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Labor laws and How They Impact The Fashion Industry

The fashion industry is a 1.3 trillion worth industry where millions of jobs are created every year. Yet, in this industry, many laborers are substantially treated poorly and many of their rights are violated or taken away. Many laws are created to respond to these violations and to ensure that employers are providing the necessary accommodations to their workers in their workplace and treating them fairly and equally. However, many law policies are not fully enforced by many businesses and corporations. While many believe that labor laws are essential because, without them, employers would take full advantage of their employees, others believe that labor laws don't fully protect workers.

There are hundreds of laws around the world, especially in the United States that protects employees. One of these laws is the Fair Labor Standard Act. This law was created to protect workers from unfair work regulations or pay practices. Not only that, but it also restricts the hours that people underage 16 can work. This avoid any child exploitation. Another labor law in the United States is the Occupational Safety and Health Act. This law ensures workers' safety and health conditions in the workplace. In other words, this law provides employees with a workplace free from recognized, serious hazards and/or anything that endanger their lives ("Summary of the", n.d).

There are many labor laws in foreign countries where most of the fashion apparel factories are located. These countries include China, India, and Bangladesh. For example, In

China, they have the Labor Law of the People's Republic of China, that "protect the legitimate rights and interests of laborers, regulate labor relationship, establish and safeguard a labor system suited to the socialist market economy, and promote economic development and social progress ("Labor Law", 2016)". In India, they have the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act which protects disabled people from various forms of discrimination. It also ensures that they have equal employment opportunities (Briefing, 2017). In Bangladesh, they have the Bangladesh Labor Act which also protects worker's rights and improves occupational health and safety conditions ("International Labour", 2019).

Although these countries have laws that intend to protect workers, many of them are repetitively violated by employers and are not fully enforced by the government. For example, in Bangladesh, "the government has not established enough development toward protecting basic workers rights in Bangladesh, including the important rights of free expression and freedom of association, or strengthening overall access to rule of law for workers and civil society activists ("The Labor rights", 2010)". The truth is that the lack of enforcement of labor law is due to the ignorance of the government and employers. Not only that, but legal authorities usually overlook several illegal practices in the workplace such as unhealthy work environment, low wages, discrimination, and child labor ("The Labor rights", 2010).

Labor laws might be violated in foreign countries, but in the United States, these kinds of laws are responsible for today's fair and equal labor system in the country. Although the case might not be the same for every country, labor laws are important because it clarifies the employer's obligations to their employees. However, because many employees, especially in

non-developed countries, are not aware of their rights and of some laws that benefit them, employers take full advantage of their lack of knowledge.

Companies and corporations should hold other countries that they contract with for production purposes to the same standard as the U.S not only because it is ethical but also because it affects the image of the company. This is because the customers might think that the company supports low working conditions and do not provide fair accommodations to their employees and this labor unrest may lead to strikes. For example, in 2013, Nike experienced and faced weeks of supply disruptions and added costs due to worker strikes over low wages in Vietnam and Cambodia (“Labor remains”, 2017).” This shows the complications a company can face when it deals with labor issues in foreign countries. This is the main reason why companies and corporations should make sure the country they make contracts with has the same labor standards.

A potential benefit of holding other countries to have the same standard as the U.S is that the company will maintain a good reputation and brand image. This will avoid any labor unrest and any negative impact on the brand image. On the other hand, a drawback of doing so is that labor costs will increase and will definitely impact the final cost of the merchandise. Labor costs will increase because if foreign countries apply the same labor standards as the U.S, employers would have to increase the wage to their employees and provide better working conditions, ending up at a higher cost for the companies.

It is ethical to compel other countries to change their labor laws only if their laws are not ensuring safe working conditions to their employees, paying low wages or have child labor. Child labor is a major issue in non-developed countries. This is not because children should not

have the opportunity to work to support themselves and their families, but because most of these children are forced to work by their families and employers take advantage of them. According to Sustainyourstyle.org, “168 million children in the world are forced to work. Because the fashion industry requires low-skilled labor, child labor is particularly common in this industry (“Inhumane working”, 2014)”. In many countries, poor families send their children to work in textile factories for a couple of years in exchange for receiving a basic wage or a lump sum payment at the end (“Inhumane working”, 2014). This is an example of child exploitation and unfortunately, it happens in many countries.

In conclusion, the fashion industry provides millions of jobs worldwide. However, in foreign countries, most of these jobs do not provide high working conditions and in many cases, employees work under an unhealthy work environment, low wages, and discrimination. Because these issues along child labor and child exploitation are huge problems in foreign countries, companies and corporations should definitely hold other countries that they contract with for production purposes to the same standards as the U.S. This is not only to maintain a good reputation, but also to protect those workers that work hard every day to produce their merchandise.

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