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Associated Press

Russell shifts course on Honduran union workers

By ALAN SCHER ZAGIER , 11.18.09, 08:09 PM EST

After widespread and prolonged student protests on U.S. college campuses, sports apparel maker Russell Athletic has announced plans to open a new factory in Honduras and rehire ousted union workers.

Student pressure over concerns about Russell Athletic's labor practices had prompted nearly 100 colleges and universities to drop licensing deals with the company that allowed it to print clothing with colleges' names, logos and mascots.

"This is huge," said Jack Mahoney, a recent Georgetown University graduate and organizer for United Students Against Sweatshops. "We've had a number of smaller victories, but this is the first time we know of that somebody has reversed a company's decision."

The factory will reopen in Choloma and be called Jerzees Nuevo Dia, which means "new day" in Spanish. The Atlanta-based clothing maker has agreed to rehire 1,200 former workers and abide by collective bargaining agreements at all of its Honduran factories.

A company document posted on Russell's Web site this week outlines the new agreement. A spokesman for Russell and its parent company, Fruit of the Loom Inc., did not immediately return a telephone call seeking comment Wednesday.

The agreement is "intended to foster workers rights in Honduras and establish a harmonious and cooperative labor-management

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