**The OUTSOURCING effect**

**“OVERLOADED, OVERSTRETCHED, OVERTIME...and OVER THERE”**

“If you didn’t do overtime they would dismiss you, it didn’t matter if it was night or day.” Sophal, Cambodian clothing worker.

Clothing orders are placed with lowest cost contractors by big-name labels, retailers and those who source for them, with no real calculation as to what can be handled. Cost is everything and it is not surprising that there are more fires and fire deaths in Bangladesh caused by the overloading of electrical systems that are not equipped for such intensity of production, and by the avoidance of the costs of health and safety, when it also has the *lowest* *wage* *levels* in the global business. This outsourcing of danger has been to the benefit of richer world mass consumers, and the cheapness of clothing has softened the impact of the present economic crisis on them. The seemingly endless nature of this crisis can only increase the pressure for lower costs and greater risk to workers. Between 1990 and 2000 there were 100 clothing factory fires in Bangladesh. In 2011, there were more than ever. Such fires and deaths are not exclusive to that country. They have occurred in India and China and in Argentina. This latter case reveals the presence of sweatshops in the richer world often staffed by undocumented immigrants. In 2012 fires destroyed two clothing factories in England, one in Leicester where previously such factories providing clothes for big name fashion outlets have been discovered with exit doors padlocked as well as illegally low pay. In Bangladesh in large factories such locked gates and locked emergency doors have been the main reason that fires have killed, just as happened at Triangle Shirtwaist 100 years ago in new York. This chaining of doors has been due to the sacredness of property, but also to the direct enforcement of unscheduled overtime working to prevent mass walk-outs when it is declared.

February 23rd 2006. Chittagong, Bangladesh. 84 workers are killed when a fire breaks out at the KTS Textiles Industries Ltd factory in the BSCIC industrial area, a company producing for a variety of US companies. An ‘impromptu’ overtime shift was created of 1100 workers to meet a deadline that otherwise would not be met. The fire was started by an ***electrical short-circuit***. The *emergency gate was illegally locked* which meant workers had just one narrow staircase with which to escape. Fires in the same factory had occurred in the past. Amongst the dead were seven girls aged between 12 and 14. The owner lives in the USA.

March 30th 2006. Buenos Aires, the Caballito district. 6 undocumented Bolivians, four children and two women, die in a fire in a textile sweatshop where over 60 immigrants worked. The children had been *locked in* a room so that they would not disturb the work. The fire was caused by an ***electrical short-circuit caused by unsafe and overloaded electrical wiring.***

December 14th 2010. Despite one tragedy after another in Bangladesh, and just one week after a ‘multi-stakeholder’ conference on the very theme of fire safety in the country,a fire breaks out in the finishing department on the 9th floor of the 10 floor *That’s It Sportswear* factory, part of the Ha-Meem group. An***electrical* *short-circuit*** and the sparks it produced is blamed. 24 workers are killed, many more are terribly injured or missing. Workers on the upper floors jumped as *emergency exit doors were locked,* and if it had not been at lunchtime many more would have been locked in to die. The factory supplies GAP, Tommy Hilfinger and JC Penney amongst others. GAP says it is sorry.