ACTION UPDATE

SUMMER 2017

Supporting garment workers worldwide

LABOUR BEHIND THE LABEL

Welcome

Right now your support is making a huge difference as we deliver our big campaign for this year. Our **Step Up** campaign launched in May to demand transparency from shoe and clothing brands. Read on to find out which brands we're targeting and how you can get involved, by signing our petition or by joining our army of activists who are out there talking to store managers and demanding change.

Also in this update you will read about our **speakers tour**, our most successful **Six Items Challenge** yet and an update about the **Bangladesh crackdown** which happened at the end of last year which saw workers and activists arrested simply for demanding better working and living conditions.

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, Dominique, Nicola and Ursula
The Labour Behind the Label Team

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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 and shoe workers' rights worldwide, supporting 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.

Step Up:

Tell us where our shoes are made

Working conditions in the shoe industry are hidden from us because most brands keep their supply chains secret. This needs to change.

That's why we've launched our **Step Up** campaign. We're calling for greater transparency and urgent change in the shoe industry and we need your help! Sign the petition at **labourbehindthelabel.org/shoes**

Huge thanks to everyone who supported our recent crowdfunder: you've made this campaign possible. If you would like to donate to this campaign you can at **bit.ly/fix-fashion**. Read on to see how your support is already having an impact.

What's the problem?

85% of all leather sold in the EU is tanned with chromium. Due to unsafe production processes chromium VI is released which, along with other hazardous chemicals, exposes tannery workers to asthma, skin cancer and other deadly diseases.

Image © GMB Akash

Toxic chemical waste from tanneries is then released into the groundwater, contaminating the surrounding communities, their farmland and rivers.

Elsewhere in the supply chain, women homeworkers play an essential role in hand-stitching leather uppers for shoes sold on our high streets. Their wages are extremely low, they suffer health problems from this repetitive, labour-intensive work and they are at the mercy of their employers, having few rights and no job security.

More information helps workers

The global shoe supply chain is complex, but it doesn't need to be a secret. Knowing which brands are buying from which factories means we can hold brands accountable. Workers can defend their rights, claim compensation after an accident and raise concerns about wages and safety. Companies can better understand and address any problems for workers and the environment. It helps us all to know where our shoes were made, to make more informed decisions, and call for change.

Brands must take responsibility for human rights throughout their supply chain

International shoe brands often try to deny their responsibility for workers' rights. They say it's the local tanneries and factories who should ensure safe and fair production. But since 2011, the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights require states and companies to respect human rights throughout their supply chain. The principles state that companies should take concrete steps to understand, monitor and mitigate their adverse human rights impacts.

Campaign

"I have been working here for 12 years... Nowadays my health is bothering me. My roommates cannot sleep in peace as I am continually coughing the whole night"

Shahabuddin, 37, tannery worker, Bangladesh

Image © GMB Akash

Your voice counts

As a result of our recent campaigning work with Clean Clothes Campaign, Human Rights Watch and others, we're really pleased that some UK brands have committed to publishing full information about their suppliers. They include ASOS, Clarks, Next, New Look and Pentland Brands Ltd. Arcadia Group (Topshop), Debenhams, John Lewis, Marks and Spencer and Tesco are moving in the right direction with commitments to publish some supplier information.

We know that public pressure works. We're now calling on more shoe brands to take action. Sign our petition at **labourbehindthelabel.org/shoes**

UK brands must act

We're calling on leading UK shoe brands and retailers to:

- Publish the names and addresses of all their suppliers
- Report on progress in moving away from dangerous chemicals
- Show that they are respecting the human rights of the people who make their shoes, ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions

Who are we calling on?

Asda
Boden
Boohoo.com
Dr Martens
Faith (Debenhams)
Harvey Nichols
Office
Primark
Schuh
Sports Direct
very.co.uk (Shop Direct)

Sign and share the petition at **labourbehindthelabel.org/shoes**

Could you take action at shoe stores where you live? Join our activist army: **see page 8**

The **Step Up** campaign is part of our Change Your Shoes project, a coalition of 18 organisations across Europe and Asia working for change in the shoe industry, funded by the European Commission.

CHANGE YOUR SHOES

Speaking Out

Our **Change Your Shoes** project is all about improving conditions in the shoe industry. It's important for us to tell and share the stories of workers and activists involved, so that the people who have the power to change things can understand the truth – they can see what needs to change and why. Then we can talk to them about how it's possible to achieve change, for example by looking more closely at their supply chain, or making sure workers have the right to join unions.

In May we were excited to welcome Gopinath Parakuni, labour activist from India, to the UK. Gopi has been working with shoe and garment workers for many years, supporting them to claim their rights, challenge exploitation and achieve better working conditions.

Gopi travelled around Europe for three weeks, visiting Spain, Germany, Sweden and Poland as well as the UK – all countries where brands and shoppers are buying shoes made in India, often with little knowledge of how they were produced.

Gopi spoke to academics and activists in Manchester, and to shoe brands and unions in London. We heard the stories of workers in India, where women homeworkers stitching leather uppers for shoes are often paid just half the minimum wage and suffer health problems from the repetitive, labour-intensive work. Factory workers report that they are told to lie about conditions when auditors visit, and tannery workers are exposed to toxic chemicals.

UK

Gopinath Parakuni, labour activist from India, joined Labour Behind the Label activists on the shopping streets of Manchester to promote our Step Up campaign, talking to shoppers outside high street shoe stores

Taking action on the streets of Manchester

"Toxic chemicals in tanneries can really poison people and water, and this is a huge concern," Gopi told us. "In factories, wages are very low and we really don't have enough information about safety and health precautions being taken in factories. There are a lot of homeworkers stitching shoe uppers in their homes. They get very low wages, around £30 per month. In the factories they get around £60 per month. They can't live a decent life. It's precarious work and this needs to change."

Gopi joined Labour Behind the Label activists on the shopping streets of Manchester to promote our Step Up campaign, talking to shoppers outside high street shoe stores about conditions in the shoe industry, the lack of information available about where our shoes are made, and asking them to sign our petition (you can read more about the petition on page 4). Gopi and the team also went into the stores to talk to the store managers – you can find out more about these actions and how you can get involved on page 8.

"It's important for UK shoe brands to source from countries like India where this is a source of employment for many poor people. But they need to know their supply chains better and tell the public where they are buying from so that we know about the conditions workers are producing under, what wages they're getting, social security, health issues, or whether there is sexual harassment. There may even be risks of forced labour, so it's in the interests of brands and the general public to know more about the supply chain."

Gopinath Parakuni is the general secretary of Cividep, a workers' rights organisation in Bangalore, India. Gopi was a student leader at university, fighting for civil rights and later working for the rights of Dalits, women and indigenous people. He co-founded Cividep with the aim of understanding the impact of trade and global supply chains on underprivileged communities and to make sure that businesses are responsible for their human rights impacts.

The customer is always right!

Take action where you live

We're getting out on the UK's high streets to speak to shoe shoppers and store staff about problems in the shoe industry. You can too!

As a customer your voice is powerful… you can raise awareness among staff & encourage shoppers to sign our petition

As a customer your voice is powerful. By discussing your concerns with shoe and garment stores where you live, you can raise awareness among staff and ask them to take your concerns to the people who have the power to make change – the brand's head office.

You could also speak to shoppers outside the store, ask them what they know about where their shoes are made, and encourage them to sign our petition.

Do you want to go that bit further to get justice for workers?

Join our activist army and we'll give you all the support you need to take action. You'll join a friendly group, with an emphasis on learning from each other about what goes well, and how we can improve our actions to make them even more effective.

Email **nicola@labourbehindthelabel.org** or sign up at **labourbehindthelabel.org/join-our-army**

The women who make leather for your shoes

Name: Rizia

Age: 30
Experience: Six months
Children: Two children
Occupation: Drying leather outside and working inside the leather factory
Location: Hazaribagh

'I cannot sleep at night because of the itching of my skin. This started when I took a job in the leather factory. I came from our village a year ago for job searching in the city. I have two school-going children and my husband's income is not enough for my family. I start work in the morning at 8 am and my work finishes in the evening. For drying all leather I have to continually stand under the scorching sun. Sometimes I feel like I will faint. After finishing here, I go inside the factory and start working. My monthly salary is 4000 taka ($50) which is half that of what a man gets. But I can't complain as I got this job after so much struggling. My house rent is 1800 taka. I cannot even buy medicine for my skin diseases. If my salary would be equal to a man's I could live a better life.'

Image © GMB Akash

Image © GMB Akash

Name: Parvin Akter

Age: 35
Children: Two sons and one daughter
Experience: 15 years
Occupation: Tannery worker
Location: Hazaribagh

'My husband left me fifteen years ago. I had no choice but to work in this tannery. I was eight months pregnant with my youngest daughter when I first started working in the tannery. I don't know how I survived all these years by working here and managing my children at home. I send my children to school. My work starts at 7 am and ends at 7 pm. Every day I have to continue working my twelve hours; no holiday nor free time. The saddest part is as a woman I have to always get less than a man. After 15 years of working my current income is 6500 taka ($80). I am giving all the hours of my life to this job but in return I am gaining nothing.'

Bangladesh

Bangladesh crackdown

An Update

In Bangladesh in December 2016, we saw over 34 arrests and detentions, a large number of false criminal charges, over 1500 dismissals, and several trade union offices close. The arrests came in the wake of a week of unrest, as thousands of workers in the Ashulia area of Dhaka went on strike to demand higher wages.

Labour Behind the Label has played a leading role in pushing brands to take action and condemn the recent crackdown in Bangladesh

The strike started on 12th December at the Windy Apparels factory, a factory which supplies to well known high street brands including H&M, Inditex (Zara), Esprit, Tesco, Arcadia, S Oliver, and Debenhams. By 20th December the strike had spread to other factories in the Ashulia area. 59 factories were closed, although many were shut down as a preventative measure by factory owners rather than by striking workers.

This is not the first time the Bangladesh government has used the pretext of worker unrest to attack trade union activists. In 2010, following a wave of strikes demanding an increase in the minimum wage, a number of trade union leaders were arrested and detained: all underwent physical and psychological abuse while in detention.

Labour Behind the Label (LBL) has played a leading role in pushing brands to take action and condemn the recent crackdown in Bangladesh. LBL has contacted all the relevant UK brands and followed up on pushing for a strong response from the EU from our MEPs and relevant ministers. After months of intense efforts by labour unions and labour and human rights organisations all over the world, in late February, Bangladesh trade unionists, the government and the employers' organisation announced the planned release of all remaining detained labour leaders. We welcome the announcement as an important first step, but warn that in its current form it still falls short of fully resolving the crisis in Bangladesh.

Why were workers striking?

The workers are demanding the implementation of minimum monthly wage of 15.000 BDT/ month (182 EUR). Right now the minimum wage is 5.300 BDT, which was set in 2013 after the Rana Plaza collapse.

Fundraising

2017 has been our most successful Six Items Challenge yet!

During lent, we saw a record breaking 37 challengers raid their wardrobe in search of six trustworthy items they would wear for six weeks. Not only was the number of sign ups record breaking, but the amount they raised was, too. At least £5,369.06 has been raised for garment workers, this is amazing and from everyone at LBL we cannot thank you all enough.

Fundraisers took part from Australia and New Zealand to Sweden, Germany Finland, Republic of Ireland and here in the UK. This year our fundraisers went one step further and really embraced the challenge. Many blogged about their experience whilst some gave talks about it. One of our New Zealand challengers even managed to get press coverage about the campaign. That's right, the campaign is now known to many on the other side of the world!

For many if not for all of this year's fundraisers, it became an empowering experience with some going further than thinking about our clothes. It's about the food we eat, the things we buy for our house, the gifts we buy for friends and family. We need to think more about where what we buy comes from, and the conditions in which they are being made.

A huge congratulations to our 37 amazing Six Items Challengers!

Interested in signing up next year? Get in touch by emailing **info@labourbehindthelabel.org**

Support Labour Behind the Label by becoming a regular donor

Campaigning and lobbying on a range of levels – company, government, public and educational – can achieve long term sustainable global change.

You can help us achieve this by becoming a friend of the campaign and a regular supporter. The easiest way to manage your donation is by visiting our website, **labourbehindthelabel.org/donate**

We suggest a monthly minimum of £5 or annual donation of £60.

If you are an organisation such as a Trade Union or NGO and would like to show your support for our campaign, **please consider becoming an affiliate**.

With the fight for workers' rights needed now more than ever, please consider becoming a regular donor for our campaign

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