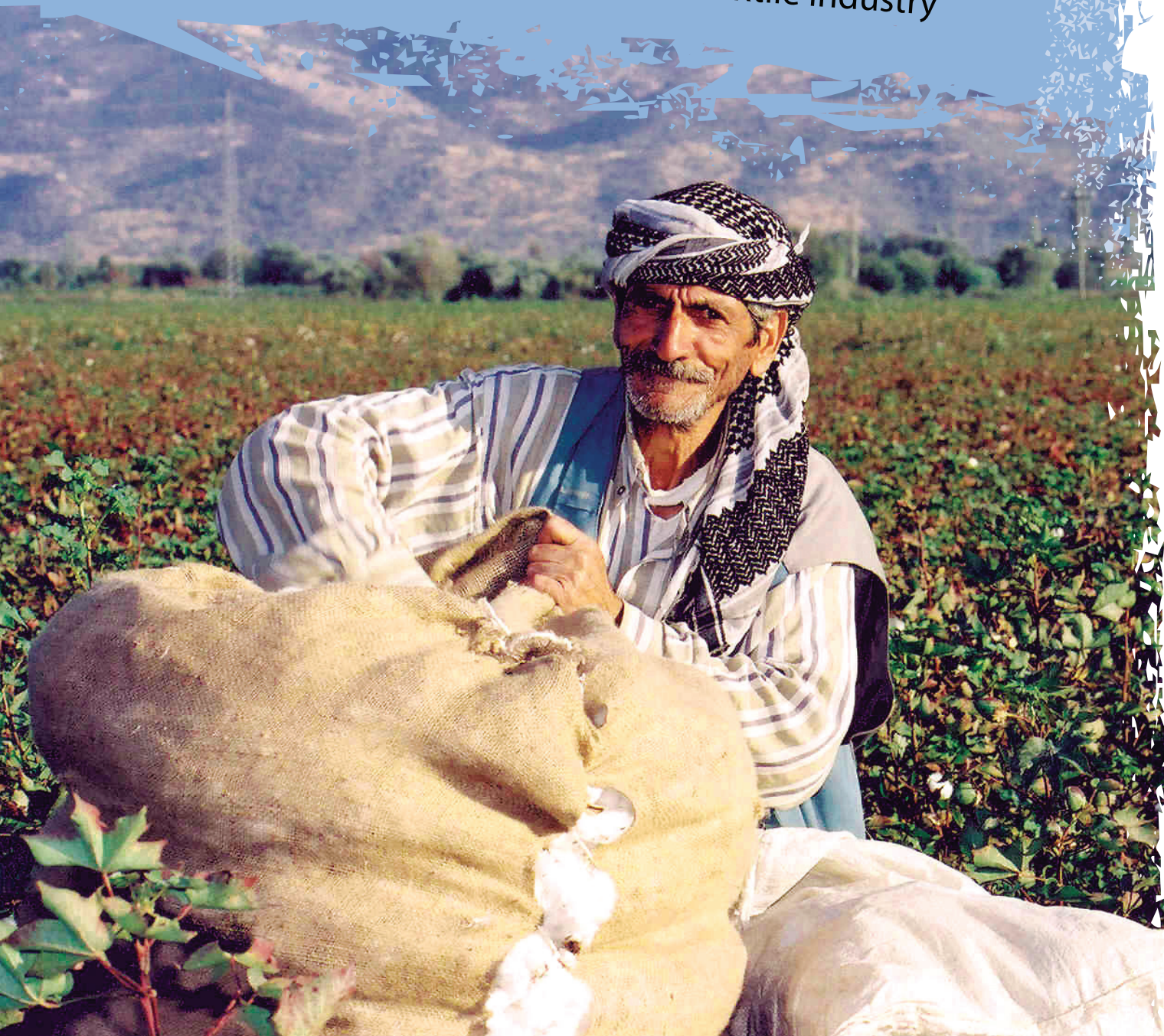


# Clothes make the man... but who makes the clothes?

Cotton and working conditions in the textile industry



Development Education Program Manual from the cycle  
**The World in your Shopping Cart**





## The World in the Shopping Cart

- The purpose of the global development education programmes titled The World in the Shopping Cart is to draw attention to the relationship between our consumer behaviour and seemingly unapproachable problems in the countries of the so-called “Global South”; that is to point out the interconnected nature of the developing and advanced countries through trade and consumption. The workshops explain selected issues (extreme poverty, poor working conditions, destruction of rainforests, etc.) to the students to give example of the products of our everyday consumption (cocoa, chocolate, coffee, cotton T-shirt or jeans, Coke, and others).
- The workshops also try to present more responsible, greener, and people-friendlier consumer alternatives such as Fair Trade, FSC (wood certification) and organic products.
- One of the principal objectives of the programme is to stimulate students to ponder over problems and their context, to critically evaluate the presented information and formulate their own opinions and attitudes.
- The educational series World in the Shopping Cart forms part of a homonymous campaign for responsible consumption.

### Other workshops from the programme “The World in the Shopping Cart”:

- **Coffee Way Too Strong.** Coffee and (un)fair trade
- **Bitter taste of chocolate.** Cocoa and child labour
- **Clothes Makes the Man... and Who Makes the Clothes?** Cotton and working conditions in the garment industry
- **The Taste of Rainforest.** Causes and impacts of rainforest felling
- **Coca-colonization.** On multinationals (not only) in developing countries
- **Banana Spots.** How the tropical farmers lives with pesticides
- **Over Troubled Water.** Water as a precondition of a development

### Clothes Make the Man

And who makes the clothes? Cotton and working conditions in garment industry  
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## Instructions For Use

Dear teachers,

The task of this manual is to introduce to you one of the workshops of our cycle 'The World in your Shopping Cart.'

The workshops advocate active teaching methods. They are made up of several connected activities, arranged to accommodate the three-phase E-R-R teaching model (evocation – realisation of what the information means – reflection).

Basically, the workshops are built around group work (social and personal skills). Through hands-on activities, they ensure that learning is anchored in experience. There is also some work with texts (teaching and problem-solving skills). Discussion and attitude-related activities will develop citizenship and communication skills. Above all, the programme corresponds to two broad topics: 1) Education and Thought in a European and Global Context, and 2) Environmental Education.

The workshops serve as a good introduction to these areas. The topics treated are very complex, and can therefore be expanded with their own activities.

The purpose of this manual is to provide a detailed methodology for holding one workshop from the cycle 'The World in your Shopping Cart,' and to support the methodology with information that will allow the teacher to spend as little of his or her own time as possible preparing the workshop.

## Methodology

In the presentation of the methodology we have mentioned the objectives fulfilled by the workshop and its activities. Partial objectives then show up in concrete activities, as do lists of teaching aids.

### Minimum two hours

The workshops are conceived for a minimum of two teaching hours, but it would be even better to extend the program and dedicate further time, especially to discussion. This is particularly attractive and useful to older students, because in addition to working on important communication skills, they have the opportunity - in the context of confrontation with others - to refine their own opinions and attitudes. The suggested schedule comes from the experience of teachers who have held the workshops numerous times. Nevertheless, the teachers who have tried the workshops for us led them in widely differing allotments of time (e.g. 1x2, 2x1, 2x2, or 1x3 teaching hours). So in addition to being possible within normal teaching hours, the workshops are well suited to special activity days at school.

## Appendices

In the methodological part of the manual we have presented a complete list of teaching aids. The majority of them will also be found in the part entitled 'Appendices.'



\*The resources marked with an asterisk (photos, pictures, recordings) can be found in electronic form on our website: [www.svetvnakupnimkosiku.cz/skoly/materialy](http://www.svetvnakupnimkosiku.cz/skoly/materialy) (the password for access to these resources will be sent to you after you register).

To make sure that the individual building blocks of the workshop mesh together, we have visually differentiated the information in the text.



Important contributions from the teacher, which sum up what should stand out in the course of an activity.



The windows for 'Transition to the next activity' facilitate the fluent progress of the workshop.

## Information Materials

Documentation has been structured in three kinds of text field: the main text on a coloured background is supplemented by the text frames, which give illustrative examples or relevant details. The bullet points in the margin are designed to orient you in the main text by summarising the basic message of the corresponding section of text. The bullet points allow a quick reading of the text when you are repeating the workshop, and you can add to them yourself.

We hope that these materials will be a dependable guide to some aspects of our globalised world, and that they will inspire you to further develop these topics with your students. We invite you to send suggestions for improvement, as well as additions and information for the activities, to this address: [skoly@svetvnakupnimkosiku.cz](mailto:skoly@svetvnakupnimkosiku.cz).



# Clothes make the man.... but who makes the clothes?

Cotton and working conditions in the textile industry.

The World in your Shopping Cart



## Objectives of the workshop:

### Knowledge:

- Students describe how cotton is processed up to the point when it becomes clothing.
- Students locate the individual components of the globalised textile industry.
- Students explain the environmental impact of growing cotton.
- Students enumerate the risks connected with the process of producing clothes.
- Students deduce the causes of the abuse of workers in the textile industry in developing countries.
- Students uncover the connection between consumption by residents of developed countries and the working conditions of employees in the textile industry in developing countries.
- Students enumerate the consumer alternatives to conventional cotton clothing, e.g. bio-cotton, more environmentally-friendly natural materials, fair trade and consumer campaigns, or reduction of consumption.


### Skills:

- Students work in groups and intelligibly present the results of their group work.
- Students use a map of the world.
- Students put themselves in the role of an overworked seamstress in a sweatshop.
- Students pick out the essential information from text, and compare two texts.
- Students work out and discuss possible solutions to the problem of working conditions in the textile industry.
- On the basis of the information available, students arrive at their own viewpoints, and formulate them in an appropriate way.

### Attitudes:

- Students critically evaluate the existence of unequal opportunities in different parts of the world.

 **Group size:** 15–30  
(ideally 15 students)

 **Duration:** 100–130 minutes  
(2 or 3 teaching hours)

### Resources:

- chairs corresponding to the number of students
- a flipchart or blackboard + a set of markers (or chalk)
- pencils and glue
- a wall map of the world on which students can draw
- coloured post-its (in the most outrageous colours possible)
- 3 sheets of wrapping paper
- a set of note cards with a description of the phases of production for each group (see Appendices Act. 1)
- printouts of photos\*
- a CD with appropriate music
- one 'Welcome to the sweatshop' diagram for each student, and one note card with a description of the phase of production that he or she will be carrying out
- one copy of the article for each student (see Appendices Act. 6)
- one copy of the code of ethics (see Appendices Act. 7)
- different attitudes written on large sheets of paper (see Appendices Act. 8)
- printouts of photos of hemp, flax, and bio-cotton clothing, a fair trade t-shirt, ideally pieces of hemp and flax fabric, and one leaflet for each student

\* found at: [www.svetvnakupnimkosiku.cz/skoly/materialy](http://www.svetvnakupnimkosiku.cz/skoly/materialy)



- Students weigh the possibility of lowering the environmental and social impact of clothing production.
- Students evaluate their own 'power' and the responsibility they have as consumers and people living in a globalised world.

Name of Activity	Type of Activity	Objective/Information	Duration
1. <i>Chairs</i>	ice-breaker	introductions; me-my personality-my clothes	5-10 min.
2. <i>How we choose our clothes</i>	brainstorming	what influences us when we buy clothes	2-5 min.
3. <i>Made in</i>	map work	what labels say about where clothes come from	10-15 min.
4. <i>From seed to jeans</i>	group work, making and presenting posters	the phases of textile processing and clothing production, and the social and environmental risks associated with them	20-40 min.
5. <i>Denim travelogue</i>	map work	locating the component phases in jeans' production according to a case study	5 min.
6. <i>Welcome to the Sweatshop</i>	hands-on activity	simulation of the working conditions in a sweatshop	5-10 min.
7. <i>The Code vs. Reality</i>	work with texts	comparison of two texts	8-10 min.
8. <i>Point of View</i>	taking up viewpoints		8-10 min.
9. <i>Alternatives on the Market</i>	discussion		20 min.

## Preparing the work space:

For this workshop you will need a free classroom with a circle of chairs.

## Abbreviated version:

If time is short, you may split the program into several shorter blocks, or leave out some activities entirely.

From the point of view of the objectives of the program, it is feasible to leave out Activity 1: '*Chairs*'. Activity 4: '*From seed to jeans*' requires the most time. It can be shortened by leaving out the creative part of making the posters and just putting the papers describing the phases of production in order. If it is not important for you and your students to analyse the environmental and social risks in the production of cotton clothes, then you can leave the activity out since the students will briefly meet the component phases of production in Activity 5: *Denim travelogue*.

You can dedicate one teaching hour to getting to know how cotton clothes are manufactured (Activities 1-5), and in the second you can focus attention on the situation of workers in the textile industry (Activities 6-9) and give more room to discussion about the alternatives.

## Amplification:

If, on the other hand, you want to look at a topic more thoroughly, you can amplify the workshop to look at the activities of brands and fashion trends. If you have time and space, this topic lends itself to being extended to a one- or more day project, whose components could be, for example, mapping the life of garments, looking for old clothes in closets and ascertaining where they may have been; fashion shows, conversations with objects; meetings with senior citizens (and discussions about their relationships with objects), school clothing exchanges, workshops on processing wool, fictive consumer campaigns, etc.



 **Duration:** 5–10 minutes

 **Resources:**

- a chair for every student and for one of the teachers

## Activity 1: Chairs

### Objective:

- Students express the relationship between themselves, their personality, and their clothes.

### Introduction to the activity:

- If you are not familiar with the group, present yourself and the program in the introduction. E.g.: *'Now we are going to chat for a while about our clothes, because as we know, clothes make the man. Maybe now you are telling yourself that this is something for my family to worry about, or a topic for the ladies' club. But we can also ask a different question: 'Who makes the clothes? And not only who, but where, from what, and under what conditions is our ordinary clothing made? And we will see that this is a topic touching on geography, economics, and the environment, and that there is even an ethical side to the question.'*

### Procedure:

- One of the teachers, along with the students, brings chairs, and the second asks the students to form a circle with the chairs, and positions him- or herself in the middle of the circle.
- The teacher again says his or her name, and adds some characteristic of his or her relationship to clothing, e.g. *'My name is Arnost and of all the clothes out there, I prefer overalls...'* or *'My name is Kunhuta, and I would never buy anything in a used clothing shop...'*
- Those in the chairs, for whom this affirmation is also true, stand up and quickly change places. Meanwhile, the person in the middle of the circle quickly grabs one of the free seats. The person left without a chair stays in the middle of the circle and continues in the same way.
- The objective is to get yourself out of the middle of the circle by thinking up some statement which will also be true for at least one of the seated persons. Thus the students gradually take turns in the middle.

#### Important contributions from the teacher:



- Ideally, these statements should be insights which while widely varying, will also reveal what strikes us as interesting about clothes and our way of dressing.
- In case they ever end up in the middle of the circle, teachers should be prepared with characteristics touching on the aspects of clothing dealt with in the workshop, e.g. above average consumption, giving in to trends, other fabrics: *'I am wearing at least one item which is more than three years old.'* *'I can't stand guys who tuck their t-shirts into their trousers.'* *'At home I have at least one item of clothing made out of flax.'*

### Tips for leading the activity:

- The contribution of this activity to the workshop is to relax the atmosphere at the beginning, and to let the teachers and students get acquainted with one another.
- If we are working with groups that we already know, it may not be necessary to linger on the introductions. Nevertheless, it may be useful because the other objective is to become aware of the relationship me – my personality – my clothing.
- The game may start to get old before everyone has had a turn in the middle. In this case we end the game and ask any students who haven't been in the middle of the circle to introduce themselves one by one.
- If the characteristics mentioned by the students start to be centred on just one thing (e.g. *'I like blue.'* *'I like yellow.'* etc.), then at that point it would be a good idea for one of the teachers to *'intentionally'* get stuck in





the middle of the circle and to bring up, as his or her characteristic, some other topic (e.g. 'I don't like people who base themselves a lot on their clothes...').



**Transition to the next activity:**

- E.g. *'OK, we have indirectly shown each other, how our clothes define us, or maybe how we present our personalities through our choice of clothing. Now let's look a little closer at how we choose our clothes...'*



**Duration:** 2–5 minutes



**Resources:**

- blackboard or flipchart
- chalk or markers

## Activity 2: How we choose our clothes

### Objective:

- Students come up with an overview of their criteria for choosing clothes, which will then be particularly useful for the closing summary.

### Procedure:

- Find out beforehand whether the students understand the term 'brainstorming,' and explain it to them if necessary.
- Invite the students to think up as many criteria as possible, according to which they choose their clothes. Write them one after another on the blackboard. When all the ideas are exhausted, end the activity.
- By way of conclusion, emphasise that you will return to this list.



**Important contribution from the teacher:**

- We buy clothes according to many criteria, some of which we may not even be aware of.

### Tips for leading the activity:

On the list should be found price, quality, whether it is 'in', comfort, fabric, the opinion of our peers, etc. Furthermore, see the closing summary.



**Transition to the next activity:**

- E.g.: *'OK, that was the theory and now we are going to have to ask some questions that hit a little closer to home. Let's look at our bodies, and ascertain how the textile industry is spread over the world...'*



**Duration:** 10–15 minutes



**Resources:**

- wall map
- coloured post-its

## Activity 3: MADE IN

### Objective:

- The students say where our clothing comes from, and deduce that at present, most of the textile industry has been moved to the developing countries to our south.
- The students give reasons for why this is so, and could also give examples.



## Procedure:

- Ask the students to ascertain what information is stated on the tags of the clothing they are wearing right now. If they can't read their own tags themselves, they can read each others'. The particularly important information is the type of material and the country of origin.
- Hand out coloured post-its, and ask the students to write what they have discovered about materials and countries of origin on them. They can then stick them onto the wall map on those countries of origin. If a label did not state the garment's country of origin, the post-it should be stuck in a place we will call 'no-man's land' (e.g. Antarctica, the map key, or the edge of the map). The more post-its each student puts on the map, the more representative the resulting picture will be.
- When the students have finished, evaluate the result together. There is no need to comment on the location of every post-it, only to attempt to comprehend the prevalent trends.
- Invite the students to reflect on the reasons for which the textile industry is spread out over the world in precisely the way that the map with the post-its shows. Write the reasons on the blackboard.
- If the students can't come up with any reasons, then you can ask them - for example – *'What do these countries, where most clothing comes from, have in common?' 'If you wanted to set up a clothing factory, how would you choose the country to set it up in?'*

### Important contribution from the teacher:



- Emphasise that the distribution of the textile industry represented here is not accidental; the reasons for it can be deduced. If the students cannot guess the reasons themselves (which is highly unlikely), use leading questions to suggest at least the aspects of cheap labour, the dependence of locals on work in factories owned by foreign investors, and the looser legislation in developing countries.

## Tips for leading the activity:

- This works much better if the students gather information from their clothing labels inside the classroom. Don't ask them to investigate their underwear, and don't let them go elsewhere to read the labels. That would make the activity drag on too long.
- It is difficult to guess beforehand how the resulting picture of the textile industry will look, because 15 or 30 students don't really represent a large enough sample. If it turns out that the location of production in developing countries is not obvious at first glance, you can at least emphasise the reality, illustrated by the picture, that the textile industry is highly globalised.
- Sometimes we can't find out where much of the clothing is from (i.e. there are a lot of post-its in 'no-man's land'). But we can emphasize how little clothing comes from the Czech Republic or the countries nearest to it. And that in spite of the long tradition of manufacturing textiles here. (If THESE trends aren't evident from the post-its either, you will have no choice but to wriggle out of the situation somehow, possibly by looking for another connection between the various post-its.)
- Note that in order for a developed country to be listed as the country of origin on the label, often it is only necessary for a part of the production to be carried out there

*Adapted from an activity developed by the Austrian organisation Suedwind Agentur*



#### Transition to the next activity:

- E.g. *'So we have answered the question of WHERE and now we will look more closely at HOW. In each group you have at least two pairs of jeans, so that you can see the end product of the process that starts with a cotton seed. But what happens in the meantime? We have a natural tendency to perceive things in such a way, that we probably just think that 'somehow' our clothes get made. ....but we're not going to stop at simply learning about the manufacturing process and being able to appreciate how complicated it is. We also want to find out whether some steps in the process pose a risk to people or the environment. ...'*

## Activity 4: From the seed to the jeans

### Objective:

- Students describe the complicated process of manufacturing jeans.
- Students enumerate the social and environmental risks of the different phases.
- Students work in groups on creating posters.
- Students present the results of the work to the rest of the groups

### Procedure:

- Explain to the students what their task is – i.e. to put the note cards representing the phases of production into their correct order, situate them on their poster and creatively fill up the posters with photos or their own drawings.
- It should be clear from the posters how jeans come into being; for each phase all of the risks should be emphasised on the posters. At the same time, the group has to agree on the final form of the poster.
- Distribute to the groups the note card sets describing the phases of production. The three sets of note cards should be slightly different in the way that they mention some of the main tendencies in the textile industry, particularly in the phase where the clothes are sewn.
- Encourage the students not to limit their creativity and to use the photographs which we have discreetly placed on desks or tables to be picked up at will. Just a small part of each photograph should be enough, so that something a bit different turns up on each poster. 10 minutes should be enough for making the posters.
- During the time allotted to the students for making the posters, it would be a good idea to turn on some lively music, both as background, and as a signal that there is still time for the posters. Warn the students when half the time is up, and also two minutes before the end.
- Next comes the presentation in which the groups set out, one by one, their results to the rest of the students, including what surprised them, etc. The second and third groups should emphasise anything in their presentations that differs from the conclusions of the preceding group(s).
- By way of conclusion you can briefly comment on any interesting insights, correct any basic errors, and thank each group.

 **Group work**

 **Duration:** 20–40 minutes

 **Resources:**

- a sheet of wrapping paper
- a set of markers and glue
- a set of note cards with the phases of production written on them for each group. (see Appendices Act. 4)
- printouts of photos\*
- a CD with appropriate music





#### Important contribution from the teacher:



- Cotton is one of the most chemically treated crops out there, and the substances used to treat it are poisonous to more than just the organisms waiting at the end of the process.
- In developing countries, substances are routinely sold which have been prohibited in Europe because of their toxicity.
- The profits from the sale of pesticides mostly end up in the accounts of European companies.
- It's not just that poisonous substances used in processing cotton end up in the environment, but also that people are continuously and directly exposed to their effects while working – at times because they are insufficiently informed, at times because the cost of protective measures is considered too high, and at times because the employers couldn't care less.
- If it doesn't turn up in any of the presentations, we should call attention to the well-known case of the Aral Sea.
- Today cotton is raised on a much larger area than what is really suited to it – hence the enormous amounts of energy added in the form of pesticides, fertilisers, and irrigation.

### Tips for leading the activity:

Just as in the other activities, in order to make things run smoothly, it is a good idea to explain right from the beginning what is going to happen, and only then distribute the resources.

This activity is time-consuming due to the production of the posters. In order to abbreviate the activity, it is possible to work with just the texts describing the phases of production, which the students can put in order and present. Even these can be left out, if you don't want to devote time to discussing the risks associated with raising and treating cotton.

Sometimes the three presentations are very similar, in spite of starting from three different sets of texts. In order to avoid repetition, indicate at the beginning of the activity, that the texts describe concrete environmental and social risks. The students must decide which of the risks is most significant, and their posters should call attention to that risk above all. In the course of their presentations, they then have to justify their choice. It usually doesn't happen that all three groups focus on the same risk, so the presentations will be more interesting.

#### Transition to the next activity:



- *Now that we have a more detailed notion of all that is needed to get a finished pair of jeans to our shop, let's go back to the map one more time. You could be forgiven for thinking that all of these phases take place in the one country that turns up on the label saying MADE IN. But in reality this is not the case. MADE IN identifies the country where the final phase of production takes place. Which in an extreme case could simply mean that you import a finished t-shirt from wherever, print a design on it, and then you can put MADE IN CZECH REPUBLIC on it. And you really have no idea what route the t-shirt has been on up to that point. So we are going to go on a trip with one pair of jeans. Be careful, this is just a typical case, and there's no reason to think that every pair of jeans that we're wearing has made the same trip. Our example is drastically simplified, but nevertheless gives us an idea of the trends. So let's suppose you are in Prague/Brno, and you have bought a pair of jeans labelled 'MADE IN BULGARIA' . . . .*



## Activity 5: Denim travelogue

 **Duration:** 5 minutes

 **Resources:**

- world map on which you can draw, or at least somehow indicate an itinerary
- a set of markers

### Objective:

- Students are surprised to learn what great distances clothing travels, and that the route is not direct, but rather back and forth.
- Students will again recall the sequence of phases of production from the previous activity.
- Students orient themselves on a world map.

### Procedure:

- We gradually draw the itinerary followed by the jeans in our typical case.
- To start with, mark a point at the place where we bought the jeans. Invite the first student to connect it with the place where the jeans were sewn (i.e. Bulgaria). Then gradually back along the path covered by the jeans.
- When we get to Kazakhstan, invite the students to try to estimate how many kilometres the jeans have travelled altogether (roughly 35,000 km), which side of the equator they have been on, or the most distant point they have reached on their travels.
- Emphasise that here we are talking about one specific case, and we are not saying that all jeans travel over this same itinerary.

Phase of production	Country
Cultivation	Kazakhstan
Spinning	Turkey
Weaving	Taiwan
Dyeing	France
Printing	China
Sewing	Bulgaria
Sale	Czech Republic
<b>Total Distance (km)</b>	<b>35,000</b>

#### Important contribution from the teacher:

- Globalisation and the free movement of goods permits producers to lower the cost of manufacturing clothes (and other goods) so much that a given phase of production always takes place in the country where that particular phase comes out the cheapest. Thanks to that, our clothes often travel more than people do.

### Tips for leading the activity:

If necessary, clarify the resulting figure: we measure distances between the geographical centres of these countries, or between their populated areas, and in many places we may be slightly overestimating. On the other hand it would be good to observe that we are probably underestimating the entire distance because we have been calculating these distances as the crow (or an airplane) flies. And likewise, the studies we are working from do not include additional parts of the clothes such as zippers, buttons, etc.

Obviously it is also possible to trace the itinerary in the opposite direction, i.e. to start in Kazakhstan, where the cotton grows, and to finish in the place where we bought the jeans.

If time is short the activity can be shortened by having one of the teachers draw the itinerary on the map. That will make the activity less interactive. (At the same time, if the teachers are working with a group they don't know, this activity is an opportunity for them to find out how many of the students' names they have remembered from the introductory activity!) Sneaky tip: If you don't remember anyone at all, there is almost always going to be at least one Kuba and one Veronika in the group.

#### Transition to the next activity:

- One of the teachers will leave the room, leaving the door ajar so that he or she knows what is happening inside. He or she will play the role of sweatshop boss. He or she can also dress up for the role, e.g. in a work apron. This will serve as a symbol, so that students understand that the teacher is in a new role.



 **Duration:** 5–10 minutes

 **Resources:**

- One 'Welcome to the Sweatshop' chart for each student (Appendices Act. 6)
- One note card for each student with a description of the phase of production he or she will be carrying out

## Activity 6: Welcome to the Sweatshop!

### Objective:

- Students will experience what it feels like to be a worker on an assembly line.

### Procedure:

- The teacher inside the room, without emotion or any further explanation, welcomes the students to the sweatshop and announces that they will sew jeans.
- The students' task is to write the sentences which they have on their note cards in the appropriate column in their charts as quickly and as accurately as possible. The chart represents the jeans, and so as soon as each student performs his or her work (i.e. writes his or her sentence), he or she sends the chart to his or her neighbour on the right.
- Every time the sweatshop boss claps, the jeans **MUST** be forwarded, even if an individual's work/sentence has not been completed.
- At the moment when the rules are clear and all the resources have been distributed, the second teacher bursts into the room as the sweatshop boss. This teacher begins, strictly and as rudely as may be appropriate, to pressure the students to work faster.
- The intervals between the clapping obviously need to be such that soon many students can't manage their tasks. The intervals are regular, and can be gradually shortened.
- For a smaller group (ca. 10 students), production continues up to the moment when the first jeans are completely sewn. For a larger group, not so long that the game ceases to be fun.
- The other teacher represents the middleman coming to pick up an order. He or she brusquely takes the charts from the students, drops a few words about their poor quality, and how he/she doesn't intend to pay much for the work.
- The sweatshop boss turns into a teacher again and asks the students what their impressions are.

#### **Important contribution from the teacher:**



- This was a clear sample of a so-called sweatshop set up to produce posters. And still it couldn't simulate the heat, noise, unsanitary conditions and suchlike of a real sweatshop. That's how you save on labour costs: overtime, ban on going to the toilet, immediately sacking those who can't manage, obviously minimum wages etc. More about sweatshops and free trade zones in the sources.
- If all the workers of a sweatshop quit at the same time, the factory would still be able to run because as a result of the huge unemployment in those countries, there would be a new applicant for every free job. And what is more, the employees who quit would have a hard time finding work anywhere else.
- Why don't the governments of these countries protect their residents? Explain the problem called 'race to the bottom'.

### Tips for leading the activity:

While distributing the charts and the note cards it is necessary to emphasise that it's the chart that get passed on to the right, not the sentences on the note cards. Make sure that everyone has understood this, perhaps by letting one of the students explain it in his or her own words.

If there is a large number of students, you can either add more phases of production, or give out the phases twice each. In that case, however, it will be necessary to lengthen the charts and their numbering.

It would be good to learn the role of the sweatshop boss at least partially by memory, especially all of the prac-





tices mentioned which contradict labour laws. Experience teaches that it's not easy to remember everything in the middle of the game, and that this can slow down the tempo (which should be a lot faster than the tempo up to now!).

You will have to evaluate how to make the sudden change into a 'bad guy' credible, but at the same time plausible. The students must perceive that the change in the teacher is symbolic. If you sense that the students are getting into the game, there is no reason to be too kind. Don't be afraid to improvise, like sacking people without warning and so on.

If you are working with a less communicative group unwilling to answer open questions, you can cajole the students into expressing themselves by voting. E.g. 'So whoever likes that, raise your hands. Who would stay in a job like that? Who thinks that the governments of these countries know about all of this? Who thinks not? And who has no opinion?'

Possible comments from the sweatshop boss: '*...don't talk, don't go to the toilet, if you have to then maximum twice a day, and I'll keep the key! We've got an especially urgent order, so nobody goes home until we've got it done. Faster! Alright, here we've got a new rule: whoever collaborates with those foreign journalists and tells the anything about their work is going to get the sack immediately. And within a week everyone is going to voluntarily leave the unions. The unions have been disbanded.*

*And from now on every one of you is going to take these here pills, I'll personally make sure you do. It's for your own good. And I'm warning you, who ever doesn't agree can finish here and go work in the steam laundry. And you'll work until you're smoking out your ears. Or I'll sack you right now....'*

*Adapted from an activity developed by the Austrian organisation Suedwind Agentur*

#### Transition to the next activity:



- We should seamlessly add this to the debate which has arisen: '*...When information about the conditions in the textile industry reached the public, a whole range of companies started to be interested in guaranteeing their clients that they weren't violating labour laws, and that their goods were being produced in humane conditions. A published, but nonetheless legally non-binding list of rules concerning treatment of employees is called a code of ethics – one of the documents that you're going to get. And don't overlook the fact that it's in English. That reflects the fact that a firm often claims to have a code of ethics, and that consequently its employees are aware of their rights. But in reality they only present the code to their employees in a language that the workers don't understand. So it will be tough for them to insist on their rights. The second text is an article from The Guardian, which describes how things work out in reality. ...'*

## Activity 7: The Code vs. Reality

### Objective:

- Students describe conditions in textile workshops and explain the problem with subcontracting.
- Students pick out essential information from the texts.
- Students compare two texts.



**Duration:** 8–10 minutes



#### Resources:

- One copy of the code and one copy of the article for each student (see *Appendices Act. 7*)

#### Important contributions from the teacher:



- The code that we are using is not the actual code of any one company. Again, it is an example like the codes assembled by the non-governmental organisations working together in the *Clean Clothes Campaign*. The students will get factual information from reading the text.



## Procedure:

- Explain the task: on the basis of the texts (the article from The Guardian and the code), decide to what extent reality corresponds to what clothing firms commit themselves to in their codes of ethics. The simplest way to do this is for the students to underline every place in the article which describes something contradicting one of the rules laid out in the code.
- Give out both texts.
- At the beginning, say how much time the students have (4-5 minutes), and warn them a minute before the end. Don't collect the texts, the students can keep them.
- As a short wrap-up, ask the students what they ran into in the text that surprised them, what doesn't seem plausible, and so on.

## Tips for leading the activity:

If the age and language skills of the students permit, you can adapt and use the English text, possibly with translations of some of the expressions. The ideal here should not be for the students to understand every single word of the text, but rather to get a clear idea of the content.

### Transition to the next activity:



- *'.. and now we can slow things down a bit- you've been getting a lot of information in a lot of different forms. Obviously it hasn't been exhaustive – we haven't got the time to chat about the historical roots of the present situation, nor details about the workings and relationships of particular connections within the textile industry and so on. In spite of that you can now try to take what you DO know about the problem and sort it out a bit – what makes you angry, what doesn't bother you, what you believe, what you don't believe, etc.'*

## Activity 8: Point of View

### Objective:

- Students sort out what they have learned up to now.
- Students take up points of view and are capable of backing them up with arguments.

### Procedure:

- Spread the various viewpoints around the room, and invite the students to say whether, on the basis of the work they have done today, they agree with any of the viewpoints offered. They should read through all of the viewpoints and stand by the one closest to their own opinion, or perhaps between two, if their opinion falls between to neighbouring viewpoints.
- If a student doesn't find any of the statements at least close to acceptable, then obviously he or she can stand aside, which of course does not exclude him or her from the following debate.
- As soon as the students are standing by the various viewpoints, allow for the first commentary, or if appropriate to the situation, pose a few questions.
- While up to now we have spoken in numbers and facts, now it is time to interpret them. Examples of questions, which can be advantageously asked:
- For everyone::
  - The majority of the affirmations have been in the first person plural, i.e. WE. Who is included in that WE? We as Europeans, we meaning those of us here in the classroom?



**Duration:** 15 minutes



### Resources:

- various attitudes written on large sheets of paper (see *Appendices Act. 8*).



- For those who are standing near the 'pole' of indifference:
  - What do you think are the causes of this dependence?
  - Can they help themselves?
  - What do you think that the inhabitants of today's poor countries did before their countries became colonies? (Were they waiting until someone would employ them in a sweatshop?)
  - That's true, but do you think that the current way the world is ordered (where some have no choice but to eke out a living at the bottom of a commercial ladder, at the top of which are profits that they couldn't even imagine, and others are again dependent on imported goods from half a planet away) is fair and sustainable in the long term?
- For the students standing near the affirmation about more expensive clothing:
  - What would be the consequences for you if clothes were more expensive?
  - What kind of price increase (maybe in percentage terms) would be acceptable to you, if it guaranteed better treatment of people in poorer countries?
- For the students near the opposite pole:
  - What position would you have to be in, in order for it to be in your power to change something?
- Don't forget any 'rejects' who may be standing aside. Give them a short while to express and justify their attitudes as well.

**Important contribution from the teacher:**



There is no easy answer to the question of what can be done about the problem. Students finally have the opportunity to express and perhaps to clarify their attitudes.

## Tips for leading the activity:

The questions for the students can be organised in a different way altogether at your discretion. In the best case the students would lay out questions for their classmates who support the opposite opinion from their own. (You can, in fact, directly invite them to do this: What would you ask those who think that.....?)

The benefit of this activity is that the teachers finally get to see how the students group themselves according to their opinions.

**Transition to the next activity:**



- Without a break, link to the preceding questions with a new question for the students strongly supporting an activist attitude. *'Fine, but what exactly? Have you got any idea of what we can do? (Quite possibly one of students will already have asked a similar question.) Let's get down to that. Is there any concrete answer to the question of what more environmentally and socially viable alternatives might exist? Something, that WE can do if by that WE we mean 'the people the cotton is grown for and the t-shirts are sewn for'; WE as customers. Before we introduce the alternatives, it would be interesting to see if anything occurs to any of you...'*





## Activity 9: Alternatives on the Market

 **Duration:** 15-20 minutes

### Objective:

- Students enumerate the possibilities open to the responsible consumer (bio-cotton, more environmentally-friendly natural materials, fair trade and consumer campaigns, or reduction of consumption).
- Students discuss the validity of the alternatives (hand-me-downs, repairs, innovations, not buying anything....)



### Resources:

- Printouts of photos of hemp, flax, and bio-cotton clothing
- a fair trade t-shirt
- ideally, pieces of hemp and flax fabric
- one leaflet for each student

### Procedure:

- At the beginning, distribute the summarising leaflets to the students
- Gradually introduce all the alternatives, and give yourself as much help as possible with the available samples or photos
- Invite the students to ask questions and to feel free to disagree

#### Important contribution from the teacher:



- Consumer alternatives: bio-cotton, more environmentally-friendly natural materials, fair trade and consumer campaigns, reduction of consumption - hand-me-downs, repairs, innovations, not buying anything. . .
- Besides clear information about the various alternatives it would be good to mention that one fair-trade bio-cotton t-shirt really doesn't change much. Nevertheless the students will be customers all their lives, which we hope will last at least another 60 years. In that time they will spend a huge sum of money. That money is like a joystick that they can point in various directions, or also like a ballot with which they choose the origin and impact of the goods they choose. By making certain choices within the range of their possibilities, they can contribute to the improvement of conditions for people in poorer countries, or contribute to making them worse.

### Tips for leading the activity:

The activity is important because through discussion, even heated discussion at times, we can work our way to the hope that there are ways to change things.

The course of the discussion will always unfold in a slightly different way, and sometimes there won't be any other option but to authoritatively cut off an interesting discussion in order to have the time to introduce all the alternatives (otherwise the whole program would miss its point a bit).

## Conclusion: One more criterion

### Objective:

- To summarise and explicitly express what we were really aiming at this whole time.

### Procedure:

- *So we hope that you have learned at least something new and interesting, and that you will take on board the information laid out here – according to your critical judgement. You might be asking yourself right now, what did we want to get across to you apart from that mass of figures and claims about the injustices perpetrated against people in poor countries? Let's go back to the beginning, where we talked about criteria for choosing clothes.*



- Open the chart to the list of criteria. *For many different reasons, we think that one more criteria should go along with these: what kind of has an environmental and social background does this piece of clothing have? What kind of story? Which we can summarise with the word ORIGIN.* Write ORIGIN on the board.
- If someone mentioned the criterion 'origin' during the initial brainstorming, underline it, and emphasise that now perhaps they have a deeper notion of what origin can mean.

### Tips for leading the activity (reflective variant):

If there is time left over, ask the students to individually write down their original criteria and then to add a new one of their own or to comment on the old ones. They can then put their criteria in order of importance, or possibly in order of how easy they are to apply.

You can write new things on the board or post them on the bulletin board.

## Activity IV.

### From the seed to the jeans

#### 1st group



During the cultivation of cotton, irrigation is often used. As a result, soil gets salted up, deserts expand and the Aral Sea has been dramatically reduced in size.

Crops are treated against pests. According to one estimate, in Uzbekistan 20 to 90 kg of pesticides fall on each hectare of the cotton fields each year.

Modern cotton harvesting machines are very expensive, so in Central Asia they are replaced with children. Under the threat of being beaten, the children working on cotton plantations must meet quotas assigned by the government.

Once gathered, the cotton is bought by government firms. Machines separate the fibre from the seeds, and the de-seeded cotton is sold for further processing. The biggest consumers of cotton are the EU and the USA.

In order for the cotton threads to meet the requirements of modern looms, their surfaces are treated with substances made from starch, polyacrylics, and so on. To rinse off these substances, an enormous amount of water is consumed and polluted.

To bleach the fabrics, organic chloride compounds are employed. These damage the breathing passages of the workers.

Up to 20% of the dye applied to the fabrics does not stick, and goes right down the drain with the excess water into rivers and streams.

In semi-legal sweatshops, known to exist, for example, in Bulgaria, Turkey, and San Francisco, the people who sew the garments are those who would have a hard time finding other work: immigrants, members of ethnic minorities, and socially vulnerable women. Their wages are under the legal minimum, and their working hours are significantly longer than the maximum permitted.

## 2nd group



Cotton is grown in monoculture conditions, which creates the ideal conditions for pests to spread. So to fight against them, pesticides are used up to 40 times a year. But the pests gradually become resistant, which in turn leads to the need for higher doses of pesticide.

The majority of growers in developing countries fail to observe the necessary safety precautions when working with pesticides – either because they can't read them, or because they don't understand the warnings on the labels, or because they can't afford the necessary protective equipment. As a result, pesticides poison thousands each year.

By removing fibres from the cotton bolls by hand, cotton of the highest quality can be obtained. Nevertheless, this manual harvesting is demanding on workers, and exhausting for adult and child pickers working in the direct sun.

By hand, a worker can separate the fibres from the seeds of approximately 0.5 to 1 kg of cotton per day.

Spinning and weaving are traditional crafts in India. But not even an experienced craftsman working on a spinning wheel or a hand loom can compete with the quantity produced with modern equipment.

Some of the chemicals used in bleaching pools are caustic acids, but workers stand immersed in them almost up to their waists, without rubber boots or gloves. Workers get unpleasant rashes and serious fungal infections as a result.

Dyeing takes place in large tubs. Huge quantities of dye don't stick to the fibres. After the water is steamed off, people collect the leftover slime from these dyes out of settling tanks, often with their bare hands.

Clothing factories send some orders out to people working at home. But these workers have no contract, and in this way the factory absolves itself of any responsibility for their working conditions. The factories only ask for the delivery of finished goods as quickly as possible, at the lowest possible wage.



## 3rd group



In developing countries, pesticides are used which are totally banned in Europe and the USA because of their high level of toxicity. When these pesticides are applied, huge amounts of them fall on surrounding areas, which besides harming biodiversity also leads to significantly higher rates of cancer among the growers.

Overcast skies or rain at the time when the cotton is ripening leaves stains on the white tufts of cotton, and lowers the overall quality of the fibre. Growers spray the plants with other poisonous substances – defoliants, which cause the plants' leaves to fall off, and desiccants, which dry out the fibres, speeding up the opening of the bolls and the cotton's ripening.

Modern machines for harvesting cotton are very effective, but nevertheless fail to take into account the gradual ripening of the cotton bolls. Mechanical cotton harvesting therefore results in lower quality cotton with large amounts of impurities.

Modern cotton gins (machines for separating the fibre from the seeds) can substitute up to 500 people working by hand.

High-speed spinning of cotton fibres into thread is facilitated by chemical compounds produced from petroleum.

In the dyeing process, up to 20% of the dye does not stick to the cloth. Just like the chemicals used to help in spinning and weaving, the unused dye goes straight down the drain.

In South America, clothing production is concentrated in so-called free trade zones. Governments set these zones up in order to attract foreign investors, for instance by lowering taxes or by granting exceptions to some laws. Results for the employees range from 12-hour workdays and sub-minimum wages to physical injuries.

## Activity VI.

Welcome to the sweatshop!

Individual operations during the production of the jeans. Print them out and cut them apart. If necessary, adapt them to the number of students by leaving out some activities, or continue to number them and repeat the activities from the beginning.



**1. I am cutting parts for the jeans.**

**2. I am quickly sewing on the pockets.**

**3. I am sewing on the fake patches.**

**4. I am sewing on various decorations.**

**5. I am making fake holes.**

**6. I am sewing up the fake holes.**

**7. I am sewing together the parts of the left trouser leg.**

**8. I am sewing together the parts of the right trouser leg.**

**9. I am quickly sewing in the zips.**

**10. I am sewing the belt loops on.**

**11. I am quickly sewing the buttons on.**

**12. I am placing and trimming the seams.**

**13. I am sewing on the labels.**

**14. I am sewing on the logos and the brand names.**

**15. I am ironing the finished jeans.**

**16. I am packing the jeans into plastic bags.**

**17. I am cutting parts for the jeans.**

**18. I am quickly sewing on the pockets.**

**19. I am sewing on the fake patches.**

**20. I am sewing on various decorations.**

**21. I am making fake holes.**

**22. I am sewing up the fake holes.**

**23. I am sewing together the parts of the left trouser leg.**

**24. I am sewing together the parts of the right trouser leg.**

**25. I am quickly sewing in the zips.**

**26. I am sewing the belt loops on.**

**27. I am quickly sewing the buttons on.**

**28. I am placing and trimming the seams.**

**29. I am sewing on the labels.**

**30. I am sewing on the logos and the brand names.**

**31. I am ironing the finished jeans.**

**32. I am packing the jeans into plastic bags.**

**This table represents manufacturing process of two pair of jeans.**

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## Activity VII.

### The Code vs. Reality

War on Want report

### **An 80-hour week for 5p an hour: the real price of high-street fashion**

Factories in Bangladesh are breaking pledges to workers made by big UK retailers

*Randeep Ramesh in Dhaka*

*The Guardian, Friday 8 December 2006*



Bangladeshi factory workers take part in a protest to demand better pay. Photograph: Pavel Rahman/AP

Some of Britain's best-known high street brands are selling "cheap chic" clothes at the expense of workers in Bangladesh who are paid 5p an hour despite pledges to protect basic labour rights.

Employees in Bangladesh are forced to work excessive hours, refused access to trade unions and face abuse and sacking if they protest, says the report, *Fashion Victims*, based on interviews with 60 garment workers from six factories.

War on Want says that although Primark, Asda and Tesco have stated publicly they will limit the working week and pay a "living wage" overseas, these commitments are flouted in their suppliers' factories. The Guardian, which interviewed workers in Dhaka, confirmed the allegations of excessive hours and poor working conditions in the report. Employees making clothes for the three retailers said they had no choice but to work longer than the agreed 60 hours a week.

Nazmul, 24, whose job is to stick pins into shirts, said he regularly worked more than 80 hours a week, with only one day off a fortnight. With overtime he makes 2,400 taka (£17) a month. "If a big order comes in we have to work. [In Britain] you get three-for-two offers. It is we people who have to make the third shirt for you. There's no choice. We just get shouted at. There are others who will take my place if I do not work."

Women, who make up two-thirds of the workforce, are particularly vulnerable. Another worker, Veena, 23, said she was accused of stealing a piece of cloth and sacked after complaining of sexual harassment. "I did not steal but I refused to do what the manager asked me [to do]. There is no union. Who can I complain to? Who will get my job back?"

War on Want says bargains in Britain, such as jeans for £3 and cocktail dresses for £6, are possible only because retailers wrench lower prices from suppliers in Bangladesh who get clothes stitched at the lowest possible cost.

The country has the cheapest garment workers in the world, with wages halving in real terms in the past 10 years. Experts say a living wage in Bangladesh would be 3,000 taka, well above shopfloor salaries in an industry of 2 million employees, despite massive street protests in September. Factories disgorge thousands of workers into huge slums constructed of bamboo, tin and concrete above fetid inky-black lakes.



There are dangers, however. After garment factory collapses and fires in Bangladesh left nearly 100 workers dead this year, safety has become an issue. War on Want claims emergency exits are often locked. Louise Richards, the charity's chief executive, said UK prices were at "rock bottom" only because of exploitation. "The companies are not even living up to their own commitments."

Mohammed Lutfor Rahman, vice president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association, said western companies had imposed codes of conduct and sent inspectors to enforce the rules, counting fire exits and auditing overtime records. "I am asked about how many light bulbs we use in the factory and where is our toilet? But who pays for these things? The buyers' profits are going up. But if we ask for more money for improvements they say China is very cheap. It is a threat to move the work somewhere else."

Names of workers have been changed.

Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/globalisation/story/0,,1967404,00.html>

## An acceptable code of conduct according to the Clean Clothes Campaign

1. The scope of the code is clear, and extends to all garment making units in the entire subcontracting chain.
2. The CCC's guiding principles for acceptable working conditions in the garment industry are comprised of the core labour standards of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and several additional standards. Briefly, these include:

*freedom of association*

*right to collective bargaining*

*no discrimination of any kind*

*no forced or slave labour*

*a minimum employment age of 15*

*health and safety measures*

*a maximum working week of 48 hours and voluntary overtime of maximum 12 hours*

*the right to a living wage*

*the establishment of an employment relationship*

3. The code should include provisions for implementation and regular monitoring and verification. ([www.cleanclothes.org](http://www.cleanclothes.org))

## Activity VIII.

### Points of view

#### **Texts to be written on large sheets of paper:**

This is totally unhuman and unacceptable. We cannot resign ourselves to it and need to do something to change the situation.

No matter that we cannot help much we can at least refrain from taking part on it.

Sure, I don't like it. However, we cannot afford buying more expensive clothes.

The situation is really bad but we cannot change anything about it. Therefore, it makes little sense to deal with it.

Sure, the situation is not satisfactory. However, if we continue to support trade with these countries their income will increase, poverty diminish and the living standards grow in the future.

That's simply how the free market is. We need to buy clothes whereas people in developing countries need jobs. How would they get by without their jobs?

# Clothes make the man... but who makes the clothes?

## Cotton and working conditions in the textile industry



### The story of cotton

Cotton is one of the oldest textiles. However, the history of its appearance is obscure and we know but a few facts.<sup>1</sup> Africa is usually mentioned as the likely place of origin but it could be China as well,

and some sources refer to its appearance in Egypt more than 12,000 years ago. In the coastal areas of Peru and in Mohenjo Daro in the Indus Valley of today's Pakistan, archaeologists have found cotton fragments more than 4,000 years old.

At first, cotton was imported to Europe as a luxury good from India, Persia and the south of the Arabian Peninsula. In the 10th century cotton plants were probably grown in Spain. In the renaissance, cotton was cultivated in other countries on the Mediterranean coast. The first explorers of America found several different varieties of cotton plant in the New World as well. Furthermore, in Mexico they encountered quite a large mechanical cotton industry, further evidence of which is a report that in 1519, Cortés was given a richly decorated cotton raiment, garnished with gold, by the Yucatan residents.

Nevertheless, cotton fabric remained something very precious. And it was so despite the fact that the price of raw cotton was far lower than that of wool, linen or silk. The value – the so-called added value – lay in the huge amount of labour involved cotton processing. Everybody who considered this plant to be a money-maker tried to lower the cost of this work. Using slaves for this kind of work proved to be a good practice, and for US cotton producers it represented an integral part of the whole business. However, for those seeking even higher profits, it did not seem to be effective enough. This initially led to the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney (1765-1825); later on it resulted in the industrial revolution, including all the technological progress as well as social problems involving workers in the factories.

This technological progress caused such an increase in production that whereas in 1780 wool accounted for 78% of the textile market, by 1900 it had been replaced by cotton, which reached a 74% share of the world market.

Today, cotton is still the most important textile; its share of world production is approximately 45%. It is popular mainly because of its qualities: it is rather firm but soft at the same time, pleasant to



"... and the trees grow there bearing the fruit – wool – which in its beauty and quality outdoes sheep's wool. The Indians make their clothes out of this tree wool then."

*Herodotus, about 500 years BC*

The origin of cotton is obscure. Egypt, Africa or China are cited as possible places of origin.

For Europeans, cotton cloth was a luxury good. It was imported from India, Persia and the south of the Arabian Peninsula.

Cotton was expensive due to the intensive labour required in processing.

Slavery was an integral part of cotton production at the turn of the 19th century.

The invention of the cotton gin was a turning point in cotton processing, followed by the industrial revolution.

Wool was replaced by cotton which gained the lion's share of the world market.

Today, cotton accounts for approximately 45% of world textile production.



### Natural or artificial?

All textile fibres used in clothing manufacture can be simply divided into natural and artificial fibres.

- **Artificial fibres** have their origin mainly in *petroleum* (polyester, polyamide etc.) or *they are made chemically using natural polymers*; the most frequent method is to use cellulose (e.g. viscose).
- **Natural fibres** have been used much longer in clothing manufacture. This was due to the fact that their processing, despite its complexity, did not have to wait for the invention of petroleum and the development of complicated chemical processes. People always used the fibres coming from those plants or animals that were easiest to access and process in a given area. In some places it was *cotton*, tropical *ramie* or *jute*; in others fibres coming from the silkworm moth (*silk*), *camel hair* or *Kashmir goats*; in the temperate zones *sheep's wool*, *hemp* and *linen* prevailed.

Fibres coming from remote countries were traded, and the products made of them were considered luxury goods outside their countries of origin. This was so until the complex mechanisms of colonization, industrial revolution, international trade and global economics made it possible to wear clothes of the same kind and similar appearance in almost any part of the world. Today, what is luxurious depends in many cases on totally different characteristics than the place of origin of the product...

touch, absorbent of both moisture and sweat, and the final fibre is also permeable. It can be washed at high temperatures. Moreover, many people tend to think of cotton as "purely natural," but only a few learn that conventional cotton cultivation is far from these ideals

### Development of the demand for textiles (as share on the world market)

	1780	1900	1960	1991	1999
<b>Wool</b>	78%	20%	10%	5%	3%
<b>Linen</b>	18%	6%	NA	NA	NA
<b>Cotton</b>	4%	74%	68%	48%	42%
<b>Synthetic fibres</b>	NA	NA	23%	47%	55%

DN = data nejsou dostupná, Zdroj: Haffmans 2000: 184, upraveno

Cotton is grown predominantly in subtropical areas. The most important producers are China, India, the US, Pakistan, Brasil, Uzbekistan and Turkey.



## Conventional cotton cultivation

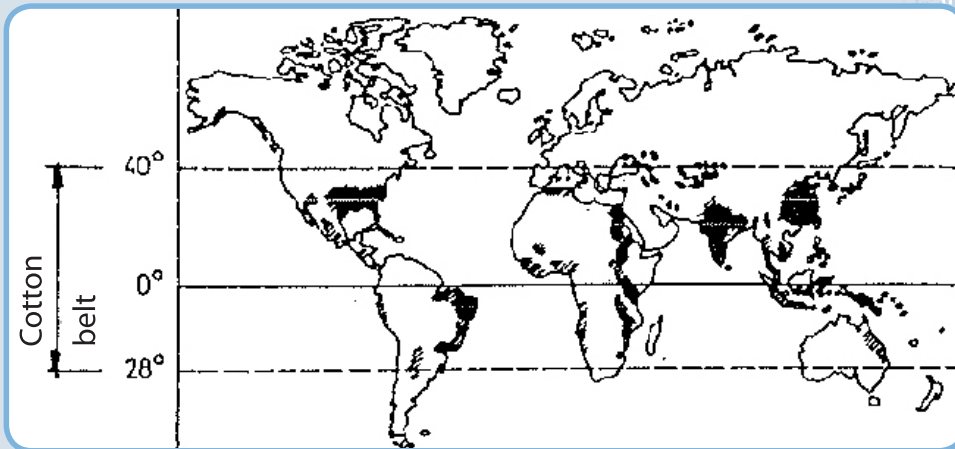
Nowadays cotton plants are grown in all the warm areas of the world. The largest areas of cultivation are located roughly between a latitude of 40 degrees North and 28 degrees South, in the so-called Cotton belt. In terms of countries, the most important cotton producers are China, India, the US, Uzbekistan and Pakistan.

Cotton growing requires a warm climate, a deep layer of clay soils, sufficient moisture in the growing season (the first 3-4 months of the entire growing season, which lasts 4-6 months) on one hand, and a dry sunny period at the time of ripening on the other. The growth and quality of the final product – fibre – is affected by all the above mentioned factors, hence the producers try to bring about conditions as controlled as possible. For conventional agriculture, this leads to many inconsistent procedures:





### Cotton Belt



## Artificial Irrigation

In areas with insufficient rainfall such as Sudan, Senegal, and Uzbekistan, or where a cotton-grower with the necessary financial resources desires to increase the crop, artificial irrigation is used. This means, though, that the water required for cultivation (up to 30m<sup>3</sup> per 1kg of raw cotton<sup>2</sup>) is drawn from another area and afterwards cannot be used in other ways. Technical incompetence causes loss of water in distribution networks (in some cases less than 40% of the water drawn away for irrigation reaches the field), salinization of soil, and desertification – desert enlargement. The best-known and the most dramatic example of the impact of intensive cotton-growing is the shrinkage of the Aral Sea (Uzbekistan).



In 1954 the USSR started a monstrous project of desert irrigation in order to grow cotton. The rivers Amu Darya and Syr Darya, which had fed the Aral Sea between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for thousands of years, were diverted into a system of irrigation canals. The result is an environmental catastrophe of an unexpected scale:

- the Uzbekistan cotton fields require 20km<sup>3</sup> of water a year
- only 15% of the original area of the lake remains today, and it is divided into three parts
- since 1960 the water salinity has increased from 10 to 67g/l
- 24 original fish species died out
- 70% of the Kara kalpaks (the local ethnic group) are unemployed
- the north wind picks up and carries away dust full of salts and pesticide residues, and spreads it over the surrounding area
- the area is exposed to 43 mil tons of dust a year
- researchers have shown that pesticides are present in water, food and breast milk
- 90% of the inhabitants suffer from anaemia, with cancer rates increasing constantly
- lung disease is the cause of death in 50% of cases<sup>4</sup>

Cotton is a product of the cotton-plant. Cotton-plants (*Gossypium*) are tropical and subtropical plants of the mallow family (Malvaceae). Hibiscus is another example of a plant belonging to the same family. They grow as plants, bushes or trees and they can be both annual and perennial.

Out of approximately 35 cotton-plant species only 4 were ever used as arable crops, and nowadays just 2 are grown.

The most frequently grown species (90% of world production) is hirsute cotton (*Gossypium hirsutum*). Its origin is probably in Mexico. Its fibres are white, brownish or greenish. Apart from the long fibres used in textile industry there are also the so-called linter, stronger, shorter and unspinnable fibres with their colour ranging from white to brown, growing from the plant's seeds. Linter is used as a source of cellulose.

The second most cultivated species is Barbados cotton (*Gossypium barbadense*) with its origin probably in South America and the Antilles Islands. At present, it is grown especially in the wet and warm areas of Egypt, Sudan and Brazil. The fibres are a rather creamy, sometimes brown colour. This species does not have linter.

Due to artificial irrigation of cotton, soil becomes salty, deserts expand, and water courses dry out. The best-known and most dramatic example is the desiccation of the Aral Sea.



Conventional cotton cultivation uses various chemicals – artificial fertilizers, defoliants, desiccants, and large quantities of pesticides.

Cotton fields account for more than 10% of world pesticide consumption.

Annan is a typical example of an Indian cotton-grower. He cannot read or write, but in the local shop he can still get any amount of virtually any aggressive pesticide to protect his crop from unwelcome pests. Annan is not able to read the label on the plastic container of the chemical he just bought. He does not understand the warning signs referring to the level of toxicity. Having applied the chemicals (which he sprays on his tiny field using a homemade duster - working barefoot and wearing rags - every day and after every rainstorm), he quickly rinses them off in a bit of pump water, which is precious and necessary for irrigating the cotton plants. Annan has no idea that the insecticide Monocrown does not wash off with water. The carcinogenic agent penetrates the skin and causes irreversible harm to his health.

*An extract from German director Inge Altemeier's documentary 100% cotton: Made in India*



**Pesticide sprayed over the fields by a crop-duster does not affect only the field, but also the surrounding workers' gardens.**

In 1997 Danish TV presented a documentary showing cotton fields in Guatemala and Nicaragua being sprayed with methyl parathion at a time when children were playing there. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency's regulations, access to fields which have been treated in such a way is in fact prohibited for 48 hours following the pesticide application.<sup>11</sup>

Another method is the use of chemicals. The fertility of the soil, which is often exhausted due to year-on-year monoculture, is enhanced using artificial fertilizers. So-called defoliants – chemicals that remove leaves – are used to accelerate ripening and to simplify the harvest. Other chemicals used are the so-called desiccants, which cause dehydration of tissue and consequently accelerate the opening of the ripening cotton capsules. However, what makes cotton the most (in)famous is the large quantity of pesticides employed in its cultivation.

## Pesticides

The American branch of Pesticide Action Network states<sup>5</sup> that the 4% of world agricultural lands occupied by cotton absorb more than 10% of the world's pesticide<sup>6</sup>, and 25% of the world's insecticide<sup>7</sup>. The fact is that many of these chemicals are highly toxic: for example, aldicarb, commonly used for pest control, is classified by the WHO (World Health Organization) as extremely dangerous<sup>8</sup>; a broad spectrum of insecticides are organophosphates, i.e. chemicals originally developed as nerve agents for the purposes of WW I.<sup>9</sup>

Essentially, all pesticides are dangerous. They are substances actually made to kill, repel or stop living organisms from growing and they do so by violating processes vital for life. Unfortunately, their impact is not always limited to the species they were originally developed to destroy. This is illustrated by some of the consequences of using pesticides.<sup>10</sup>

Symptoms of **Acute poisoning** are headaches, excessive sweating, eye burning, rash, sickness, dizziness, convulsions, trembling, blackout, loss of perception etc. It also might lead to death.

**Chronic poisoning** does not come right after working with pesticides; the symptoms usually appear after a couple of months or even years. The long-term, gradual accumulation of poison in small doses causes memory and concentration failure, serious depressions, confusion, speech impediments, delayed reactions, nightmares, drowsiness etc. Young people exposed to pesticides experience learning and behaviour disorders, reproductive disorders, and infertility. Insufficient immunity, DNA mutations, and growing cancer rates are also serious problems.

**Indirect poisoning** is also a hazard for those who do not work with pesticides directly. In many cases it is the cotton-growers' relatives (children) who show symptoms of indirect poisoning. That is mainly due to inappropriate storage of the contaminated clothes, containers and the toxic chemicals themselves. Pesticides found in blood of other people are further results of the contamination of water and accessible food.



**The Environmental Justice Foundation states that:**

- 99% of the deaths caused by pesticide poisoning occur in developing countries
- 88% of 52 cotton-growers investigated said they never used any kind of protection when working with pesticides
- A PAN UK (Pesticide Action Network) study showed that in 86% of Western African households investigated, the valuable pesticides were stored in bedrooms.
- In a Benin province, at least 37 people died of endosulfan poisoning within one season
- Endosulfan is the second most frequently used pesticide in the cotton-growing industry. 3000 tons are applied annually just in India.<sup>12</sup>

According to the World Health Organization estimates, 500 000 to 2 mil people are poisoned every year, and of these, 40 000 people die because of poisoning. Cotton is to blame for a quarter of all the cases.<sup>13</sup>

The cotton growers in developing countries - 99% of all the cotton growers in the world - are particularly at risk<sup>14</sup>. As they are often illiterate they are not able to read the user instructions or warnings on the labels. Even if they do read them, the required protective equipment is not usable in the local hot and moist climate. What is more, it is not available there. Quite often, there is not even enough clean water for washing. When eventual damage to health appears, another disadvantage of developing countries strikes –health services are far way and too expensive.

The higher risk in Third World countries is also evidenced by the fact that local legal measures on the environment and human health protection are not as strict as regulations in developed countries; this enables producers to sell products containing substances banned by European and American legislation. The sad truth is that the producers are usually multinational corporations (e.g. Bayer, Novartis...), well-informed about the impact of the ingredients used in the products<sup>15</sup>.



Paradoxically, even large amounts of a pesticide do not perform the task for which these sacrifices are made. The targeted pest soon becomes resistant to the poison, and the grower gets in a vicious circle. He spends more financial resources (e.g. in Benin, from 1999 to 2000 the sum of money spent on

pesticides increased by 86%, which in 2001 was 2000 CZK per hectare per year on average<sup>17</sup>) and intensifies the frequency of spraying – 18 to 30 sprayings on average per year<sup>18</sup>, hoping he can maintain the rate of production. Nevertheless, the grower is forced to replace the toxic chemical with another even more toxic, to which the pest gradually gains immunity again.

At least half a million people are poisoned by pesticides annually. Cotton production accounts for a fourth of this number.

**In particular, cotton-growers in developing countries are at risk because:**

- their government legislation enables chemicals banned in other countries to be used
- the workers cannot read the instructions
- there is no protective equipment available for the workers
- healthcare is inaccessible to the workers

“An 8-year-old boy was helping his parents to weed cotton. Since he was thirsty, he ran back home. On his way he found an empty bottle. He filled it with water from a ditch. Unfortunately, he never got back home. Villagers found his dead body next to an empty endosulfan bottle.”<sup>16</sup>

Spraying is not a solution to the problem, because the pest become resistant. The growers thus increase the amount, frequency and toxicity of the spraying. This way, not only do their expenses grow, but also the risks to their health.





GM cotton endangers local ecosystems with irreversible contamination, and is harmful to small growers.

There are children working in the cotton fields in many regions of Africa and India. They do physically demanding and dangerous work which irretrievably damages their health.

## GM Cotton

Genetic manipulation is one of the methods used to try to decrease the amount of pesticide applied to cotton plants. It results, for example, in the plant producing an insecticide itself.

The best-known Bt-cotton put on the market by the Monsanto Company is, for the time being, grown mainly in the USA (30% of all cotton<sup>19</sup>), China, India and Australia. Up to now however, the experiments with genetically modified cotton have had quite controversial results. In 2001, in Australia and in Andhra Pradesh in South India, the genetic protection of the cotton failed after two years. The pest was able to attack the plants, and tens of thousands growers thus lost their crop and profit. Many of the affected farmers got into serious debts, and were forced to sell their land and leave, like beggars, for suburban slums. Several thousand peasant farmers found the only way out – suicide. Among other arguments adduced by opponents of genetically modified crops are: 1) as with other plants, the impossibility of predicting the influence of GM cotton other cotton species, 2) the threat of uncontrollable spread and 3) its very limited environmental and economical benefit.<sup>20, 21</sup>



## Child Labour

The exploitation of child labour in cotton-growing is widespread. From West Africa to Egypt, India to Turkmenistan, children carry on various tasks connected to cotton production – they weed, harvest ripe cotton bolls, and spray the pesticides. Clearly, the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (ILO Convention No. 182) is being violated here, as the work on cotton fields is often strenuous, and children are exposed to danger through direct contact with machinery and toxic chemicals.

- In five countries in central Asia, children from the age of 7 are forced to help with the cotton harvest.
- In 2004, children harvested almost 40% of the cotton in Tajikistan.
- In Uzbekistan, schools close down at the time of the cotton harvest, and children have to meet quotas given by the government. The labour is done for extremely low wages, often for free, while considerably high profit from harvest sales goes to the government.
- If the children fail to collect the required quantity, they are threatened with lower marks or beaten.
- One of the jobs children do in Uzbekistan is spraying pesticide using perforated PET bottles.
- In Benin, cotton production is supported by bringing children from Burkina Faso.
- An Egyptian report estimates that in 2001 approximately 1 million children worked in the cotton fields in the area.
- In the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, 240 000 children are employed in cotton production.<sup>22</sup>





## From the Plant to Jeans

If the cotton plant gets everything it needs during the growing season, its fruit – **bolts** – ripen and burst open upon maturity, revealing the so far hidden seeds and fluffs of white/creamy and downy fibres surrounding the seeds. These **fibres are the basic material for textile production**.

The first step on the way from the plant to jeans is picking the cotton fluffs, or collecting the entire bolts, called snapping.<sup>23</sup> In some states this work is done almost entirely by hand (e.g. Bolivia, Benin, Tanzania, Egypt), while elsewhere machines are used<sup>24</sup> (USA, Israel, Australia, Greece).<sup>25</sup> There are several advantages to manual harvesting: it is easier to send a flexible number of people than to set out a machine, thus it is not a problem to collect the gradually ripening bolts in up to four stages. **Moreover, manual harvesting ensures higher yield per hectare and better quality cotton as it contains fewer impurities such as the capsules or leaf chips. Last but not least, it employs a large number of people. Yet there is a big disadvantage: low productivity.** While a person collects about 25 kg of cotton in one afternoon, the machine's capacity in one day is 1000 times higher.<sup>26</sup> In order to be able to compete against cotton harvested by expensive machines, poorer countries try to save on wages. They employ children without protective equipment and in strenuous working conditions under the direct sun.

The harvested cotton still contains seeds which have to be removed prior to further processing. The ways of separating seeds are based on the fact that the strength of the connection between a fibre and a seed is only about 25-50% of the average fibre strength. Till the gin was invented this was one of the most laborious parts of the cotton manufacturing. The workers (slaves) who managed to separate the seeds from 0.5-1 kg of cotton per day<sup>27</sup> have been - in most cases - replaced by machines.<sup>28</sup>

After ginning, cotton is cleaned and combed so that the fibres become parallel. Cleaning involves removing dirt, leaves and branches bits and short fibres. With cleaning, the weight of ginned cotton drops by 50-75%.<sup>29</sup> After this treatment, the cotton fibre is prepared for spinning.

Spinning, just like the follow-up procedures, usually takes place somewhere else, often in a different country on a different continent. For this reason clean cotton is moulded in prismatic bales, packed to jute or cotton fabrics, chemically treated against mould<sup>30</sup> and transported to exchanges taking place in harbour cities by companies which purchase the cotton.

Spinning is again done manually or mechanically, depending on the conditions in a particular area. In order to lower the friction in high-speed machine spinning, the fibres are treated with various mineral (petroleum-based) oils.

Mature capsules

Harvest (manual or mechanical)

Seed separation (ginning)

Cleaning

Spinning





Weaving or knitting



Twisting cotton fibres together creates yarn, the starting material for knitting and weaving.

The fabric for jumpers, sweatshirts and T-shirts is knitted on special knitting machines. Cloth for shirts, trousers, various dress materials, jackets, denim and similar materials is woven. Hand weaving is still common in some areas – there are some 17 million people working with hand-weaving looms in India.<sup>31</sup> Again, in economically more advanced areas, people are being replaced by more productive machines. **For easier**

**manufacturing, the fabrics made on knitting and weaving machines are impregnated with starch-based solutions containing cellulose, polyacrylates, etc.**

**These are later washed out and drained away together with waste water – usually directly into the surrounding environment in developing countries.**

Bleaching and dyeing



There is a similar problem connected with bleaching and dyeing, i.e. with procedures almost any fabric undergoes at some stage of manufacturing (yarn is dyed as well as finished materials). **Waste water takes away bleaching bath components containing chlorine and the residues of the dyeing process, because up to 20% of the colours actually do not adhere to the fibres.**<sup>32</sup> This occurs even though the cotton fabric or yarn is, in addition to hazardous bleaching, also treated by mercerization - or soaking - in a solution of caustic sodium hydroxide.

Dyes are of natural origin (more than 300 dyeing plants are known in India, and up to now people have often made use of these traditional methods<sup>33</sup>) or of chemical origin. However, there is usually only one way of dyeing in developing countries – a worker is standing next to or inside the dyeing bin, and with a stick or his hand rinses the fabric, takes it out of the bath and hangs it up to dry. Needless to say, the manipulation of the bulky, water-soaked fabric is not easy. **What the workers find more difficult, though, are skin irritations – burning, itching, various moulds – and respiratory problems.** The cause is obvious: they spend all day in a caustic bleaching bath reaching up to their knees and elbows and releasing chlorine, and they pick the colour sediment with their bare hands etc. The Danish documentary „Killer Bargain“ featured at the One World film festival in 2007 clearly shows that in these countries, protective equipment is used only exceptionally, even when carrying out such hazardous operations.<sup>34</sup>

How fabric is treated

**Prior to becoming a piece of clothing, the fabric usually goes through a number of other treatments: properties of the fabric such as creasing, susceptibility to static electricity etc. are modified**



Cutting, sewing, ironing...

by other chemicals, and the outer side is embroidered or has a fashionable pattern printed on it...

If the fabric characteristics match the initial requirements, there is only one more thing to do - make a garment. To cut, sew, and iron.

**Compared to the above mentioned operations, these tasks seem simple. This is probably only because somebody else is doing them for most of us. And what is more, we do not see in what conditions.**

## Strategy of the Globalized Clothing Industry

3 Phases in the industrial garment production:

**Pre-manufacture prep stage** – this stage includes all steps leading to a garment design. The design of a future product is developed on the basis of a thorough market analysis and ongoing fashion trend monitoring. An important role is played by demand on the part of retail chains, or more precisely customers, although their taste is considerably shaped by fashion trends and retail supply.

The pre-manufacture prep stage takes on different forms in different clothing companies. Taking pride in originality, the most prestigious ones pamper their own design artists; others employ designers who find inspiration at fashion shows, and it is not unusual for a clothing company to simply buy a product design from an independent designer.

**The production stage itself** – includes all procedures starting with cutting the fabric, through to sewing its constituent parts together, sewing in zips, completing the garment with buttons, decorations and labels to the final pressing and packaging of the finished product.

**Follow-up marketing** uses all possible methods to reach one objective – sale. We can perceive how marketing and advertisement make a customer long for a product; advertising slogans linking the product to a certain feeling or atmosphere; company presentations at suitable cultural events; contests, etc. A “brand,” as a symbol of this phase of production, is probably the one most often used in the clothing industry, and the easiest to recall.



“Our strategy for North America lies in an intensive orientation to brand management, marketing and product design as the means of satisfying our customers’ requests concerning casual clothing. Transferring a significant part of our production from the USA market to business partners all over the world will enable us to be more flexible in resource and fund allocation for brands. These steps are necessary if we want to remain competitive.”

*John Ermatinger, chief executive officer of the Levi Strauss Americas division, 1996<sup>35</sup>*

### MADE IN ...

According to the law we should be able to find the name, size, full name of the material and care instructions on each garment’s label. As for the origin, it is obligatory to indicate the producer or importer. However, there are no regulations regarding the “producer’s” actual share in the manufacturing (which is clear in the importer’s case). Thus, we might never learn what conditions the garment was made in.

The same is true about the country of origin. The well-known “made in” is optional in European countries, and even in the states where it is obligatory (USA, China, Japan), there are no unified regulations. Each country has its own conditions regarding its use.

Therefore, more and more often “made for” replaces “made in”, which only illustrates what is emphasized in the globalized clothing industry – the brand is important and the origin should not be noticed.





While the preparatory phase and follow-up marketing remains the sole responsibility of the companies, production itself is more and more often submitted to one or several subcontractors. Designers, marketing specialists and advertising departments are based in the same country as the company management – usually in one of the rich countries of the global North – and the company spends large sums from its budget on their highly valued work. On the other hand, individual producers from the sometimes lengthly chain of subcontractors are usually based in the countries where it is possible to reduce the rest of the expenses (i.e. production costs) to a minimum. There is an apt label for this kind of practice, commonly used by the clothing companies („brands“) – **„producers without factories“**.<sup>36</sup>

### A pair of jeans and their journey

- In 2001 two correspondents of The Guardian tried to track the place of origin of one pair of jeans, specifically a pair of Lee Cooper LC10, which were sold at discount for less than £20 at the time.
- The jeans were delivered to the shop in Ipswich from a store in the north of London. They had reached London from a similar store in Amiens (France), to which they had been transported by ship and train from Tunis – more precisely from Ras Jebel, a town of approximately 3000 inhabitants and three factories. Every day, in each of these factories, over 500 people manufacture garments for the Lee Cooper brand.
- Compared to the fabric and raw materials used in the jeans, this hot, noisy place called Ras Jebel is actually not so far from the shop in Ipswich.
- Denim – the fabric the jeans are made of comes from Italy, where it undergoes dyeing and other procedures. The synthetic indigo, which imparts to the denim its typical blue, was in this case produced 505 km to the North, in Frankfurt, Germany. As a matter of interest: the pumice stone they use in Ras Jebel to scrub the blue out, giving the trousers the look of a worn-out pair, comes from Turkey.
- There are several sources of cotton for the denim. The Italian producer imports most of its denim from Benin in western Africa. Obviously, jeans do not consist solely of denim. The fabric for the pockets was delivered to Tunis from Korea, after being treated in Pakistan.
- Assorted polyester threads were supplied from Northern Ireland, Hungary and Turkey while dyeing took place in Spain. The petroleum needed to produce polyester was provided by a Japanese company, and the teeth for zips were produced in France. The German Prym Company obtains copper and zinc for the buttons and rivets from deposits in Australia and Namibia.
- We could go on about the logo labels and tags with the care instructions. The jeans bought in Ipswich have already travelled the world at least once anyway.
- The authors of the article state that in tracking this one particular pair of jeans, they counted at least 64,000 km. They also add that along every kilometre of the journey, this garment, valued at less than £20, was treated by people who rarely had the same attitude towards the Lee Cooper brand as the people in the advertising campaigns.
- Although not all jeans are Lee Coopers, and of course not all of them ‘wander’ the same way, it is highly probable that the jeans in our wardrobes have also travelled a similar distance.<sup>37</sup>
- Haffmans presents another case study. ‘Her’ pair of jeans, also bought in Great Britain, arrived from Bulgaria. The fabric the Bulgarian seamstresses used was printed in China, dyed in France, and woven in Taiwan. The fibres for weaving were spun in Turkey from cotton grown in Kazakhstan. The study did not take into account the zips, rivets or labels. Regardless, the jeans travelled at least 19,000 km.

Selling clothes without being a factory owner is advantageous to big clothing companies for several reasons. The subcontractors become responsible for the order and its timely completion, including the quality of workmanship. The subcontractors are the ones who have to find enough workers, pay them, and fire them if necessary when there is a lack of work – the production facilities are the links in the chain where any economic instability becomes evident.

In other words, together with the work ordered, the subcontractors also take on all the associated risks. They themselves are then exposed to another risk, probably the most worrying from their point of view: unless they meet the client’s often very strict requirements on time, they are deprived of profit and perhaps of future orders as well.





## Why run the risks?

Why are people from the so-called global South willing to do this poorly-paid work? The rural areas of developing countries are more and more affected by the 'rich North' lifestyle. Fields are quickly being turned to industrial zones, resorts, golf courses in extreme cases. Having lost their jobs in agriculture, people set off to try their luck, i.e. earn a salary, in the cities. Although the majority of the people leaving for the cities are young people, usually women, their generally low level of education does not enable them to apply for anything other than unskilled jobs. And this is the kind of work offered by the clothing industry.

The subcontractors in the world's poor countries approve of this system, as poorly-paid work in the clothing industry is their only option.

## Race to the bottom

Looking at the enormous and continuously changing stocks of clothing in shops in rich countries, it might appear that the clothing industry is, as far as unskilled labour is concerned, insatiable. Nevertheless, even the market for unskilled labour is highly competitive.

To understand the situation, it is necessary to consider not only the generally low level of education and its inaccessibility to most people, but also the large increase in population and the oppressive poverty of many 'global South' countries. Such conditions make **the unqualified job applicants compete for employment. As they are not armed with any exceptional knowledge or skill, the only thing they can use as a competitive advantage is the willingness to give up their entitlements and rights.** In other words: they are willing to work in hazardous, shocking conditions. Once they are employed, the fear of being replaced by someone waiting in the long queue prevents them from complaining, even if the working conditions strongly violate their rights.

Even since the MFA (see the box below) was cancelled, the textile and clothing market cannot be referred to as a 'free market'. In 1999 53% of cotton growers were supported by direct subsidies; from 1998 to 2002 the USA spent 14.8 billion dollars on these subsidies.

The lion's share of the subsidies goes to big agricultural concerns, which then sell their cotton below cost and decrease the value of this commodity on the world markets in general. They themselves still make profits, since they sell large amounts, while the African and Indian growers are deprived of their profits.

Although the USA has committed to cancelling subsidies by 2013, OXFAM, a non-governmental organization, estimates that cotton-growers from Mali, Chad, Benin, and Burkina Faso will lose more than 1.5 mil dollars in the meantime.<sup>38</sup>

Race to the bottom: in the effort to attract foreign investments, poor countries compete with each other by offering tax breaks, weakening labour and environmental legislation, etc.

### The Multi Fiber Arrangement (MFA)

The international trade in textiles and clothes is the only industry which was until recently subject to the international import quota system. The purpose of the MFA was to protect European and American producers against competition from countries with fast-developing clothing industries. A limit setting the maximum volume of exports to the developed countries' markets was allotted to every significant producer from the group of developing countries. This quota system fundamentally changed the layout of the world clothing industry. Having reached the limit in one country, the only option for clothing companies was to move production somewhere else. Consequently, the industry grew even in the most underdeveloped regions of the world, such as Bangladesh or the Philippines – states which would otherwise have remain unnoticed by clothing companies.

Although originally the MFA was designed to apply only for 5 years, this period was prolonged several times. Not until 1995 did members of the World Trade Organization agree to a gradual elimination of the quotas, leading to their total abolishment in 2005.

It is still too soon to evaluate the results of such deregulation; however, experts have already expressed their concerns regarding its effects in those poor countries which had become dependent on clothing exports. In a free market environment, they will not be able to compete with e.g. China or India, which apart from a large and cheap labour force, have sufficient infrastructure at their disposal.<sup>39</sup>



### If T-shirts could only speak...

British journalist and activist Anita Roddick went to Bangladesh to bring back stories of women sewing clothes for the European and American markets. The interviews were published in *The Ecologist*.

- Women sewing garments for one of the best-known entertainment companies in the world are forced to work from 8.00 am to 10.00 pm – fifteen hours a day, seven days a week, for just 20 cents an hour. They were allowed one day off in the previous four months. They are cheated of their overtime pay, and are always paid two or three weeks late.
- Workers sewing clothes for one of the largest sports retailers in the world, a European company, worked from 8.00 am to 10.00 pm, seven days a week. Before important export shipments, they were kept straight through from 8.00 to 3.00 am the next day. Then they slept on the factory floor, curled up next to their sewing machines. A bell would ring at 7.00 so that they could get ready for their next shift. They were paid 10 cents an hour. The workers reported being slapped and beaten for not reaching their production target.
- The workers went on strike demanding one day off a week, an end to all physical abuse and payment of at least the minimum wage. The striking workers blocked a trailer truck trying to leave the factory. All the striking workers were sacked. The owner called in the police, who attacked the workers with clubs, beating men and women. At least six people died, and forty-nine were hospitalised.
- Women who sew some of the best-known labels in Europe and the United States repeatedly said that they needed permission – a ‘gate-pass’ – in order to use the bathroom, twice a day at the most.
- One workers’ housing complex was actually built on bamboo stilts over a stagnant, polluted lake. The floors and ceilings were rough wooden planks. There were no windows in the tiny rooms and there was very little light. In the summer the rooms heat up like ovens and the place is noisy at all hours of the day and night. The complex is home to 2,000 people.<sup>41</sup>

As the global economic setting allows international corporations, in whose hands most of the garment business is concentrated, to change their place of work quite easily, **countries themselves resort to this strategy. Aiming to attract foreign investments, they vie with each other by offering tax breaks, weakening labour and environmental legislation, and building infrastructure or industrial zones etc. at their own expenses.**<sup>40</sup> In professional literature, the above-mentioned processes are referred to as the ‘race to the bottom’ – a strategy aiming to minimize the production costs, but resulting in alarming working conditions not only in the garment industry.

## Working Conditions in the Clothing Industry

In most industrial sectors, production costs are lowered by replacing human labour with machines. The garment industry is unique in this respect, as it involves operations where fine and precise human manual work is indispensable (sewing parts together, sewing in zips, pressing etc.). Actually, almost any kind of garment production process can be divided into such simple, relatively independent operations.

The already mentioned system of sub-suppliers, so typical for the clothing industry, is built to these specifications. The basis is always a relationship between a clothing company – the submitter, and a subcontractor – the maker of the garments or their parts.

**Both sides enter into a contract – that is why this special ‘submitter – maker’ relationship is sometimes referred to as a subcontract, or as a multi-level subcontract if the subcontractor orders some of the operations from other entities as well.**

A subcontract or a multi-level subcontract can take on various forms. Here are three variations that are usually mentioned:

### Free trade zones

Free trade zones are one of the so-called Export processing zones (EPZs). UNIDO (the United Nations Industrial Development Organization) defines a free trade zone as ‘**a relatively small, clearly specified area within one state; its purpose is to attract export-oriented industrial sectors by guaranteeing advantageous terms for investment and trade compared to the rest of the host country. Most importantly, free trade zones provide the advantage of duty-free import of the material to be processed**’. It means that both domestic and foreign companies can import the raw materials without paying tax on it, process the materials using cheap labour, and then re-export the final products or semi-products. Apart from investment incentives in the form of customs and tax breaks, companies might profit from the transportation, storing, handling and other infrastructures, or from the presence of the necessary suppliers.



In some countries companies profit from exceptions to labour and environment legislation – free trade zones are notorious for non-observance of environmental regulations, very low labour-law standards, low wages, limits or outright prohibitions on trade union activities<sup>42</sup> etc.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, export processing zones are more and more frequently private property, which enhances their character of being a state within a state, surrounded by a high wall, out of the public eye.<sup>44</sup>

Compared to other manufacturing sectors, the clothing industry does not require much initial capital or special technical equipment – it is an ideal sector for free trade zones in developing countries, and therefore has a large presence in them. In particular, it is common in EPZs in the countries where there is a huge unqualified labour force available instead of capital. This is also the case in regions where the development of the textile industry was stimulated by the system of import quotas, in force until just recently, called the Multi Fibre Arrangement (see the box). Garment production is concentrated in the free trade zones, for example, in Bangladesh, the Philippines and China, but EPZs exist in at least 86 countries and their number is constantly growing.<sup>45</sup> They are common in the countries of Middle America – Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico. That is where the much-used name for factories located in the free trade zones comes from. The name, in the activists' language, is a synonym for unsuitable working conditions and exploitation: **maquiladoras** or **maquilas** (generated from *maquillar*, connected with mill production).<sup>46, 47</sup>

### The migrating swallows

Free trade zones are set up by governments with the aim of attracting foreign investment, boosting economic development and creating job opportunities. However, there are some catches to the present system of global trade. Although the manufacturing zones, often blessed with several years of tax breaks and exempted from some regulations, usually attract the investors, due to the competition with other countries' offers they rarely manage to keep the investors behind their high walls long enough for the countries to start seeing the benefits of this investment. The factories of individual producers migrate, like swallows, to the places which are most favourable for them.

The promise of job opportunities is related to this, too. The factories in free trade zones provide a huge number of jobs – in 2000 over 20 mil people worked in EPZs in China alone, over 1 mil in Mexico<sup>48</sup>. However, apart from the fact that the jobs in question are monotonous, require no skills, and offer no possibility of promotion, they are also extremely unstable. An investor is actually interested only in two things: the speed of at which orders are filled, and the quality of the manufacturing.<sup>49</sup> Thus a promise from a different producer - in a different town, different country or maybe on a different continent - to do the same work at comparable quality, meeting the same deadline, but at the same time cheaper, is enough for the submitter to move the 'production' there without any hesitation. Normally nobody is interested in how many employees will carry out the cheaper production, or at what wages. Nor is anybody asking about the fate of thousands of employees, unexpectedly fired from a factory which is not needed anymore. Their misfortune remains the silently overlooked price for the almost unbelievable flexibility of the global trade.

Nevertheless, it should be obvious that where people's income hardly covers their cost of living and the government does not obtain its share of tax revenues, one cannot expect economic or social development.







## Sweatshops

A Sweatshop is a **smaller, informal factory employing unskilled workers in inappropriate conditions, immigrants, members of ethnic minorities, socially deprived women and other social groups with few opportunities in the job market.** Existence of these factories was reported not only in many countries of Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey),<sup>50</sup> but also in some of the countries with the strictest labour legislation in the world: the Netherlands, France, Belgium or the USA.<sup>51</sup>

### El Monte: Thai immigrants' nightmare

On August 2, 1995 a sweatshop was discovered in El Monte, California. 72 Thai immigrants were sewing garments there for renowned American clothing companies. The public was appalled by the slave-like conditions some of the immigrants had been working in for 17 years. The employees worked for 18 hours a day, supervised by armed guards. They slept in groups of 8 to 10 in double rooms, with rats running around them. The complex was surrounded by barbed wire. Unmonitored phone-calls and uncensored letters were forbidden. Even shopping had to be done within the complex – food and other necessary things were sold there at prices about 4 or 5 times more expensive than in a shop.

They had left rural Thailand for the promise of a good job, income to feed their families. They had probably paid a lot of money to smugglers to get there, and still paid high 'rent' for a place to sleep, just like with other sweatshops. Now they were living in their dream country illegally and in dark garages. Under constant harassment they were sewing garments for well-known chains' customers, just in order to be able to – at best – earn money for the journey home.

When their story was revealed, it attracted the public's attention and inspired the formation of several activists' groups, fighting for the rights of sweatshop workers<sup>53</sup> However, as shown in a report from 2003 about uncovering Brazilian sweatshops producing for the C&A<sup>54</sup> chain, there are still an unimaginable number of people, and not just Asians, suffering a similar fate..

Some sweatshops copy the clothes of popular brands, while others focus on fast production of a smaller amount of the latest fashion pieces, often destined for higher levels of the supply chain. The quality of manufacturing sometimes surpasses the legally run workshops, but this difference goes hand in hand with a much bigger difference in the approach to employees. Low wages, extremely long hours and forced overtime - also common in the free trade zones - affect the workers even more, since

their job or their presence in the country is illegal. Working illegally, they have nowhere to demand their rights – e.g. for the minimum wage or fixed working hours. Being illegal immigrants, they get into a situation close to slavery or imprisonment. It is quite common for the employer to collect workers' travel documents, or to lodge them in an environment detrimental to their health, like cellars etc. Police have also recorded beatings and even murders of workers who tried to escape. Considering these facts, it is no wonder that with regard to sweatshops, the ILO speaks of forced labour.<sup>52</sup>

### Working conditions in the clothing industry:

- The clothing industry is based on the system of sub-supplies; a subcontract is a contract between a submitter and a supplier who performs a precisely specified operation; the subcontractor assumes the risks as well as the responsibility
- the submitter opts for a subcontractor according to the production costs of a particular operation within a particular area
- the subcontract takes on three forms, considerably affecting the working conditions of the workers:
  - export production zones (EZPs) and maquilas
  - sweatshops
  - home-based work

## Home-based work

According to the ILO, home-based work is work done for a wage-based reward to fill a clearly stated order at a place the worker chooses him- or herself. Regarding the clothing industry it is usually industrial, home-based work. Its most typical characteristic is a simple task setting. Together with the task, the worker usually obtains all the materials needed for the completion of the order.<sup>55</sup>

**Home-based work usually represents the last part of the suppliers' chain. It is typical for the countries of southern and south-western Asia,** e.g. in Bangladesh in 1993 at least 80 000 people were sewing



### Made by women

Despite the fact that there are over 30 mil people of both sexes employed in the textile industry, alarming working conditions are unenviable privilege of women. Women, usually aged between 18 and 20, form 80% of the industry workforce<sup>56</sup> (up to 95% in Eastern Europe<sup>57</sup>). While the executive and supervising positions are occupied by men, the worst-valued (both metaphorically and literally) work is left to women. Deeply-rooted social stereotypes about the leading position of men and also about the value of women's work are still clearly apparent here: sewing is considered a natural women's ability which does not require any special effort or qualification, and it is paid accordingly. Women are denied the possibility to receive higher qualifications. If they still manage to become qualified, their salary remains 20-30% lower than that of men doing the same work.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, women are discriminated against in other ways, unlike men:

- Women battle a critical lack of toilets: at some places they stay open only for a very short time, within which 45 women have to take turns to use them; in another factory only 1 toilet is available for men and 1 for women, while 920 people work there. That is why Indonesian women have to wear dark clothes at the time of their menstrual period.
- The supervisors shout at them and sexually harass them.
- When leaving a factory, African women are searched for stolen things. Any check which involves taking off underwear is carried out by women, but not necessarily out of the sight of men.<sup>59</sup>
- Women forced to work till late at night face the danger of rape on their way home.
- A woman applying for a job is asked about her marital status, or if she has or plans to have children, and whether she uses contraceptives. She is sometimes forced to buy a pregnancy test and if she refuses or is pregnant she will not be accepted.
- In some factories women have to show their bloodstained sanitary pads every month to prove they are not pregnant.
- Pregnant women perform operations just as difficult as others, and at some places they are assigned even more demanding tasks – they have to stand instead of sitting, they are transferred to warmer rooms to iron, for example, etc. The aim is to make them leave or suffer a miscarriage so that the employer saves on the maternity leave.

In such conditions women suffer both physically - from malnutrition, exhaustion, pain and overwork - and mentally: from humiliation, separation from family or their children, whom they cannot be bringing up because of the long working hours.

Traditionally, women played the role of caretakers in society – they took care of children, household, community. If they are producing clothes for the rest of the world and the traditional social structure remains unchanged, their working conditions must have an impact on the situation of the whole community.<sup>60</sup>

clothes for export at home.<sup>61</sup> It is becoming popular in other countries too, but the conditions in economically more advanced countries differ considerably from those in the global South.

A worker opts for home-based work, either because of its convenience or the above mentioned flexibility, but he/she might be also be forced into it by external factors. In the situation where a woman has a small child or children, looks after the household etc. and is denied maternity leave or is sacked because of motherhood or age, home-based work is her only possibility. What her colleagues in economically

Although the particular forms of the employee – employer relationship differ in many ways, it is possible to describe working conditions in the globalized clothing industry in several points – more or less applicable in the individual cases:

- **the wages are very low**, often under the level mandated by law and under the level which is necessary to survive in the given country
- **the working day usually lasts 12-14 hours**, and when there is an urgent shipment or an order needs to be finished, they are even longer
- frequent **overtime is required, and paid only partially** or not at all
- **the job contract rarely takes a written form**, so the possibility of demanding rights hardly exists
- **trade union activity is suppressed or forbidden**
- **sanitary conditions at the work place are alarming**: heat, insufficient ventilation, noise, poor light, no evacuation system
- **employers often require too much of employees, thus restricting their freedom**: e.g. they are not allowed to talk at work or to go to the bathroom freely; women are forced to use contraceptives and they have to involuntarily undergo pregnancy tests, etc.
- due to dependence on the world market situation, **the jobs of millions of people are extremely precarious**





### What do we have to do with that?

- Over 23 mil tons of cotton are used every year
- Almost 2/3 of it is manufactured by the textile industry
- The vast majority of the clothing produced in countries in the global South is for export.
- The USA, EU and Japanese markets together consume 74% of world clothing production.<sup>64</sup>
- The average EU resident consumes nearly 20kg of textiles a year, in comparison to an Indian who uses about 2 kg.<sup>65</sup>
- An average Czech spends 4,908 CZK on clothes and footwear per year.<sup>66</sup>

The truth be told, it is actually us – customers – who stand on the far end of an imaginary path from cotton seeds to jeans, for example. With our decisions on how to spend quite a large sum of money (strictly hypothetically: in 50 years, a family of four spends nearly 1 mil CZK on clothes and shoes), we support a certain way of manufacturing clothes and influence the fates of the people and the environment related to it. It is up to us what those fates will be.

### What we can do

- prefer organic cotton or other organic fabrics
- prefer traditional textiles: wool, linen, hemp
- buy Fair Trade
- recycle clothes: wear hand-me-downs, second-hand clothes
- reduce consumption of clothes
- prefer Czech products
- support consumer campaigns – by taking action or otherwise

developed countries consider as flexibility turns into uncertainty from her viewpoint. It is true that a person working at home can more or less decide about working hours, and he or she is not constantly supervised and shouted at. However, he/she also has to take responsibility for all the risks related to his or her work, while nobody is responsible for his/her health care or social security, and nobody can guarantee there will be more work for this person in the future.

As the home-based work is usually done by the poorest of the developing countries' inhabitants, it is not unusual for the working conditions to closely resemble those in big factories. The rooms in these suburban slums are hot and poorly illuminated, and in the overcrowded, cramped rooms the workplace is not separated from the living space. Other members of the household, in particular small children, are exposed to the heat, dust and noise. The wages of household workers are usually lower than those of factory employees. Yet, in the system of task wages, the working hours are frequently longer and when the deadline approaches, all members of the family including children get involved in the work. As these workers usually lack the status of legal employees, they stay out of the purview of institutions or inspections. The social and health aspects of their work are not monitored, and their isolation from other workers prevents them from fighting efficiently for their rights, e.g. with the support of trade unions.<sup>62</sup>

## What we can do

The current conventional way of growing and manufacturing cotton and globalized garment production threaten the environment and people's lives. Although it appears obvious, it is far from being the only way to obtain clothes. Alternatives exist. Some are very old, some came into existence only recently as a reaction to the spread of information on the alarming conditions in the clothing industry in the developing world. Some are more accessible, some less. Even a Czech fashion-mad consumer can choose from a wide range of options:

### Organic cotton

Just like an organic carrot, organic cotton is a product of organic farming, subject to strict regulations embodied in international<sup>63</sup> legislation. Organic differs from conventional farming primarily on that it uses no toxic pesticides, defoliants, or artificial chemical fertilizers. As far as organic cotton is concerned, this means its cultivation, unlike conventional production, does not threaten human health or the environment. Similar, if not better, quality of fibre is achieved by proven traditional procedures: alternation of crops in the fields, natural fertilizers, growing other pest-repellent plant species amidst cotton-plants. Different species – pest-attractive, e.g. sunflowers – are planted around the fields. The pests' natural enemies also become helpful in the fight against them: birds, parasites etc.



Currently, organic cotton is grown in 22 countries and more than 31,000 tons are produced annually. The biggest producers are Turkey, India, China, the USA and Tanzania. It is grown on small farms in Benin and Uganda as well. They benefit not only from protection of their health and the local ecosystem, but also from the lower costs (they save on chemicals), premiums for the organic quality, and free control over their income as the trade with organic cotton occurs outside the corrupted conventional sector.<sup>67</sup>

Nowadays, the range of garments made of organic cotton is nearly as wide as for conventional cotton. However, apart from verification of the organic origin of the raw materials, organic clothing production is not subject to any legislative measures. While there is a unitary label to indicate products made of organic cotton: "100% organic/bio cotton", the labelling of the organic garments – i.e. certification that the whole production process is controlled in a certain way – differs, since it is provided by a larger number of private standards and brands. Nevertheless, in the case of organic clothing, a customer might consider the label 'organic' or 'bio' sufficient.<sup>68,69</sup>

The Czech market for garments in organic materials is still quite limited. Most frequently it is cotton underwear, children's (especially baby) clothes and nappies. Additionally, the assortment of towels and dressing gowns is growing. The bio-textile brands offered in our market are, for example: Boweevil (Holland), Popolini (Austria), Disana (Germany) or bGreen (USA). Currently, the biggest Czech trader and producer of children's organic-cotton clothes probably is the Biobaby Company. Organic-cotton clothing for adults is available in e-shops: [www.ecomamma.cz](http://www.ecomamma.cz), [www.biosfera.cz](http://www.biosfera.cz) and [www.bioobchod.cz](http://www.bioobchod.cz). As for regular shops, organic cotton can most often be found in specialised Fair Trade shops and shops offering healthy food. There are also a growing number of large companies offering organic collections, or clothes with an organic-cotton share (Nike – surprisingly the biggest organic-cotton clothing producer in the world, C&A, H&M, Marks&Spencer and others). Czech shop-assistants do not usually have any information about it but it is worth asking. Not least because the demand usually affects the supply.

It is necessary to add that the 'organic/bio' label does not say anything about the working conditions in the manufacturing process, nor about the impact of long-distance transport and other problems related to globalized clothing production.<sup>70</sup>

## Traditional textiles: wool, linen (flax), hemp

Use of wool, flax and hemp to produce textiles has a long history in Central Europe. However, with the accessibility of cotton, the demand for these materials, and thus their production, dropped considerably. Today there are numerous reasons to return to them again. Their advantages are their utility and the fact that flax and hemp cultivation and sheep breeding are usually not related to the overuse

### Forgotten hemp

Hemp fibres have been used for making fabrics since the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. It has always been valued for its superior strength and durability, and that is why even Levi Strauss chose it to produce his first work trousers – the world-popular jeans. The decline of hemp as one of the most frequently used sources of fibre started when the process for manufacturing cotton was discovered and improved. The definite end of hemp use came with the Marihuana Act, passed in America in 1937.

Nowadays, hemp is regaining its value, this time as an 'ecological plant' with inexhaustible possibilities for use. It is so hardy that no pesticide treatments are necessary, and it is even said to improve the soil quality. The largest volumes of hemp are manufactured in China, Poland and also in Nepal. In the Czech Republic, species containing less than 0.3% of THC substances are allowed to be grown legally. However, hemp for use in the textile industry is not currently being grown here. This is because of insufficient public awareness of it, and the rather high cost of harvesting and manufacturing machinery for it.<sup>71</sup>



of toxic chemicals or to the exploitation of workers in developing countries. Moreover, hemp can be grown in our climate, which reduces the impact of long-distance transportation which damages the environment. Wool production is linked to the positive influence of pasture on our cultural landscape.<sup>72</sup>



## Fair Trade

Fair Trade is an international movement aiming to offer the general public a different concept of commerce, based on solidarity with disadvantaged producers in developing countries, and on fair profit sharing between the producers and traders. Provided that goods are traded in accordance with Fair Trade principles, it is guaranteed that no child or forced labour was used for their production, the workers receive fair wages sufficient to support themselves and their families, and that the growing and manufacturing processes are preferably friendly to people and the environment. Furthermore, Fair Trade seeks a long-term and stable relationship between producers and traders which is as direct as possible. The origin of goods is ensured either by a FAIRTRADE certification label or an organization's membership in WFTO – the World Fair Trade Organization.

The main Fair Trade commodities are the so-called colonial goods: coffee, cocoa and tea, although clothes are increasingly offered by these specialised organizations. The most typical goods are scarves or garments which are traditional in their countries of origin, and which are usually made of locally accessible fabrics – silk, cotton, wool, alpaca etc. What is more, companies importing and distributing fair trade clothes now offer modern patterns and designs. Just recently, the growing demand for clothes manufactured in socially acceptable conditions led to the creation of standards for the Fair Trade cotton certification itself. It could contribute to broadening the range of fair-cotton garments, as the FAIRTRADE certification enables Fair Trade goods to be distributed even to the retail network.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to all the general Fair Trade principles applied to fair clothing, the preservation of traditional craft skills and handiwork in Fair Trade cooperatives is also emphasized. A certification for the manufacturing process itself does not exist yet, so the origin is guaranteed by the traders' membership in the WFTO association. Additionally, there are a growing number of producers of Fair Trade cotton clothes who use certified organic cotton, and thus the social dimension of Fair Trade is complemented by the environmental one.

In the Czech Republic there are still no clothes available from producers engaged in Fair Trade, or they appear only exceptionally. There is no



### Fair Trade or Fairtrade

While Fair Trade means a system of fair trading, Fairtrade is just the certification of a product.



company or organization engaged in the import of fair clothes. A Czech customer can buy them in specialised Fair Trade shops for a price comparable to brand-name clothes. The widest assortment is available in the Fair Trade Centre shop in Znojmo. FAIRTRADE-labelled cotton clothing, frequently available e.g. in Switzerland or France, can be found here only in some Marks&Spencer shops. As always, supply depends on customer demand, and this applies to fair clothes as well.

## Second-hand clothes

Hand-me-downs and clothes from second-hand shops represent the cheapest and the most accessible alternative, compared to those mentioned above. From the environmental point of view, this way is simply the best, since first we recycle material that would otherwise end up in a landfill or incinerator; second, through zero consumption of new goods, no hazardous production is supported. Nevertheless, the social consequences of hand-me-downs and buying in second-hands shops are a bit more complex: if one rigidly preferred used clothes, this might lead to a decline in the demand for clothes in general, and consequently to a loss of jobs in the textile industry. Export of cheap surplus clothes from richer to poorer countries, e.g. to Sub-Saharan Africa, is also problematic.<sup>74</sup> The local clothing industry, often the only industry in the country employing thousands of people, cannot compete with the extremely low prices of the imported used clothes – basically our rubbish – and the local industry is ruined. However, as regards the issue of inhumane working conditions, trade in used clothes is neutral. It does not solve the problem but at least it does not make it worse.

Of course, there are more ways of obtaining clothes produced in a more environment-friendly way than conventional clothes. By buying a Czech product, we can decrease the negative impact of long-distance transportation, and at the same time support the declining Czech textile industry. By relying on our own skills, or the skills of freelance tailors and dressmakers, we can easily check what conditions the garment was made in. In this case we can also choose the fabric to be used. There are infinite of combinations of these alternatives. Ultimately, it is completely up to us whether we prefer an altered hand-me-down T-shirt made of conventionally grown cotton to a self-made garment made of Czech, perhaps self-woven, flax.

The truth is that whatever way we produce a piece of clothing, it is highly probable that to some extent we cause harm to something or someone. Moreover, if we realize how many garments we buy every year and how little we have worn them when we discard them<sup>75</sup>, it seems clear that reducing the amount of clothing we consume is more than just a complement to the above-mentioned alternatives.

In addition, despite the fact that any alternative to conventionally-produced clothes will help to bring about better conditions in the textile industry, it does not improve the current situation of workers in





the free trade zones and sweatshops. However, there is still something we can do:

## Consumer campaigns

### Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC)

The CCC is a European initiative, launched in 1989 in the Netherlands, which now operates in 11 countries. In each of these countries, the CCC is a coalition of nongovernmental organizations, trade unions, church organizations, etc. working individually on the national level. They are joined by trade unions and nongovernmental organizations from developing countries on the international level.

The goals of the organization, actively pursued by all members of the alliance, are to improve working conditions in the garment and sportswear industry, and to support workers in these sectors. To achieve them, the CCC uses a wide range of activities summed up in 4 categories:

- raising public awareness of the practices of the most famous clothing companies, and based on this information, mobilization of consumers to take action towards improving them
- exerting pressure on the companies to accept responsibility. They are usually asked to adopt 'codes of conduct' and to ensure that all company suppliers adhere to them
- acts of solidarity, i.e. support for workers in their struggle for labour and human rights, e.g. through demonstrations or letters sent to the company's management etc.
- lobbying and actions on a political level. The CCC, for example, finds opportunities for legal challenges, and makes efforts to change individual countries' legislation etc.<sup>76</sup>

A national CCC affiliate in the Czech Republic has not been established yet. However, a Czech consumer can join the direct campaign's action via these websites: [www.cleanclothes.org](http://www.cleanclothes.org) or [www.saubere-kleidung.de](http://www.saubere-kleidung.de).



Campaigns targeting consumers, often taking the institutionalized form of non-governmental organizations, are probably the most typical initiatives aiming at improving production conditions in the clothing industry. **The main idea is to provide consumers with information on the production and trade conditions in the conventional clothing industry so that they can use their spending power in a positive way and exert pressure on responsible companies and institutions.** The campaigns point to the order submitters, i.e. clothing companies which order production and state the conditions of the contracts – deadline, prices, material, design etc. – as the party responsible for unacceptable manufacturing conditions. Non-profit organizations require the clothing companies to acknowledge their responsibility for the manufacturing conditions at their suppliers, and to take appropriate measures to improve the situation. For practical reasons, the campaigns predominantly aim at well-known brand-names which are easy for consumers to identify and which, to a certain extent, set the tone for the whole clothing industry.

Examples of consumer campaigns are **Clean Clothes Campaign** in Europe, the American **Sweatshop Watch** or Canadian **Maquila Solidarity Network**. The means of reaching their goals are similar in all of them. These means include publishing and distributing leaflets, organizing public debates, seminars, demonstrations, media campaigns and petitions. Research, direct monitoring of working conditions in particular factories, and lobbying on the political level, e.g. in the law-making process or in awarding public contracts, are integral parts of their work as well. (See also the CCC box.)

Changes in the common practices of such companies as Nike, The Gap, Tommy Hilfiger, H&M and others show that the fight is not in vain. Consumer campaigns sparked massive protests against these companies in the 90s, and they resulted in the introduction of so-called **codes of conduct** – documents which regulate the relationship between the companies and their suppliers in developing countries. They deal with the prohibition of child and forced labour, payment of at least the minimum wage, and compliance with labour laws. Unfortunately, although these voluntary ethical commitments are promises of change in terms of workers' rights, it appears that they are a gimmick for creating a 'good company image' rather than an effective tool for improving working conditions. This is because the codes are usually formulated too broadly,





or only the main supplier is subject to them, so they do not apply to the subcontractors. Researchers also found that in many factories the workers either did not know anything about the code of conduct recently introduced, or they have not noticed any real improvements since the code was established.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, one of the tasks of consumer campaigns is to exert pressure on clothing companies to strictly insist on compliance with their codes of ethics, and to ensure independent monitoring of working conditions in all of their suppliers, preferably by an independent non-profit organization or an authorized agency.

As the consumer campaigns focus mainly on the consumers, their websites offer not only a lot of useful information which might serve as a guide when choosing more socially-friendly clothes, but also many practical suggestions for how to directly participate in improving working conditions in the garment industry in developing countries. They encourage customers to be informed about the production practices of clothing companies, to show disapproval when they realise that their favourite company violates labour laws, and to boycott goods manufactured in such conditions.

Consumer campaigns make our effort to change the working conditions in the clothing industry easier for us – they research the data for us, organize petitions, write letters addressed to the chief executives of those companies found violating their commitments. It does not mean, though, that the people who do not want to or simply cannot join the campaign actions –e.g. people with no access to Internet or who do not speak a foreign language etc.- are forced to remain passive. If we are not willing to reconcile ourselves to the often appalling conditions most of the garments are made in, there is always at least one measure that we should take without exception. For every piece of clothing, we should be interested in who made it, and where and in what conditions it was made. In other words, we should ask: 'Who made our clothes?' What we do with that information is then a question of our possibilities (and for our conscience).

### **Aims of consumer campaigns:**

- monitoring
- spreading the word on conditions of production
- creating guidelines and tips on how to participate in improving the current state of affairs
- exerting pressure on clothing companies to:
  - accept a responsibility
  - adopt a code of conduct
  - ensure its principles are upheld by all subcontractors as well
- lobbying during the law-making process



**Where to buy things?  
...or alternatives available on the Czech market  
(as of October 4, 2007)**

A small range of bio-clothes by assorted brands is available on:

[www.ecomamma.cz](http://www.ecomamma.cz)

[www.biosfera.cz](http://www.biosfera.cz)

[www.bioobchod.cz](http://www.bioobchod.cz)

[www.biotricko.cz](http://www.biotricko.cz)

[www.dobrykramek.cz](http://www.dobrykramek.cz)

[www.bundles.cz](http://www.bundles.cz)

[www.mamaja.cz](http://www.mamaja.cz)

[www.bettymode.com](http://www.bettymode.com)

[www.biomamma.cz](http://www.biomamma.cz)

[www.vitek-odevy.cz](http://www.vitek-odevy.cz)

[www.etique.cz](http://www.etique.cz)

You can find organic-cotton garments at:

**H&M** – amidst conventional clothing, carrying a black label ‘organic cotton’

**ZARA** – organic-cotton T-shirts have their own rack labelled ‘organic cotton’

**C&A** – a large number of jeans for both men and women, other trousers and T-shirts, differentiated from conventional clothes by an easily visible beige label ‘bio cotton’

You can find garments made of bio and Fairtrade cotton in the Switcher company’s catalogue on

[www.switcher.cz](http://www.switcher.cz)

Fair Trade clothes, mostly T-shirts, can always be found in the Fair Trade shop **Na Zemi**, Pekařská 16, Brno

Fair Trade cotton products made of Fairtrade cotton are also in the offer of **Marks&Spencer**

Hemp clothes produced in ethic conditions, made of ecologically grown crop are sold by:

[www.ecovoice.cz](http://www.ecovoice.cz)

[www.thtc.cz](http://www.thtc.cz)

[www.ekooko.cz](http://www.ekooko.cz)

[www.grateful-hemp.com](http://www.grateful-hemp.com).

Linen clothes are available from many producers. Original hand-printed garments for example can be found here:

[www.jocha.cz](http://www.jocha.cz) – the company Jocha based in Uherské Hradiště

Czech wool garments made in environment friendly way for example can be found here:

[www.prirodnivlna.cz](http://www.prirodnivlna.cz) – socks or gloves from pure wool ([www.surtex.cz](http://www.surtex.cz))

The list is of course not exhaustive. The assortment of bio and Fair Trade clothes is growing fast, hemp; flax and wool earn well-deserved popularity. Despite this, many of our consumer requirements regarding ‘ecological’ and ‘ethic’ clothing will probably remain unsatisfied. If we do not want to give them up we can still start sewing and knitting ourselves, use tailors’ and dressmakers’ skills or at least look for companies where there is no reason to worry about unacceptable working conditions.

Here are some examples of companies with manufacturing premises in the Czech Republic:

**REJOICE** – A Czech company producing patched trousers and other mostly sports garments labelled with a little flower in Vysočina

**BUSHMAN** – a Prague-based producer of outdoor clothing made of natural materials including hemp



## Notes

- 1 The information, however, is not the same in all sources. For more historical facts, see HOBHOUSE, H.: Šest rostlin, které změnilly svět (Seeds of change: six plants that transformed mankind). Praha: Academia, 2004. pp. 163–213 or THOMPSON, J. Cotton: King of Fibres. National Geographic. 1994, No. 6, Vol. 185, pp. 60–82.
- 2 HAFFMANS, S.: Cotton and Textiles. In: Challenges of Fair Trade 2001–2003. Brussels: EFTA, 2000. p. 177. [Online] Available on [http://www.eftafairtrade.org/pdf/YRB2001Ch12\\_EN.pdf](http://www.eftafairtrade.org/pdf/YRB2001Ch12_EN.pdf).
- 3 EJF: White Gold: the true cost of cotton. London: Environmental Justice Foundation, 2005, p. 3.
- 4 EJF: White Gold: the true cost of cotton. London: Environmental Justice Foundation, 2005, p. 24–32.
- 5 PANNA. Cotton Briefing Kit. Pesticide Action Network North America. [Online] Available on <http://www.panna.org/resources/documents/conventionalCotton.dv.html>
- 6 Substances to kill pests.
- 7 Substances to kill insect pests.
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## Why shall we ask who produces our clothes

Clothes, food and shelter are considered to be one of the basic human needs. The reason for clothes to be included in the list is its primary function: the protection of body against cold and bad weather, as well as against other people's eyes. This function, however, tends to be supplemented (or even replaced) by the symbolic function of clothes, i.e. by their ability to carry various meanings. We are interested in who is wearing what, because we believe that via clothes we can find out who the others are. In the same way, we care that our clothes express our unique personality. Put in other words, we believe since ages, that clothes make the man. Many generations are just asking: "How? How do clothes make the man?" The question "Who makes the clothes?" has not seemed to be very interesting. Spinning, weaving as well as sewing used to be a basic skill. Even though this kind of skills has gradually been vanishing, it was still possible a few years ago to spot and even visit the place where a particular piece of clothes was produced. It usually wasn't a long way to go.

As the world has become increasingly interconnected, which is true for the garment industry as well, the question of the origin of our clothes is becoming more interesting and intricate.

Using the example of cotton and its processing up to ready-made garments in shops, this workshop aims to show that it is enormously interesting and even desirable to ask who has produced the clothes for us. Not only as regards our conscience, but mainly as regards the lives of those through whose hands the clothes have gone before us.

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