

## **Poverty pay list calls for reality check on London Fashion Week**

*High street retailers accused of lack of action to prevent 'sweatshops'*

High street retailers are failing to take enough action to end poverty pay for overseas workers, says a new report being released as the champagne corks pop to celebrate the start of London Fashion Week.

The list, from the campaign group Labour Behind the Label, compares and ranks efforts by retailers to end workers' poverty (attached). It includes among the worst offenders Debenhams, Fat Face, French Connection, Gap, Hobbs, Jane Norman, La Senza, Paul Smith, Peacocks, Reiss, Republic, River Island, Superdry and Whitestuff.

The group and the authors of the report *Let's Clean Up Fashion* say wages across the board are too low to allow workers even basic living standards – the ability to feed, clothe and shelter a family.

The study also condemns 11 other companies for not making enough effort to work towards a decent wage: Arcadia, Asda/George, Aurora, Burberry, H&M, Levi Strauss, Matalan, New Look, Primark, Sainsbury and Tesco.

Authors were particularly critical of Gap, which received a top grade in the group's previous *Let's Clean Up Fashion* reports. They cite its recent decision to drop plans to work towards a living wage and to monitor payment only of a minimum wage, a figure which leaves workers struggling at the bottom of the poverty scale.

The study reveals that retailers taking more significant action to end poverty pay are Inditex, which owns the brand Zara, Next, Marks & Spencer and Monsoon.

But the group says none of the 29 UK high street brands surveyed yet pays workers a living wage.

Research last December by Labour Behind the Label found Indian workers producing for Debenhams, Next and M&S were paid just £60 a month – below half a living wage of £126 needed to live a decent quality of life.

Authors also point to the trend for firms to take steps to increase wages, but to fail to ensure workers can join trade unions and fight to maintain and improve their pay – a vital step, if work is to be sustainable.

The study is launched today, as activists start a postcard campaign to press Gap and H&M to increase wages for workers.

One of the report's authors, Anna McMullen from Labour Behind the Label, said: “Many companies fail to admit that their buying practices and the prices they pay to suppliers are to blame for the poverty facing those who make our clothes.

“As London Fashion Week is revealed in all its glamour, nowhere is the disparity between retailers' huge profits and poverty for garment workers overseas more apparent. It is high time fashion giants, such as Gap and H&M, took this seriously and committed to meet the cost.”

### **CONTACT**

Available for interview – Co-author of the report, Anna McMullen

Anna McMullen, Labour Behind the Label: t: +44 (0)7786 832 035 or [anna@labourbehindthelabel.org](mailto:anna@labourbehindthelabel.org)

Report is available to download from <http://www.labourbehindthelabel.org/campaigns/item/download/148>