
Sweatshops And The Importance Of Labour Reform

Abstract

The use of developing countries for cheap labour by multinational companies has become more prominent because of increased trading around the world. Supporters claim that MNCs are helping the development of third world countries by providing more job opportunities. However, others argue that MNC's are using sweatshops to exploit their workers which causes many human right violations and deaths. A review of sweatshops in developing countries is that workers are usually forced to work long hours in dangerous working conditions for little to no pay. This essay points to the importance of a reform in this matter as many workers are being exploited and mistreated. Conversely, arguments supporting sweatshops will be discussed and devaluated.

Thesis statement

This essay argues that there must be reform within the sweatshop industry to improve working conditions to eliminate the exploitation of the workers. Multinational companies such as Nike, Adidas and Apple are corporate organisations that operate in more than one country, and due to the spread of globalisation, more countries are trading worldwide; thus, creating more jobs (Background on Sweatshops. n.d.). However, there have been many cases of MNCs (Multinational companies) exploiting some of their employees in many ways, which goes against human right and ethical consumerism laws and MNCs have a responsibility to the people who produce their products in developing countries (Forrester 2013). Hence, there has to be reform on laws and regulations because many people are working long hours in dangerous working environments for little to no pay.

Sweatshops

Firstly, globalisation has changed the way people interact around the world. According to Ethical Footprint (2010), globalisation is "the process by which businesses or other organisations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale." Mejia-Zaccaro (2013) claims that some big brand companies are being heavily criticised due to the workplaces not providing the workers with their labour rights and forcing workers to work in these so-called 'sweatshops'. Sweatshops are "any workplace in which workers are subject to extreme exploitation. The exploitation includes not providing workers with benefits, acceptable working conditions, or a living wage" (Background on Sweatshops, n.d).

Reality of sweatshops

Firstly, most sweatshops are owned by big brand companies originating from the United States and these sweatshops commit illegal actions such as disobeying the laws of the country and infringing contracts between the factory workers and owners (Forrester, 2013). Another example by Globalpeaceandconflict (2012) states that Nike is one of the many companies that produce their clothing abroad, and in their case, the foreign factories provide jobs for locals, but the

workers are also underpaid, overworked and exploited. They also explain that workers are not provided with proper training and safety equipment. Moreover, they are exposed to toxic glues and chemicals while being expected to work 60 to 70 hours a week with pay of 1.60 \$ a day when a person needs around three dollars a day to survive. Therefore, Sweatshops are a clear violation of human rights and ethical consumerism laws, but yet not much is being done to provide workers with their fundamental rights. War on Want (2010) also asserts that Nike continues using these unregulated sweatshops for providing jobs for developing countries as an excuse for cheap labour.

Secondly, Forester and Mejia-Zaccaro (2013) argues that sweatshops pose a significant threat to workers' lives, this is due to the sweatshops not paying attention to health and safety procedures, which risks the lives of many garment workers due to the dangerous and life-threatening working environments (Forrester 2013). Furthermore, As-Saber (2013) also argues that sweatshops usually fail to provide basic needs to workers such as working space, drinking water and light. Also, another violation is that workers are usually imprisoned inside low-cost factories in order to prevent theft, which as a result leaves the workers with no way to escape in the event of a fire or the collapse of the building. For instance, As-Saber (2013) states that the collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory in the city of Dacha killed 110 garment workers due to the building being over-occupied with machinery and workers and the doors were locked at the time of the incident which made it impossible for workers to escape the atrocity. However, there have been no reforms made to give these garment workers their well-deserved rights. Therefore, this results in the continuation of the desecration of human rights.

One other example is a violation a factory committed in Karachi, Pakistan where over 300 people died inside of the building due to the doors of the building being locked up at the time of a fire break out (War on Want, 2019). Therefore, sweatshops pose as a significant human rights violation as it goes against the 'Declaration of Human Rights' articles such as article 23 which states that "everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment" 2018. Moreover, article 3 states that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person". Thus, it argued that Global comities such as the United Nations Human Rights Council are failing to provide these fundamental human rights to those sweatshop workers which is ultimately contributing to the continuation of human right violations in sweatshops since it is cheaper for big brand company to pack their bags and leave than giving the worker's their rights (Woolfe, 2013).

In addition, some governments are being heavily criticised for promoting the exploitation of workers through scheme a called "Race to the bottom". The race to the bottom is a phrase used to describe the deregulation of the business environment in order to attract more investors to operate in the country of interest (Ethical Footprint, 2010). Therefore, MNCs are taking advantage of these third world countries in order to make the highest profits and some governments are supporting this by applying lower taxes and exemptions which makes MNCs more likely to continue trading in these countries (Forrester, 2013). This leads to the enforcement of weak labour laws, essentially concluding to many labour and human right violations. An example of this, is continuous demand by American companies to Chinese supplier to lower of prices in order for American consumers to enjoy cheaper goods at the expense of sweatshop workers who have their rights exploited. For example, attempting to escape from outrageous destitution, provincial vagrant labourers end up caught in horrifying working conditions. The vast majority of these labourers are ladies acquiring amazingly low wages – the average month to month pay, including extra time is CNY 1,690 (£150) (Woolfe,

2013). Migrant workers experience long working days, work seven days a week and many are without a business contract and face consistent abuse. Living conditions are poor with up to six individuals sharing little confined residences. Ladies transient specialists, who are principally utilised in production lines, seldom get maternity leave, and with no childcare offices and working a long time of over 70 hours many are compelled to send their kids to live with family in the farmland. Therefore, due to the lack of regulations in developing countries to protect labour and the government attracting investors by lowering taxes and tolerating labour violations, sweatshops are still being exploited.

Reform

Working conditions

Although it is tough to abolish the use of sweatshops altogether, many non-government organisations are helping to seek justice for sweatshop workers and to improve the horrible conditions and reduced wages they are experiencing. One of these organisation is War on Want, and the NGO aims to ensure that garment workers receive a fair living wage, decent working conditions, and that women workers receive the same treatment as men (War on Want, 2012). The organisation has been quite successful in making a minor change as they have been able to provide legal compensation to labour right abuses for over 500,000 workers accumulating to around £650,000 as well as Preparing and equipping migrant workers and teaching them how to protect their rights. In 2009, 14 migrant worker associations and 186 members were trained on labour law and techniques to battle for improved wellbeing and security assurance. Although this is making a difference, there is still far more steps that need to be taken to assure safe working conditions and fair wages (War on Want. 2012).

The National Garment Workers' Federation (NGWF) has been battling for the privileges of sweatshop labourers in Bangladesh since 1984. They are situated in Dhaka, and have seven branches across the country, the NGWF is an establishing organization from the Bangladesh Garment Workers Unity Council, and a body that arranges work law and condemns labour rights infringement through exchange between worker's guilds, government and processing plant proprietors. After a hard-hitting effort is driven by the NGWF together with other worker's guilds, another lowest pay permitted by law for a piece of clothing labourers was presented in December 2010 (Mejia-Zaccaro, 2013), This spoke to an expansion of 80% for the most minimal paid piece of clothing labourers and a standard increment overall work evaluation of 60%. Moreover, In December 2010, another national the lowest pay permitted by law came into power, the first pay increment for a long time. Already, the most reduced paid piece of clothing labourers earnt a pitiful £15 every month (1,662 takas), yet they will currently have the option to acquire £25 per month (3,000 takas), an expansion of 80%. Anyways, this is still shy of a living pay, determined to be £45 per month (5,000 takas), and the NGWF keeps on crusading for reasonable pay that covers the essential needs of labourers and their families.

Counter argument-Survival

Although many argue that sweatshops are inhumane, and workers are paid less than minimum wage working environment. Others argue that sweatshops can be beneficial to some workers, and according to Powell (2014), people working in sweatshops have better wages and working opportunities than people working in other job sectors. For instance, it is reported that 82.8% of

people working in Bangladesh make a daily living of fewer than two dollars whereas people who are working in sweatshops are making more money a day with most sweatshops paying their workers around 1.8\$ a day in comparison. Moreover, in most of the countries in third world countries have a daily wage of two dollars for ten hours of work. Therefore, critics assert that with 41 out of 43 cases of people working in sweatshops show that they are making more than two dollars, which is better than most job sectors (Powell, 2014). In addition, critics assert that the developing countries MNCs operate in have high percentages of unemployment, for example, according to the CIA World Factbook, the projected unemployment rates for Nicaragua, Haiti, Bangladesh, Honduras and the Commonwealth of Dominica were 7.4 per cent, 40.6 per cent, 5 per cent, 4.5 per cent and 23 per cent (Mejia-Zaccaro, 2013). Powell (2014) also mentions that MNC's employ thousands of people across these countries and by doing so, providing better financial work streams. However, people can argue that the data gathered is not entirely accurate as biases are likely causing an underestimation in earnings as a per cent of living standard.

Conclusion

In conclusion, through analysing sweatshops, it has been determined that sweatshops pose a significant threat to a worker's life and many people have ended up injured or dead due to the hazardous working environment they need to deal with. On the other hand, critics argued that workers in sweatshops make more money than people in other industries. However, this is not a valid argument because workers are still being underpaid and exploited in these low-cost factories. Therefore, there must be a reform within the sweatshop industry to improve working conditions to eliminate the exploitation of workers.

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