Welcome

In this update you will find out how your donations and support make a huge difference. Since our last update two of our projects have come to an end and we’ll share some of the successes that happened as a result. Our transparency campaign is really developing now, read on to find out how you can get involved, by either joining our army of activists or supporting our crowdfunder. Also in this update you will read about the landmark compensation arrangement which was reached on the 4th anniversary of the deadly Pakistan factory fire and an update on the Chinese activists who were charged and found guilty of “gathering a crowd to disturb social order”.

Thank you for your continued support – without you our work wouldn’t be possible. Whether you stand with us outside shops, attend demonstrations, donate, send action cards or fundraise for us, it all helps to make change happen.

In solidarity,
Caroline, Rose, Nicola and Ursula
The Labour Behind the Label Team

In this issue

3 Labour Behind the Label at a glance
4 Transparency now
6 Bangladesh
7 Pakistan
8 China
9 Activist training
10 Cambodia
11 Six Items Challenge
12 Affiliate to Labour Behind the Label

Labour Behind the Label Limited supports garment workers’ efforts worldwide to improve their working conditions. It is a not-for-profit cooperative company, registered in England No. 4173634. The Labour Behind the Label Trust is a separate organisation that raises funds for the organisation’s charitable activities, registered charity number 1159356.

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Labour Behind the Label at a glance

Labour Behind the Label campaigns 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.
“Made in Turkey. Wash at 40 degrees. 100% cotton.” Garment labels give us some information, but tell us nothing about who made our clothes and the conditions they were working in. Even if we look beyond the labels and scour brands’ websites, it’s hard to find out much more. Some brands don’t even reveal the number of countries they source from. But imagine if every item you wore, you knew exactly which factory it was made in and whether the workers had secure contracts, whether they worked in safe conditions, and whether they earned a living wage.

This level of transparency is a long way off, but Labour Behind the Label is pushing for it in our new campaign. We’re calling for brands to publish the names and addresses of factories where garments are produced, including where printing, embroidery and laundry takes place. We’re asking them to publish the parent company of their suppliers, the types of products made and the number of workers at each site. And we want them to publish audit information about these factories, to demonstrate the working conditions in each.

Of course, an average consumer won’t wade through downloaded spreadsheets to assess brands, but once this information is available, it will allow the development of user-friendly apps, websites and other comparison tools that will transform consumer choice.

However, informing consumers is only one of the reasons why increased transparency in the garment industry is a good idea. The real transformation will be for workers’ rights. Just think, if workers have access to audit reports, showing whether a brand’s Code...
Demanding transparency of conduct is being met, it will support them in their negotiations with factories to improve safety conditions, wages or union rights. Or in the horrific event of another catastrophe like Rana Plaza, it will allow compensation to be paid for workers and their families much more quickly, because it will be clear from the outset which brands are responsible.

Workers have already benefited from increased transparency in Bangladesh, where the Accord signed after Rana Plaza requires the name, address and number of workers in a factory to be published. The government of Bangladesh will only recognise a union if 50% of the workforce in a factory has signed up. Corrupt factory owners sometimes try to exaggerate the total workforce to underplay the support for the union within a factory. But now the number of workers in a factory is publicly available, union organisers in Bangladesh can demonstrate that they have reached the crucial 50% target.

Now this supply chain transparency needs to extend much further, and for every country, not just Bangladesh. But we need your help! Can you join our army of activists who will take this message to UK brands across the UK? Sign up here: labourbehindthelabel.org/join-our-army

Support our first ever crowdfunder!
We need funds to develop this campaign. Our target is £3500. Can you get behind it? Visit our crowdfunder page at bit.ly/fix-fashion to find out more.
In Bangladesh workers face numerous barriers to organising, including widespread and often violent repression of the right to freedom of association. Many workers and activists are harassed and intimidated so that they are discouraged from joining unions. Lack of trade union rights is one of the root causes of the numerous disasters we have seen in Bangladesh in recent years due to workers’ inability to organise effectively and to be able to take advantage of programmes such as the Bangladesh Accord.

Since June 2014, UNISON’s International Development Fund has been working with LBL to support Bangladesh’s garment workers through a project with Bangladesh Revolutionary Garment Workers Federation (BRGWF) – one of the trade union federations set up after the Rana Plaza tragedy. The project funded an office in Gazipur; a district of Dhaka which is becoming one of the Bangladesh’s fastest-growing garment industry hubs, so that BRGWF could better support workers’ efforts to organise. Four organisers were also recruited so that advice and training in law, health and safety, working against the discrimination of female workers, the forming of unions etc. could be provided. We would like to thank UNISON for enabling this project and congratulate BRGWF for their fantastic work mobilising workers despite the huge pressures against them. We look forward to following BRGWF’s progress and watching the office grow from strength to strength!
Pakistan

After four years of campaigning and months of negotiations, an agreement has been reached to pay compensation in excess of US$5 million to the survivors and families of workers killed in Pakistan’s worst industrial accident.

On 11 September 2012, more than 250 workers lost their lives and over 50 were injured in a fire at the Ali Enterprises garment factory in Karachi. Workers burnt to death trapped behind barred windows and locked doors. Others jumped for their lives from the upper floors, sustaining permanent disabilities.

German retailer KiK, Ali Enterprises’ only known buyer, had previously paid $1 million to a relief fund. But after joint campaigning – involving national and international unions, and the Clean Clothes Campaign – KiK have finally agreed to pay out proper compensation. This is an additional $5.15 million to fund loss of earnings and medical costs for the injured survivors and dependents of those killed in the disaster.

As part of the global Clean Clothes Campaign, we’re committed to supporting garment workers in their fight for justice and keeping the pressure on brands to ensure safety for the workers who make their clothes.

Saeeda Khatoon, a widow and vice president of Ali Enterprise Factory Fire Affectees Association, lost her only son in the fire. She said: “It is a day of respite for the victims’ families as their cries have been heard. We know that our nearest and dearest will never come back, but we hope that this kind of tragedy will never ever happen again. The government, brands and factory owners must seriously observe labour and safety standards in factories.”

Landmark compensation arrangement reached on 4th anniversary of deadly Pakistan factory fire
In your last Action Update we promised we'd continue to call for the release of labour activists who were arrested in December 2015 in China. Meng Han and Zeng Feiyang were two of the activists arrested after simply educating workers about their rights, at the Lide Shoe Factory in Guangdong. Zeng was tried in September 2016 along with two other activists, he was found guilty of “gathering a crowd to disturb social order” and given a three-year sentence suspended for four years.

Meng was tried in November 2016. Along with other activists he had been allowed only sporadic access to his lawyer, which is a violation of Chinese law. His parents have been harassed and intimidated throughout his detention, and were forced to move after one incident when unidentified thugs came to their apartment and attacked their door with an axe. Despite previously claiming he had done nothing wrong, Meng pleaded guilty at his trial – no doubt wanting to protect his family – and was sentenced to 1 year, 9 months in prison.

Brands who source from factories where workers’ representatives are being arrested and intimidated simply for asserting their right to organise, have a responsibility towards those workers. We've been calling on big name, high-end brands Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein and Coach who source from the Lide Shoe Factory to stand up for their workers. We want them to ask the Chinese government to release Meng Han and to stop suppressing workers’ rights. So far they have been silent. We stand with Meng Han and workers in China, we will continue to call for Meng to be released, for an end to the repression of workers rights and the persecution of activists and their families.

We thank all of you who have been involved in these campaigns, for continuing to show solidarity with garment workers, and putting pressure on brands to do the right thing.
Getting active in Birmingham

On 29th October we met with a group of activists in Birmingham, all with the same passion: to make a change in the garment industry. It was an opportunity to meet with three garment workers through our partner CENTRAL in Cambodia who shared their experiences over Skype and told us what changes they want to see in the industry. The main things? To have greater accountability in the industry, to be able to eat nutritional food and to be treated with respect - not like machines made to produce more and more.

During the day activists learned how to take practical action. LBL knows we can’t achieve the change we want to see on our own, so by having activists on the ground throughout the UK, taking action at the grass roots level in their communities, these activists are going to be crucial to get brands to listen to workers’ demands.

Want to join our army of activists? Sign up at labourbehindthelabel.org/join-our-army.
Cambodia workers stand up for their rights

Over the past two years LBL has been working with CENTRAL to empower and give voice to Cambodian garment workers. Funded by TRAID, this project has made huge strides for workers. The top three successes from the project include:

1. **Minimum wage increases** from USD100/per month to USD153/month for 733,300 garment workers.

2. **H&M contract policy**: After four years of campaigning, including five months of this project, on 18 March 2015 H&M informed CENTRAL that they had adopted a new internal policy for suppliers that all fixed duration contracts for Cambodian workers with at least two years seniority would be converted to contracts of unlimited duration. Currently, 31 of 72 H&M suppliers are using illegal contracts which are to be converted starting July 2015. The new contract policy will benefit 57,979 workers in these 31 factories. This will make a big difference to workers’ ability to exercise their rights and freedoms.

3. **Legal aid**: During this project 386 union leaders were reinstated after illegal termination for union activity and a total of $527,149 in compensation payments were received by workers. CENTRAL also facilitated the successful registration of 15 new local unions in 15 garment factories with another 3 existing local unions experiencing significant increases in membership – 4,624 new union members (90% women) at 18 factories.

“We are delighted to work with LBL on this project and others. It is extremely powerful to have connections between garment workers on the factory floor all the way up to the consumers buying these garments in the UK. And the results under this project show that. We have learnt a lot from LBL and our partners. Thank you to LBL from CENTRAL and the garment workers that have received support under this project.”

Tola Moeun, Executive Director, CENTRAL

**What’s life really like for a Cambodian garment worker?**

Also as part of this project we gave workers mobile phones to document their daily lives. Our friends, Rainbow Collective, who produce documentaries committed to raising awareness on issues of human rights then worked with these workers in Cambodia to produce some great content and films. Want to see the results? Find out more at labourbehindthelabel.org/citizen-journalists
Sign up to the Six Items Challenge!

Ever wondered how you’d cope without Fast Fashion? Fancy a Fashion Fast instead? Or maybe you’ve always dreamt of the perfect capsule wardrobe. Feel like it’s time to have a wardrobe declutter? Like to do something to help garment workers? You can answer all these questions – and more - by signing up for our Six Items Challenge!

For the Six Items Challenge we challenge you to spend six weeks with just six items to wear, and raise money for LBL throughout your challenge. It’s a chance to find out what you love to wear, what you’d really miss, and think about what really matters about the clothes you put on. Of course we’d love you to Instagram, blog and write about your challenge to encourage others to think as well. And of course, let us know how you get on!

It’s up to you to pick the six items you’d like to wear, and we don’t include your socks, smalls, and sportswear in the total. Every penny you raise on your fashion fast goes to help garment workers who make the clothes on our high streets.

For further information and a Six Items Challenge Pack, please get in touch with us at info@labourbehindthelabel.org or on 0117 941 5844.
Affiliate to Labour Behind the Label

Many organisations, including unions, schools, colleges and businesses, choose to affiliate to Labour Behind the Label to show their support for the workers who make our clothes. By affiliating with us your organisation will directly support our work alongside over 250 unions and garment worker organisations across the garment industry.

“Wolverhampton UNISON takes international issues seriously but also recognises the need for our members to see the relevance of those issues. By supporting Labour Behind the Label’s campaign to defend and promote the rights of garment workers who produce much of our high street clothing, we believe we can engage our membership in making the link as to “what has it got to do with us?” as well as support Labour Behind the Label in its direct contribution to international solidarity.”

Dave Auger, UNISON Deputy Branch Secretary

For an affiliation pack please email donate@labourbehindthelabel.org or call us on 0117 941 5844