LUCY TAYLOR (right), who died last month, joined Coretta Scott King and other national leaders at 1977 Washington, D.C. premiere of "Testimony," ACTWU film on Stevens workers' struggle.

On High Court docket, it's Brown Lung vs. Workers

The disease which took Lucy Taylor's life Nov. 12—and the cause of health protection for workers endangered, as she was, by exposure to harmful cotton dust—is at issue in a major case to be decided by the Supreme Court next spring.

Beginning its new term on Oct. 6, the Court agreed to hear a case brought by the major textile companies and cotton growers challenging the government's 1978 OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) standards limiting worker exposure to cotton dust, which can cause the crippling respiratory disease known as "brown lung," or byssinosis.

Lucy Taylor, an ex-J.P. Stevens worker from Roanoke Rapids, N.C., was one of an estimated 35,000 to 100,000 workers permanently disabled by byssinosis. The U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, in upholding the OSHA standards last October, said that at least 250,000 workers in the U.S. are exposed to cotton dust.

Compensation comes late

For decades, textile companies have fought efforts to curb dust in the workplace, as well as efforts by brown lung victims to get compensation. Only three months ago, Lucy Taylor became one of the few retired brown lung victims to win a workers' compensation claim. She won $18,000 and "lifetime" medical benefits, but she had long since been admitted to the intensive care unit of a Roanoke Rapids hospital.

Mrs. Taylor, 66, a past president of the Carolina Brown Lung Assn., testified at congressional hearings, to J.P. Stevens stockholders and to her fellow workers throughout the South. "She lived to see success" in her "valiant struggle to arouse the conscience of the nation to the sufferings" of mill workers, said ACTWU Sr. Exec. Vice Pres. Sol Stetin.

Relief...and rejoicing

The contracts won by J.P. Stevens workers and the ACTWU-Stevens settlement agreement drew expressions of praise, relief and continuing concern from leaders of some of the nation's major religious bodies.

The National Council of Churches of Christ, in which 32 Protestant denominations are represented, "rejoices with the workers of J.P. Stevens, and congratulates them for having endured and waged the struggle for justice," said an NCC resolution adopted unanimously Nov. 7.

The council urged "all the parties to enter into this 2½-year period with a commitment to justice and equality" and commended the "binding arbitration, a non-discriminatory seniority system and health and safety measures" contained in the contracts.

The NCC cautioned, however, that since only 10% of Stevens workers have contracts, "it is unclear whether non-union plants will enjoy these protections, and the Company has stated that it will continue to resist Union organizing efforts."

'Obstacles removed'

Six Roman Catholic bishops from the Southeast, who monitored the Stevens situation for several years and endorsed the consumer boycott last March, expressed satisfaction that "many real obstacles have been removed" from the workers' path. "With the pledge of the Stevens Company to permit legitimate unionization efforts at their plants, a giant step forward has been taken by the textile workers," Most Rev. Thomas A. Donnellan, Archbishop of Atlanta, and his five colleagues from the Carolinas, Georgia and Virginia said Oct. 20.

In New York, Rabbi Bernard Mandelbaum of the Synagogue Council of America said: "Working alongside Catholics, Protestants and people from various groups, blacks and whites together, we have been able to demonstrate that the coalition of conscience is still alive." The SCA was one of many Jewish community groups supporting the Stevens boycott.

National Organization for Women Pres. Eleanor Smeal called the "historic victory" an event "of major importance to the large percentage of women and minorities working in the textile and clothing industries." It's "a breakthrough for future organizing," she added.

Since November, 1976, **Social Justice** *has brought news of the J.P. Stevens workers' struggle and the consumer boycott, now ended, to hundreds of thousands of people. You, the readers, translated that news into activism and action that culminated in the victory scenes published here, in our final issue. Future campaigns will bring us together again, no doubt, but for now we pause to celebrate and consider how far we have come... and how far we have to go... proudly, sustained by the Stevens workers' example.—Joe Pilati, Editor.*

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