ACTION UPDATE

Volume #33

LABOUR BEHIND THE LABEL

Supporting garment workers worldwide

ACTION UPDATE

Winter 2021

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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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Welcome

It's our birthday! Labour Behind the Label is 20 years old. In this issue, you can read about our 20 years of impact. We can also finally celebrate the signing of the International Accord, which follows its Bangladeshi predecessor in legally committing brands to work to improve factory safety. This is the culmination of an enormous campaign effort from workers and activists around the world. The Pay Your Workers campaign to get justice for garment workers following pandemic wage cuts is also making headway as Black Friday approaches. You can find out about our new exciting short film and activist toolkit, and more.

In solidarity,

Angie, Anna, Caroline,
Dominique, Kathryn and Meg
The Labour Behind the Label Team

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Labour Behind the Label at a glance

Labour Behind the Label campaign for garment workers' rights worldwide, standing in solidarity with 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 act – workers must join together and demand better rights, consumers need to use their power to enter into dialogue with companies, governments need to defend workers' rights through legislation and increased wages, and companies, especially the big brands at the top of the supply chain, need to act to deliver rights and living wages at their supplier factories.

20 years of pushing for change for garment workers' rights

A brief look back at our success

It's a big moment for Labour Behind the Label – two decades of standing in solidarity with the people who make our clothes worldwide. Since we started in 2001, alongside with partners and activists around the world, we have achieved so many things. Here is a brief whistle-stop tour.

In the early 2000s our fashion education project Fashioning an Ethical Industry, was in full swing. It spoke truth about fashion's workers to a generation of fashion students. Shop demos to support factory cases were successful, including winning union reinstatement for workers at the Fortune Garments factory after our campaign got under Philip Green's skin (and he rang our office personally to tell us to desist). 2009 campaigning on Primark, with workers speaking at their AGM, pushed the brand to increase their corporate social responsibility team and seriously engage in supply chain due diligence. In 2011 we campaigned to ban sandblasted denim, because the process was causing a deadly lung disease in Turkish workers. We held funeral services outside companies selling it, and published research – sandblasted denim was banned in Turkey in 2012.

The Rana Plaza collapse happened in 2013 and we were on the ground from day one calling for justice for the survivors, compensation, and a legally enforceable agreement between brands and unions to ensure factory safety was delivered in Bangladesh. Our media work put Bangladeshi women front and centre, and we held demonstrations and lobbied brands, got shadow ministers to call CEOs into Westminster to account for their actions, until survivors received the $30 million in compensation they were owed. This fund being paid out was one of the proudest moments of justice we helped create.

Our research on mass fainting in Cambodia, proving that low wages were leading to bad diet and a health crisis for workers, was used at the wage board to deliver a monthly $5 health bonus for workers in 2015. In 2017 we raised awareness of the huge health risks for leather workers at London Fashion Week, and called for greater transparency in fashion, which led to a movement of brands publishing their supplier lists. Online retailer Boohoo was on the receiving end of ad busts about secrecy, and our research into their hidden exploitation in Leicester factories, eventually led to them publishing their factory list just last month.

Ongoing campaigns on living wages, freedom of association, the playfair sportswear campaigns, factory safety and freedom from harassment in general also were a huge part of our history. There is so much more to be done but we are proud of the part we have played so far in working for change alongside garment workers, and amplifying their demands for solutions to fashion's problems. Here is to the next 20 years.

SALE
LETHAL
KATE:
GAP RISK
FACTOR
DEATH

Birthday

adidas

will this Greedy steal Christmas?

PEOPLE
BEFORE
PROFIT
PRIMARK!
PUT PEOPLE
BEFORE
PROFIT!
SMASH
SWEATSHOPS
FREE
INDEPENDENT
TRADE UNIONS

STOP
FRUIT OF DOOM

2012
Make the London 2012 Olympics Sweatshop-free

BOOHOO
WON'T TELL US
WHO MAKES
THEIR CLOTHES...
SHHHHH!
Keeping supply chains
secret hides illegal
wages and exploitation
in the fashion industry
boohoo?
#gotransparent

LONDON
XIC SHOES
KILL
ORKERS

FILA WORKERS
DEMAND FAIR PLAY

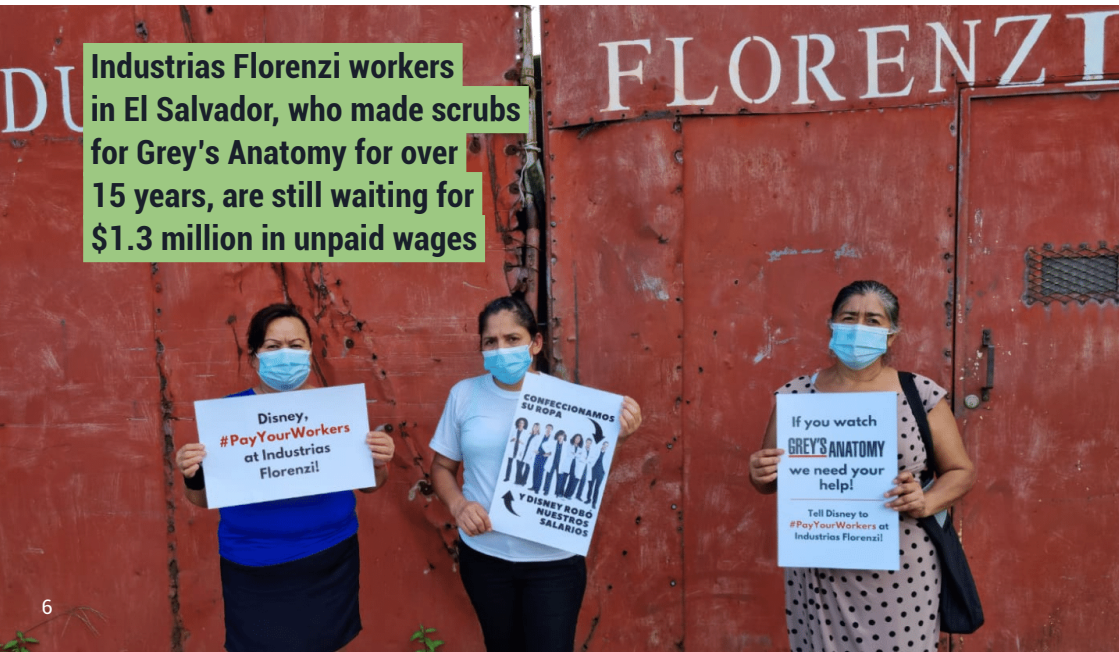
Building pressure on brands to fix pandemic wage and rights crisis

Campaign actions on Nike, Next and Amazon taking effect

Following ongoing pandemic news of supply chain exploitation caused by big brands acting irresponsibly over the past year, the campaign to pressure brands to fix things, by signing an enforceable agreement on wages, severance pay and basic rights is building.

The Clean Clothes Campaign published the Breaking Point report in late summer, based on interviews with 49 workers producing clothes for big brands. We found that almost 70% of workers have had to endure periods in which they were not paid their normal, pre-pandemic wages. These workers were surviving on poverty wages before the pandemic, and now it has become even harder for them to make ends meet. The Still Underpaid report, estimates that garment workers are owed $11 billion in unpaid wages from the first year of the pandemic alone, and this figure is set to rise.

Wage theft is just one of the ways in which brands are pushing the workers in their supply chains to breaking point. The pandemic has also seen an alarming rise in employers refusing to pay severance to workers who lose their jobs. During the first year of the pandemic alone, garment workers were robbed of at least half a billion dollars in legally owed severance. As the



Industrias Florenzi workers in El Salvador, who made scrubs for Grey's Anatomy for over 15 years, are still waiting for $1.3 million in unpaid wages

Manchester activists in front of Nike Store

primary profit-makers in supply chains, brands have a responsibility to ensure that workers are paid their legal entitlements. Feigning innocence as they are not direct employees is not an option.

Activism to fight wage and severance theft

In October, Labour Behind the Label activists took to the streets and carried out actions in Nike stores across the UK. Nike has so far refused to take responsibility for the 1,200 workers from Violet Apparel factory in Cambodia, who lost their jobs when the factory suddenly closed in July 2020. Workers are still waiting for compensation as well as their legally owed bonuses and unpaid wages. We delivered our messages to Nike through the medium of sport, by doing flash-mob style exercise routines outside Nike shops and telling them to get a move on and pay their workers. We also took part in a global relay race, connecting Nike workers to the big shots at Nike HQ. By the power of film and technology, we took messages written by workers across the world and delivered them to Nike HQ.

In the coming months, we will continue to put pressure on brands who fail to ensure that their workers are paid. This includes the Industrias Florenzi workers in El Salvador, who made scrubs for Grey's Anatomy for over 15 years. The factory began to lay off workers at the beginning of the pandemic, and in July 2020, Industrias Florenzi closed permanently. More than a year later, the workers are still waiting for the $1.3 million in unpaid wages and severance they're owed under Salvadoran law. The workers are demanding that Disney, which owns Grey's Anatomy, and its vendor, Barco Uniforms, urgently ensure that they receive the $1.3 million they are owed in unpaid wages and severance. If you haven't already signed the petition, you can do so here: **payyourworkers.org/disney**

Your support makes a difference

In the coming months, we will continue to push Next, Nike, Amazon and all other brands to sign the binding agreement on wages, severance and basic labour rights. If we are successful, this will be a game changer in the garment industry. We are going to need your help. We will be planning online and offline actions for Black Friday targeting Amazon. As one of the wealthiest companies in the world, Amazon can afford to pay their workers, yet they are choosing not to. If you are able to make a donation to this important work, we would really appreciate it. **From 30th November, all online donations through the Big Give platform will be doubled, so it's the perfect time to give. Look out for our emails or see back page.**

Introducing 'Another World is Possible'

New film and activist resources to equip a new generation of change makers

The pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated the injustice in the garment industry, but the systemic problems are in no way new. For decades, big brands have been out-sourcing production in countries with low wages and poor protection for workers' rights. Exploitation of workers is an inevitable outcome of unchecked capitalism where brands pursue profit, whatever the human cost. Just because this is the way things are, doesn't mean this is the way things should be. This is a critical point for us to reset the garment industry. Through collective action, we can make living wages, secure employment, and labour rights, a reality for the millions of workers who produce our clothes around the world.

We have been working hard, setting out this vision, and developing resources to mobilise and equip an ever-growing army of activists. We are therefore very excited to launch a brand-new short film, Another World is Possible, which is available on our website now, sharing the story of a Mei Ling, a garment worker in Vietnam, who shows what this change could look like.

We are also pleased to launch a new set of resources, which we have developed with our network of activists, equipping people with the tools they need to take action. If you are ready to join the millions of garment workers who are fighting for change, you can explore the new activist toolkit on the take action pages available on our website from November.

This work would not have been possible without the amazing activists in our network, who helped to shape the activist toolkit and co-produced resources, so thank you. If you would like to help plan actions and develop new resources, please get in touch with **meg@labourbehindthelabel.org** to join our activist planning group.

Another World is Possible film out now.

Join action to pressure Amazon this Black Friday

Sign and send your postcard and join our demo

Amazon, one of the big business winners of the COVID pandemic, are refusing to engage in discussion about the impact of the COVID pandemic on the workers in their supply chain. We aren't going to let them get away with it. Black Friday (the last Friday in November) is traditionally a huge shopping moment for online businesses and we want to use this moment to tell Amazon to stop passing the buck, and commit to rights, wages and social security for workers in their supply chain.

The impact of pandemic order stoppages has led to wage theft and job losses in Amazon's supply chain. Just one example is Amazon supplier Hulu garments in Cambodia, where 1020 workers were suspended then called in to sign a document with their thumb print to get their final wage packet. However, workers were duped by management, as hidden under each paperclipped payslip was text saying they agreed to voluntary resignation. This allowed Hulu to avoid paying $3.6million in severance pay to workers, who were left jobless, robbed and denied their rights. Stories like this occur across Amazon's supply chain, showing what happens when orders stop and the most vulnerable are made to pay the price.

Amazon is the most powerful corporation in the world and it is responsible for ensuring the rights of the hundreds of thousands of workers whose labour underpins its global empire. It is not okay for huge corporations to take economic actions then stand back to let the fall out impact their supply chain workers. Amazon must commit to ensure workers are never again left penniless if their factory goes bankrupt, by signing on to a negotiated severance guarantee fund. It must also commit to pay the workers who make its clothes their full wages for the duration of the pandemic and protect their right to organise and bargain collectively. The pandemic has demonstrated that change is vital, and the winners of the pandemic, like Amazon, must act.

You can help

1. Send the postcard enclosed in this action update to pressure Amazon to **#PayYourWorkers** and **#RespectLabourRights**
2. Come to our Black Friday demo in London outside Amazon HQ. See our social media closer to the time for all the details.
3. Go to **www.payyourworkers.org** and sign the petition

Factory safety programme goes international

Success

In September this year, we joined workers, trade unions and labour rights organisations around the world to celebrate a big win for workers, when the International Accord for Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry, took effect as the successor agreement to the Bangladesh Accord.

The new International Accord builds on the success of the Bangladesh Accord, however crucially this time brands have committed to extend the programme to at least one other country over the next two years.

The new International Accord maintains the vital elements of the ground-breaking model established by the Bangladesh Accord: legal enforceability of brands' commitments, independent oversight of brand compliance, the obligation to pay prices to suppliers sufficient to support safe workplaces, and the obligation to cease doing business with any factory that refuses to operate safely.

Where next?

The International Accord is starting to carry our feasibility studies to identify which country will be the first to benefit from the programme's extension. With many factories operating in unsafe conditions, it is clear that brands should support the extension to multiple countries as soon as is possible.

The Clean Clothes Campaign has identified at least 36 incidents between January – September 2021 alone, resulting in the deaths of 109 workers and at least 153

The Bangladesh Accord was created in the wake of the Rana Plaza tragedy, when the Rana Plaza building collapsed in 2013, killing 1,134 workers and injuring thousands more. This huge loss of life was entirely avoidable. The day before the collapse, large structural cracks appeared in the building. The shops and bank on the lower floors closed that day. However, factory management ignored the warnings and ordered garment workers back into the factory. Over 200 brands signed on to the Bangladesh Accord after it was established. In the following years the programme made 1,600 factories safer, protecting over 2 million workers.

injuries. These incidents have occurred in Pakistan, India, Egypt, Morocco, China, and Cambodia. As worker deaths and injuries often go unreported this is likely to be the tip of the iceberg. This year, there have also been several massive factory fires in Argentina, Chile, Turkey and Peru which occurred during the night, thus avoiding injury to workers, but which would have resulted in devastating loss of life had they occurred during the day. These tragedies show that the Accord is much needed in garment producing countries across the world, and we will be working hard to ensure that it is expanded to as many countries as possible.

The Clean Clothes Campaign has identified at least 36 incidents between January – September 2021 alone, resulting in the deaths of 109 workers and at least 153 injuries

Why are some brands still lagging behind?

By October 2021, 147 brands had signed the Accord. These brands include Marks and Spencer, Next, Primark and Matalan – four brands which we targeted in a campaign earlier this year. However, there are still some big brands who are dragging the feet on factory safety, including Asda, Ikea, Levi's and Northface. This is simply not good enough.

All apparel and textile brands who claim to be responsible or to value their workers, must sign this new agreement. This includes brands and retailers that failed to sign the original Accord. We will be working with our global partners on campaigns to convince brands that have not signed, to join the Accord immediately, as the failure to do so wilfully endangers workers' lives.

THE BIG GIVE

30th Nov – midday on 7th Dec, 2021

We are once again joining the Big Give's Christmas challenge. Every pound you give during the big give will be matched, up to £6k, meaning you can double your impact.

We are hoping to raise a whopping £12k (£6k in matched donations) in this Christmas appeal which will have a huge effect on our ability to continue to fight for a fair and just garment industry. All money you donate will go towards ensuring that the garment workers affected by the pandemic are paid what they are owed and treated with the respect they deserve. It will help hold brands and retailers accountable for their treatment of garment workers during the pandemic and help call for justice.

Give from 12pm on 30th November at
bit.ly/LBLbiggive2021

Or go to the **Big Give website** and search for **Labour Behind the Label**

One donation, twice the impact