News Review

MRS CARTLEDGE
Modern slavery at heart of new virus outbreak

How are people kept in slavery?

- Locked in: 6.6%
- In debt: 9%
- Family Threatened: 12%
- Violence: 16%
- Personal Threat: 17%
- Not paid: 24%

Source: International Labour Organisation, Walk Free Foundation
Will the world ever eliminate slavery for good?

- It’s nearly 200 years since the UK banned slavery, but modern-day slaves are revealed to be the source of a new coronavirus outbreak.
- “They make profits like hell and pay us in peanuts,” shouts the factory foreman.
- He has to be loud. His voice is drowned out by the sounds of the sweatshop: the hum of machinery, the hissing of industrial irons, and the chatter of dozens of workers crammed into a hot and tiny room.
- At the end of the day, the workers in this factory will take home just £3.50 for every hour of backbreaking work.
Where do you think this scene might have taken place?

• The answer is surprising: the factory is in Leicester, a UK newspaper revealed this weekend.
• The workers are making clothes for some of the UK’s biggest fast fashion brands such as Boohoo.
• Doctors think that factories like this may be the source of a new coronavirus outbreak in the city, causing the government to enforce the first local lockdown.
• With cramped conditions making social distancing impossible, it is no surprise that the virus spread like wildfire through the workshop.
But Leicester is just one part of a global problem....

- An estimated 40 million people worldwide are trapped in slavery.
- They are being made to work through intimidation and violence, or to pay off debts, in factories, on farms or construction sites.
- In fact, slave labour is a huge part of the global supply chain. It is a secret economy worth over £116 billion every year, a third of which is generated in developed countries.
- As one 2017 report put it: “Forced labourers produced some of the food we eat and the clothes we wear, and they have cleaned the buildings in which many of us live or work.”
People often think of slavery as a problem of the past....

- More people are enslaved today than at any other time in history.
- Today, rather than being abducted and sold, many victims are tricked into slavery.
- Last year, British police jailed members of a gang who promised vulnerable Polish people well-paid jobs in England.
- Instead, the gang stole their wages and forced them into rat-infested homes.
But what is being done about the problem?

• Anti-slavery campaigners say that activism is working.
• In 2005, sports brand Nike finally admitted to abuse at its factories, including restricted access to water, after a global boycott campaign hit their profits.
• In the last five years, countries like the UK have introduced new laws to stamp out exploitation; the Modern Slavery Act 2015 forced companies to be more transparent about their actions.
• Convicted people traffickers now face life sentences in prison.
• And, in France, businesses can now be fined up to €10m (£9m) if they fail to publish human rights reports.
So, will the world ever eliminate slavery for good?

- Yes, say some.
- Growing awareness, through initiatives like Anti-Slavery Day, is the key to solving this worldwide problem.
- Finally, the tide is turning against exploitation: more countries are making laws not just banning slavery outright, but targeting the global companies that turn a blind eye to forced labour in their supply chains and the processes enabling the trade of humans beings.
So, will the world ever eliminate slavery for good?

- **No, say others.**
- The continued existence of garment factories, like those in Leicester, show that new laws are not working.
- As long as capitalism exists, so will the instinct for corporations to find cheap labour.
- It is impossible to outlaw cruelty: human nature will always find a way round any new legislation.