of sweatshop labor around the world. "The big foot is all the oppressive forces in the world," Elbow said. Rally attendees were asked to send the owner of Nike footwear, Philip Knight, their old Nike sneakers in protest.

By Stacey Chase  
*Free Press Staff Writer*

More than 300 people rallied against child and sweatshop labor Saturday at the steps of City Hall, joining gatherings around the country as part of a "National Day of Conscience to End Sweatshops."

One local union worker expressed his disapproval of Nike and its exploitation of workers in poor countries by flinging his sneakers over the railing from the top of the stairs.

"I'm going home barefoot!" Richard Haines of Bristol declared. "I don't want children making my clothes!"

The Vermont Coalition Against Sweatshop Labor — a new statewide organization of political, religious, labor and student activists — urged Vermonters to boycott products made by grossly underpaid workers and children. About a dozen pairs of old Nike sneakers

## Prayer vigil

An interfaith prayer vigil in solidarity of those suffering sweatshop abuse will be held at 4 p.m. today at Mount St. Mary's, a convent for the Sisters of Mercy at 100 Mansfield Ave. in Burlington.

were collected in a wicker basket to be sent to the company's chief executive, Philip Knight.

"To us, the idea of people our age and younger working in dangerous situations is shocking," said Abby Krasner, a junior at Brattleboro Union High School who campaigns against child labor.

"We will use our power as consumers to reject the products of misery and greed," she said. "No to Nike! No to Disney! No to Wal-Mart! No to child labor here and everywhere."

Organizers of the anti-sweatshop rallies nationwide appealed to consumers, hoping the efforts would make them more aware of the source of gifts they buy in the upcoming holiday season.

As part of the effort, high school students belonging to the group Krasner represents, the International Student Activism Alliance, were collecting signatures on a petition against sweatshop labor. The alliance is hoping to collect 1 million signatures by the holidays; about 200 were collected before the rally.

"We're dealing with a basic moral issue," Rep. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt., said. "We, in the United States of America, should not be aiding and abetting in the virtual slavery of Third World women and children."

Sanders is a vocal critic of

# PROTEST: Sweatshop, child labor challenged

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sweatshop labor. He backed a bill to ban imports made by forced or indentured child laborers, those sold into bondage by their parents. Congress is expected to pass the bill.

Saturday's rally featured signs that read: "Philip Knight: Your sneakers stink" and "No public \$ for Filene's." One student had a sign scrawled on notebook paper on her backpack that read: "Don't do it. Just screw it."

Critics charge that multinational corporations roam in the world in search of ever lower wages. Workers in Haiti sewing Disney garments are paid 6 cents for every \$19.99 "101 Dalmatians" children's outfit they make, according to literature distributed by the National Labor Committee, an independent human rights organization.

"We see the problems. We want to be part of the solution," said Arnold Engel, a 12-year-old from Montreal representing Free the Children, an international youth organization committed to ending child labor.

"I encourage children to join Free the Children because here in the United States and Canada we have so much," Engel said. "Imagine switching roles with a child laborer in Asia. You would want people to help you."

Added Krasner: "We won't stop until we have a world that values every child as a child and gives every worker a fair day's pay for a fair day's work."



RAJ CHAWLA, Free Press

Rep. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt., addresses a rally against the use of sweatshop labor Saturday in front of City Hall in Burlington.