



# The Second Pillar of Bluwashing: Labour

Alex Douglas, Ashna Arora, Daisy Agar,  
Jessica Mills and Kirsty Wright

## Abstract

For many generations, numerous regulators have attempted to reduce and tackle abusive labour concerns worldwide (Sengenberger, 1994). Fundamental employment rights are in place to ensure that the abuse of employees is not acted upon; however, many countries worldwide, if not all, have been linked to slavery claims, physical or psychological violence issues and child labour issues. However, due to the sensitive nature of this topic, many companies are not noted in media outlets due to the severity of claims. This paper delves into the main areas of prime concern and outlines the effects of proper awareness on this devastating subject.

**Keywords:** UN, labour, child labour, trafficking, slavery, debt, violence, psychological.

### Introduction

For decades, the ILO has been in control of setting and supervising how a corporation applies international labour standards within their work forces. The ILO “international labour code” was established to set out core principles for those in executive management positions to incorporate an ethical and balanced workplace for their employees across the globe (Sengenberger, 1994). This Code set-out a line of principles that overall ensured that a corporation had a steady economic increase whilst also complying to social justice and human right aims.

Globally, firms that fall short with labour standards are not always pointed-out and flagged which is a major issue (Freeman, 1994). If a firm does something bad and does not have the adequate punishment then how will this issue be tackled? Many members of the public know of issues within the labour market, however, feel as if they do not happen in the western. Those who think like this are entirely wrong and miss the painfully obvious facade that a number of companies have whilst behind closed doors, their members of staff are treated badly, paid below minimum wage, or even have company ties with firms that participate in force and compulsory labour environments such as slavery, violence in the workplace, or child labour (Nolan & Bott, 2018).

Over recent years, high profile labour rights scandals have occurred and caused an uproar to those interested in this imperfect area of employment rights but many still do not know the western society is incorporated severely into the devastating cases that have affected workers throughout the years. For instance, the Walmart scandal, as well as numerous similar scandals in Australia, occurred recently and identified the link this super chain has to modern slavery principles (Mason et al., 2015). Therefore, the education of these issues, on an international scale, needs to happen to assist those to understand that these issues happen not just in lower socio economic countries, but also the western ones.

### Employment Rights

The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) was set up in 2000 to combat the issue of corporate bluewashing, a deceptive marketing strategy where member firms, as Berliner and Prakash state, pay lip service to the actual goals of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Berliner & Prakash, 2015). Signatories adopt a façade of creating a more sustainable business world when they are doing the converse in practice. The companies, a part of the UNGC, promise to adopt socially and environmentally responsible procedures to increase their financial gains. Members may, for example, advertise their goals of 'fair employment practices such as following employment laws when in actuality, they have made no changes to their business. Over 12,000 business signatories of the Global Compact program, extending across 160 countries such as China, Germany, and the United Kingdom (Arato, Speelman & Van Huylenbroeck, 2016).

In terms of labour, the UNGC establishes four principles: businesses should uphold the freedom of association; eliminate forced and compulsory labour; abolish child labour and eliminate discrimination regarding employment (Nolan, 2005). It also sets out guidance on human rights in the workplace: businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights and make sure they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

### Basic Rights

The Ten Principles encourage firms to respect the rights of their employees, for example, ensuring equal and fair treatment, workplace regulations and good employment conditions (Aspire Wellbeing Hub, 2021). However, the UNGC guidance on labour and human rights is not enshrined in law; businesses will therefore be accountable to international or national courts if they breach such, as contracts of employment will typically comply with the direction of the land. For example, in the United Kingdom, worker's rights are covered by a statute in the Employment Rights Act 1996, which states an employee's rights in areas such as unfair dismissal and protection of wages.

However, Berliner argues that laws are not definitive in improving labour standards and that "labour rights require state capacity and political will" (Berliner, Greenleaf, Lake & Noveck, 2015). Even where a country provides legislation to protect worker's rights, this does not always happen. This is exemplified in Bangladesh, which has ratified several International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and labour laws such as the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 yet their factories "remain among the worst in the world". It seems that in lower-income countries (LICs), the law is not always the problem. A country's poor authority and low state capacity to enforce labour laws have a detrimental effect on the rights of its workers.

Conversely, in high-income countries (HICs) such as the United Kingdom and the United States, the political system is more stable and more interested in workers. Berliner supports this, arguing that "democratic, political systems, powerful left-wing political parties, or higher rates of union membership" typically result in greater interest in the rights of workers, and thus, more of a willingness to enforce labour standards. This highlights that firms operating in LICs will be able to take advantage of the UNGC's 'public relations' benefit as they can escape liability due to a lack of labour law enforcement.

### *Employment Rights and the Exploitation of the UNGC*

The UN Global Compact is known as a "guide dog rather than a watchdog" due to its lack of adequate monitoring mechanisms (United Nations Global Compact, 2021). Member firms can pay little attention to the Ten Principles but retain their membership so long as they disclose their progress annually. In practice, this means companies can do very little to further human rights and labour rights in their business. Berliner and Prakash support this, arguing that members enjoy the "goodwill benefits of program membership without making costly changes". This is devastating when such rights are vital for all human beings and workers. Employment rights prevent firms from exploiting their employees

and ensure they are treated fairly, a belief which the UNGC aims to promote.

For example, if workers in LICs had the right to freedom of association under Article 11 of the UDHR, They would be forever able to "improve their lot through union organising", and this would lead to the "growth of democratic institutions" as the citizens would have more power over authority, as Hiatt and Greenfield claim (Hiatt & Greenfield, 2004). The lack of monitoring for the UNGC program, however, insinuates that, primarily due to its voluntary nature, the UNGC is exploited by firms for their selfish gain, i.e., improving their reputation and business profits, and not for progressing the sustainability of their work or protecting their employees as is envisioned.

This issue of self-benefit is so prominent that the UN Global Compact's 2021-2023 global strategy includes holding companies more accountable for their role in the initiative using "specific, measurable targets" (United Nations Global Compact, 2021). If this is improved, the rights of many workers worldwide may be respected as companies would have to make changes that coordinate with the targets or else would lose their membership and public relations benefits.

### *Company Accountability*

Nestlé joined the UN Global Compact in 2001 but has violated the principles set out by the program (Nestlé, 2019). The company was found guilty of breaching health and safety regulations in 2016, where a worker sustained injuries due to a failure of safeguarding the factory machinery (Clea, 2021). In theory, Nestlé may have violated Principles 1: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights. Article 23(1) of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) states that everyone has the right to just and favourable conditions of work, which Nestlé did not provide.

Englehart furthers the issue with human rights abuses in LICs, emphasising the need for the UNGC to improve its accountability operation, especially when UNGC membership is high in those countries, such as China at 536 signatories. Arguing that "weak states

create conditions ripe for human rights abuse" as they cannot restrain businesses in treating their employees (Englehart, 2009). This is particularly concerning as it makes it difficult for the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) to place blame on members of the program for human rights abuses, and therefore make a legal change or, as Englehart describes, "addressing [abuses] effectively".

The Global Compact cannot adjudicate matters involving failure to follow the Ten Principles; however, as they are guided, not law, it is, in turn, the responsibility of the international or national courts to deal with breaches of human rights or employment rights. This, therefore, exposes the issue with the UNGC in its efforts to reduce the case of bluewashing. It cannot practically sanction firms breaching the principles, and it can only hope they will fail to present progress data. Until the shift to more company accountability is finalised, signatories cannot lose membership if they make 'some' progress; they will persist in utilising the illusion of membership for their benefit, despite failing to truly respect the UN's goals (United Nations Global Compact, 2021).

### Forced and Compulsory Workers

#### *Slavery*

While the word slavery might be reminding individuals of a thing of the past as we live in a modern world, the drier truth of the matter is that slavery still exists. Gov (2021) explained that "Modern slavery is a human rights violation and has severe consequences for the health and wellbeing of survivors. It is an exploitative crime that impacts physical and mental health and has public health implications." Additionally, The International Labor Organization describes forced labour as, "Forced labour can be understood as work that is performed involuntarily and under the menace of any penalty. It refers to situations in which persons are coerced to work through the use of violence or intimidation, or by more subtle means such as manipulated debt, retention of identity papers or threats of denunciation to immigration authorities." It has been stated that

slavery is most prevalent in housework, manufacturing and construction work.

In addition, the fashion industry runs on slavery; it is estimated that slaves make more than 70% of our clothing. An example of this is when the Triangle ShirtWaist Factory went on fire on March 25 1911, at 4:40 pm. It was one of the most dangerous industrial failures in U.S. history and killed 146 garment workers forced to work on a Saturday. Sadly, the workers could not escape as the exit door was locked due to non-existing working rights. Most of the workers that died were primarily immigrant women ranging from 14 to 23 years.

However, History.com (2021) stated that "the fire helped unite organized labour and reform-minded politicians like progressive New York governor Alfred E. Smith and senator Robert f. Wagner, one of the legislative architects of Roosevelt's new deal agenda. Frances Perkins, who served on a committee that helped set up the factory investigating commission in New York in the wake of the fire, would later become Roosevelt's secretary of labour. In addition, the workers union set up a march on April 5 on New York's fifth avenue to protest the conditions that had led to the fire. Eighty thousand people attended it." Civil rights movements took complete charge following the incident, and adept working conditions were prevalent in the U.S. Nevertheless, fashion companies still require cheap labour, this might not be a problem in the U.S. or U.K. anymore, but it still exists in China, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.

Another Fashion Industry manufacturing disaster is the 2013 Dhaka Garment Factory collapse that transpired on April 24. The eight-story building collapsed due to defective construction and the use of poor materials. Regrettably, the incident killed 1,134 garment workers and wounded over 2500 workers. The New York Times stated that "Bangladesh has long been among the cheapest places to produce clothes, along with Vietnam and India. More than 4.4 million people — mostly women — work in its 3,000 factories, where the minimum wage is currently 32 cents an hour, or \$68 a month. As a result, brands flock here to source \$30 billion worth of "ready-made

garments," or RMG, making Bangladesh the world's second-largest apparel manufacturing centre, after China" (Thomas, 2021).

While the fashion industry especially might be leading in greenwashing and the use of fur, they bury their shady and unethical labour practices in common sight by providing their consumers with the cheapest rate, which is indisputable. Still, it is vital to research the firms' supply chain and understand where they source from. It should be noted that if the goods are being made in any Asian and South Asian country, it is a given that there was the use of some form of slavery as purchasers can do better by educating themselves on simple issues or books.

### *Debt Labour*

Antislavery (2021) outlines bonded labour as "Debt bondage occurs when a person is forced to work to pay off a debt. They are tricked into working for little or no pay, with no control over their debt." To provide a more detailed explanation, enslavery.org describes bonded labour as "designed to exploit workers. The cyclical process begins with debt, whether acquired or inherited, that cannot be paid immediately. Then, while the worker labours to repay the debt, the employer adds on additional expenses. For instance, a labourer may begin with an initial debt of \$200. While working and unable to leave, this worker needs shelter, food and water. The employer tacks on \$25 per day to the debt to cover those expenses. Consequently, the employee only grows his debt while labouring for his debtor, and repayment is impossible."

As stated by Devin Finn in *Bonded Labor in India*, "Bonded labour stems from a variety of causes, which are highly debated in the literature: an ingrained legacy of caste-based discrimination, vast poverty and inequality, and inadequate education system, unjust social relations, and the government's unwillingness to alter the status quo all exemplify a few such causes. Additionally, India's colonial background and caste system have made it difficult to delineate the history of labourers" (Finn, 2021). The labourers are so fearful of their debt that no matter rain or sunshine, they do not stop operating as they

do not know what their debt truly is. It is one of the biggest scams being led to getting cheap labour.

It is also unfortunate to note that the women of the families tied up in bonded labour often have to perform sexual activities to pay off their debt. The following is a true-crime event in India on October 8, 2021, and was reported by *The Hindu* (2021) "The workers, including Muruganatham (49), his wife and two children, were employed at the unit for the last seven months. Muruganatham was from Kaniyur and has been working in brick kilns since he was 15."

Kaye (2021) states that the supply chain is engulfed in bonded labour for manufacturing in south Asian countries, particularly India. It concluded that every industry with a manufacturing plant in India supports debt bonded labour, which is the sole reason this system continues to predominate. As stated throughout the labour pillar, it is vital to be aware of these issues as they might not prevail in first world countries. Still, they are very evident in third world countries, which is why big corporations can get away with such unethical practices so quickly.

### *Abduction, Kidnapping and Selling an Individual*

The United Nations (2021) Office on Drugs and Crime illustrates human trafficking" as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, to exploit them for profit. Men, women and children of all ages and backgrounds can become victims of this crime, which occurs in every region of the world. The traffickers often use violence or fraudulent employment agencies and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick and coerce their victims."

Human Trafficking is a very detailed process, which the United Nations breakdown the method for use in the following manner (*Human-Trafficking*, 2021). The crime of human trafficking consists of three core elements: the act, the means, the purpose. Physical and sexual abuse, blackmail, emotional manipulation, and the removal of official documents are used by

traffickers to control their victims. Exploitation can take place in a victim's home country, during the migration or in a foreign country."

Human Trafficking is believably the most profitable and the third-largest industry. With an urge so big, the U.K. government has stringent laws, one of them being the following, as stated by the CPS (2020), as a "conviction [that is] subject to twelve months imprisonment or an unlimited fine. On conviction or indictment, it is life imprisonment. The offence is also a "lifestyle offence" under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. As the offence is likely to lead to a significant sentence on conviction, all cases should be tried in the Crown Court."

In addition, the Human Trafficking Hotline (2021) describes the demand for labour trafficking in the following manner: "In cases of labour trafficking, consumers provide the demand and profit incentive for traffickers. These consumers can include companies that subcontract certain types of services, end-consumers who buy cheap goods produced by trafficking victims, or individuals who use the services of trafficking victims. By supporting fair pay for workers and basing our purchasing choices on the equitable treatment of those who make our products, consumers have the power to reduce the demand for labour trafficking."

Human Trafficking is the most prevalent class of forced labour in the supply chain of any economy. This is what makes it a global matter. Every product we use most likely promotes human trafficking, and more prominent corporations chose to have a blind eye to the case as they show on paper that they are following the laws. Still, any corporation that elects to use a third party for manufacturing is supporting human trafficking as the corporation itself isn't indulging in anything unethical. It is doubtful that these corporations are not aware of human trafficking and forced labour. Yet, because they are abiding by the laws and are clean on paper, most of the corporations chose not to do anything about the prevalent issue as forced labour is one of the primary reasons why they can get cheap labour and cut down their production costs which leads to them profiting more out of the whole system.

### *Physical and Psychological Violence*

Forced labour is the most extensive psychological violence of them all. Like human trafficking, bonded labour, modern slavery, and physical confinement are all physical and mental violence methods. Unfortunately, it is tough to get an actual definition that defines physical and psychological violence that labourers go through. The most common topics that are discussed in place of this are corporate harassment. This goes to show how well these crimes are hidden in plain sight. However, physical violence is defined as, "Physical violence is an act attempting to cause, or resulting in, pain or physical injury. As with all forms of violence, the main aim of the perpetrator is not only – or may not always be – to cause physical pain, but also to limit the other's self-determination." The Council of Europe (2021) describes psychological violence as being "Any intentional conduct that seriously impairs another person's psychological integrity through coercion or threats.

With the definitions declared above, it is necessary to understand that any human being forced to perform any work against their will is immoral and deemed psychological violence. Moreover, bonded labour traps individuals into this system who cannot find a way out because they have no financial understanding of their debt. They are instilled with fear if they do not work to pay their debt off as they are either beaten, or daughters of such families are taken to perform sexual acts to pay their debts. These acts not only violate the fundamental integrity of being human but life itself. Families and individuals trapped in such schemes find it incredibly difficult to get out of such systems that lead to suicides or honour killing of the family.

Human trafficking is not only psychological violence but also physical violence. It is only food for thought, but any individual being kidnapped to be trafficked is not only used for sexual activities but also beaten and drugged to make the whole crime manageable. The entire act of trafficking strips the individual of everything. It is not only psychological violence but also a form of torture every day, so multinational

corporations can get cheap labour to make higher profits. Whilst there is not much information out there talking about specific psychological and physical crimes that are taking place in the labour industry. All human beings must spread awareness about the same to bring an ounce of justice to the victims of such acts.

### Child Labour

#### *International Perspective*

"Nearly 1 in 10 children are subjected to child labour worldwide, with some forced into hazardous work through trafficking" (UNICEF, 2021). It is a disgrace to read the statistics as we live in a "modern" world. Yet, we allow such horrible practices to continue in our society as it has been mentioned by the media numerous times that "Children on the move risk being forced into work or even trafficked – subjected to violence, abuse and other human rights violations" (UNICEF, 2021). Children who are forced to work generally belong to families that go through financial hardships, which can often result from bonded labour.

While children are trafficked for all varieties of work, it is not very surprising that the shoes we wear or the bread that we consumed don't involve child labour in the whole supply chain. Nike, Walmart, Gap, to name a few, were caught using child labour to produce at a fraction of the cost as child labourers do not even get paid poverty wages. But, unfortunately, it is a menace that continues to take place because of the profits involved.

#### *Preventions*

Child labour is renowned for resulting in physical and mental harm, the sexual or economic exploitation of children and restricting the fundamental rights of children (Unicef, 2018). Child Labour has even been described as a type of a "disease" (Bales (2004, p. 32). In light of its far-reaching and devastating effects, there are countless preventions against Child Labour, stemming from the laws of countries all around the world (Fair Labor Standards Act 1938) and Conventions which help to set international laws against child labour (1973 ILO Convention C138: Minimum Age Convention (Convention concerning

Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, 58th Conference Session Geneva 1973).

Due to the inevitable link between companies and child labour, several aids can be used by Companies in combating and preventing child labour. For example, the International Labour Organisation established the Child Labour Platform, which acts as a forum for sharing businesses' 'experiences... in tackling Child Labour in supply chains' (International Labour Organization, p11) and also produce publications which can act as training guides to companies and their staff to identify child labour practices and actions to eliminate them (International Labour Organization, p3). Companies themselves have their aids of prevention, such as Nestle. They have established the Nespresso AAA Sustainable Quality Program to educate and train their farmers globally against child labour (Alvarez, Pilbean and Wilding, p170).

The existence of the U.N. Global Compact can also arguably be seen as acting as prevention against child labour. Companies that join this compact agree to adhere to the compact's ten principles, including principle five, which states, "Businesses should uphold the effective abolition of child labour". This acts as a norm-based approach and can serve as a preventative measure against child labour by increasing pressure on companies not a party to the Compact from customers and supply chains (Berliner & Prakash) and even providing companies with already party to the Compact a metaphoric "social licence to operate" (Gunningham, Kagan, & Thornton, 2004). This norm-based approach can encourage adherence to commonly shared principles and provide a united approach to preventing and eliminating child labour.

#### *Effectiveness*

Whilst a multitude of preventions against child labour are freely available and exist internationally, a report has into the prevalence of child labour internationally has found that the decrease of child labour has become stagnated for the first time in 20 years, with analysis suggesting that a further 8.9 million children could be involved in child labour by the end of 2022

(International Labour Organisation and UNICEF, p 8). Therefore, it is evident that despite the existing preventions and companies entering into the U.N. Global Compact, Child Labour is still prevalent and could even see increases for the first time in 20 years across the world.

Suggestions have been offered as to why this may be the case. For example, Jonathan Davies suggests that organisations and frameworks like the U.N. Global Compact (the "Compact") have very little power as an organisation. They encourage companies to follow their principles rather than have the ability to enforce this. Therefore, Davies goes on to the premise that there is nothing to stop an unethical company from joining the Compact and using the accreditation to promote their company whilst breaking the Compact's principles (Davies, 2021). Therefore, the regulatory framework of the Compact and the lack of enforceable provisions of some of the aforementioned provisions may provide loopholes for companies to continue their involvement in child labour, despite appearing as though they support and are contributing to the elimination of it.

The issue with the Compact's regulatory framework has further been highlighted by Berliner and Prakash, with the Compact's institutional design of minimal sanctions suggested to enable members of the Compact to exploit the lack of monitoring and enforcement by benefiting from the membership without changing their company's approaches towards child labour (Berliner & Prakash, 2015). This exploitation can be coined as "shirking" (Delmas & Keller, 2005) or "bluewashing" (Berliner & Prakash, 2015). In support of this, Berliner and Prakash conducted a study of nearly 3,000 firms within the U.S. from 2000 to 2010. They found evidence that in the areas of human rights (including labour rights, like the prohibition of child labour), members of the 'Compact' "shirked" their obligations. A further recent survey in 2020 found that companies had not moved beyond policy commitments to end Child Labour (U.N. Global Compact 20th-Anniversary Progress Report: Uniting Business in the Decade of Action, 2020)

Indeed, examples of companies "bluewashing" their commitment to preventing and eliminating child labour can easily be found. For instance, Nestle has been the subject of several lawsuits, including one filed by the International Rights Advocates for the use of child labour in the Ivory Coast (Balch, 2021). Another lawsuit was further brought by Danell Tomasalla, whom alleged Nestle had deceived customers by not adequately informing them that child labour may have been used for some of their products (Nieburg, 2018). These possibilities of involvement in child labour coincides with Nestle being named as a 'Global Compact LEAD company for its ongoing commitment to the Compact (Nestle, 2019)

This issue of "bluewashing" and child labour further extends to other industries, such as the clothing industry. H&M, for example, we're unable to deny the use of Uzbek Cotton as made through child labour in Uzbekistan due to not having reliable methods to ensure it did not end up in any of the products (Wikipedia, 2021). Therefore, it is evident that Companies can pay "lip service" to the elimination and prevention of child labour without enforcing actual measures against it (Berliner & Prakash).

### *Recognised*

It is clear that further measures are required to prevent the "bluewashing" of child labour by companies, and there are measures already in place. The issuing of class action lawsuits, such as those against Nestle, can shed light on the actions of "bluewashing" by companies and can seek legal redress against companies misleading the public as to their involvement in Child Labour (Balch, O. ed., (2021). The publicity and coverage of such lawsuits can act as a deterrent to other companies' "bluewashing" as they can have potentially damaging reputational effects. It can also shed light on the reality of its ability to be involved in Child Labour, despite being a part of organisations such as the Compact.

Recognised organisations such as Global March can further action against the "bluewashing" of Child

Labour. Global March aims to produce evidence and research to encourage businesses to abide by human and labour rights. Global March has increased its involvement in addressing child labour in countries such as India and Bangladesh (Global March. (n.d.). Organisations such as these can encourage companies to improve their practices and act as an investigatory tool into the actualities of child labour.

The U.N. Global Compact itself has issued a U.N. Global Compact 2021 Action Pledge on eliminating child labour to encourage companies to increase their due diligence and efforts on eliminating child labour and supporting human rights (www.unglobalcompact.org. (n.d.). With the Compact to which many companies may use to "bluewash" their involvement in child labour, highlighting the gap between members of the Compact, and elimination of child labour, it acts clearly as a strategy against the "bluewashing" of child labour.

### National Minimum Wage

The National Minimum Wage Naming Scheme is produced every year by the UK Government to disclose which employers have failed to pay their workers correctly. This includes many household names such as John Lewis and Pret a Manger (GOV UK, 2021). First introduced in 1999 as the National Minimum Wage Act 1998, setting rates at £3.60 for those over 21 and £3 for under 21. The Low Pay Commission reviews rates every year and makes increased recommendations to the Government (GOV UK, n.d.). On April 1st 2016, the Living Wage was added to the Act, pushing minimum wage for over 25s to £7.20 in 2019 (BBC, 2015)

For some companies, speaking out against the minimum wage has appeared attractive to potential employees, investors, and the public. These companies believe the minimum wage is too low to maintain a modern-day lifestyle and work hard to promote themselves as paying well above this. BrewDog, for example, championed The Living Wage movement from 2014 (BrewDog, 2019) and often used this as marketing across their bars. John

Lewis Partnership has also published notices on their website noting the public of salary increases to employees. In 2021, the company published notice of a £5000 per annum rise to LGV drivers, as well as a recruitment bonus of £1,000. Director of Supply Chain for John Lewis Partnership, Mark Robinson, stated: "There's never been a better time to get behind the wheel for Waitrose and John Lewis... our drivers are paid competitively and by investing in training for their future." (John Lewis Partnership, 2021).

By making such a public announcement, John Lewis Partnership appears to have made a clear statement about their commitment to their social practices and responsibilities as an employer. However, unlike BrewDog, who have never come under fire for underpaying employees, John Lewis Partnership was listed at the top of the UK Government's National Minimum Wage Naming Scheme. The company failed to meet the National Minimum Wage Act, owing £941,355.67 to 19,392 workers (GOV UK, 2021). The biggest perpetrator in the United Kingdom claimed this was due to a technical error; however, they still chose to market themselves as paying 15% above minimum wage to employees: "Our average minimum hourly pay has never been below the national minimum wage and is currently 15% above it." (Ambrose, 2021).

While this may have been the average case, choosing to ignore this excellent margin for error and continuing to market themselves as an employer who upholds more than minimum wage is a clear example of bluewashing. Consumers who consciously shop often look to support employers who value their employees. John Lewis markets itself as just that, a company owned by its employees. They even go as far as referring to all staff as "partners" (John Lewis Partnership, n.d.). This continued bluewashing shows the company has broken the law and disregarded their 'partners' welfare. This was further shown when the company scrapped staff bonuses in 2020 for the first time since 1953. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the company had hinted at a cut to staff bonuses due to growing competition (BBC, 2020).

Those companies such as John Lewis, who are bluewashing the public to generate sales, must be held accountable for their actions. Naming them on Government reports is a step in the right direction. However, this information must be available to the average consumer who values John Lewis and their perceived commitment to their staff's well being and salaries.

### What Can We Do?

We must educate ourselves and not stop with this fight. That education needs to reach other people, and awareness is the most foolproof way to bring transformation. United we stand, and it couldn't be more accurate. If we all were to unite against unethical practices, it would be laborious for the government and corporations to ignore these issues. It is also crucial to keep engaging in difficult conversations about labour and unethical practices. These are difficult conversations, but they are essential conversations as those trapped in all forms of modern-day slavery do not have a voice. They do not even have a good life. Lastly, we should all be investigating ways in which we might change society while making sure that the changes are following the law.

End Slavery Now is an innovative tool that can educate consumers about the supply chain and slavery in the whole process. The website provides a list of actions that can be taken to educate oneself, but it also offers a list of alternates for brands and corporations that do not support slavery. There are also brands like Everlane, Mejuri, and The Attire, which pride themselves on transparent supply chains and fair pricing. Their pricing is so evident that the brands provide the actual cost that it took them to make the product vs what they are selling it at, revealing their substantial markup and margins. Another great way of educating and raising awareness about slavery is, watching documentaries like the actual cost that dive deeper into how the production sector is engulfed with slavery.

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