ACTION UPDATE
SUMMER 2016
Supporting garment workers worldwide
Welcome

In this Action Update you will find information on how your donations, campaigning and support have really made a difference. Since our last update we have been busy with events, releasing reports and developing our transparency campaign.

In December we held a successful People’s Meeting event in London which saw over 80 participants come together to discuss and get informed about current issues within the industry. In this update we will update you on our transparency campaign and share with you some exciting updates about our Cambodia project where workers have gathered footage which shows what it’s like to work and live as garment workers. The Change your Shoes project has released four reports of which the India report was researched by our friends Home Workers Worldwide and co-written with LBL, and highlights the exploitation of women working in shoe production.

Thank you for your continued support – without you our work wouldn’t be possible. Whether you stand with us outside shops and attend demonstrations, donate or like and share our social media posts, it all helps to make change happen. Together we can ensure a world where no one has to live in poverty for the price of a cheap t-shirt.

In solidarity,
Caroline, Anna, Ilana and Ursula
The Labour Behind the Label Team

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Labour Behind the Label campaign for garment workers’ rights worldwide, supporting garment workers in their struggle to live in dignity and work in safety. We believe that everyone with a stake in the garment industry has a responsibility to improve conditions – workers need to join together and demand better rights, consumers need to take ethics into account in the way that they shop and enter into dialogue with companies, governments need to step in and defend workers’ rights through legislation, and companies, especially the big brands at the top of the supply chain, need to be accountable to their workers.
Who made my clothes?
We don't know the half of it.

Information is power, but brands continue to vigilantly guard information about their supply chains. Workers and consumers are regularly prevented from accessing vital information, which in turn could hold companies accountable and end human rights abuses.

From anywhere below the retailer, we have little knowledge of who is involved in making our clothes. Data about rights and wages in factories, subcontractors, spinning mills, homeworkers, cotton growers, is largely hidden. We have to change this. The Clean Clothes Campaign surveyed workers and activist organisers around the world to find out what information would help empower their fight for better rights and wages. The list of needed data is quite long – information like:

- the addresses of their supplier factories
- what average wages were paid
- if there is a union in the factory
- if workers have permanent or temporary contracts;
- if the factory uses subcontractors
- if the factory employs homeworkers, and respects their rights;
- the outcomes of factory audits

That’s right – currently companies can and routinely keep all this information secret. Imagine the possibilities if this information was available to the public. With this information, people could find effective solutions to the complex problems plaguing the garment industry.

This is why we’ve launched a transparency campaign.

Join the campaign and sign the petition demanding full disclosure from brands about their supply chains.

Take action: labourbehindthelabel.org/transparency

New Report: Do We Buy It?

When brands say they are going to pay living wages, can we trust them? Should we take them at their word, regardless of whether we know the facts? Our study into brand living wage commitments shows that despite M&S’s commitment to ensure suppliers would be able to pay a living wage to workers by 2015, workers in all of their main production countries continue to live in poverty. H&M was also shown to not be paying workers a living wage, despite pledging otherwise. These brands seem to be all talk and no action – full of empty promises aimed at allaying consumer fears. We expect and demand more from brands.
Eastern Europe's Shoe Sweatshops
The realities of working in Europe's shoe manufacturing peripheries

When a label says ‘Made in Europe’ should we breathe a sigh of relief? Unfortunately, no. Our latest study ‘Labour on a Shoe String’ shows how garment workers in Eastern Europe and the Balkan states face severe wage poverty and damaging piece rate contracts.

Researchers found that shoes labelled ‘made in Italy’ or ‘made in Germany’ are often part-produced in Eastern Europe and the Balkan states. The process, called ‘outward processing trade’ involves brands shipping shoe parts for assembly out to nearby low-wage countries such as Macedonia and Albania, where workers assemble products for piece rate pay, costing significantly less. Once assembled, the shoes are then shipped back to the country of origin for labelling and retail.

“The most difficult thing is to pay for heating in winter. I am afraid to look at the bill. If we fail to pay for longer than two months, they cut us off, the prices keep on growing. Our parents, who work in Spain, are sending us money every few months and that’s how we get by,” said one Romanian worker.

As many workers earn a wage based on units produced and not hours worked, they have to take unpaid overtime or refuse to follow safety procedures (that protect them from glue and hazardous chemicals) in order to maintain high productivity.

Throughout Eastern Europe and the Balkan states the working conditions in many factories is dire, often without heating and cooling systems. As a result, workers have no other choice than to face extreme cold in winter and temperatures so high in summer that they frequently faint.

The research found that wages for shoe workers in these states are far below the poverty line, coming in around 25% - 35% of an estimated minimum living wage level. This is similar to the wage deficit faced by shoe workers in China, and in some cases even more extreme. In order for Albanian, Macedonian and Romanian factory workers – the majority of whom are women – to earn enough to support themselves and their families, wages need to be four or five times higher.

Reports galore!
Check out our recently released reports from the Change Your Shoes campaign, detailing poor working conditions in Italy, India and China. labourbehindthelabel.org/resources
SWITZERLAND
ILO commits to consider new tools for governing global supply chains
The International Labour Conference in Geneva this summer saw unions from garment producing countries make a strong case for better enforcement frameworks in order to protect rights and prevent disasters in global supply chains. The ILO agreed to further research the issue. This is an important first step.

ITALY
Factory owners push back against regulation
Chinese factory owners in Italy are pushing back against findings of Italian labour inspectorates in their factories, on illegal workers and health and safety concerns. Riots have been breaking out among Chinese migrant workers in Parto.

NICARAGUA
Brutal police repression at Walmart factory
After taking action calling for clean drinking water in a Walmart factory, union leaders were fired and physically escorted from the factory by riot police. At least one person was assaulted in the process. The brutal treatment of workers, including pregnant women, set off a strike by more than 3,000 workers. In the aftermath 13 workers were arrested.

SRI LANKA
Beyonce’s Ivy Park sportswear exposed for poverty pay
A Sun investigation into wages and working conditions for Beyonce’s new sportswear label ‘Ivy Park’ – sold by Topshop - uncovered that workers were paid 44p an hour – far below the amount needed to live with dignity. Poverty pay is common throughout Sri Lankan suppliers.
**BANGLADESH**

**Tazreen fire victims receive claims**

After 3.5 years of waiting, survivors and victims’ families have finally received loss of income payments following the Tazreen Fashions fire, which killed 113 people in 2012. This was largely paid through donations from the Bangladesh Prime Minister’s Fund, C&A Foundation and the Fung Foundation, with some smaller contributions from other brands. Edinburgh Woollen Mill did not contribute, despite documents clearly linking them to the disaster.

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**CHINA**

**Activists imprisoned for supporting workers**

Following several worker uprisings in China’s factories, the government staged a crackdown on labour activists in December 2015, in which dozens of NGO workers supporting labour struggles were arrested. Two of our partners remain in custody for ‘disturbing social order’ after they educated workers about their rights at the Lide Shoe Factory, which supplies shoes to Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein. As the cases come to trial, we are continuing to call for their immediate and unconditional release.

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**CAMBODIA**

**Union members at H&M supplier lose their jobs, in violation of their rights**

In December 2015, 105 members of a Cambodian union in the Zhong Yin factory were fired for taking part in union activity. Efforts to secure their reinstatement, including strikes and negotiations, have so far not been successful. An international solidarity campaign is ongoing, calling for the workers immediate reinstatement.
3 years on from Rana Plaza – have things changed?

There is no question that the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety (the Accord) was a landmark agreement, a crucial step towards establishing a safe and healthy garment industry, not just in Bangladesh but globally. Signed on 15 May 2013, the Accord is a five-year independent, legally binding agreement between global brands and retailers and trade unions in order to ensure a safe working environment for garment workers in Bangladesh. It set an essential global precedent that can now be replicated.

However implementation of the Accord is far from complete. Now, three years on from its initial signing and agreed implementation plan, many brands that signed the Accord are still not meeting safety requirements, in violation of the Accord. H&M is one such brand. For example, 55% of H&M’s supplier factories in Bangladesh still do not have adequate fire exits. It is simply unacceptable that workers continue to face the possibility of being trapped in a building during a fire.

This year, Labour Behind the Label joined with partners globally in marking the anniversary of the signing of the Accord by launching a campaign against H&M. We are demanding that H&M finally fulfil their responsibilities in Bangladesh and ensure factories are safe. No one should face the impossible choice between definite starvation and possible death.

Join us in action: labourbehindthelabel.org/takeactionhm
Workers tell their story through hidden cameras and secret recordings in Cambodian factories

Have you ever wanted to see what it is really like to work in a factory in Cambodia? Not through the eyes of western media, but captured by the people who actually work in the factories? Working with partners in Cambodia, Labour Behind the Label initiated a project to train 40 ‘citizen journalists’ to record footage of their lives and work in Cambodia’s garment factories. Workers used 40 smart phones and a shared social media platform, to gather pictures showing what is happening minute by minute in their factories and villages. These secret videos and photos were taken from inside the factories, often at great personal risk, from packed factory buses, piles of clothing, and special label machines, to workplace injuries, unsanitary toilets, and worker demonstrations – the images captured provide an inside glimpse into what it’s like to work in a garment factory in Cambodia. You can view the latest footage now by going to labourbehindthelabel.org/undercover

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Thank you and shout outs

We would like to thank all of the unions who have affiliated to LBL this year. So far you have donated £930 towards our campaigning work. As we experience tough financial and political challenges your support and solidarity is invaluable. Thank you.

If you are part of a union and haven’t affiliated yet and would like to, go here: labourbehindthelabel.org/affiliate or email info@labourbehindthelabel.org

Huge thanks to Workers Beer Company, My Cause UK and all of our amazing volunteers who have worked at festivals this summer representing LBL! There are still some events this year with opportunities to snap up, take a look at labourbehindthelabel.org/festivalvolunteering or email info@labourbehindthelabel.org to be notified about next year’s festivals.

The Six Items Challenge was a huge success earlier this year raising £3,705.67 towards our work fighting for garment workers rights– our most successful year yet! One of our challengers Sarah Chapman has even decided to extend it to a year long campaign with a fundraising target of £1000. Impressive, right? You can visit her fundraising page at sixitemschallenge2016.everydayhero.com/uk/sarah.

Coming up

We are so excited to be involved in 2017’s Bath Half Marathon and we have ten places up for grabs. Whether you’re a beginner or an experienced runner we would love for you to be a part of our biggest team yet. The registration fee is £20 and in return for a place we ask for you to raise a minimum of £250. Help us make a big success of this event and raise money for garment workers. Sign up at labourbehindthelabel.org/bathhalf2017

Running not your thing? We have cycles, walks and treks available to participate in and fundraise for not just in the UK but worldwide. How about a trek along the Great Wall of China? Or a cycle around Burma? Whatever the challenge, we will support you.

Find out more at: labourbehindthelabel.org/dontsweatforsweatshops
Get Active

Watch new documentary
The Asia Floor Wage has released a wonderful new documentary film about the movement for a living wage in the garment industry. (32:51mins) Consider hosting a film night and discussion about the issues. Watch it online here: bit.ly/AFWvideo

Who made our clothes? Get data out there to defend human rights
Sign the petition calling for supply chain transparency, order copies of Labour Behind the Label’s new report, Do We Buy It?, organise to write to brands to ask for data about where our clothes come from. See labourbehindthelabel.org/take-action

Write for us
Are you passionate about garment workers’ rights and want to tell others about your concerns or experiences? Maybe you’re fed up with brands not being honest with consumers, or perhaps you produce garments yourself and want to share with others the skill needed which is often overlooked and undervalued. We welcome bloggers to write for us.
Contact: info@labourbehindthelabel.org

Take action to support our campaigns and work fighting for garment workers rights go to: labourbehindthelabel.org/take-action

Do you have other ideas or questions about how to get more involved?
Get in touch. Let us know what resources you or your group might need.
Share with us your ideas. Email: info@labourbehindthelabel.org

In Cambodia, every Monday protesters are wearing black to “mourn” the increasing suppression on human rights in Cambodia. To join in solidarity with these garment workers wear something black the next Monday you are free and tweet @labourlabel with your picture and the hash tag #BlackMonday and we will re-tweet you!
Activist training – Save the date!

When: 29th October 2016
Where: Impact Hub, Birmingham
Why: To meet, learn new skills and get organised.

All welcome!

To express an interest and to sign up contact info@labourbehindthelabel.org