ACTION UPDATE

Volume #41

LABOUR BEHIND THE LABEL

Supporting garment workers worldwide

ACTION UPDATE

Winter 2025

Join Us

Labour Behind the Label is a movement for people like you. People who are passionate about justice, passionate about changing fashion for good, and passionate about positive action.

Keep up to date with industry and campaign news by signing up to our mailing list.

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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.

Welcome

Winter is nature's way of telling us we need to seek warmth, celebrate what we have and come together to counter the darkness of dwindling daylight. And this edition of the Action Update starts with a really significant cause for celebration: after years of fighting for justice, the Wages Not Warrants campaign has been won! The charges against workers have been dropped – and you were all part of making this happen.

We also met with an old friend from Cambodia; Mr Khun Tharo visited the UK to tell us more about the threats to his work defending civil society and worker's rights. Speaking of threats to unionising, we've also got a case from Pakistan you need to know about. From protests at London Fashion Week to petitions at Number 10, we've been using every opportunity we can to raise workers' demands, and we will keep doing so, regardless of seasons, until we transform the garment industry. Justice is always in fashion.

In solidarity,

Alena, Angie, Anna, Caroline, Dominique, Ellen, Kaenat, Kathryn and Tansy
The Labour Behind the Label Team

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Workers in Pakistan join International Living Wage Action Day in September alongside Labour Behind the Label and others around the world

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 have the freedom to join together and demand better.

Consumers need to use their power to enter into dialogue with companies. Governments need to defend workers' rights through legislation and increased wages. And of course companies, especially the big brands at the top of the supply chain, need to act to deliver better working conditions and living wages at their supplier factories.

Victory: Bangladesh workers see blank arrest warrants dropped!

Thanks to your hard work and campaigning, we are pleased to share a huge campaign victory

Two years ago on the streets of Dhaka, lines of police aimed their loaded guns at crowds of striking garment workers. Protest chants mingled with the smoke from burning tyres, as thousands of people marched through the streets. The protests were a direct response to the news that garment workers would be paid a poverty wage 12,500 taka (£90) – roughly half the monthly Living Wage that trade unions wanted. With the tyrannical Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina governing Bangladesh the protests fell on deaf ears and the police opened fire killing four garment workers.

In the aftermath of the protests garment workers faced unprecedented attacks on their workplace freedoms and civil liberties. Thousands of people were arrested and 44,000 blank arrest warrants were filed by factory bosses. The fact that at any moment, anyone's name could be added to a blank warrant, created a climate of fear designed to stop people from unionising.

Yet this story is one of victory. A year later Revolution was sparked in Bangladesh by students calling for economic justice and social change. Hope arrived with a new interim government in charge. Trade unionists continued to fight to have this injustice overturned.

Labour Behind the Label worked hard to push for the cases to be dropped. We repeatedly lobbied 14 brands linked to the cases to get the charges dropped. Over 800 of you sent petitions.

Alongside the Rana Plaza Solidarity collective we organsied the 'Wages Not Warrants' protests which saw huge crowds and drummers take to Oxford Street fashion stores, and shop actions in Manchester. We worked to build support with British trade unions, pushing the Bangladeshi embassy to act. The real breakthrough came from the work of Bangladeshi unionists negotiating with the interim government to act unilaterally. Finally this autumn, we were able to declare that the cases have been finally dismissed.

We must all be proud to have supported our friends and comrades in Bangladesh through this unprecedented struggle. Thank you to everyone who took part.

Street action in UK formed part of the global solidarity campaign, winning a major victory for workers in Bangladesh

Workers in Cambodia demand better

In October we had the pleasure to welcome Khun Tharo from CENTRAL, Cambodia

Tharo was visiting the UK in a bid to raise awareness among policy makers, civil society and activists of the shrinking space for labour and human rights organising in Cambodia. Despite making clothes for many big fashion brands, garment workers in Cambodia receive little support from fashion labels when it comes to their wages and their rights to freedom of association.

In a packed visit, Tharo met with parliamentarians to speak for the need to focus on human rights and freedoms in trade conversations. We also spent time together with the TUC and UNISON because trade union solidarity is vital to maintain pressure on authorities and businesses back in Cambodia.

These were important conversations. But we were particularly heartened to welcome Tharo to Pelican House in London, a radical space for a radical reimagining of our collective freedom and wellbeing.

Despite making clothes for many big fashion brands, garment workers in Cambodia receive little support from fashion labels

We hosted an in-conversation gathering with Tharo, our policy lead Anna and our trustee Ronae – and many of our supporters.

It was an inspirational, if rainy Monday evening and we want to take the time to celebrate the beautiful moments when our movement comes together despite borders and distance.

Scan this QR code to see a short video of what Tharo had to say on a visit to H&M in Oxford Circus

Billionaires Out of Fashion

Exploitation, poverty and unsafe conditions in garment factories have been a fixture of the industry for ages. Surely by now we should have fixed fashion?! Trust me, we share the frustration. As a tiny organisation part of a massive global network taking on huge corporations week in and week out, we'd be pretty exhausted if we didn't have our eyes on the prize. And the prize is systemic change.

The problem is not just the garment industry. The problem is the economic system that makes exploitation profitable and labour cheap

This September, shortly before International Living Wage day, we joined a big mobilisation of anti-poverty groups, climate campaigners and tax justice activists calling for action on extreme wealth inequality precisely because we know the problem is not just the garment industry. The problem is the economic system that makes exploitation profitable and labour cheap. And when we fix it, it will be together – for all workers, for climate justice and for all our rights.

But don't be alarmed. While we marched with others on the Make Them Pay demo,

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we kept our focus squarely on the big baddies of Big Fashion. And they have a way of sticking out – by purchasing huge superyachts to be precise. So for our Billionaires Out of Fashion bloc, we marched with the boat of the super-rich fashion CEOs and a whole pod of orca whales ready to flip that boat. We chanted 'Sink the yachts, Raise the wages' and we stopped outside Big Fashion villains like H&M, Zara, NEXT and many more who still don't pay their workers a living wage.

For our Billionaires Out of Fashion bloc, we marched with the boat of the super-rich fashion CEOs and a whole pod of orca whales ready to flip that boat

And if we looked like a well-oiled demo machine, that's because we practiced. London Fashion Week was happening at the same time as our mobilising for living wages – and we paid this fashion institution a visit. Because we know that it's underpaid labour that unites high fashion, fast fashion and high-street fashion all the same. So the first day of London Fashion Week saw the orca pod descent to London's Strand and pitch outside one of LFW's venues. As London Fashion Week and the fashion world increasingly don the language of sustainability, it is important for all of us to keep drawing the conversation back to workers.

An industry that has made little progress on paying all its workers a wage they can live and thrive on has made little progress towards sustainability and deserves to be called out!

Time to end corporate greed

Over 145,000 of you signed the petition calling on the UK government to implement a new law to tackle human rights abuses and environmental damage in UK company supply chains. Earlier this year, alongside other members of the Corporate Justice Coalition, we handed it into Downing Street, calling on Prime Minister Kier Starmer and all parliamentarians to pass a Business Human Rights and Environment Act. Joined by MPs Carla Denyer (Green), Richard Burgon (Labour) and Ellie Chowns (Green), we showed the strength of feeling among the public and across the political spectrum: businesses must do better.

We exist because labour abuses continue across fashion's supply chains. From high end to high street, brands promote inefficient and ineffective voluntary agreements and corporate solutions like auditing. And yet we're still here, because the brands are still cutting corners and trying to wash their hands of responsibility. With a climate emergency already impacting those in the global south that are least responsible for it, we simply can't afford business as usual. It's time for accountability.

The corporate greed fuelling the climate crisis and violation of workers rights must stop now!

Union Busting at M.I. Industries

A Battle for Workers' Rights

Worker power and trade union organising is the route to change in the garment sector. Yet when workers try to unionise, so often employers find ways to dismiss, persecute and harass workers who push back. No more clear case is available than a new union busting struggle we have started to support – the fearless workers from the M.I. Industries factory in Pakistan.

In February this year, workers held a work stoppage to demand they be paid a new minimum wage that had come into force more than 6 months previously. While management paid the increased wages from March, this saw the start of a brutal anti-union campaign against the organised workers.

One of their first tactics was the fraudulent creation of an employer-controlled "yellow union" led by factory management. Then came the harassment. On June 5th, all workers were given their EID bonuses and pay and allowed to leave the factory. But for the 50 workers involved with the union, management withheld their pay packets. Anxious mothers with children waiting at home milled around outside the office for hours. Shazia Kanwal, the independent union vice president, asked when they would be paid and received the response: "Get out of here, you illiterate woman! You cannot do your union business and demand your salary like this. We will pay you when we finish our work." He then proceeded to slam the window between the office and the area the workers were waiting directly on Shazia's head. At 10.30pm they received their wages, but not before factory management required them to sign two documents which they couldn't read and the meaning of which were not explained.

The harassment intensified as the factory management began suspending and firing union members. From June to August 2025, at least 10 workers, including key union leaders were illegally suspended, terminated, or harassed due to their union activities. Some workers faced blackmail and threats of legal action if they did not denounce the union and cooperate with management.

Together we are drawing a line in the sand. If we let these cases slip by in silence, without speaking up, the industry will only continue to adopt tactics that stop true organising and limit any opportunity for worker power and change.

Activists delivered a letter to the Pakistan High Commission in London this autumn to ask the government to enforce the law and protect workers' rights at M.I. Industries

Double Trouble

We spend a lot of time trying to reduce things in the fast fashion industry, from emissions to production. But if you could choose to *double* something in the fast fashion industry what would it be?

When I asked staff at Labour Behind the Label what they want to double, they came up with some good answers:

- Double the wages of every single garment worker in the world.
- Double the number of laws that keep greedy CEO's in check.
- Double the number of people taking action in solidarity with garment workers.
- Double the number of women union leaders given space to build workers power.

Twice As Nice

From the 2nd–9th December, Labour Behind the Label is taking part in the Big Give to raise money for our Urgent Appeals. The power of the Big Give is that anything you donate will be doubled.

If you donate £20 it will become £40. If you donate £50 you can watch it become £100. If you give £500 it will transform into £1,000!

The funds you donate will go directly towards fighting our frontline Urgent Appeals – this is urgent, global work that directly acts to stop the worst wrongdoing in the fashion industry. When workers have their wages stolen, when factories are reported as dangerously unsafe, when trade union leaders are fired, arrested, or imprisoned – we fight to stop brands from getting away with the worst of their exploitation.

This work is critical and has helped lead to compensation for Rana Plaza victims, the banning of carcinogenic sandblasting and the withdrawal of 48,000 arrest warrants in Bangladesh.

One article, one post, one protest can never be enough for these protracted and complicated cases where the lives of thousands of women are at stake – achieving justice takes exactly the kind of dedicated and relentless campaign work that you will be supporting if you donate to Labour Behind the Label through the Big Give.

Right now, our Urgent Appeals team is fighting to get justice for 1,416 NEXT workers in Sri Lanka who were shockingly sacked by text message when NEXT effectively closed its only unionised factory. This was despite NEXT announcing record-breaking profits of £1 billion pounds and shows how little regard fast fashion brands have for the workers who make them these profits.

As our union partner in Sri Lanka stated: "NEXT may be a corporate giant, but we will not be silenced. We continue to fight for justice for our members and for the company to stand by its commitments to genuine workers rights."

We're also working on the case of 130 Burmese garment workers who were fired

from making Tesco jeans by VK Garments in Thailand. These women endured years of 99-hour working weeks, confiscated passports, sexual abuse and only one day off per month – and then were fired when they spoke out. These women are now suing Tesco to try and get compensation for their horrific experiences.

Doubling Down

At Labour Behind the Label we never take money from billionaires and their fashion brands, we stay independent so we can call out wrongdoing no matter who is doing it.

This makes the Big Give doubly important since all the work we do depends upon people like you making generous donations. Without you there is no Labour Behind the Label.

With its factory fires, stolen wages, black listed unions and police opening fire on demonstrations, you know the fashion industry is an exploitative nightmare for the people who work in it.

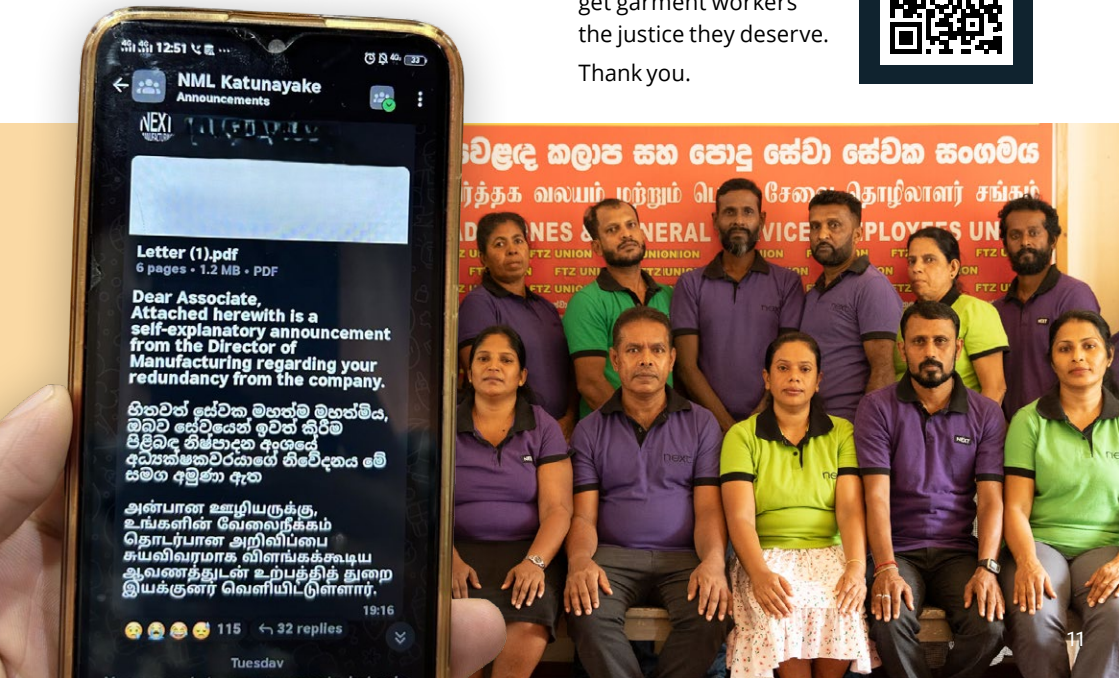
But it's a nightmare that you can help bring to an end by supporting us in the Big Give. We can fight together alongside garment workers for a fashion industry where exploitation has no place.

Please join the Big Give to double our collective ability to fight the highest-priority injustices in the global fashion industry. You can make a difference – by doubling your money and your impact, you can get union leaders out of prison, you can fight for safe factories and you can get garment workers the justice they deserve.

Thank you.

Right now, our Urgent Appeals team is fighting to get justice for 1,416 NEXT workers in Sri Lanka who were shockingly sacked by text message when NEXT effectively closed its only unionised factory

Donate now



The Big Give is now on December 2–9

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