ACTION UPDATE

WINTER 2017

Supporting garment workers worldwide

LABOUR BEHIND THE LABEL

Welcome

2017 has been a busy and important year for Labour Behind the Label. As we respond to external factors around funding we continue to make impact and push for change for the workers who make our clothes.

Here you will read about the Change Your Shoes campaign where you will be provided with a round-up of our work changing how the shoe industry operates. You will read updates on the most pressing Urgent Appeals we are focusing on – in Cambodia and Turkey where workers are not being listened to and refused their rights. We are doing all we can to change this.

Also in this update you will hear about ways to get involved in with fundraising – at a time when it is needed most. Donate to support our Urgent Appeal work, or sign up to raise awareness and funds through our Six Items Challenge.

And finally, thank you! Without your continued support our work wouldn't be possible.

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.

Change Your Shoes

Over the last three years we've been campaigning to improve conditions for workers in the shoe industry. With the help of supporters like you, a grant from the European Commission, and a partnership with 18 organisations across Europe and Asia, we've reached millions of UK and European citizens, and dozens of leading brands and policymakers.

Together we're uncovering the dangerous, insecure conditions and poverty wages endured by the people who make our shoes, and raising awareness among those who have the power to change the system. We're starting to see positive steps from the shoe industry, and we're determined to keep fighting alongside workers to seek lasting change.

image © Rumana Akter

Getting the facts straight

We've researched and published 12 reports into a whole range of issues in the shoe industry – from investigating conditions for homeworkers in India and Indonesia, to surveying brands on their human rights performance.

We've found that leading brands need to do much more to address the risks of human rights abuses in their supply chains. We've started to work with them to change this, through our Step Up campaign which thousands of you have supported by signing our petition.

We've uncovered the true cost of Eastern Europe's shoe manufacturing industry: tens of thousands of workers producing shoes sold as 'Italian' or 'German' and often earning even less than shoe workers in China. This story has been told to millions through national news coverage in the UK and Europe, so more and more people are aware that there may be another story behind that 'Made in Italy' label.

We've interviewed some of the many thousands of women homeworkers in India who stitch leather shoes from their homes. Stitching just one pair of uppers could take one of these women up to one hour, but she will earn less than 10 pence per pair, far from a minimum wage let alone a living wage. This pair of shoes could fetch £50–100 on our high streets. It's back-breaking labour-intensive work that requires the precision of hand stitching instead of a machine. The work often leaves women with health issues like hand numbness, eye strain, back problems, and skin rashes from chemicals used to dye the leather. Unlike factory workers, homeworkers have no health insurance to allow them to seek medical attention. We gathered some of these women's testimonies and we held roundtable meetings with UK brands about what action they must take to give these women the recognition, wages, security and benefits they deserve.

You can find all of the Change Your Shoes reports at **labourbehindthelabel.org/reports**

Getting the message out

Our 'People's Meetings' were forums for citizens, civil society organisations, policymakers, unions and businesses to come together, debate and make suggestions for improving the shoe industry. The meetings were lively and showed that a lack of transparency is a big concern for people across the EU.

We invited labour rights activist Gopinath Parakuni from India to talk to UK brands, unions and organisations about the reality for workers in the leather and shoe industry, and what change is needed from brands.

We've got the message out in national press, radio, blogs, podcasts and social media, with some great videos making people think about where their shoes come from. We've produced a new booklet with tips to help people fight fast fashion, and to challenge brands to do better for workers.

We've been out on the streets too. On **page 6** you can read about what our activists have been up to this autumn across the UK.

Keeping the pressure on

We've been writing to leading UK shoe brands with our demands to publish names and addresses of their suppliers, and to stop using dangerous chemicals in shoe production. An amazing 13,606 people signed our petition calling on brands to Step Up, showing brands and policymakers that there is a growing movement for change.

Some brands have been more responsive than others. We're really pleased that Clarks have now committed to publishing their supplier list. Other leading brands including Arcadia (Topshop), Debenhams, Next, New Look, and Pentland Brands Ltd have also agreed to publish supply chain information. And retail giant ASOS have recently published their supplier list online. This is an important step forward for workers' rights, and we'll continue to work with brands and workers' organisations to improve transparency and ensure fair and safe conditions for the people who make our shoes and clothes.

image © Rumana Akter

Taking Action

Our activist army

Sometimes brands don't want to listen to workers' demands, and our letters and phone calls don't always seem to get their attention. That's why direct action is an essential part of our armoury when we're fighting for justice for workers in the fashion industry.

This autumn our determined activists have been out on the streets raising their voices for workers in the shoe industry. They want brands to publish information about their suppliers so we know who made our shoes, and to stop endangering workers' lives.

On 18 September, activists were at London Fashion Week calling for an end to Killer Heels. They want shoe brands to stop using toxic chemicals in leather tanning which cause lung cancer, blindness, asthma, skin ulcers, nose bleeds, fevers, headaches, and eczema, and pollute rivers and soil. So they went to get the attention of the industry at their biggest event of the year, and ask them to put an end to toxic shoe production.

Watch our video and find out more at: labourbehindthelabel.org/watch-killer-heels-at-london-fashion-week

On 7 October, activists were out speaking to shoppers in Manchester, Bristol, London and Exeter. 17 activists took action across these four cities, speaking to shoppers and asking them to sign our petition. Activists also went to speak to store managers in nine different stores (of Office, Harvey Nichols, Schuh and Sports Direct), asked them to pass their concerns about working conditions to head office and tell them we want to know who made our shoes.

Activists went to get the attention of the industry at their biggest event of the year, London Fashion Week, and ask them to put an end to toxic shoe production

A huge thank you to all our brilliant activists for getting out there, and building the movement for greater transparency and better working conditions in the shoe industry.

Chung Fai workers demand justice

On 1 July 2016, the 208 workers of the Chung Fai Knitwear Fty factory suddenly found themselves unemployed, without notice, without severance pay and without receiving their final salaries. Left in extremely dire situations, these workers, largely women, are still fighting for justice. As they stitched clothes for UK brands Marks and Spencer and Bonmarché, as well as the Canadian brand Nygård, they demand these brands take responsibility and ensure the legally due payments that their supplier failed to provide. While Bonmarché contacted its supplier, the other two brands flatly refuse any involvement.

A year after the closure a solution for the workers is desperately needed. Due to their sudden and unexpected joblessness and the absence of severance payments, the former Chung Fai workers have been left in economic hardship, often forced to take out loans to make ends meet. These women are often breadwinners, providing the family income for their children, parents and partners. Garment factories tend to hire young women, which means that many of the long-time workers at Chung Fai are struggling to find new employment and their debts are accumulating. The heart-breaking stories following the closure of the

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Labour Behind the Label along with other Clean Clothes Campaign representatives, Workers United Canada, and Maquila Solidarity Network have repeatedly contacted M&S, Bonmarché and Nygård, urging them to take responsibility for the workers. Bonmarché has contacted the parent company who deny all responsibility.

In July 2016, the Chung Fai workers, LBL and others launched a public campaign to call on M&S, Bonmarché and Nygård to take responsibility for the people who made their products for years.

Watch the video at **bit.ly/Chung-Fai**. So far almost 9,000 people have signed the petition. Add your name at **labourbehindthelabel.org/get-involved/take-action**

Cambodia

Update on Cambodia

In the recent months there has been a big rise in repression against independent media and civil society groups – including trade unions. LBL is deeply concerned about the closing of democratic and civil society space in Cambodia. This trend has recently escalated with alarming high-profile incidents of repression against political leaders, non-governmental organizations, and independent media.

Clean Clothes Campaign, Worker Rights Consortium, and International Labor Rights Forum are calling on multinational apparel companies sourcing from Cambodia to take a stand against this repression, and to urge the Cambodian government to respect human rights and labour rights.

Our friend Moeun Tola, Executive Director of the Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL) is under threat. Sign the petition to the Cambodian government expressing your concern: **labourbehindthelabel.org/get-involved/take-action/**

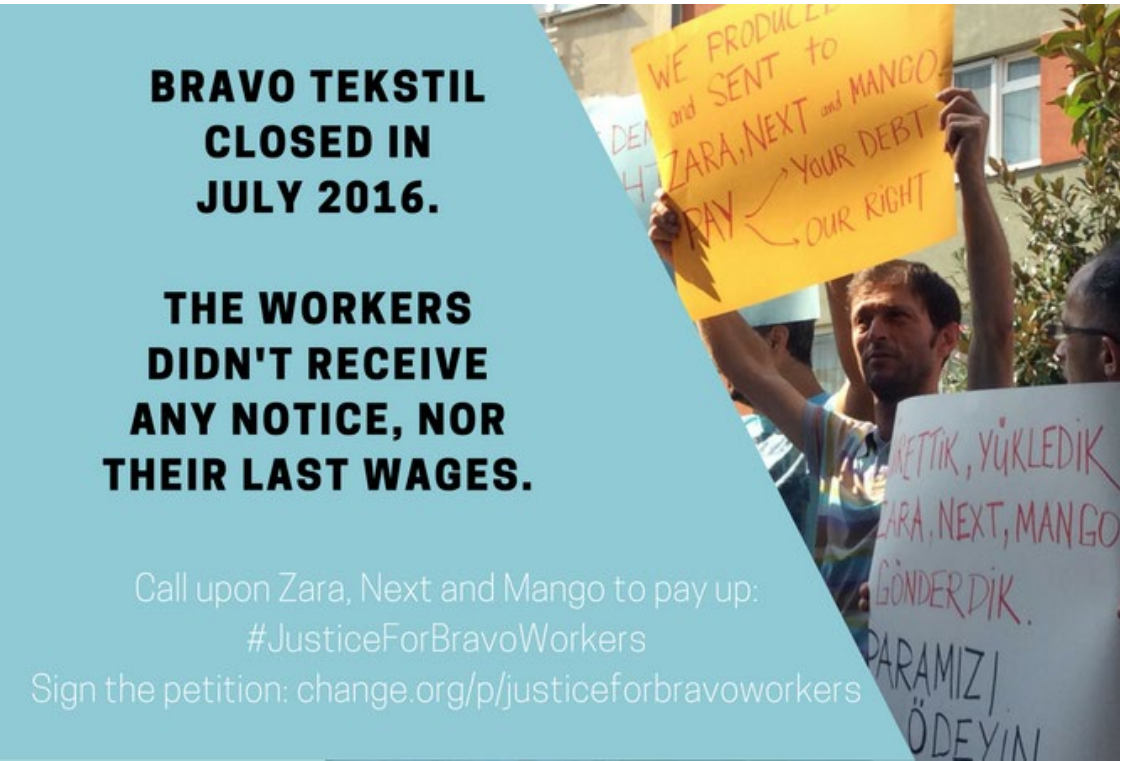
Workers still without wages in Turkish Factory

Workers at the Bravo Tekstil factory complex in Istanbul, Turkey are demanding their back wages and severance after the sudden shutdown of their factory. Working without payment for three months for apparel brand giants Zara, Next, and Mango, Labour Behind the Label and the Clean Clothes Campaign supports the workers' demands that these brands take responsibility and pay up.

Despite 75% of the factory's overall production being for Zara and making record profits in early 2017, Zara has refused to ensure that the workers producing the clothing were fully compensated for their labour. Next and Mango have also refused to take responsibility for all 140 Bravo Tekstil workers who are now left with nothing. The amount the workers are asking for is 2,739,281.30 Turkish Lira (about 650,000 euros), which in case of Inditex's, Zara's parent company, constitutes less than 0.01% of net sales for only the first quarter of 2017.

"We demand what is rightfully ours. We only demand the compensation for our labour. Nothing else, nothing more"

Yeliz Kutluer, a new mother and former Bravo Tekstil factory worker



After more than a year of negotiation Zara, Next, and Mango have not been able to come with a settlement to fully compensate all 140 workers in the factory.

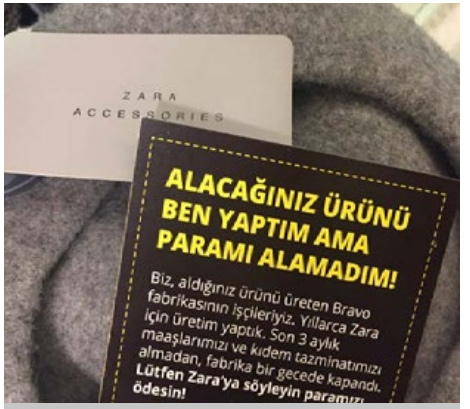
To make their voices heard, the Bravo workers went to Zara stores in Istanbul in October and placed their own labels on Zara products.

The petition has been signed by more than 290,000 people! You can sign it at: **bit.ly/JusticeForBravoWorkers** Watch the video at: **bit.ly/BravoWorkerVideo**

"Brands are principal employers. They have proven time and again that they control every aspect of their orders to their suppliers. Therefore, it is clear that it is in their power to make sure that all workers who produce their apparel receive their monthly wages and are working in safe conditions, and morally they must do so"

Bego Demir of Clean Clothes Campaign Turkey

Turkey



The leaflet says : I MADE THE PRODUCT YOU ARE ABOUT TO BUY, BUT I HAVEN'T RECEIVED ANY PAYMENT! We are the Bravo factory workers who made this product you are about to buy. Years long we have produced for Zara. Our factory suddenly closed without paying us our last 3 months of wages and severance payment. Please tell Zara to pay us our money!

Sudden factory closures are not uncommon in the garment industry, in which competition is fierce and capital flexible. Within the garment industry supply chain, power is concentrated at the top, where major brands such as Zara, Next and Mango make high profits and have a lot of leverage over the factories vying for their orders. Past precedents in Indonesia, Cambodia and Latin America, involving major brands such as adidas, Nike, H&M and Walmart have shown that brands can and should take responsibility to ensure that abandoned workers in their supply chain are paid their legally owed back wages and severance.

Success! The Accord is renewed until 2021

In the wake of the Rana Plaza building collapse – the deadliest disaster in the history of the global garment industry, in which 1,134 workers were killed – the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh (Accord) was created along with several other smaller initiatives. The Accord is an agreement reached between over 200 apparel companies, eight Bangladeshi union federations and two global unions.

This unprecedented safety agreement is based on legally-binding commitments by apparel brands to ensure that hazards in their factories are identified and corrected. The Accord has overseen factory renovations – from installation of fire doors to strengthening of dangerously weak structural columns and beams – that have already improved safety for over two million garment workers.

This success can be attributed to the Accord's distinct approach, which combines independent safety inspections with multi-brand leverage, financial support and legal accountability to ensure that problems are not only identified but are fixed.

To ensure that the safety improvements achieved under the Accord are maintained and expanded, brand and union signatories of the Accord announced in June of 2017 that the Accord has been extended for three years, until May of 2021.

To date, 47 companies, including have signed the new Accord, with many more likely to follow in the months ahead

To date, 47 companies, including H&M, Inditex (Zara) Primark, and PVH (Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein), have signed the new Accord, with many more likely to follow in the months ahead. These signatories represent many of the largest brands and retailers in the world and most of the Bangladesh RMG sector's key customers. Their combined commitment means that the 2013 Accord successor agreement will cover at least 1,400 factories and a majority of all export garment production.

The 2018 Accord represents a tremendous opportunity for all involved. It enables the buyers to support and sustain improvements, it gives the government of Bangladesh time and support to create a regulatory apparatus fully capable of ensuring building safety, and it provides factory owners with global recognition of their commitment to build a safe industry.

We are now pushing for more British brands to sign up!

Fundraising appeal: will you support our Urgent Appeal work? An Urgent Appeal is a rapid response to a request for support from workers in the garment industry whose rights are being infringed. Urgent Appeals are a core part of what we do and what sets us apart from other groups working on similar issues. Urgent appeals work won compensation for Rana Plaza victims and was behind the development of the ground breaking Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, has supported the reinstatement of thousands of workers and also helped get workers and activists released from prison.

As of January 2018 this work will be unfunded. We aim to raise £7,500 – the most ever from an online appeal that we have run. Support this fundraising appeal at **labourbehindthelabel.org/donate/urgent-appeal**

Six Items Challenge

Last year's challenge raised £5,368 for garment workers. We aim to beat this for 2018's challenge. This means we need you to help us.

What is the Six Items Challenge?

The Six Items Challenge is our flagship fundraising event where we ask fundraisers to give up their wardrobe for six weeks, choosing just six main items to wear for the duration. It is designed to challenge our increasing reliance on fast fashion and raise vital funds which will enable Labour Behind the Label to keep fighting for the justice that garment workers deserve.

When does it happen?

2018's Six Items Challenge is during lent which falls between 14th February and 29th March 2018.

Sign up today!

To sign up head over to **bit.ly/SixItemsChallenge** or if you have any questions contact Caroline at **caroline@labourbehindthelabel.org**

Call for artists

Invisible Threads: Unravelling the Garment Industry

On 28th April 2018 it will be five years since the tragic collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in Bangladesh. It is also the annual World Day for Safety and Health at Work, and International Workers' Memorial Day. Labour Behind the Label will be holding a charity art auction, raising funds for our vital work.

We ask artists to think about the garment industry from the perspective of transparency. We encourage artists to think broadly in terms of worker/consumer solidarity, how these groups have the power to change the industry, and about fast fashion and its effects on people and the environment. We want to be excited and challenged by messages about transparency – messages that question and reveal hidden truths about where our clothes come from.

Are you an artist wanting to contribute?
Deadline: **31st January 2018**

For any questions please contact
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