

## Sweatshop Addendum

This is a note from Sam Kendall, a former student of mine regarding the difficult question of sweatshops. Sam has worked in the Ukraine, Nepal, and Cambodia for NGOs that try and help people who need help in speech therapy. Go to the website and write some thoughts below: <http://www.oiccambodia.org/>

Sam's thoughts: Here in Cambodia a few years ago a bunch of Cambodian factory workers were shot, by the police, for asking for \$177 per month (think about that for a spell as you read some of the article below).

*More than 1,000 garment workers gathered in Phnom Penh and marched through the city center Sunday, demanding a "decent wage" from their factories, the largest garment-sector demonstration in the capital since military police fatally suppressed a protest for higher wages in January.*

*Six unions teamed up to organize the rally, aimed at putting pressure on the government to approve a hefty raise to the industry's monthly minimum wage, now set at \$100. The Labor Advisory Committee—composed of government, factory and union representatives—is set to make a wage recommendation to the government next month, with a new floor wage scheduled to take effect in January.*

*The unions deliberately avoided demanding a specific figure Sunday—unlike a smaller "day of action" in September, when workers called for \$177 per month—but have been asking for a raise of at least \$50. The factories say they can't afford more than a \$10 wage hike.*

*Sporting bright pink T-shirts that read "We want a decent wage," the workers, from Phnom Penh and surrounding provinces, gathered at Freedom Park in the early morning before beginning their march.*

*"We demand a decent wage because we want a decent living, good health and to send our children to school," Ken Chhenglang, acting president of the National Independent Federation of Textile Unions in Cambodia, told the crowd.*

(Watch Deadly Fashion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CI-WPATGa24> and take notes here:

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There is a lot to unpack, because sweatshops for one person is a crappy factory for another person and there are important differences. After all factories are jobs people do sign up to work in, like many in Cambodia, the problem is there aren't a whole lot of options for people. So the forced aspect doesn't always apply. Many of the individuals who end up working in crazy factories are younger (16-25) and their only other option is to work in the agricultural industry. They can get more money in the factories than they can in the agricultural sectors, and if they are women, significantly more money that they have control over. Similarly, as demographics shift, families have more children as in the past many would die and now they don't. If families do not have money from farming to send their kids to school or even to pay for the food for their kids, what are their options?

Many say universal education is the answer, but that leads to a multitude of other problems. Even if governments offer free education, which isn't always the case, how do they pay for that free education if the most of the population is an agricultural society? How can we as humans in the world continue to make sure that our products (not just close and electronics, but food, wood for our houses and beds) are created in a way that supports those who make it, be it in America, Cambodia, Columbia, or Bangladesh.

As this discussion gets complicated, many people throw up their hands and say, "Well this is too much to think about when I need money myself to buy clothes and then food." Most of us from Saratoga though have the financial background to be able to spend a bit more upfront so we don't have to stretch the dollar as much as a single parent who might never have a savings account and only seasonal work. We are therefore in a place of privilege (the bugabear of the modern day). Having privilege isn't something to be ashamed of though, as long as you use it to spend the time to think through these problems.

One last thing from my time here in Cambodia and from when I was in Nepal. We all focus a lot on factories because it is easier to regulate a big building with hundreds or thousands of workers. What is often overlooked are Subcontractors (the sequel to the tv show I linked to above has a good bit on them that's 10 min I think). Many of these are people working out of their houses, which could be a good thing, giving people work that they can do from home. It is really difficult to regulate and ensure that people aren't employing child labor/exploiting people though, so what do you do? Some people need that money to survive, but others exploit it to do some fairly heinous things.

Summary