

# Fashion affects more people than you would think

BY GREG MCFARLANE

Most people really care about how they dress. People want to fit in; we are inherently conscious of our place in society, and what we wear is a factor that helps to determine that place.

Name brands prey upon this aspect of human nature. Personally, I don't buy products simply due to their name brand, but if something is nice and of good quality, I have no problems handing over the cash. For this reason, I thought I was doing my part in not conforming to society's ready-set mold for my demographic. I never really thought to ask where these clothes were coming from.

I went to a fashion show in the Green Room last week for the main purpose of laughing at the expense of others. I was waiting for people to discuss fashion, just so I could mock them and their passé, bourgeois tastes. I needed to smell the sweet air of pretention.

The show was organized by the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group (NSPIRG). Instead of holding a "Welcome to Dalhousie" party for RuPaul, NSPIRG displayed fashions from companies that allegedly employ sweatshop workers: The Gap, Nike and

the Northern Group (the parent company of Northern Reflections, etc.), among others.

Sweatshops are hardly new. Everyone has heard of Nike's indiscretions in southeastern Asian countries, and unless you've been living under a rock, you've heard of poor working conditions around the globe, especially in less developed states. Yet not everyone knows how pervasive they really are. According to Labour Behind the Label (LBL), an interest group based in Toronto, the Northern Group uses sweatshop tactics in Canada. Some clothing from Club Monaco, Fairweather and even kiddie clothier Osh Kosh B'Gosh is made in sweatshops, says NSPIRG executive director Jennifer Reynolds.

My foundation was rocked. It's quite an experience to find out that much of what I wear was made by someone who was severely overworked, grossly underpaid and restricted from using the washroom.

I went to bed that night fraught with the knowledge I had acquired. After mulling over the issues, I finally got to sleep.

But the issues didn't leave my mind. I dreamed that I walked into a house,

dressed rather stylish. A woman was waiting there for me. She was standing beside a welcoming fireplace that provided the only light in the room. She started to ask me some questions.

"Tell me the brand names of your clothing," she demanded.

"Alright," I said in a cocky manner. I was eager to show off my fashion *savoir faire*.

"Sweater?" she asked.

"Club Monaco," I stated, referring to a forest green v-neck sweater.

She took a pair of scissors and cut my sweater to shreds. I stood in shock, helpless, while this happened. She then threw the ruined garment into the fire.

"Pants?" she asked. I knew from her tone that she knew they were from The Gap. According to LBL, some clothing from The Gap is made in sweatshops, so I expected the worst.

"These cords are from The Gap," I replied timidly.

The woman grabbed me by the cuff of my right pant leg and dragged my entire right leg into the now roaring fire. I scrambled to get the burning pants off of me, and I tried to get the hell out of there. This attack on my conscience and personal space was starting to get to me.



NSPIRG's fashion show wasn't on the paparazzi's to do list, but it did expose the pressing issue of sweatshop labour. (Photo by Lisa Verge)

The door was locked. It wouldn't budge.

She looked at the navy blue swooshes on my two white socks. Nike's advertising department had given me away, those bastards. I was a pawn in their plan of global domination; a gnat being sacrificed for the greater good of the corporation. I felt small.

"Nike, eh," she noted. "Do you know that they exploit workers in

Indonesia and Vietnam?"

"Yeah, so," I responded defensively. I was finding it hard to cut my old ties.

"Well, why do you wear Nike stuff?" she asked.

"Cause it helps me to belong," I retorted.

Apparently the well being of my social status wasn't very important compared to human rights violations committed in subcontracted Nike factories. I was forced to hand the socks over like a toddler caught with gum in kindergarten. The powerful swoosh soon disintegrated into embers at the bottom of the fire.

I stood in the centre of the room with only a pair of Donald Duck boxers saving my dignity. I was embarrassed, but also elated.

"Disney," I thought, "the champion of good upstanding values. I shall be redeemed." Or so I believed.

"Disney subcontracts a factory in Haiti where workers earn only two dollars per day," the woman proclaimed, referring to United States National Labour Committee executive director Charles Kernaghan's war against Mickey Mouse. "By wearing those underpants, you're supporting the company's exploitation of those workers."

In one swift move, she dangerously sliced my underwear off of me with a knife and tossed them into the fire.

I was fully unclothed. I was expecting to have to flee from some sort of sexual advance. I had been violated in every other way, so I figured it was coming. Instead, I was greeted with a size 7 Birkenstock kicking my naked ass out the door.

Yes, as in most of my dreams, I ended up naked. But this time I wasn't giving a presentation at the front of the class; I found myself alone on the street.

I moved to the sidewalk. It was raining. It was cold. I was hunched over like Quasimodo in a futile attempt to conceal myself.

I was miles from home and penniless. My wallet went up in flames with my priceless Gap cords. I couldn't call a cab to come get me. I couldn't get anyone to help me. Besides, who would help me anyway?

I was in trouble. I was destitute. I was alone.

I was ripe for exploitation.

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DALTECH GYM

A **Multi-Cultural Night** is planned and promises to be both entertaining and educational.

FRIDAY, FEB. 13, 9PM,  
THE GRAWOOD

Polished Canadian pop from a band that doesn't sound "Canadian" comes to the Grawood in the form of Calgary's **Zuckerbaby**.

SATURDAY, FEB. 14,  
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