

Nike labor

continued from page 1

was sixteen-years-old and needed money to support his family and his high school education.

Reyes is sponsored by United Students Against Sweatshops, a Washington D.C. based group that helped create the WRC.

USAS organizer Eric Brakken said Reyes' experience with working at the factory for three years contradicts monitoring reports conducted by a student group that was invited by Nike to help the company's independent monitor, PricewaterhouseCoopers, conduct monitoring visits over spring break.

Reyes said he worked 13.5 hour shifts in the packaging department of the Korean owned Yupoong BJ&BSA factory, which produces Nike hats and other collegiate apparel. He said he got a 45-minute lunch break and another 15-minute break and could sometimes leave early to attend night school and get his high school diploma.

In 1997, Reyes earned the equivalent of \$20 per week. He said the Dominican Republic government suggested at the time that a family of five needed the equivalent of \$625 a month to cover such basic needs as housing and food.

The working conditions at the factory were poor and supervisors who physically abused employees for working too slow or making errors were not uncommon, Reyes said.

Nike spokeswoman Cheryl McCants said she could not respond directly to the allegations Reyes made because she was not familiar with the specifics, but Nike has a code of conduct that subcontractors, such as the factory Reyes worked at, are required to follow.

Nike's code of conduct states

that, "Nike is committed to providing workers making our products with the best workplaces. When a contractor cannot or will not meet the standards that define the best practice in workplace management, we do all we can to work with those owners and managers so they can come up to standard."

But according to Reyes, this standard was not met at the factory he worked at. He described an incident where a supervisor allegedly pulled him by his ear for making a mistake and when Reyes stood up to defend himself the supervisor asked him into a room to fight. Before the fight could escalate, however, Reyes said another supervisor broke it up and threatened to fire Reyes.

"There was a lot of oppression from management — supervisors to the workers," he said. Reyes spoke in Spanish and Human Rights Alliance member Devin Dinihanian interpreted during an interview and Reyes' speech.

Reyes also claimed that women who applied for jobs were forced to take pregnancy tests. Pregnant women were not hired, he said and women who became pregnant while they were already employed at the factory had to work the same long hours under the same poor conditions as everyone else.

Reyes also said that workers who tried to organize into unions were fired. Every department of the factory had some employees whose job it was to monitor any attempts their co-workers made to organize labor, he said.

For announced monitoring visits, workers were told not to speak up, the factory was cleaned and painted and the bathrooms were accessible, he said.

Now Reyes works as a labor organizer, but said he can only meet with factory workers at their homes.

McCants said Nike does not

agree with any of those behaviors and they go against Nike's code of conduct.

"We completely do not support any of those sorts of behaviors," she said.

Reyes said conditions at factories where workers have the right to unionize tend to be significantly better and he hopes that the WRC can help more workers attain that right. The factory he worked at still is not unionized, he said.

But despite all this, Reyes said his fight is not against such industry leaders as Nike CEO Phil Knight and he does not want people to boycott Nike products. He said if people boycotted Nike products, the factory would close down and its 2,500 employees would become unemployed. Instead, he asked that consumers and students demand that the products they buy are produced under humane conditions that honor basic worker rights.

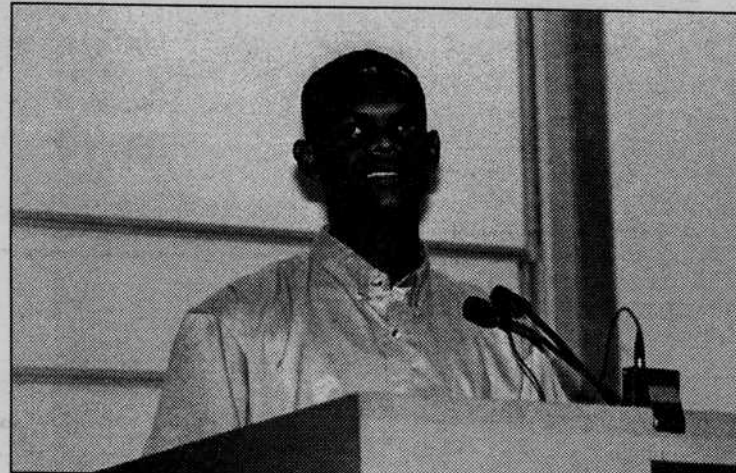
HRA member Sarah Jacobson said Reyes' visit helped show students what the WRC is all about and what kind of conditions it aims to improve. She said hearing Reyes' story first-hand should remind students that the problems the WRC hopes to solve are abroad and not on campus.

"A lot of what's been lost in the uproar ... has been that this isn't about some argument about some students and universities and Nike, it's not about what's happening here. It's about the workers. It's about the factories," she said.

"I think this is what people are looking for," said HRA member Halle Williams.

During his visit to Oregon, Reyes toured the Nike headquarters in Beaverton and said that all of Nike's facilities should look like it.

"It's a difference. You can't compare," he said.



Roselio Reyes, a former Nike factory worker, spoke about the poor conditions in sweatshops. Reyes is currently a labor organizer and student activist.

WRC a public relations case study

By Josh Ryneal
Oregon Daily Emerald

As a former Nike factory worker spoke to students about his experiences in a sweatshop, University Vice-President of Public Affairs Duncan McDonald spoke to public relations students about how they could learn lessons about the WRC controversy at Allen Hall.

"I don't know what will happen with the Phil Knight issue, but I've got a suspicion that everything will be fine," McDonald told the members of the University chapter of the Public Relations Students Society of America.

"In fact, I'd bet on it," he said. McDonald compared the controversy to a family squabble; the two sides may be mad at each other, he said, but they are very close and that explained the intensity of the explosion.

"One thing about family is that they'll eventually get back together," he said.

Responding to fears that the

University will be seriously hurt without Knight's donations, McDonald said that projections indicate that this year will set a record for the largest amount of fund-raising in the history of the University.

McDonald also told the students that as future public relations representatives, they could learn a lot from how the University has handled the media frenzy around the issue.

"You can be swallowed up in the vortex of this thing very easily ... but you have a responsibility to react quickly and fairly," he said.

John Mitchell, adjunct professor and professional adviser to the group, said that he agreed with McDonald's assertion that the decision to join the WRC was not pushed by a "small cabal of manipulated students," but instead asked for critics to give students more credit.

"If you can't take a stand on issues that you believe in at a university, where can you?" he said.



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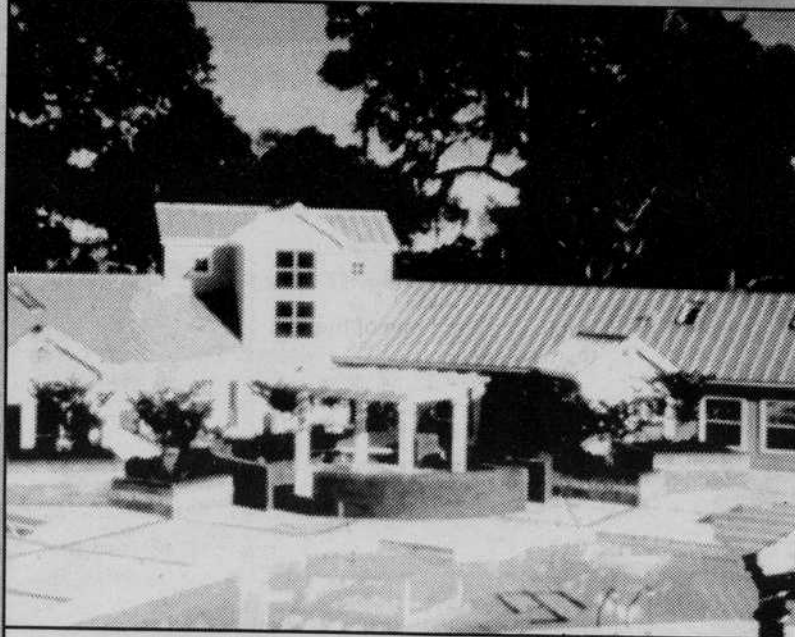
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