

equip their shops with the same machinery and equipment as is found in the most advanced American factories.

Since there is little or no technological advantage for American manufacturers of handbags, as compared with their foreign competitors, and inasmuch as workers in our jurisdiction overseas are easily brought to high levels of proficiency somewhat analogous to the experience of Puerto Rican workers in our jurisdiction, there is little difference in productivity. As labor costs represent such a high proportion of total costs in manufacturing handbags, relative wages become crucial.

Recent figures furnished by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor underscore the great competitive advantage given to importers to this country as a consequence of exploiting sweatshop labor: In France, male workers in our jurisdiction receive \$.895 per hour, while female employees receive \$.692. In Germany, average hourly earnings for both sexes are \$.883. In Italy the average is \$.51, while in Spain it is only \$.254. The average goes up to \$1.056 for male leather goods workers in the United Kingdom, although female employees receive only \$.642 as an hourly average wage. In Japan, whose exports to this country in this area has escalated to astronomical heights, the average hourly earnings are \$.371.

The U.S. Department of Labor had no comparable figures for Hong Kong which during the 1960's has become the chief competitor for this industry with reference to spring and summer handbags. However, in related industries, such as textiles and apparel, the wages run between \$0.13 and \$0.15 an hour. Homeworkers earn even less and this evil, now largely eliminated in the United States, is still widespread, in those leather goods' manufacturing countries which export in large volume to the United States.

By contrast, workers on handbags and personal leather goods in New York State, the leading producer of such items in the country, had an hourly average wage in February 1968, the latest figure cited by the Research and Statistics Office of the New York State Department of Labor, of \$2.03. Coincidentally, the weekly hours worked were 36.2 as contrasted with the significantly longer workweek in other countries, up to 12 hours a day in Hong Kong for example, and this without the overtime premium pay which is universal in this country.

The International Leather Goods, Plastics and Novelty Workers' Union, has organized the overwhelming majority of the Nation's handbag workers. If collective bargaining alone were the complete answer to the problems of our members and the industry we could endeavor through negotiations to raise wages to make them comparable to those paid workers of comparable skill in other industries as well as sufficiently adequate to meet the standards of minimum comfort and decency, as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor. It has failed to do so because of the plight of the handbag industry, a condition due in large measure to the foreign competition with which the domestic manufacturers are confronted. True, the wages paid to our members are below the levels paid to workers in other American industries. But they are still far above the levels paid abroad. Any widening of the wage gap, however desirable from the standpoint of giving our members the conditions they need and deserve, would only give further impetus to the trend toward imports, and in effect complete the destruction of the industry.