

# WWD FRIDAY

Beauty

## Workers Win Subcontractor Case

By Matthew Lynch

IN A DECISION 10 YEARS IN THE making, a federal jury on Wednesday awarded 25 garment workers almost \$600,000 and found New York-based clothing maker Liberty Apparel Co. Inc. liable for wage and labor violations by its subcontractors.

The case is believed to be the first in which the question of whether a manufacturer is responsible for conditions at its subcontractors' facilities was put to a jury.

The workers, all of whom worked at Manhattan factories used by Liberty, filed the complaint in 1999. They alleged that Liberty and their

subcontractor employers failed to comply with minimum wage laws and did not provide overtime for working, in some cases, more than 94 hours a week.

Liberty argued that it shouldn't be held solely responsible because company representatives spent little time in the factories and the laborers also did work for other manufacturers.

"The victory in this case was not only the amount of money but also that this case is going to affect every single shop in the garment industry," Ling Nan Zheng, one of the workers who brought the suit, said through a translator.

The workers and their supporters

appeared at a news conference at the Chinatown offices of the Chinese Staff & Workers' Association on Thursday, a day after a jury awarded \$598,333 to be divided between Zheng and her co-plaintiffs.

"My client has serious concerns as to how a decision in this case could affect the garment industry in the entire country," said Vano Haroutunian, an attorney for Liberty Apparel, its owner Albert Nigri and the other defendants. He said his clients were withholding further comment until a judge ruled on post-trial motions.

The plaintiffs' attorney, James Reif, commended his clients for sticking with the case through the years. In 2002, a federal judge sided with Liberty Apparel. The workers won an appeal in 2004 but the case did not go to trial until last month.