

## SECOND STATION: JESUS BEARS THE CROSS

*Exploitation of Labor (The US Department of Labor)*

**Scripture:** *Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts (James 5:4).*

Jesus bore the cross in order to bring an end to exploitative relationships. He lived as a servant, taught, died and was raised in order to unite people in love and justice across all divisions, including those that arise from natural, social and economic differences.

Yet working people in the global South—and increasingly in the United States—are oppressed by a cross of low wages and economic insecurity. Many people are denied the ability to find meaningful jobs that provide a dignified and adequate standard of living for themselves and their families.

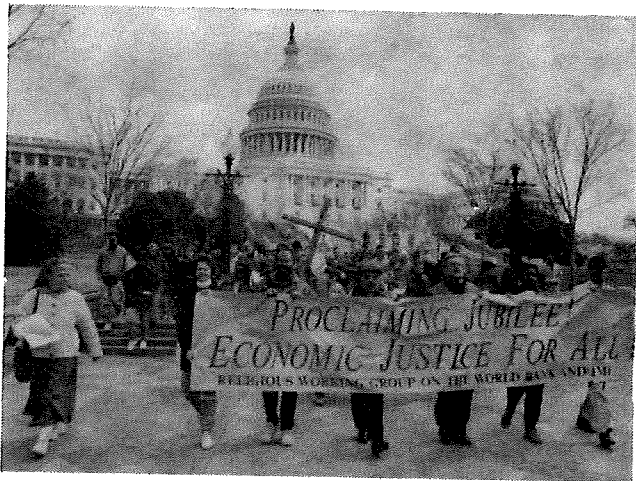
Workplace standards and wages are in decline for many US families and sweatshop labor is returning to US industry. Itinerant farm workers and below-minimum wage piece workers struggle to survive. In many countries children are required to work from an early age in abusive conditions.

Yet transnational corporations are increasing their profits and market share, and paying inordinate executive salaries, while laying off workers and displacing small and medium-sized businesses. As consumers looking for inexpensive products we ourselves may seem to benefit from this exploitation of our sisters and brothers, but all of us are harmed by injustice.

Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as the New Testament writers, condemn the affluent for greedy accumulation at the expense of people living in poverty (Isaiah 5:8; James 5:1-6) and for exploiting laborers (Jeremiah 22:13; James 5:4). As people of faith we too must insist prophetically that the products we purchase not come to us from the hands of coerced and degraded workers.

The laws upholding the dignity of labor are being challenged by those who want to deregulate and de-fund many functions of the US Department of Labor. Yet the Labor Department has a prophetic role of protecting the basic rights of workers. We call today for it to fulfill this divine responsibility.

**Let us pray:** *God of justice, revealed in a carpenter's son, we pray today for all who labor and for all who are charged with protecting their dignity. Forgive us, God, for our own unfair treatment of others and for benefiting from the oppression of others. We seek a renewed commitment—in our government and among ourselves and our neighbors—to the rights of workers here and abroad, and to the protection of international labor standards everywhere. We ask, God, for the restoration of our broken relationships. This is our prayer for Jubilee. Amen.*



Rick Reinhard

*Marie Dennis (far left) of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns leads a 1995 Economic Way of the Cross witness from the US capitol toward the Department of labor, Washington, DC.*