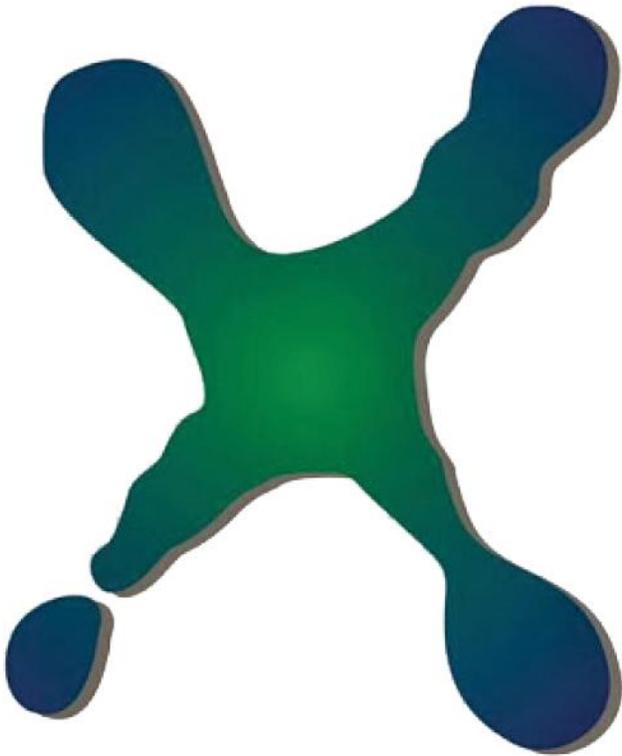


SWEATFREE TRIBE  
INTERVIEW SERIES  
PRESENTS



AN INTERVIEW WITH

Ben Hensler

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**You have an impressive educational history and could probably choose to work at any white glove law firm in America. Why did you choose to use your education to fight for worker rights?**

I went to law school relatively late – after having already spent 15 years working for the labor movement. So, for me, law school was just a way to develop new skills and a new role in advocating for workers' rights.

**Your recent report, "[Stealing from the Poor](#)" highlights wage theft in Haiti by brands like [Hanes and Gildan](#). These brands are members of the FLA, which is supposed to monitor its member companies' factories. If they were monitoring the same factories, why have they not discovered these violations?**

The FLA requires its member companies to have 5% of their supplier factories worldwide monitored annually, with the particular factories selected randomly. It appears from [the FLA website](#) that none of their member companies, including Gildan and Hanes, have had any of their Haiti factories monitored. It may be that the FLA system for identifying factories to monitor doesn't take into consideration which of their members' supplier factories are actually producing sizeable shares of their production – since both Gildan and Hanes clearly source a significant share of their t-shirts, at least, from Haiti.

**I was recently talking to someone who had read the report and they chastised the WRC for picking on Haiti. Their feeling was that Haiti needs jobs and that your report will have a net effect of simply discouraging brands to source from Haiti. How would you have responded to them?**

The WRC has reported on a variety of labor issues – including minimum wage violations - in most of the major garment-producing countries around the world for more than a decade. This our second report ever on Haiti, so that comment just indicates lack of knowledge about the WRC.

In fact, our report emphasizes that Haitian garment workers need these jobs – unemployment in the country is very high, and garment workers are often sole wage earners for their families. But these workers also desperately need and deserve to be paid at the very least what Haiti's own laws require.

The wage theft reported in this report is taking meals off the tables of these workers and their families – workers told us they literally could not afford to buy their families enough to eat, due, in part, to the factories' failure to pay them what they are legally owed. Our report also explicitly says that the right thing for

brands to do is not to cut-and-run from Haiti, but to stay in Haiti and make sure the workers who are making their products are paid what they are legally-owed.

### **What can the average person do to help workers in Haiti to get what they are rightfully entitled to?**

People who care about Haiti and care about the conditions of the workers who make their clothes should tell the brands they do business with to make sure that these workers are paid what they are legally-owed. We all have many more connections to the global garment industry than we realize – not just as individual consumers, but also as employees, students, alumni, members and constituents of organizations that are major purchasers and/or licensors of apparel. All of these connections provide an opportunity to speak up against sweatshop abuses.

### **Would you say that the groups and organizations who currently purchase the apparel from the brands cited in your report are complicit in the wage theft?**

The widespread and ongoing theft of wages from garment workers in Haiti has been an open secret. For the past three years Better Work Haiti, a factory monitoring program run by the [ILO – the UN-affiliated body for labor issues](#) – has been reporting to the major brands that all of their supplier factories in Haiti are violating the country's minimum wage law. The brands have done nothing – probably because the issue hadn't received public exposure and, so, they didn't feel any pressure. Now, with this issue starting to receive public attention in the U.S. and Canada, groups and organizations doing business with these brands have an opportunity, and, yes, a responsibility to make their views known.

### **Can you give us an update on the DSP program?**

The [Designated Supplier Program](#) is, and always has been, an initiative whose launching depends primarily on the energies of student anti-sweatshop activists encouraging their universities to implement its standards. Very understandably, those student energies are focused, right now, in another direction – on the factory safety crisis in Bangladesh and in urging universities and colleges to require the major collegiate apparel companies to do their part to help resolve this crisis by signing-on to the [Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Accord](#). That effort is showing quick results – two top collegiate apparel companies, Knights Apparel and Adidas, just announced they are joining the Accord. While, for the

long-term, we still believe the DSP is the best comprehensive response to labor rights violations in collegiate apparel production, we support and applaud the initiative of students, universities and those companies, like Knights Apparel and Adidas, that are taking meaningful steps to protect workers' lives in Bangladesh.

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