

bULLETIN 34
AUTUMN/WINTER 2010



Labour Behind the Label

Clean Clothes Campaign



GARMENT WORKERS IN ASIA STAND UP FOR A LIVING WAGE.

Massive wage protests sweep Asia



(Photo © Reuters/Andrew Biraj)

Garment workers protest in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

As the economic crisis continues to hit workers around the world, massive protests in Asia have seen garment workers take to the streets in their demand for a living wage and decent conditions.

In July thousands of garment workers in Bangladesh, among the lowest paid in the industry, came out to protest the refusal of the government wage board to meet their demand for a minimum wage of 5,000 tk/month (£45). Instead the wage was increased to just 3000tk (£27) which despite, almost doubling

the previous minimum wage, still falls well short of any definition of a living wage. The demonstrations both before and after the announcement saw the temporary closure of over 250 factories in the country's capital, Dhaka.

In September over 200,000 garment workers in Cambodia participated in a national strike to demand a minimum wage of \$91 – estimated to be close to a living wage. The government were proposing to increase the wage from \$50 to \$61 a month.

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Worker action to demand increased wages and conditions were also reported in Sri Lanka, Burma and China over recent months.

These actions have been met with increasing repression from both the state and the manufacturing associations who have warned workers "not to be misled" by "selfish interests" and "enemies of the nation."

The Bangladeshi garment worker protests were violently repressed and hundreds of worker leaders were arrested on apparently unsubstantiated charges. Three of those arrested work for a Labour Behind the Label partner, the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (see pg5). Kalpona Akter, Babul Akhter and Aminul Islam are all facing false charges of inciting worker unrest and are currently on trial under Bangladesh's speedy tribunal system. Their organisation has been de-registered and had its assets frozen. Meanwhile, the country's powerful garment manufacturers' association are lobbying for a special 'industry' police force, specifically focused on suppressing worker unrest in the garment industry.

When Cambodian workers returned to their factories at the end of the strike in mid September, they were confronted with the massive dismissal of union leaders and workers and dozens of court cases filed against union leaders. To date over 700 workers are still locked out of their factories, despite calls from the government and the local courts to immediately reinstate them. Instead manufacturers and brands have demanded that workers sign 'regret' letters, apologising for their actions before they are allowed back into the factory. After two months without pay a large number of workers have now agreed to do so, despite the fact that such a demand is in contravention of their right to freedom of association and collective action. Even so, most

remain locked out and the unions continue to campaign for reinstatement and constructive negotiation to take place.

It is unlikely that increased repression will do much to stop the mounting unrest in the garment industry. As inflation rises throughout Asia the real value of already paltry wages earned by the, mainly women, workers in the garment industry is being eroded. The truth facing many thousands of workers is that they are simply unable to meet even their most basic needs, even when working 60 -80 hours a week. The simple fact is that hunger and need are the motivations for protest and they are increasingly outweighing the fear of reprisals.

In this context the industry needs to step up and take action to address this fundamental abuse of human and worker rights. They need to provide the space for workers to organise into union and develop mechanisms through which workers and their union can start to negotiate on these issues and have their needs, wishes and dreams acknowledged and respected. The never ending search for cheap prices and increased profits needs to stop and brands and retailers need to make sure that minimum prices always take into account the true cost of labour paid at a living wage level.

The campaign for an Asia Floor Wage, which was launched around the world last year sets a framework in which such actions can take place. Over the past year Labour Behind the Label supporters have been calling on UK brands and retailers to sign up to this initiative and start working with workers and their organisations to move towards a living wage for those in their supply chain (see LBL Bulletin, Winter 2009). As we gear up for 2011, the campaign for a real living wage for Asia's garment workers has never been more important.

CHANNEL 4 "DISPATCHES" UNCOVERS UK SWEATSHOP

It isn't just in Indian back street units that clothing sold on the UK high street is made using sweatshop labour. Channel 4's Dispatches documentary, aired on 8th November, found a workshop in Leicester where workers were cramped in overheated, unsanitary and unsafe conditions, working under high pressure targets and paid half the UK legal minimum wage.

Garments were being produced by this unit for British retail chains including Sir Philip Green's BHS, New Look, Peacocks, C&A and Jane Norman.

According to the programme, workers' identities and legality also went unchecked, and many workers had no papers. This left them vulnerable exploitation.

All of the companies, with the exception of Jane Norman, are members of the Ethical Trading Initiative, and all have codes of conduct aimed at preventing abuse of workers.

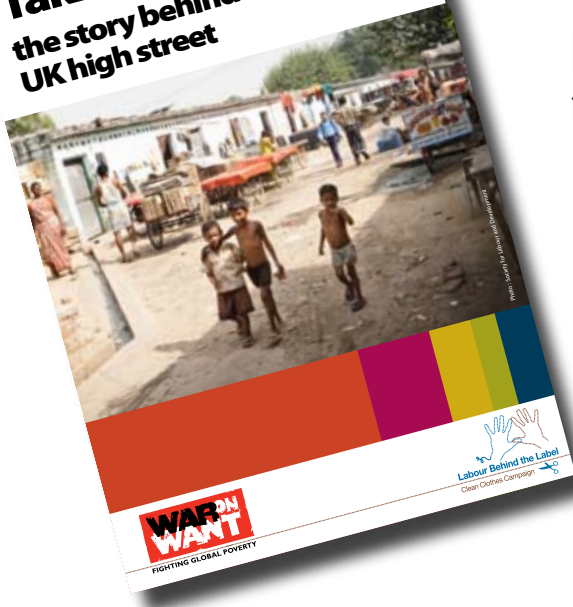
Over 450 people have taken action via Labour Behind the Label's website, calling on the brands to end UK Sweatshops and stating that illegal and poverty wages, abuse of workers, and alarming lack of health and safety are unacceptable both in the UK and anywhere that production happens around the world.

» Brand responses can be found on the LBL website at:

www.labourbehindthelabel.org/campaigns/item/901-uksweatshop

INDIAN WORKERS SPEAK OF A LIFE LOCKED OUT FROM BENEFITS AND RIGHTS

Taking Liberties:
the story behind the
UK high street



The Taking Liberties report, released by Labour behind the Label and War on Want this December, reveals that the struggle for a decent life for garment workers in India goes far deeper than the problem of poverty wages.

Rights removed by contract labour

Over 90% of workers were found to be employed on short term or temporary contracts by agents who supply labour to large factories. This ruse leaves them vulnerable to arbitrary dismissal and allows employers to evade the responsibilities they have towards their work force, such as holiday, maternity and sick pay or bonuses and promotions. The daily problems workers face, such as forced overtime; harassment and bullying; lack of drinking water remain under the control of the factory manager but as he is no longer the agency workers' official employer, their ability to protest is stripped away.

The Bogey Man

Both suppliers banned workers from trade union activities, contrary to all the brands' codes of conduct. Hired security guards were employed to visit the factories and workers were threatened to do as they were told or 'the guards would get them'. As such, a climate of fear exists in Gurgaon, and workers are too afraid to speak out about their problems, let alone join unions to protest their wages and living/working conditions.

Wages

Wages were also found to fall well below the living wage. Helpers and thread cutters received only £60 (4,349 rupees) a month – below half a living wage of £126 (9,100 rupees). Even skilled tailors and checkers earned at most £65 (4,739 rupees) a month - £2.70 (195 rupees a day) or just 33p (26 rupees) an hour. Workers often could not afford breakfast and shared one-room slum homes with their families or other staff. Researchers found only two toilets for all the residents of 18 rooms. Most workers lacked the funds to keep their families with them in the city, so had to live apart.

Overtime

Though all the retailers highlighted point to their code for voluntary overtime not exceeding 12 hours a week, workers at one factory had to toil for up to 140 hours overtime a month, but were paid the standard working rate. The other factory's employees were also forced to toil until 2 am several times a month.

Sam Maher, Labour Behind the Label campaigner and author of the report, said: "These conditions, and their poverty wages, are inexcusable. Brands sourcing from Gurgaon must take action to

Investigating the true story behind UK highstreet retail, researchers met with workers from two supplier factories in Gurgaon near Delhi, to hear their stories.

Workers were found to suffer long hours in sweltering temperatures, verbal and physical abuse, unsafe water and poor sanitation. Life is being lived in slum housing, and to afford enough food is a trial. A climate of fear and insecurity is an everyday reality, where workers' choices are limited by the contractors, factory owners, landlords and authorities who control their lives.

But the workers interviewed were not producing for the low cost, fast fashion and supermarket brands often associated with appalling conditions. Instead, they made garments for some of the well-respected brands on the UK high street such as M&S, Debenhams, Next, Arcadia Group (Dorothy Perkins, Bhs and Miss Selfridge), and Monsoon.

Slum conditions at home

Workers spoke of living in housing 'colonies' or unofficial slums, in packed accommodation with asbestos roofing.

"Living under asbestos roofing is really tough in Delhi summer where temperature goes up to 46 degrees celsius. I get up in the morning, cook lunch, take bath, wash clothes and go for work. I can't afford to eat breakfast."

Most landlords refuse to give housing contracts to their tenants and, without these, workers were unable to get residency cards. This unregistered life beyond the pale means workers cannot access government-subsidised products such as gas – more than double the cost on the open market – and cannot register their children for state schools. Private schools are unthinkable on their salaries, or where workers can scrape together the fees, this cost is cut when overtime isn't available or temporary contracts dip.



» 5 ways to take action!

Call on the brands to act now to ensure workers in Gurgaon earn a living wage and live a life free from repression and fear.

10 minutes to spare

1. Take action on our website by sending an email to M&S, Next and Debenhams.
2. Send our action postcards to the brands, which you will have received with this bulletin.
3. Tell your friends by sharing the link to the online action, or ordering more cards from LBL and handing them around.

stop violence against unionised workers and make sure they pay prices that allow for a living wage.”

“You will not see an energetic garment worker in Gurgaon. This industry is sucking our blood and growing and leaving us in this dirt and filth. Are we living in humane situations? Nobody cares...”

-Garment worker producing for Debenhams, M&S and NEXT

The report calls on Debenhams, Marks & Spencer, NEXT, Arcadia group (Miss Selfridge, BHS and Dorothy Perkins) and Monsoon to:

- » Take concrete steps to ensure freedom of association in Gurgaon.
- » Develop clear benchmarks for paying a minimum living wage, based on the Asia Floor Wage figures.
- » Address purchasing practices that impact on wages;
- » Eliminate the use of short term contract labour in supply chains.
- » Work with others, especially workers and their unions, to translate aspirational codes into reality.

30 minutes to spare

4. Write a personal letter to the brands using the addresses on the cards. Personal letters have a greater effect, and you are much more likely to get a response. Then when you do, follow up with more questions. With the second letter, the company cannot send an automated response and will have to take time to answer your queries.

1 day to spare

5. Organise a store action outside your local M&S / Next / Debenhams shop. LBL can send you leaflets and action cards for you to give out. You could collect signatures for a petition to send to brands too. Take a picture of your demo and send it to the brands to let them know you have been protesting.

CCC INTERNATIONAL FORUM 2010: IN TURKEY



Two hundred and thirty garment workers, worker organisers, campaigners and NGOs working on workers rights from around the world came together in Turkey this November at the Clean Clothes Campaign International Forum. Together we shared stories, made strategies, discussed plans, and talked about ways we can better support each other in bringing about a fairer world for garment workers.

For more info on the international Clean Clothes Campaign go to: www.cleanclothes.org

LABOUR RIGHTS GROUP COMES UNDER ATTACK

The Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) has long had to contend with Bangladeshi government repression and surveillance as security forces tap their phone lines, monitor their emails, and sometimes search their offices.

However, the current crackdown on their work is the harshest yet, threatening BCWS's existence and putting staff and organisational leaders in serious physical danger.

When, on June 3rd, 2010, the NGO Affairs Bureau (NAB) of the government of Bangladesh cancelled the non-governmental (NGO) registration of BCWS, it deprived it of its legal right to exist and operate. At the same time, the Director General of NAB ordered government officials to seize the BCWS office and property and also instructed their bank manager to close their foreign donations bank account, preventing it from continuing important work funded by international donors. A daily newspaper reported that the government was to "*prepare a list of cash foreign donations and the movable /immovable properties procured through foreign donations and take them under government control/possession.*"

On June 16, 2010, at 1:50 pm Bangladesh time, BCWS staff member Aminul Islam was detained at the offices of the Director of Labour by members of the National Security Intelligence (NSI) police. According to Mr. Islam's testimony, he managed to escape custody late that night while being transported to

another district. Mr. Islam reports that the NSI officers blindfolded him, and beat him and threatened to kill him in an attempt to extort false testimony against BCWS.

On July 30th, following the worker protests against the new minimum wage protests in July (see lead article) Kalpona Akter, Babul Akhter and Aminul Islam were among hundreds of workers and leaders accused of inciting unrest. Criminal charges were filed against the three and they were forced into hiding. On the night of August 12 2010, 20 police officers arrested Kalpona Akter and Babul Akhter and they were held in prison until finally they were released on bail at the end of September. During their imprisonment both were subjected to constant harassment and Babul was subjected to a brutal beating. Babul, Kalpona and Aminul are now on trial under the "Speedy Tribunal" system, which takes place in a closed court. The verdict should be delivered by the end of January.

Labour Behind the Label will continue to report on the proceedings and on any further harassment of our colleagues and friends.

» Take action in solidarity with BCWS. See the Labour Behind the Label website for action updates and requests at

www.labourbehindthelabel.org/urgent-actions/itemlist/

WORKERS' RIGHTS CHAMPION: PROFILE



Name: Kalpona Akter

Role: one of the founders of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS), an NGO focused on building capacity of workers, rights training, support for union organising and documentation of violations.

Description: Kalpona herself started working in the garment industry at age 12 after her father, a construction worker,

fell ill. "*I was the eldest of four sisters and a brother. Schooling was the last thing on my mother's mind. She wanted food to feed the family.*"

At the garment factory Kalpona suffered many of the problems she now highlights as part of her work at BCWS: long hours, poverty wages, terrible health and safety and no job security. At age 18 she heard from other workers about a trade union and began to organise inside her factory. Her attempts to form a union were crushed, she was dismissed from her workplace and blacklisted from other factories in the area.

Since then she has used her time to develop expertise in labour law, learn English and computer skills and start organising other workers. In the early 1990's she co-founded BCWS where she has worked tirelessly as an advocate for more than 2 million women employed in the industry.

The success of BCWS has not gone unnoticed by the Bangladesh Government or the powerful Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association. It is clear from the recent repression of Kalpona and her organisation (see above) that she is considered a threat to the interests of the richest and most powerful people in the country, many of whom have amassed considerable fortune from their involvement in the garment industry. It is for this reason many observers believe she has now become a target, culminating in her arrest in August this year.

Turkey: DESA

The struggle for union recognition at the DESA factory is entering its third year with workers continuing to face harassment and repression. Following a Dutch TV documentary on the factory and a big demonstration at Prada in Istanbul DESA management agreed to meet union representatives once again. One worker, dismissed on false charges in October was reinstated but no agreement was signed on recognition. The campaign continues.....

Germany: ALDI

The German low cost retailer, Aldi was not amused by the parody of its own glossy leaflet by labour rights campaigners at the Christliche Initiative Romero (CIR), a member of the German Clean Clothes Campaign. It has attempted to take out an injunction against the campaign to prevent it from circulating the mock Aldi flyer, which highlighted the retailer's failure to address appalling working conditions throughout their supply chain. It seems that rather than taking the long overdue action needed to address these issues ALDI has attempted to muzzle its critics by threatening them with legal action.

UK: Playfair 2012

The Playfair campaign continues to raise awareness and lobby hard. We've been out and about doing workshops with student groups, promoting teaching materials and holding events with unions. Thanks go to over 1,000 of you who have sent action cards to the brands, which is great. Larger demonstrations to be organised in the new year. Watch this space!

UK: ASDA

ActionAid's Asda Poverty Guaranteed campaign, profiled in our summer bulletin, has gone full steam ahead. Secret shopper pocket drops in Asda stores around the country have been taking place over the last few months, telling consumers where and how their clothes were made. A response was received from Asda (see <http://bit.ly/eFFsGg> for some great counter responses) stating they were carrying out a pilot project in Bangladesh and would try their best to do more soon. Perhaps their 5 year CSR strategy, out soon, will show progress... or perhaps not.

INDIA

URGENT APPEALS AND SOLIDARITY

UNION LEADER KIDNAPPED FROM M&S SUPPLIER

LBL has condemned the kidnapping of a union leader, Anwar Ansari, who was working for an M&S supplier in the Indian city of Gurgaon. The kidnapping was part of a brutal attack against 60 workers, which took place as they arrived for work at the Viva Global factory on August 25th 2010.

Anwar Ansari was reportedly snatched by contractors from the P&D labour agency, who supplied workers to the factory. He was detained for over 14 hours and was severely beaten by his kidnapers before being dumped in the road near his home. He

was warned to leave the region and not to return. Two men from P&D have been charged with his kidnap.

Over 100 other workers were locked out of the factory and continued a picket for several weeks, demanding that Viva Global management and M&S take action to bring Mr Ansari's attackers to justice. The workers remain locked outside the factory and are now taking their case to the state high court.

The attack followed months of harassment against union members who were attempting to get improvements to water, sanitation, overtime and wages for both permanent and contract workers at Viva Global. The union and Labour Behind the Label had repeatedly urged M&S to intervene to stop harassment of union members and support the calls for negotiation. Despite regular communication with M&S since May 2010 the retailer failed to take a strong line with their supplier. Following the attack M&S announced they had cut their orders with Viva Global, ending their six year relationship with the factory. Until August, workers reported that around 80% production had been for M&S. The factory has now scaled down production to a small number of lines employing around 60 workers.

M&S have told LBL supporters and other campaigners that they continue to work to resolve this case, yet have had no contact with either LBL or the union since the beginning of September. It is clear they hope to wipe their hands clean by walking away from the factory and from the workers who have bravely taken a stand to defend their rights. These actions are a far cry from the image of the ethical retailer they promote to their consumers.

» For more information on the attack and to take action see:

www.labourbehindthelabel.org/urgent-actions/item/849-ms-viva-global



Left: M&S worker Anwar Ansari after his release, August 2010.

LBL SUPPORTERS

SUPPORTER TOP TRUMPS



LIVING WAGES ROCK THE UK....

This year saw LBL on the road to a few festivals: doing textile workshops at Green Man festival in Wales (above) and running a successful campaign stall at Tolpuddle Martyrs festival in Dorset (centre). Thanks to everyone who took part in volunteering at these events and everyone who came along



and took action. Thanks also to our big band of Workers' Beer volunteers who did sterling work at all the big festivals this summer to raise a huge £3,000 for LBL (LBL team at Reading festival clock off for the night, right).



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! SEND US PHOTOS OF YOUR FUNDRAISING AND CAMPAIGNING EVENTS FOR LBL...

THANKYOU FOR BEING A MEMBER OF LBL....

We are always so grateful when our supporters opt to become members of our campaign. It means a lot to us as membership gives LBL more valuable aid to ensure that the best possible work is being done on behalf of garment workers all round the world. If you are pleased with what we do and the things we have achieved this year please consider giving an extra gift to LBL.

BECOMING A FRIEND OF LBL BY GIVING £5 A MONTH OR MORE HELPS GIVE US A SECURE FUTURE TO CARRY ON FIGHTING FOR BETTER RIGHTS AND WORKING CONDITIONS FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN THE GLOBAL GARMENT INDUSTRY.

Did you know you can donate to LBL or join online now? It's easy, just go to www.labourbehindthelabel.org/join or www.labourbehindthelabel.org/donate, or you can simply fill in the form below.

We'd love it if you told your friends about us too; why not pass on this bulletin when you have finished it and wake up more people to the plight of garment workers and their families. Together we can make a difference.

Your bank's name and address: _____

Your name and address: _____

Your sort code: _ _ _ - _ _ _ - _ _ _

Your account number: _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

Please pay the Co-operative Bank plc, PO Box 250, Skelmersdale, WN8 6WT. For the account of Labour Behind the Label Ltd, Sort code 08-92-99, Account no 65071595

The sum of: £ _____ (in numbers) In words: _____

Starting on: _____ / _____ /20_____

And _____ monthly/annually hereafter
(please delete as appropriate)

(Please leave at least one month until the start date to ensure your form is processed in time)

Signed: _____

Date: _____

This order cancels any previous order to the same payee. Please send this form to LBL, not to your bank: 10-12 Picton Street, Bristol, BS6 5QA.

SWEATSHOP RELAY.... A NEW WAY TO LEARN ABOUT LBL



Students at William de Ferrers show off their wares after a gruelling 6 hours of 'sweatshop labour', August 2010.

'I now know that the clothes we wear have been crafted by highly skilled people and yet they don't get the credit or money that they deserve. Fashion is demanding, and now I believe that it is dark and a lot of greed comes from it. Brands worry about profit and customer satisfaction - not workers.'

If you would like further information on using this pack in your school or college please email: bee@labourbehindthelabel.org

This year LBL trialled a new fundraising and awareness pack for schools. The Sweatshop Relay pack is a new resource designed to give students a hands-on understanding of what it's like to work in a garment factory, what problems workers encounter and just what it takes to produce all the clothing that flies in and out of our high street stores.

Students studying 6th year textiles at William de Ferrers school in Essex devised how their 'sweatshop' would run after a presentation by Sarah Daly of LBL. The students created a micro-factory where they cut and stitched bags from recycled materials for 6 hours. Incorporating some business acumen they marketed the bags for LBL to raise money, making over £300 from their efforts. The event was featured in the Essex Chronicle and really made the participants think hard about the issues they had been dealing with:

'I will be researching all the stores I like and will contact those who do not have proper knowledge of who makes their garments to raise awareness and encourage them to change.'



TOP FUNDRAISERS 2010: THANKS FROM THE LBL TEAM!

This year we have had some really creative fundraising from our members and supporters. Thanks especially go to Garrad Hassan for their decision to donate to LBL rather than send company Christmas cards; Dan Lakey who ran the London Marathon for us; Bristol University staff who held a staff Clothes Swap for us using our new pack (see www.labourbehindthelabel.org/support-us/item/845-clothes-swap-pack for more details); University of East London and St Hugh's College, Oxford for their fundraising efforts; Motherwell Fairtrade Steering Committee and Dundee Fairtrade network who held awareness-raising film nights for us; Nathalie Heseltine who auctioned off final year work at her graduation show to raise money and awareness for LBL; and to all the other individuals, Fairtrade groups, church groups, trade unions, schools and other organisations who have raised money for us this year and spread our important message.

ACTIVIST TRAINING

In early december Labour Behind the Label hosted our first Activist Training Weekend. Ten LBL activists managed to brave some tricky weather conditions and public transport chaos which sadly marooned a couple of participants (and almost the entire staff of LBL!) to come together at the ActionAid offices in London. They learnt skills and best practice in writing press releases, campaign planning, on-street campaigning and were the first to hear all about our new campaign, Killer Jeans, due to launch in March next year.

A really good outcome of the event was a desire to see locally active groups of supporters doing awareness-raising or fundraising events in their own areas, thereby increasing LBL's capacity to reach out to more and more people and get the message across. A number of participants hope to set up a local LBL group for supporters in London who want to organise more LBL actions in our capital.

The ten will be the first LBL supporters to join our new "core activist" network, set up to provide campaigners who want to get more involved in our campaigns with the tools and information they need to be real advocates for garment workers around the world. If you feel passionately about garment worker exploitation and want to dedicate some of your time to our organisation we would love to hear from you too.

To find out more about future trainings or to join our core supporters list please contact: bee@labourbehindthelabel.org

Labour Behind the Label

Clean Clothes Campaign



Labour Behind the Label Ltd is a not-for-profit company registered in England, No. 4173634.

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