

Barbie's

TRIP AROUND THE WORLD

**GLOBAL
CITIZENS
FOR A
GLOBAL ERA**

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2

*GLOBALIZATION
IN THE TOY INDUSTRY*

November, 2000

The publication of this booklet is
made possible by the support of:



Canadian Auto Workers'
Social Justice Fund



Canadian International
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de
développement international

Canada

Canadian International Development Agency

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Barbie's Trip Around the World

Globalization in the Toy Industry

by Victoria International Development Education Association, VIDEA

GLOBAL CITIZENS FOR A GLOBAL ERA

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ISBN 0-91723-41-8

Workers in the Toy Industry

Made in the Third World

Child labour, unhealthy and dangerous working conditions, and dismal pay are commonplace in the international toy industry. Three decades ago most toys sold in North America were manufactured in industrialized countries like the United States, Canada, Japan, and Hong Kong. Adult toy workers were paid the minimum wage, at least, and health and safety standards were enforced. Today the majority of toy companies make their wares in the Third World, far away from the scrutiny of North American and European consumers. Moroccan Barbie, adorned with glittering pink and gold jewelry, is made in China. North American Barbie, in buckskin and beads, is made in Indonesia. Puerto Rican Barbie is manufactured in Malaysia. Barbie's red Porsche is made in Mexico.

Toy sales in Canada are soaring. Sales increased 50 percent in the 1990s. The industry is now worth Cdn\$1.5 billion a year.

Free trade and the erosion of international trade barriers through agreements like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) have made relocation to Third World countries easy for corporations like Mattel Inc., the maker of Barbie and her accessories. Low wages, lax labour and environmental standards, and tax exemptions make Third World production highly profitable. Mattel, the biggest toy company in the world, garnered record profits after eliminating 700 jobs at its Medina, N.Y., factory in 1995 and

Tariffs on toys from developing nations were virtually eliminated in 1995, making production overseas even easier and more profitable for multinational corporations like Mattel and Hasbro Inc.

increasing production in China, Mexico, Indonesia and Thailand. The Medina factory made toys for Fisher-Price, a company bought by Mattel just two years

before the layoffs. Now the Fisher-Price Little People parking garage that was made by Medina workers is assembled in Mexico, with components from China. Mexican and Chinese toy workers earn a fraction of what their American counterparts took home.

Mattel makes about one half of its products in China, where the company jointly owns factories with Chinese investors. These factories employ approximately 10,000 workers. Mattel also contracts about 50 other Chinese factories to make toys and components for toys.³ Most Barbies are made in China.

Check the labels on toys made by companies like Hasbro and Irwin Toy Ltd. and you'll find that most are made in Third World countries such as China, Indonesia, Mexico and Malaysia. Walk down the glittery aisles of the giant toy retailer Toys R Us and you'll see that much of the store's stock comes from China. Check out the origins of most small plastic toys, like the ones bought in dollar stores and used in birthday party grab bags, and you'll find that they, too, are manufactured in China.

Toy Factory Fires

Chen Yuying was a happy-go-lucky 15-year old when she began working for the Zhili Toy Factory in Kwai Yong, a city in China's Shenzhen Province. For three years, she earned seven cents an hour stitching stuffed animals sold in Canada and Italy by the Italian company Chicco. She sent home what little she could from her US\$26 monthly salary to help pay for her older brother's schooling.

In November 1993, the Zhili factory caught fire. The building had no fire alarms, sprinkler systems, fire hoses or fire escapes. Heavy wire mesh covered the windows. Doors at the bottom of the factory's only stairway were locked to prevent workers from leaving before they had met their daily quotas. When the last flame was doused, 87 workers were dead. Scores of others, including Yuying, were injured.

Now 24, in what should be the prime of her life, Yuying describes herself as a useless cripple. Burns to her left ear, breasts, left arm, back, waist, hips and both legs at first left her paralyzed, then wheelchair-bound for months. Now she moves gingerly on crutches, holding the left one with the two remaining fingers on her left hand. Most of her skin cannot perspire, making her uncomfortable on days when the weather is hot and dry. The parts of Yuying's body where skin grafts were taken are itchy and her burned skin is constantly inflamed and bleeds.

Medical bills and other expenses have devoured the compensation money she received for the accident US\$5,800. Chicco promised additional compensation money in 1997, but it never materialized.

Huang Ming, a 21-year-old worker at the Ci Hang Toys factory in Zhongshan City, in China's southern Guangdong province, died in late December 1998 after she was refused sick leave and forced to work overtime. After Huang became so ill that she could barely walk, the factory's management removed her from her dormitory bed and left her outside. She died on the train journey home, accompanied by a fellow worker. When the local labour bureau intervened, Ci Hang Toys agreed to pay Huang's family the equivalent of 15 months wages and stated that they would limit overtime in the future.

Yuying worries that she will forever be a burden to her family and that no one will ever marry her. What can I do? she asked researchers from two Hong Kong-based human rights groups who visited her. When will my suffering end? ⁴

The fire that injured Yuying is by no means an isolated incident in the fast-growing toy industry. During the past decade, fires and industrial accidents have killed and injured hundreds of toy workers in countries like China and Thailand. ⁵ On May 10, 1993, the world's worst industrial fire occurred at a Thailand factory making Cabbage Patch Kids and other stuffed toys sold by Toys R Us, including Bugs Bunny, Bart Simpson, the Muppets, Playskool Water Pets, and Big Bird and other Sesame Street dolls. ⁶

As at the Zhili factory, windows at the Kader Industrial Toy Company were barred. Doors were locked. Kader's fire alarms were out of order, despite two earlier fires at the factory including a blaze that killed one worker and injured 30 others when polyester fabric used to make dolls ignited in a spinning machine. There was no sprinkler system and no fire exits. The company's 3,000 workers had never had a fire drill.

Smoke, fumes and heat quickly made the factory's two stairways inaccessible. Panicked workers ran to the top of the four-storey building. They jumped to the cement below, their falls cushioned by the bodies of friends and colleagues.

There was the sound of yelling about a fire, recounted survivor Lampan Taptim. I tried to leave the section but the supervisor told me to get back to work. My sister who worked on the fourth floor with me pulled me away and insisted we try to get out. We tried to go down the stairs and got to the second floor. We found that the stairs had already caved in. There was a lot of yelling and confusion. I couldn't go down further. In desperation I went back up to the windows and went back and forth looking down below. The smoke was thick and

I picked the best place to jump in a pile of boxes. My sister jumped too. She died. ⁷

All told, 188 workers perished in the Kader blaze. Another 469 were injured, many permanently. Most of Kader's remaining 2,300 employees lost their jobs.

More than 60 percent of the toys sold in Canada are made in China, with the number increasing every year. According to Statistics Canada, toy imports to Canada from China topped \$564 million in 1997, more than a fourfold increase over 1990s \$133 million. Toy imports from other Third World countries also increased during the 1990s.

A Thai government investigation into the fire concluded that Kader had violated safety laws ...with the connivance of Government Officials. ⁸ Thailand's National Fire Protection Association found eight major flaws in the Kader factory's design that contributed to the high number of casualties. The government investigation also revealed that working conditions at Kader were severe and depressing with workers forced to drink dirty tap water, denied permission to leave the factory if they were sick, and shouted at by management. ⁹ The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) conducted its own investigation, concurring that working conditions at Kader were unhealthy and unsafe. Noise, heat, fumes and dust at Kader created health hazards on the factory floor. Dust control was nonexistent; protective equipment inadequate, said the ICFTU's report, *From the Ashes*. Inhaling the dust created respiratory problems and contact with it caused skin diseases. The factory's clinic would provide drugs (e.g. chlorpheniramine, antihistamine or antipyretics) to alleviate symptoms...Workers paid for medication themselves. ¹⁰

According to the ICFTU, Kader employed girls as young as 13 as part-time workers. At the time, the minimum wage for Bangkok and surrounding areas was US\$5 a day. Kader workers received as little as US\$2.40 a day. During busy periods, employees worked up to 19 hours daily, earning an extra 84 cents for each hour of overtime.

Mattel, Hasbro, Irwin and other toy companies insist their products are made under decent conditions by workers paid a fair wage. Yet they refuse to release comprehensive lists of the names and addresses of factories where their toys and toy components are manufactured. Mattel's excuse is that the factories change frequently and any list would soon be out of date. Irwin says it will not reveal the names of overseas suppliers because it does not want competitors to gain an advantage. However, until the names and locations of toy factories are made public and working conditions are scrutinized by impartial observers, there can be no guarantees that toys sold in Canada and the United States are not made by

sweatshop or child labour.

When Mattel closed the Fisher-Price plant in Medina, employees were earning an average of US\$11 an hour. By contrast, Mattel's toy workers in China make as little as US\$3 to US\$4 a day.¹ It would take a Chinese worker making Barbie more than seven working days to earn enough money to buy the doll for her child. She would have to work seven days a week for four-and-a-half years to earn the US\$5,000 daily salary of Mattel CEO Jill Barad. In the eight years that Barad was associated with Barbie as a Mattel senior executive, before she became CEO, Barbie sales grew from US\$430 million to more than US\$1 billion.²

The Labour Behind the Mattel Label

Mattel has been linked to sweatshop labour in several countries. A December 1996 NBC Dateline investigation revealed that Indonesian girls as young as 13 were stitching Barbie's frilly dresses, some on night shifts, at a factory subcontracted by Mattel. One of the girls interviewed on Dateline was Wasieti, who told viewers she was 14 years old, had a grade-five education and had been sewing Barbie's clothes for one year. Another worker, Ramla, had been making Mattel products since she was 14. Ramla rode her bike for 40 minutes to get to the factory for a 3:30 p.m. shift, and then rode home again in the dark at 11:00 p.m. Indonesian labour law forbids the employment of children full-time, and does not allow children to work night shifts.¹¹ When asked about Ramla, Wasieti and other young Indonesian workers, Mattel insisted that the young sewers interviewed by Dateline were all of legal age.¹²

Workers making Lion King toys at the Dynamic Toy Industry factory in Thailand sew for up to 13 hours a day, rushing to fill Christmas orders for the popular Walt Disney toy sold by Mattel. They are paid 3,480 baht a month, 550 baht less than the estimated minimum survival wage. Duan, who also makes Mattel's Pocahontas dolls and Barbie accessories, lives with her husband in a cement dormitory-style building on the outskirts of Bangkok. They rent one room for 1,100 baht, or one third of Duan's monthly wage. They are rarely able to visit their son, who lives in the city with Duan's parents. When Duan was interviewed by a journalist for Gemini News Service, she requested that her real name not be used because she fears losing her job. When there are a lot of orders, I have to sew about 50 pieces an hour. If we don't reach this quota, we are harassed by supervisors... We suffer from back and neck aches and several times, hurrying to meet quotas, I have pricked my finger with the needles. Some workers have had the needle break off in their finger.¹³

In addition to low wages, forced overtime and physical discomfort, Dynamic

workers must pay 75 baht for scissors and a spindle when they are hired, and must replace them if they break. There are only nine toilets for seven hundred workers on the main floor of the factory. Their time to use the bathroom is restricted and they are constantly supervised in order to make sure that they work for the full 8 hours. Most of the women workers have lung disease, sinus problems and allergies. ¹⁴ Dynamic Toy Industry part of the Dynamic group of companies, is a Thai company which produces toys for Mattel, Tyco, Hasbro, Kenner and Sega. ¹⁵

Three female employees at a Mattel subsidiary in Tijuana, Mexico, were forced to sign letters of resignation in 1995 after being detained and interrogated for more than 10 hours by company guards and the factory's manager of human resources. The women had been carrying information that Mabamex management said was subversive flyers from Alianza Civica (the Civic Alliance) that questioned the economic policies of the Mexican government. Defina Rodriguez, one of the women who was detained, says she and the other workers were held against their will at the factory, prevented from using the bathroom or phoning their families, and released only after agreeing to resign. Not going to the bathroom, not being able to speak to anyone but those interrogating us, threatening us...We feel humiliated...They treated us worse than criminals, she recalled. ¹⁶ Mattel denied that Delfina and other workers were held against their will and insisted they were rightfully dismissed for distributing political materials inside the factory. Eventually, Delfina and her colleagues reached a settlement with Mattel which awarded them severance pay. ¹⁷ The Mabamex factory, which made Barbie's minivans, is no longer contracted by Mattel.

In late 1999, a researcher for the Asia Monitor Resource Centre, a non-profit labour rights center based in Hong Kong, interviewed workers at the Zhong Mei Factory in China's Guangdong province. Zhong Mei produces exclusively for Mattel. The researcher met with workers in a small cafe opposite the factory. Although the first two workers she spoke with had no complaints about factory conditions (both worked in the quality control department), others were upset about the following rules:

- When they are hired at the factory-workers must pay a deposit of 100 yuan and must buy two uniforms which they cannot resell when they leave.
- The 560 yuan salary, while more than the minimum wage of 350 yuan, is still far too low to meet even basic needs.
- Workers live in dormitories with up to 29 other workers per room and have no privacy.

- They frequently have to work overtime.
- They do not have paid sick leave.
- Every two weeks workers must switch from day shift to night shift, which they find tiring.¹⁸

Mattel Gobbles Up Competitors

One of the hallmarks of globalization has been increasing corporate concentration. The toy industry is no exception. In the past decade, Mattel has snapped up many of its competitors, surpassing its chief rival, Hasbro Inc., as the world's leading toy company. From 1986 to 1996, Mattel purchased eight of its competitors, including Fisher-Price and Tyco, the third largest toy company in the U.S. The US\$755 million deal with Tyco gave Mattel several proven global brands, including Matchbox cars, and, in 1997, helped propel the company to the best results in its history. (The merger also resulted in the layoffs of 2,700 people.)

In 1996, Mattel made a daring US\$5 billion bid for Hasbro, the maker of G.I. Joe and other enduring toys. Hasbro successfully fought off the proposed merger, and Mattel continued to expand its holdings. In 1998 it bought the Pleasant Company, makers of the specialty The American Girls Collection, which features books, dolls and accessories based on six fictional nine-year-old American heroines. (Mattel plans to take the doll global, with versions catering to other countries.) Then Mattel bought Purple Moon, a girls' entertainment company dedicated to the preteen market. Later that same year it also bought the Learning Company, the corporate leader in education and productivity software with brands which include Reader Rabbit, Carmen Sandiego, The Print Shop and National Geographic. The acquisition of the Learning Company propelled Mattel to its current status as the world's second largest consumer software company after Microsoft.

Brands produced by Mattel include:

Barbie	Disney
Fisher-Price	WinnieThe Pooh
Sesame Street	Nickelodeon
Cabbage Patch	See N Say
Magna Doodle	View-Master
Power Wheels	Hot Wheels
Matchbox	Tyco Radio Control
Tyco Electric Racing	

Chinese Toy Factories

The Asia Monitor Resource Center (AHRC) also investigated working conditions at ten toy factories in southern China's Guangdong province, where the majority of China's toys for export are manufactured. The centre concluded that workers suffer long-term and potentially fatal health problems from exposure to a toxic brew of chemicals, earn less than legal wages, and are poorly compensated for industrial accidents resulting in the loss of fingers and parts of their palms.

Xiao Zie, an employee of the Sewco Toy Factory in Zhongshan in southern China, had worked in the factory's spray paint department for more than four years when researchers spoke with her. Before Xiao Zie started her job, she was in good physical condition and rarely ill. However, after working for the factory she frequently caught diseases and felt ill. In December, she applied for sick leave five times. She now always feels sick. Minor illnesses like influenza will last for a long time and are not cured by taking medicine...Absence from work will bring a deduction of thirty yuan per day, which forces Xiao Zie to go to work even when ill. ¹⁹

Spray paint exposure can result in the loss of white blood cells, weaken the body's immune system within six months, and eventually cause leukemia. Workers who are in contact with the glue and mixing solvents used in the production of plastics suffer from headaches and skin rashes in the short term and can go on to develop diseases of the nervous system. ²¹ If Xiao Zie and her colleagues had jobs spraypainting toys in British Columbia, they would have to don individually fitted respirators. ²¹ In the majority of factories studied by the AMRC, however, toy workers exposed to spray paint were supplied with only a simple gauze mask.

Toy workers in the ten factories studied by the AMRC were also routinely paid less than legal minimum wages and forced to work overtime in excess of hours stipulated by Chinese labour law. Of all the factories, Henggang's Qualidux Toy

Factory demanded the most overtime of its employees 270 to 300 hours a month on top of regular shifts. According to Chinese labour law, workers can only be required to put in three hours of overtime a day, and no more than 36 hours of overtime a month.

Legal minimum wages vary by region, but the report found that workers at the majority of the ten toy factories earn less than the minimum legal rate. At the Kin Tak Toy Factory in Dongguan, the hourly wage is two yuan and the hourly overtime rate is .667 yuan, 78 percent less than the legal rate. ²²

Industrial accidents also take a heavy toll on Guangdong's toy workers. In the plastics department at Sewco, several workers operating dyeing machines lost half of their right palms and all of their fingers in accidents. They were compensated only a few thousand yuan, far less than the 20,000 yuan stipulated by Shenzhen municipality for injuries sustained on the job. ²³

Upon joining the factory, workers of the Zhongshan International Toy City have to pay 45 yuan for the temporary resident permit fee, 30 yuan for [a] deposit, 5 yuan for [a] monthly labour management fee payable to the Labour Bureau and 60 yuan for food per month. Workers have to work about 16 hours a day, their basic daily wages are only 9.8 yuan, and overtime rates and even overnight wages are both 0.3 yuan per hour. After all charges and fees are deducted from the monthly wages of about 300 yuan, workers are left with nothing.

McDonald's Toy Makers Not McHappy

In February 1997, the Asia Monitor Resource Centre and the Coalition for the Charter on the Safe Production of Toys reported that 220 Vietnamese workers making McDonald's Happy Meals toys had fallen ill after being exposed to acetone, a colourless liquid solvent. Acetone, used in the manufacture of Happy Meals toys such as the 101 Dalmatians, can cause dizziness, nausea, unconsciousness, and irritation to the throat, lungs, eyes, mouth and nose. According to the resource centre and coalition, twenty-five workers at the Keyhinge Toy factory in Vietnam's Hoa Khanh Industrial Zone collapsed and three were hospitalized after losing consciousness. The workers received no compensation, and the company did not even cover the medical costs of those admitted to hospital.

Almost all of Keyhinge's workers are young women, most between the ages of 12 and 20. A typical working day at Keyhinge is ten hours, and workers are not given rest days. They earn as little as six U.S. cents an hour enough in a day to buy one meal of rice, tofu, and vegetables and to put ten cents aside towards a second meal.

That salary is well below the legal minimum wage of US\$35 a month for workers in foreign companies located outside of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

For many of the workers this is their first job, and they lack the experience needed to collectively defend their rights. Nearly all of them come from villages outside of Quang Nam-Da Nang Province, so they lack a social support base in or near the Hoa Khanh Industrial Zone.

Keyhinge is subcontracted by M-B Sales, a McDonald's supplier. Despite an eight-page report on the incident produced by the resource centre and the toy coalition after researchers interviewed Keyhinge workers, and two follow-up reports, McDonald's denies that Keyhinge workers were ever poisoned.

To: Artsana S.p.A/Chicco

My daughter, Chen Xiaorong, was from the Zhong County, Sichuan Province. She worked at the Zhili Toy Factory in Shenzhen in April 1992. She was in the sewing section and got only 100-odd yuan a month. Later, she got 200-odd yuan a month, but just two months after the raise, she was burned to death on November 19, 1993. She was just 16. It was really painful for us, she was our only child.

After her death, we have never received any compensation. Her mother cried a lot. She was so sad that she had fallen sick for two years. I went to Shenzhen and brought back my daughter's ashes. The sight of it hit her hard; she fell sick and was later burdened with mental problems. We could not afford medical expenses, so we had to borrow from the local authority. She finally died after two years' sickness. We have been living in very difficult conditions ever since the fire. Things are never quite the same. It's been six whole years!

We are farmers and we live a difficult life. Our daughter is gone; we are getting old. Who will take care of us?

I know that your company is supposed to pay compensation to the victims' families, but the money has been diverted to other purposes. This should not have happened! We are in dire situations, and our daughter was killed when she was making toys for your company. How could you have diverted the compensation to other purposes? It is your responsibility to pay us compensation; you cannot get away from it! We demand that your company pay reasonable compensation to the families of the Zhili fire victims.

Chen Qiguo
Father of Zhili fire victim Chen Xiaorong
November 14, 1999

Toys R Us

Laotian and Chinese immigrants in California who made baby pillows sold in Toys R Us stores were paid as little as US\$2 an hour and forced to work up to 20 hours a day, according to a lawsuit filed against Toys R Us supplier Air Creations by the Asian Labor Caucus. Global Exchange, a San Francisco human rights group, is asking consumers to write to Toys R Us and ask the company to ensure these homeworkers are given the wages they are due. Check with Global Exchange (www.globalexchange.org) for an update on the campaign.

When you shop for toys, ask the store manager whether companies or their suppliers have signed a code of conduct and whether they have agreed to monitoring of toy factories by independent, local human rights monitors. Ask that your concerns be passed on to the head office. If the company assures you it doesn't tolerate human rights or labour abuses, ask to see a copy of its code of conduct. If the code does not contain provisions for a living wage and protect human rights, then ask: why not? Check to see who monitors the code to ensure compliance. Ask how consumers can get information about where and how products are produced.

You can also write or fax the Toy Manufacturers of America (200 Fifth Avenue, New York City, 10010, U.S.A., 212-645-3246) demanding the establishment of an independent monitoring system for their code of conduct which guarantees workers the right to organize a union and bargain collectively.



Organizing in Canada

To find out more about how to stop sweatshops in the toy industry and other sectors, contact the following organizations:

Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN)

The MSN promotes solidarity among Canadian labour, women's and social movement groups and Mexican, Central American and Asian counterparts organizing to raise standards and improve conditions in maquiladoras and export processing zones. The MSN acts as the secretariat for the Labour Behind the Label Coalition and is active in Stop Sweatshops campaigning.

606 Shaw St.

Toronto, ON M6G 3C6

(416) 532-8584, fax (416) 532-7688

perg@web.net

<http://www.web.net/~msn>

Victoria International Development Education Association (VIDEA)

VIDEA's Global Citizens project is a public education initiative to increase awareness of global issues in the southern Vancouver Island region and beyond. Through the production and distribution of learning materials, school and community workshops, networking, and an internet presence, the project is designed to stimulate critical thought and action on issues such as poverty, human rights and economic injustice. The project looks at globalization of the economy, with a particular focus on international trade and the links between consumption in the North and production in the South and the problems associated with this pattern (e.g., exploitation of workers, environmental degradation, social and cultural dislocation).

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Ten Days for Global Justice

Ten Days is a program of the Anglican, Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian and United Churches, and of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace.

947 Queen St. East, Suite 210

Toronto, ON M4M 1J9

(416) 463-5312, fax (416) 463-5569

tendays@web.net

www.web.net/~tendays

Canadian Labour Congress

International Department

The CLC participates in the Ethical Action Trading Group and monitors sweatshop campaigns for the labour movement in Canada.

2841 Riverside Drive

Ottawa, ON K1V 8X7

(613) 521-3400, fax (613) 521-4655

www.clc-ctc.com

Coalition for the Charter on the Safe Production of Toys

The coalition, formed after the Kader toy factory fire in Thailand, aims to make toy companies more accountable for conditions under which their products are made.

c/o Asia Monitor Resource Center
444 Nathan Road, 8-B
Kowloon, Hong Kong
(852) 2332 1346, fax (852) 2385 5319
amrc@pacific.net.hk
<http://home.pacific.net.hk/~amrc>

The following organizations are also concerned about issues pertaining to globalization. Their work includes the monitoring of corporations.

The Council of Canadians

The council focuses on social programs, countering corporate influence in the media, and building a Citizen s Agenda. It has local action groups across Canada.

251 Laurier Ave. West, Suite 904
Ottawa, ON K1P 5J6
1-800-387-7177
(604) 688-8846

The Canadian Auto Workers (CAW)

The CAW s Social Justice Fund helps the CAW respond to a variety of international issues through humanitarian, development and social justice assistance. It also attempts to influence the Canadian government s international policies. The SJF aims to establish worker-to-worker and union-to-union relationships internationally.

205 Placer Court
Willowdale, ON M2H 3H9
(416) 947-4110

The Social Justice Centre

The centre provides resources for social movements on corporate and other issues.

836 Bloor St.
Toronto, ON M6G 1M2
(416) 516-0009