



Looking for the union label

It's been more than a decade since I used this space to lament the difficulties my family was having finding union-made products to serve our purposes—most specifically jeans and a bicycle for my then-young son. I described the flight of Huffy bikes, once union-made in the USA, first to Mexico and then, not surprisingly, to China. I wrapped up my piece by discussing the union-led demonstrations at the Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organization in December 1999—demonstrations calling for all countries to adopt fair labor practices “so that workers *everywhere* can enjoy a living wage and decent working conditions...[to] halt ‘the race to the bottom.’”

Sad to say, the situation has deteriorated since I wrote that column. More and more manufacturers have shut their doors or sent their work abroad, and fewer and fewer products are made in this country, let alone made by union workers. Our trade deficit with the rest of the world, especially China, continues to be out of sight as China resists pressure from the United States and other countries to stop manipulating its currency to benefit Chinese manufacturers while limiting the amount of American goods entering China.

As a vice president of the AFL-CIO's Union Label & Service Trades Department, I take a special interest in promoting union-made products. My role in the department has made me keenly aware of the precarious situation that union workers find themselves in today as far too many companies out-source, downsize or just close their doors in the face of serious economic pressures from here and abroad (China being only part of the problem) and pure, unadulterated greed that puts corporate profits over people.

The Union Label & Service Trades Department doesn't pretend it can solve the nation's trade imbalance or increase the percentage of American workers belonging to unions. But what it can do is what it has been doing energetically since its founding more than a 100 years ago: Promote union-made products by encouraging the purchase of products that have a distinctive union label signifying that the product is made by union workers.

You may remember the 1975 jingle, “Look for the union label,” produced by the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, now part of a larger and more diverse international union.



It's difficult to find the union label these days, not only because of the decrease in the number of products made by union workers, but also because not all these products have labels. Of course, there's no way to slap a union label on the services union workers provide, such as the mail collection, processing and delivery by letter carriers and other unionized postal workers.

But this doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to spend our dollars on union products and services. To help you “buy union” even when you can't find a union label, get on the website of the Union Label & Service Trades Department, unionlabel.org, and download a recent copy of the Department's *Union Label* newsletter.

For late shoppers this holiday season, take a look at page 24 of the November issue for a list of great union-made gift ideas and the websites of the unions that make or provide these products and services.

But whether you've finished your holiday shopping or not, you definitely shouldn't give away your hard-earned money to anti-union companies. That's why you should look at the “Boycott” page on the Union Label & Service Trades Department's website. There you'll learn what you should not buy and what hotels and other services you should avoid.

The Huffy Corporation doesn't make bikes in this country anymore, and I have no idea when American families will be able to buy union-made, American-made bikes for their kids. But I do know that all of us have to do everything we can to support economic and trade policies designed to give American workers a fair shot at foreign markets, and prevent foreign countries that engage in unfair trade practices and exploit their workers from dominating *our* markets.

And one way of doing this is to buy union-made products and services, whether they're “labeled” or not. ☒

I wish you and your family health, happiness and—most of all—peace during this holiday season and throughout the new year. May all your holiday wishes come true!