

Tekst 5 Suffer the little children

Nike and Gap were exposed on *Panorama* recently as having child workers stitch their products in a Cambodian factory, in breach of their employment codes.

They are not alone. A recent edition of *Business Week* exposed appalling conditions in a factory in Guangdong, southern China, which makes handbags for Wal-Mart. 11, the retailer has a code of conduct that appears to have been ignored by its supplier, and, as in the cases of Nike and Gap, the code is audited by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

These stories obviously reflect badly on all concerned, but they highlight several issues arising from globalisation that do not get the same attention as the international trade and finance aspects that attract the rioters and the headlines. First, conditions that appear appalling by western standards are endemic in developing countries. Second, codes of conduct will not stamp them out. Third, auditors face an impossible task attempting to certify the standards in contractors' factories.

These are the 12 projects such as the UK's Ethical Trading Initiative, which is backed by the Department for International Development.

The initiative exists to improve the conditions of workers in developing countries who make the products that appear on British shelves. Child labour is the headline-grabbing issue, but there are many

others (see table). The initiative is now led by the unlikely figure of Yve Newbold. She used to be the Hanson Group company secretary and, because of that past, she may have the clout to persuade reluctant boards that they need to take seriously the 13 of their suppliers, no matter how far away these may be.

Publicity such as the *Panorama* programme, and other controversies dragging in companies such as Marks & Spencer, have shown it is 14 to get the attention of directors in the most vulnerable companies – the big-brand owners. After all, nobody with a fragile brand to protect wants to be exposed for using child labour in China or paying a pittance in Portugal.

But the question is how to ensure 15 are what they should be, and the ethical initiative is running a series of pilot schemes in Zimbabwe, China, Costa Rica and elsewhere to work out practical solutions.

It is tempting to think that the

Codes of conduct will not be enough to stop child labour and long hours. By Roger Cowe

answer is simply to pay more for the products. That would certainly help and in many cases would hardly be noticed, given the tiny proportion of the western selling price accounted for by the 16 of items such as trainers.

But price is not the only, or even the main, issue. This is a question of bridging the cultural divide between the kind of attitudes that existed in England at the start of the industrial revolution and those prevalent today. The battle for the ten-hour day for children and women went on for decades before it was won in 1847. Organising a strike was a criminal offence until 1875. That 17 the current employment conditions in Cambodia, Vietnam, the Philippines and other countries producing the west's cheap consumer products.

This is not to excuse such conditions, but to highlight the complexity of the issues – which has forced the Foreign Office into a rethink of its plans to tell British businesses how to behave abroad. Guidance on 18 was supposed to have been published months ago, but an initial draft was savaged by experts and campaigners.

According to a recent report from the Institute of Business Ethics, systems to ensure appropriate employment practices will take at least ten years to develop. In the meantime, companies such as Nike and Gap will continue to be exposed, in spite of their best efforts.

Sometimes, the only answer is to move production. For example, the DIY chain B&Q had to stop buying rugs from Pakistan because it was impossible to guarantee that children were not being exploited. 19 that is almost self-defeating, as is the sacking of child workers, who often end up as street prostitutes.

There is no shortage of codes (from the International Labour Organisation, for example) and no shortage of companies willing to sign up to them.

But a code is of no use unless it is enforced, and that is the tricky bit in an environment where there may be 20 what is actually happening inside factories. In countries where there are no birth certificates, it can be hard even to tell who is a child. And it is usually easy for a recalcitrant manufacturer to give the children a day off when the auditors come calling.

EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

- **Bonded labour** – workers forced to work to pay off debts to the employer
- **Forced labour** – prisoners forced to work against their will
- **Freedom of association** – includes trade unions linked to government, employers refusing to recognise unions, governments (for example, China) banning unions
- **Health & safety** – includes lack of enforcement of regulations, lack of training, poor sanitation or ventilation, excessive hours
- **Child labour** – globally, 120 million children under the age of 14 are believed to work full time
- **Wages** – legal minimum is often ignored; some operations can be exempt, especially in special economic zones dedicated to manufacturing for export
- **Discrimination** – can be reflected in different wage levels, exclusion from some work, denial of rights
- **Other exploitation** – illegal immigrants, in particular, can be exploited in the developed world, out of fear of being repatriated

Source: Institute of Business Ethics

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Kies bij iedere open plek in de tekst het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.

1p **11** ■

- A After all
- B Again
- C Consequently
- D On the other hand

1p **12** ■

- A challenges facing
- B codes of conduct applying to
- C failures threatening

1p **13** ■

- A behaviour
- B complaints
- C reputation

1p **14** ■

- A necessary
- B not difficult
- C risky
- D very useful

1p **15** ■

- A conditions
- B products
- C sales figures

1p **16** ■

- A advertising cost
- B brand name
- C manufacturing cost
- D price of raw materials
- E transport cost

1p **17** ■

- A compares favourably with
- B is in sharp contrast with
- C lies at the root of
- D puts into perspective

1p **18** ■

- A consumer rights
- B ethical issues
- C how to expand trade relations
- D how to remove political obstacles

1p **19** ■

- A But
- B For
- C So

1p **20** ■

- A employers who keep silent about
- B very little hard evidence of
- C very little reason for criticism of