

THE CHRONICLE

of Higher Education.

March 30, 2001 • \$3.25
Volume XLVII, Number 29

GIVE & TAKE

Nike has realized that some criticism can't be ignored.

The corporation had cast doubt on a January report from the Worker Rights Consortium, an anti-sweatshop group, which found "substantial evidence of severe ongoing violations" of labor standards at a South Korean-owned factory in central Mexico that has produced licensed apparel for at least 11 American universities.

A spokesman for Nike, which has had clothing produced at the factory, questioned the "objectivity and the veracity" of the report.

Now, another independent monitoring agency hired by Nike has substantiated many of the same conditions.

Inspectors for Massachusetts-based Verité found, among other things, armed guards patrolling the work area, some workers who were paid less than the Mexican minimum wage of about \$4.80 per day, and workers who were not given adequate protective gear. Workers told the monitors they had been punished for using the restroom more than three times a day, and said there had been physical abuse and sexual harassment. The audit did not find evidence that the factory employed underage workers or that it was forcing employees to work excessive overtime—issues raised in the January report. Officials at Kukdong Corporation, the factory's owner, dispute the findings about wages, saying they pay at least minimum wage.

Nike plans to try to improve conditions, including giving workers a confidential grievance process and the chance to choose a union.

In a statement, Nike played down its objections to the January findings. The Verité report, the statement says, "does not reveal any non-compliance issues that have not already been publicized."

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