



“WHAT CAN I DO”? - ETHICAL CONSUMERISM

Modern Slavery (like Transatlantic Slavery before it) is a business: big business. It's that plain and simple. It's just about making as much money as possible, with utter contempt & disregard for the cost to others' lives.

Theft of goods can be risky but seemingly the risk/reward ratio for kidnapping and stealing people's labour is astonishingly low in favour of the slaveholder.

So as well as “pulling people out of the river” (of slavery) by identifying and reporting where we have suspicions, we need to “go upstream and fix the bridge”.

Fixing the holes in the bridge, means (in terms of Modern Slavery) addressing the **demand side**. That is not a matter for government but for every single citizen. After all it is we who consume goods and services.

Modern slavery has brought us consumers huge savings. Those savings consist of cheap goods and services.

Those of us of a certain age will tell that “cheap” is a relatively new phenomenon for everyday quality goods. It is a bi-product of, and has accompanied the recent exponential rise of modern slavery.

If we are to stem the demand for slaves it follows we must cut down and eradicate our demand for cheap goods and services.

Cheap goods and services are usually only cheap, because something is missing from the “standard” or more proper price. What is that element? Sometimes it is inferior materials. Often it is the cost of labour that's missing.

We've become rather accustomed to paying low prices: at the local hand car wash, at those High Street or online retailers or for fast fashion, or for a bar of chocolate, tea coffee and so on.

Taking chocolate as an illustration: at the same online retailer I can buy chocolate of a brand rated as poor for responsible sourcing for 83p per 100g. I buy a different brand rated high for responsible sourcing at £1.50 per 100g.

That difference of 67p per 100 g almost certainly represents the absence of the labour cost.

Using the slave labour of vulnerable children trafficked onto their farms is the only way farmers in The Ivory Coast (where 70% of cocoa originates) can sell cocoa at the lowest possible price required by the large manufacturers.

Large chocolate companies have for the past 20 years employed market relations experts to persuade us of their honest efforts.

It's worth watching "Shady Chocolate" and its forerunner "The Dark side of Chocolate" on YouTube and see for yourselves their broken promises.

In Ivory Coast the large chocolate companies have their own offices as well as the offices of industry groups of which they are members. They effectively control the production of Ivorian cocoa.

The hard truth is that they have lobbied hard & successfully in the US against Congressional efforts to require them to certify and label their products as slave free.

You can find details of the US lawsuits in this area in The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/12/mars-nestle-and-hershey-to-face-landmark-child-slavery-lawsuit-in-us>

It follows that if we buy a cheap bar of chocolate we are feeding the demand and price suppressing practices that enslave children from countries neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire.

If you extrapolate this illustration of the chocolate industry to all the goods and services that are vulnerable to exploitation you will see the scale of the problem but also what consumers can do to stem the demand.

To get a view of where you stand in this, dare to take the "How many slaves work for you?" survey at <https://slaveryfootprint.org/>

There is also an "alternative" BBC3 film on BBC iPlayer "How many slaves do you own" by Blindboy Undestroys The World at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfhWhGJOMxg>

We couldn't find much guidance for the citizen consumer so the following is a start: an offering of some things beginners can do to make a difference.

- Never buy Knock-off or Counterfeit goods. They are made by slaves for organised crime gangs.
- Fair Trade:– it has its critics and isn't perfect but for now seems to be the best we have. Where the brand is not trusted but still bears the Fairtrade logo it may be best to avoid still. Fair Trade pay a premium to the minimum price for cocoa for example and this premium has enabled millions to go to school.
- Boycott pariahs such as:- cheap garment retailers, pound shops, cheap (often big name brand) chocolate.

ETHICALCONSUMER.ORG

This website has been around since 1989 and provides reports and detailed information about most areas of consumerism. It's not quite free but very good value at £29 p.a. It produces a monthly magazine. Its reports cover the following subjects:

Energy

Fashion & clothing

Food & drink

Health & beauty

Home & garden

Money

Retailers

Technology, Travel

Guides on all the above and more...for .57p per week: a great investment!

OTHER GENERAL RULES

- Less is more: how many shoes, shirts, dresses do we need? If they are of a material whose footprint is vulnerable to modern slavery, the less we own, the less we risk enslaving still more people.
- Re-cycle at Charity shops and elsewhere and shop pre-loved.
- Learn more and spread the word everywhere.
- Choose an organisation. e.g. Anti-slavery International, Unseen or Hope for Justice all in the UK, and support it.
- Shop at independent local retailers or Co-ops, Go trusted labels.
- Challenge & shame corporate power

2 FREE SMARTPHONE APPS

The purists would not have a smartphone but for those of us that do here are two very practical apps that you can download from your regular App Store:

- “Good on you” is an app for apparel (clothes, shoes, bags, accessories): by simply searching for brand you see a rating. You are given ethically sourced similar brands. If the rating is not in the lowest categories you are given the nearest branch or online store link. or category rates brands
- The “Giki” app uses your device’s camera to scan any product’s barcode and give feedback, by a score out of 8 for responsible sourcing/environmental/ animal welfare/UK made/packaging/organic/healthier and others. This app also gives alternative more responsibly sourced products.

REMEMBER - THE STARFISH STORY

Watch this touching story here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-aVMdJ3Aok>

No single one of us can solve the problem alone. We are not being asked to.

We just need to do what we can and share our experience of doing so with friends and family as a positive experience.

It's clear that our consumer choices are having a devastating effect on our planet and its more vulnerable inhabitants.

Shopping more sustainably is enriching and motivating.