

Sweated Trades:
Offshoring, Labour Standards, and the Corporate Response to
Public Criticisms of Garment Factory Working Conditions

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It is a great honour to be with you this evening.

To follow in the footsteps of such esteemed lecturers is a daunting task to be sure.

And, to open with a note of candour, I feel like a bit of a cheat. In the wake of the Rana Plaza disaster, which claimed more than a thousand lives almost a year ago, the Toronto Star dedicated rich resources, in a tough time for newspapers, to the objective of bringing home to Canadian readers the stories of those who lost their lives in the disaster, and to give voice to the cry for change, a chorus that continues to this day. I played but a part in that. And so I must, before continuing, acknowledge the superb work of my colleague Raveena Aulakh, who went undercover in Bangladesh, working in a garment factory, being tutored in her tasks by a girl of heartbreaking beauty. Her name is Meem and at the time of Raveena's investigation, Meem was nine. Meem was Raveena's boss.

Joined by Rick Westhead, Tanya Talaga and Francine Kopun, Raveena led us in the investigation our editor labeled *The Clothes on Your Back*, an exploration that took me to Phnom Penh to investigate how a pledge for change long ago was meant to turn Cambodia into the standard-bearer for the off-shoring of garment manufacture. Change, you may not be surprised to hear, did not come.

But that's getting ahead of the story.

I will begin by stretching the parameters of tonight's talk.

True, Rana Plaza brought to the fore reminders of the sweated trades a century ago, but I would like to lead us further back in time to the beginning of the American Industrial Revolution, to Lawrence, Massachusetts, on the banks of the Merrimack River.

Students of industrial history will be more familiar with Lowell, the so-called birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution.

But it is Lawrence, just up the way, that offers one of those head-shaking pieces of history, one of those echoes that burrows into one's head, and not in a pleasant way.

It is instructive, I think, as we approach the first anniversary of the collapse of Rana Plaza, the first anniversary of the day an eight-storey factory, illegally built, was reduced to rubble.

Lawrence, as with Lowell, grew up as a planned textile manufacturing city, incorporated in 1847, its existence spurred by the foundation pillars of industrialization. The primacy of the machine; the harnessing of electricity; the architecture of the multi-level factory; the surfeit of workers provided, not least, by an ever-growing pool of immigrant labor. A manufactured urban migration. The new city.

Wealthy merchants were transformed into tariff-protected manufacturers and textile mills rose up with great speed, including one built in 1853. It bore the name Pemberton Mill.

The building rose five storeys, with hundreds of looms and thousands of spindles and a near 1,000 workers, mostly women, many as young as 15, earning \$2 a week for 60 hours of labour.

This no doubt sounds familiar.

At approximately 5 p.m. on January 10, 1860, the penalty was ultimately paid — for the poorly constructed building, for those thin walls, for the decision taken by the owners to overload the fourth floor with heavy equipment.

In the words of one witness, when the building collapsed, “The floors seemed to have descended without breaking apart.”

I have in my mind an accordion being squeezed.

And naturally enough I have in my mind Rana Plaza.

In either case, we can imagine the voices screaming from beneath the rubble.

At Pemberton, cotton remnants, cotton bales, machine oil – all provided fast fuel for the fire that subsequently ignited. The mill, which produced 150,000 yards of cotton weekly, was reduced to a smoking ruin.

The cataclysm laid gruesome claim to being the worst American industrial disaster at a time when the word “industrial” still played quite freshly upon the tongue.

No corporate price was paid.

And change did not come, at least in terms of industrial relations.

Of course, technological advances continued to arrive. While I won't attempt to pronounce the name of the Frenchman who invented the sewing machine, the progress from electric-powered chain stitch to lock stitch to 250 stitches a minute is all we really need to know. That, and the American sewing machine patent secured by Elias Howe, the inventor from, yes, Lowell, Massachusetts. Thus was born the American sewing factory, which in substantial ways, is still the factory we know today.

This occurred to me as I walked in, unannounced, to a number of garment factories in Phnom Penh last autumn. Row upon row of sewing machines. Young women at work, many underage. Partially sewn garments piled to the rafters. Ceiling fans whirring overhead. What occurred to me was how little capital appeared to be deployed in these smaller operations. But once again, I am getting ahead of the story.

Anniversary stories – victories, catastrophes, scientific breakthroughs – have long been the stock-in-trade of the news game.

So it is perhaps fitting that as we are gathered here today, the anniversary of yet another disaster lies just days ahead.

It is just before 5 p.m., about the close of business for the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.

Mary Domsy, 18 years of age, was one of the 900 plus workers employed there, and she recalled that March day as a “day that was bursting with life — a day full of the first breaths of spring.”

Sylvia Kimeldorf was a tucker, earning a flat rate of \$10 weekly for six days of work. That would have been a skilled wage. The less skilled had a much thinner pay packet — \$6 a week for six 13-hour days was more the norm.

What struck me about Sylvia’s account was its quotidian context. “I can remember it as if it were yesterday,” she recalled. “I had just put on my skirt and blouse and ... I had my hat on, and ... I put my jacket and pocketbook under my arm.”

These recollections, for which I am indebted to the school of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University, make the Triangle story immediate, relatable, human.

For today’s fast fashion consumer, the word “shirtwaist” may seem as obscure as “lead type” so I will digress briefly to note an advertisement that ran in the Toronto Daily Star, 1911, promoting a dainty shirtwaist of the

smartest fashion, pure linen, tucked in front and fastened with novelty pearl buttons. All for a price of two dollars and twenty-five cents.

I don't know if the term ready-to-wear ever appeared in such advertisements, but suffice it to say that the factory-made fitted blouse was seen as a form of emancipation from the labours of home sewing.

It was that same year, 1911, on the 25th of March, that a fire broke out near a cutting table at the Triangle factory. Imagine if you will row upon row of long cutting tables. Numerous accounts made note of the array of shirtwaists hanging on lines above the workers; of the fabric trimmings on the floor; of paper patterns hanging by the windows.

On the day of the fire Mary Domskey noted to colleagues that the fire buckets were empty.

One of the more fascinating accounts, at least to my eyes, appeared in September of that year in McClure's, that seminal periodical of epic muckraking journalism.

Here we learn of the sudden arrival of so-called loft factories in New York City accompanied by the learned fact, and I'm quoting, that in the decade to 1910 "neither the city nor the state enacted a single new building or factory law that recognized there was a new situation to meet."

Such loft factories, as initially conceived, were designed for the storing and display of goods.

There were no specified requirements for stairwell construction. Sprinkler systems were not compulsory. While the lofts often rose above eight stories, fire department ladders rose only as high as the seventh. The fire at the Triangle factory broke out on the ninth floor.

New York factory laws stipulated that each worker shall have 250 cubic feet of air at a time when the so-called tenement factories had eight-foot ceilings. The loft ceilings, however, were 10 or even 11 feet and thus the calculus as to how many workers could be legally present grew as the floor space per person shrank.

On the day of the fire, one of the exit doors was locked, the bolt sprung, a common practice by managers always on the lookout for worker thievery.

The New York Times reported that the owners escaped by fleeing across the rooftops, an escape route either not known to or forbidden to the workers.

If you look at your watch, or rather your smart phone, you can see that 18 minutes isn't a huge amount of time, even in our current fast-paced madness. To think of 146 people dying in that space of time is almost an unimaginable cruelty. I say almost because, as we know, the modern-day story is so much worse.

Before we leap forward, let's remember that Kate Leone was 14, and Ida Brodsky was 15, and Anna Altman was 16. Apparently there was much excitement in the factory that day for one of the girls was engaged and was showing off her ring. I'm not sure if Clothilde Terranova was that same girl, but the record notes that she was soon to be married, that she was about to quit her job, and that her bank book displayed a balance of \$54. How proud she must have been, saving such a handsome sum.

The papers of the day were filled with horrific accounts of workers jumping from windows, of the nets that did not hold. The account in the Milwaukee Journal particularly resonates for the way in which the writer uses a grotesque term: thud dead. What hits me is how difficult it is to say. And it goes: "Thud-dead, thud-dead, thud-dead, thud-dead....The first ten thud-deads shocked me."

The eyewitness account was from a United Press reporter. "It seemed to me that the thuds were so loud that they might have been heard all over the city."

The Star in its front-page coverage wondered, "Could such a holocaust occur in our own city?"

What is sometimes lost in the ruins of the Triangle tragedy is the rising worker action that came before it. In September of 1909 a number of

Triangle workers went on strike – I don't have a precise figure though estimates appear to be in the range of 200. By November a general strike against the shirtwaist manufacturers had grown to tens of thousands, including support from some women in so-called high society, Safety conditions. Sanitary conditions. Paltry pay. Gender discrimination. Hours of work. Some of the factories, through not Triangle, did agree to higher wages, fewer hours. Supreme Court Justice Brandeis had his hand in here, with the Protocol of Peace that he helped negotiate, seeking the underpinnings of a fair and just work place. Minimum wages; maximum hours.

Triangle, unlike Pemberton Mill, did spur long-term change. Automatic sprinklers. Factory registration. Fire drills. Fire escapes. Exits. Limits on hours worked. I will leave it to the labour relations historians among you to argue the degree to which laws enacted signalled a new era in labor relations, and whether the advances won by Brandeis held fast.

But perhaps we can agree that the Triangle Fire served as a demarcation, a before and after, at least as far as the sweated trades were concerned.

How the world has changed.

Or has it.

Memory being what it is, or in my case, what it has become, I can't recall precisely when I found myself standing on the banks of the Massacre River in Haiti. We were in a town called Ouanaminthe. The day was slate grey, spitting rain, and I clearly remember an adolescent boy buck naked doing aerial cartwheels on the shore and how hard photographer Lucas Oleniuk worked on capturing that shot without, you know, including the private bits. We had flown to Ouanaminthe to investigate Haitian garment manufacturer. An industrial park was located there, positioned right across the river from the Dominican Republic. The DR could provide reliable electricity for the garment manufacturers – Haiti's own power grid was a mess – and the labor pool was ever present in a country like Haiti, which is indescribably impoverished.

So much of that story has stayed with me. Watching the Haitians stream across the border, when allowed, to the market in the DR. Watching a Dominican boy slap a Haitian boy just because, it seemed, of a long held belief in cultural superiority. Listening to the screeching complaint of the woman who ran the food stall just outside the factory, for workers were constantly in arrears in paying her for their lunch. Henceforth, she decreed, no more credit.

But the facts were that Madam Flora's lunch of beef and plantain stew was more than a day's pay, at least for entry level workers. Louise Mene was one of these. Her days started at 6:30 and ended 10 hours later. Her employer, she told me, squeezed six days into five because if she actually worked that sixth day, the Saturday, he would be obliged to pay her for the seventh.

Louise's take home pay was 125 gourdes a day, or a weekly pay then, in dollar terms, of about \$14.

She was paid in gourdes and was supposed to receive 588 of those. Her employer, she said, regularly paid her 585 gourdes instead. He didn't have the change....he said.

Needless to say, Louise could not afford Madame Flora's lunch. To site the common parlance of today, Louise did not earn a living wage.

At the time, former U.S. president Bill Clinton was running the now defunct Interim Haiti Recovery Commission. Attending the commission's second public meeting, I had an opportunity to briefly interview Paul Farmer. The superstar medical anthropologist from Harvard's Medical School had deep roots in Haiti and had written critically of offshore garment assembly which, he wrote, made "cunningly efficient use of the high-repression, low-wage setting that Haiti offers investors."

It had done, in fact, since the heyday of Papa Doc Duvalier.

But after the earthquake, after the devastation, Farmer hitched his wagon to Clinton and, to mix a metaphor, changed his tune. He had had, he explained to me, an epiphany.

Gone was the flat criticism of garment manufacture as a mode of economic development that exploits labor differentials.

Arrived was his new position that garment jobs weren't the worst of the worst and that the key going forward was to ensure labor standards and fair wages. The commission, he said, would perform an apple and stick function. The apple was access to capital; the stick was the enforcement of wage and labor standards.

Garments account for 91 per cent of Haiti's exports. Favourable tariff and quota arrangements with the U.S. dating back to 2007 were struck on condition of labour standards compliance.

A report last fall from Better Work Haiti, a partnership between the ILO and the International Finance Corp., indicated that at least as far as piece rate wages were concerned, noncompliance was rampant. A follow-up investigation by the U.S. based Worker Rights Consortium alleged that garment workers are regularly being denied as much as one-third of their earned wages. There is much work to be done.

I raise the Haiti example because the garment industry is imbedded with a trip wire: If not garment factory jobs for a country such as this, then what? When Rana Plaza collapsed on the 24th of April last year news reports of the mounting death toll — 87, 175, 225 and on until the tally surpassed 1,100 — became quickly entwined with an economic profile of Bangladesh. Garment exports account for roughly 80 per cent of the country's total exports. The CIA World Fact Book notes that the sector, and I quote, “has remained resilient in recent years amidst a series of factory accidents that have killed over 1,000 workers and crippling strikes that shut down virtually all economic activity.”

This “resilience” I suppose can be captured by little Meem as she sat on the floor, 12 hours a day, seven days a week trimming threads from collars and cuffs in a Bangladeshi garment factory. Small nimble hands are adept at such tasks.

My colleague, Raveena, was tutored and supervised by Meem and thus was perfectly placed to report on the grim, unsanitary conditions Meem faced each and every day, of the half hour break for 12 hours worked, of a factory with no fire extinguishers and a single exit.

It may seem strange to suggest, but Meem, who, remember, was a little girl 9 years of age, was relatively lucky. Raveena would go on to investigate the

toxic world of Bangladeshi tanneries. At least Meem was spared that.

Neither story was meant to provide a comprehensive picture of the industry today. But in both situations readers could be forgiven for believing that time in the garment universe had stood still, that 2013 was 1913, or even 1860.

Locked doors to prevent against thievery, underage labor, underpaid labor, harassment, fear of retribution, unsanitary conditions, unsafe conditions. All of these notes were struck by the legion of reporters around the globe launched into action by the Rana disaster.

Or was it the Tazreen disaster. That fire, in November, 2012, just outside Dhaka claimed 112 lives. Gates locked from the outside. No emergency exits. Etcetera. Here's a breakthrough: last month the Tazreen owners were charged with culpable homicide. On Friday their bail petition was rejected. It is believed to be the first time in the country that garment factory owners have been prosecuted.

I wonder what Clara Lemlich would think. The sudden activist played a central role in spurring garment workers to strike over these self same conditions. In 1909.

My own curiosity took me to Cambodia.

Let me tell you of the night I arrived in Phnom Penh. Garment workers had been protesting in what is ironically called Freedom Park. At about the time my plane set down, a young man had been shot dead by the military police. He was not a garment worker, but had been caught up in the crowd as he made his way home that evening.

I had felt this sense of unease before. In the Congo. In Indonesia long, long ago. During a strange reportorial escapade in the high Andes. I'm not a war correspondent. I've never been on the front lines, life at risk, that sort of thing. It is business stories that have intrigued me, from the Westray coal mining disaster to conflict minerals in the DRC. I suppose in these journeys I was seeking the answer to the central question: how does business behave in this globalized world?

In Phnom Penh it was a tense political scene. Former Khmer Rouge operative Hun Sen was about to resume his seat as prime minister.

Opposition leader Sam Rainsy was having none of it after what was broadly assessed as a rigged election.

There are echoes of Bangladesh and Haiti here. Garment manufacture account for 80 percent of Cambodia's exports last year. Add in shoes and that figure exceeds 90 per cent. The explosion of garment factories triggered

an urban migration – memories of Lowell, Mass. – and the workers are frequently dormed in housing owned by the factory owners.

The difference is that the protest power of the Cambodian garment worker has been well harnessed. Sam Rainsy's platform pledge to double the minimum wage to \$160 monthly had ignited a mass of tens of thousands.

My translator joined me in walking as nonchalantly as we could through the main floor of a large factory in the capital, a point I am making here only because of the eerie scene that unfolded. The light is low, hazy. From bright daylight it takes a moment for eyes to adjust. What comes into focus is a sea of army green hammocks strung from the ceiling, military police cocooned in some of these. Packing bins perhaps four by three feet in size appeared to be the prime real estate as a policeman popped up from one of these clearly wondering what our business was there.

The capital was in lockdown. Razor wire blocked the centre of the city from car and motorcycle traffic.

In the centre of the capital is a strange and rather diminutive statue of labour leader Che Vichea. On the morning of January 22, 2004, as Vichea read the newspaper, a motorbike drove up and the man on the back shot him at point-blank range. Two men from the provinces were charged and convicted in a cocked up trial.

Last September the scapegoats were, at last, exonerated.

The killers remain at large.

Vichea is a powerful martyr to the cause. Vichea founded the Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia with none other than Sam Rainsy. Vichea's memory, ever present as I pursued the story, helped explain the raging anger that fuels the protest movement.

The garment story in Cambodia offers some distinctive and important features. Many of us will recall various exposes on the global industry in the mid 90s. A CBS news documentary took viewers to Nike Town, in Saigon, where labourers earned 20 cents an hour making Air Jordans. There was the congressional presentation from Charles Kernaghan exposing the Honduran child labor behind Kathie Lee Gifford's clothing line. Kathie Lee famously cried on air. And so on. Celebrity culture and brand name endorsements provided a weak spot. Kernaghan became a loud voice for change, with a dab hand at shaming. A profile in Mother Jones some months ago recalled the banner that Kernaghan had flown above the Academy Awards one year: Disney Uses Sweatshops.

But go back to the mid-90s. Bill Clinton took on the anti sweatshop mantra. In the spring of 1997 he unveiled the U.S. Apparel Industry Partnership.

Two years later a bilateral trade agreement with Cambodia linked increased quotas to improvements in labour standards.

As “sweatshop” was the buzzword for appalling working conditions, “transparency” became the buzzword for this new beginning in garment manufacture, though as Clinton said, “We know that sweatshop labour will not vanish overnight.” That was April, 1997.

A monitor was established, located in Phnom Penh. Called Better Factories Cambodia, the monitor was and is an offshoot of the ILO. At its inception Better Factories’ chief task was to conduct regular factory inspections and publish reports on their findings.

So there it was. Transparency.

That oft repeated phrase of Justice Brandeis seems appropriate here:

“Publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants.”

It appeared to be a giant step forward.

Followed by a giant step into the deep, dark past.

In 2004 Better Factories, under pressure from the garment industry, amended its reporting methods. Out was public transparency. Factory audits would be disclosed only to a paid subscriber base.

About a year ago, the International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution at Stanford Law School released a report called *Monitoring in the Dark*.

Working alongside the Worker Rights Consortium the report revealed non voluntary overtime. Poor health and safety conditions. Revolving fixed duration contracts. And so on.

When I met with the BFC in the capital, there was some disdain expressed about the report. How easy it was for students – a word that was said rather witheringly as I recall – to pass judgment. But a synthesis report, produced by the BFC without providing a factory by factory breakdown, had noted generally the sadly predictable problems: locked exits during working hours, unclean drinking water, nonpayment of overtime wages; insufficient emergency exits. And so on.

What would force remedial action if there were no public disclosure?

David Welsh, the Phnom Penh based country director for an international labour rights organization, said this, and I quote: “I can tell you first hand, all the data that’s given to the government, to the brands and to the factories – it’s virtually always the case that never is any proactive measure taken unless they’re pressured to do so.”

But here’s the thing: the day I attended that meeting Better Factories had decided to revert to its prior policy. The program manager said this in our

interview: “One hundred years after the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire we have got to do something completely different. What we’re doing isn’t the biggest revolutionary thing. But it’s a start.”

Just yesterday, the BFC launched its online public data base.

So that’s a small piece of good news.

I wish there was not so much bad news on the other side of the ledger.

A January standoff between thousands of protestors and police in the capital resulted in the death of four garment workers. Twenty-three protestors, 21 of whom are garment workers, were arrested and placed in a prison known as C3. When last I heard from David Welsh, a few days ago, he informed me that 21 remain in detention – trials are pending – and that bans on assembly and restrictions on union formation have become the norm.

It is important to note that a number of large global brands lent their name to a letter sent to Hun Sen calling for a full investigation into the activities of both sides. H&M. Adidas. Gap Inc. The use of deadly force against workers, the letter stated, would not result in long term industrial peace. And state action against the workers’ right to organize is, and I quote, “counterproductive to re-establishing social dialogue in the garment industry.”

The unions intend to stage a stay at home strike after the Khmer New Year next month.

I fear for what may happen next.

Cambodia remains a tinderbox.

Journalists are magpies. And the frustration for some of us is that by not working a beat but rather tilling a broad landscape of feature stories, we descend briefly on the bright shiny story object, then flit away to the next headline. The challenge is to unearth compelling authentic stories in a brief period of time. To bring the story home.

In Phnom Penh a labour activist teed me up with a group of workers who were actively involved in the protest movement. I interviewed them. But I needed, as the job demands, to dig deeper, to find the average story of the average girl.

Srey Moch was 19 when I met her. She had been working in the factory for three years. Her sister, who started work at 13, got her the job. Both had used forged identity papers. Srey Moch's first job was as a shirt measurer. For this she was paid \$55 monthly. Last year the country's minimum wage was raised to \$80. To earn this Moch starts work at 7 a.m. sewing T-shirt

sleeves often until 9 p.m. Her quota is 950 pieces a day. For every 100 shirts above the quota she is paid an additional 25 cents.

I went three times to Moch's home, to the slated wood shanty she lives in with her sister, siblings, parents. One day was a Sunday, washing day, and Moch's favourite T-shirt, bright yellow with the phrase "Happy Alive Style" printed upon it, was hanging from the laundry line.

Moch has never heard the word Adidas. Nor Nike. Nor McDonald's.

Starbucks T-shirts were hugely popular in the capital when I was there. I asked a number of people wearing the T-shirts if they knew what Starbucks was. None did. The coffee chain has no presence in Cambodia.

Moch's father could find no work. If there were no factory jobs the family would face many problems. The family, he said, "would be deficient in living."

It was clear that this form of living was a bare subsistence. And the family was deeply in debt due to medical bills.

Moch's father has a point.

It hits home when you travel to the garbage dump outside the capital, just past the Killing Fields, and talk to the children who prefer to work at night when the smell is less bad.

It hit home too when I asked the driver to stop the tuk-tuk I was travelling in so I could speak to a woman who had caught my eye.

Imagine. She was sitting on a chair by a bathtub.

One foot was positioned on the side of the tub and she had a knife sticking out between her toes.

The bathtub was partially filled with water and a sea of plastic bags.

The woman's job was to slit the bags open with the knife.

She told me that a broker in her village had brought her to this job. She was to sleep at this place. She did not know how much she was going to be paid.

In the garment biz, a common refrain is that if wages were to rise, companies would uproot and head elsewhere. It's the kind of argument that makes people like David Welsh see red. "What they're saying, in other words, is if you force us to comply with international labor standards we'll pull out of the country."

To where? Lao? Myanmar?

Maybe.

Or maybe the carousel has to stop sometime and maybe Cambodia is it.

Or maybe not.

I wish I could provide some clear insights into what might happen next.

But I can't.

And here's why.

In the mid-90s, through what I will call the anti-sweatshop heyday, I really thought we were getting somewhere. I thought my generation would fix this for the next generation. For my children.

But that didn't happen.

Instead we find ourselves in a fast fashion world overpopulated by \$5 Joe Fresh T-shirts matched with \$200 Armani jeans.

I asked one garment worker if she would try to leave work with a label so that I could see what she was sewing that day. And as she exited the gates of her factory at sunset, she pressed that Armani label into my hand.

Meaningless to her, of course.

Fast fashion looked at through the lens of high end global brands is fast in the sense of demanding that contractors fill orders quickly, driven by a high paced seasonal turnaround. The manufacturers, squeezed, they say, by the brands, simply seek the lowest cost labor environment in order to preserve what they insist are the skinniest of profit margins. As we can all attest to with the ease of checking the labels on our own clothing, brand manufacturers produce the vast majority of their lines offshore. We're all involved in this.

What has to happen?

Are we, journalists, doing a good enough job at probing this story?

How can it be that more than 100 years after Triangle and more than 150 after Pemberton Mill we are still writing the same sorry tale?

That's a tragedy.

And it embarrasses me to admit that I've had to move on long since to the next shiny object. I know that Primark is upping its payouts to the Bangladeshi victims. I know that the chief safety inspector for the Accord on Fire and Building Safety is a Winnipegger named Brad Loewen and that an evacuation of one building was ordered on the 10th of this month. I know that the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety doesn't compel independent site inspections. Last month Human Rights Watch reported on interviews with workers in 21 Bangladeshi factories who claimed that any union organizing met with intimidation and mistreatment on the part of managers — and even death threats.

My eyes flit across the headlines.

That's quite sad, isn't it?

I don't know how Moch is doing.

Or her sister.

I keep thinking of that line: What then must we do?

We should all be demanding full disclosure, transparency, brand audits. We should be informed as to which monitor is doing the auditing and how independent they are. We should be informed as to when remedial action is taken.

We shouldn't have to fight for this. I'm a bit surprised in this era of corporate social responsibility that we have to.

Talk about scales falling from eyes.

Brands should be on the bandwagon to increase the minimum wage. Full stop.

Independent audits and full disclosure should be borne as the cost of doing business. Full stop.

Infractions should be time stamped with deadlines attached for remedial action. Full stop.

Am I naïve?

Really, is it that hard?

So many stories on the Rana Plaza continue to use this phrase:

“The worst industrial accident to hit the garment industry.”

Until now.

Or until tomorrow.

I don't have a high degree of confidence that such a record will hold.

Do you?

As I poked through all that history – a bit of an interest of mine as you can tell – I wondered if future generations will still be speaking of this more than 100 years from now?

If they do so as distanced observers, that's all to the good.

If it is a contemporary disaster of which they speak, we will have failed.