

How much for a pair of **JEANS?** And who actually pays?



# UNZIPPING THE JEANS INDUSTRY

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Just off the Buttermarket in Ipswich, in a glass-and-steel mall with double doors and escalators, you will find it: Cromwell's Madhouse. A wide-open jumble of a shop on a corner site, piled high with jeans, sweatshirts, casual trousers and yet more jeans.

And somewhere in the middle, on a dais, there they are, under a huge sign saying: "Famous Brands for £19.95." Just a pair of jeans, nestling among dozens of identical others. Blue stonewashed denim five-pocket jeans, straight leg, zip fly. Lee Cooper LC10s, to give them their proper name. Waist 32in, leg 34, a very popular size.

Nothing special at all. Bog-standard, everyday, kicking-a-ball-about-with-the-kids jeans. Thirtyfortysomething jeans. To put it bluntly, middle-aged jeans.

"Wash inside out separately", it says on the inside label. 100% cotton. But it doesn't say where they come from, which is perhaps just as well, for what would you put, if you really knew? "Made in Tunisia, Italy, Germany, France, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, Turkey, Japan, Korea, Namibia, Benin, Australia, Hungary"?

For Cromwell's Madhouse is the last stop on a journey which, if it were put end to end, would go right around the earth and half way round again. At a very rough, very conservative estimate, a journey of about 40,000 miles on which components and raw materials criss-cross the globe in a sort of jerky, deranged dance.

These jeans, our jeans, arrived here a few days ago in a van that came up the A12 from Lee Cooper's warehouse at Staple's Corner, just at the bottom of the M1 in north London. There they had the Cromwell's label attached to them before being packaged up and posted off in plenty of time for the weekend rush. Before that, they came through the Channel tunnel on a lorry from a similar warehouse in Amiens, France and before that, by boat and train from Tunis in Tunisia. From Ras Jebel, to be more precise, a good hour's drive north of the city through flat Mediterranean farmland where the fields are fat with artichokes and the pencil cypresses sway in a surprisingly chilly spring breeze.

You can see the red Perspex Lee Cooper sign as you approach the outskirts of Ras Jebel. And it's fitting that you should, for Ras Jebel is Lee Cooperville. So much so that it would be no surprise to see a saloon door swinging lazily in the midday sun, and a horse swishing its tail as it munches lazily on a nosebag.

But this is north Africa, not the wild west. A quiet, dusty, slightly faceless town of 3,000 souls with no fewer than three factories making Lee Cooper clothes; a presence that

has drawn in other garment producers and spawned textiles and sewing courses at the local college.

It has given the place a whole new dimension, according to Chedly Chtourou, managing director of Lee Cooper Tunisia. When the first factory opened 25 years ago, he says, women here used to dress from head to foot in black cloth. Now they have their own incomes. Some of them even wear jeans.

Our jeans come from that first factory, where everything is made for export and there is a customs post on the gate. The others manufacture under license for the local market and make a variety of other Lee Cooper clothing.

Drive through as the security guard opens the barred metal gate and there is no sign of activity. Just smooth, white walls and an air of calm. Through double glass doors, past the receptionist and into a corridor lined with cool, white-painted offices with tiled floors, where computers hum contentedly, where the ringing of telephones seems muted and where men in open-necked shirts smile politely as they pass back and forth with sheaves of paper.

Burst through this protective layer, though, through more double doors - heavy wood this time - and there is an eyebrow-scorching blast of activity, heat, noise. For here in one huge, grey, shed-like room is the nerve centre of the Lee Cooper empire; the engine room; the furnace.

Here, 500 women work furiously, eyes down, every muscle clenched. Each has her own small part to play; zips, pockets, side-seams, hems. And each function like an automaton, pulling a garment from a trolley by her side, throwing it on to her sewing machine, roaring down the seam at full throttle, ripping it off, throwing it back. Over and over. Bonuses depend on it. There are no safety guards on the machines and the women concentrate hard, keeping their fingers from the pounding needles. If they slip up, they can visit the factory nurse.

Trained machinists here take home 220 dinars a month - about £110, or 58p an hour. Comfortably above the legal minimum of 47p per hour before tax, but well below the Tunisian garment industry average of 92p per hour, according to a study published a few years ago. If they meet their targets they can make another 30 dinars, or £15, per month.

Eight lines, each of more than 60 people, each producing 2,000 garments a day. More than three tasks per worker, per minute, on average. From 7.15am until noon, 1pm until 5.45pm, an hour for lunch, a maximum of two 15-minute toilet breaks. Between the lines is a sea of trolleys draped

in hard, dark denim which stains the workers' hands blue. Nowhere for a leg-stretch, but then again everyone is too busy to get up or walk around. Fortunately, there has never been a serious fire.

Chedly Chtourou, a pleasant, mild-mannered man who seems to be universally known as Chedly, takes our jeans and peers at the batch number on the inside label: W002920. March 16 2001, line number two.

Ejallah Dousab did the "English stitch", the most difficult part, racing down the back seam, under the crotch and up to the zip, holding the legs out in her stretched hands like the reins of a galloping horse. She is 21 and has been here four years. Does she like it? She laughs shyly under Chedly's gaze and says yes, of course. But maybe one day, insh'Allah, she will marry and leave.

There are men working here, but mostly they're found in the cutting and washing areas, or staring studiously at computers in side offices. But there are so many young women that there's a shop by the front entrance selling sheets and towels for their trousseaux. Times are changing, though, and some stay on until their first child arrives, or even longer.

Among these is Fasedj Sihem, who sewed the pockets on our jeans. A chatty, forthright 30 year old, she is married to a policeman and has a 15-month-old son, Iheb. She has done lots of different jobs in her 14 years here, but pockets are a new departure for her and she isn't fast enough to earn a bonus.

"If I could I'd like to have my own business, a small business making dresses for women. But I need more money to start it. And we're going to build a house, so I have to work to earn money for that too," she says.

Although the factory-gate cost of these jeans is just £5 and the cost of transport to France only 10p, Fasedj isn't a bit surprised that their standard price at Cromwell's Madhouse is £29.95. Her brother lives in France and there they cost £30-£50.

"You can't compare our salaries with the salaries in France and you can't compare the prices. It isn't the same," she explains with mild exasperation, as if speaking to a small child.

Most of the factory's 900 workers are members of a trade union, the Federation of Textile Workers, which is part of the Tunisian General Workers' Union. Its representative is Grundi Armor, who says it's not a bad place, really. Although some of the workers in the finishing area, where there are two shifts, are angry that they sometimes have to work until 11pm when 10pm is the legal limit, and some say the toilets are too far away for them to get there and back in a 15-minute break.

"I act as an intermediary," he says. "We always find a solution that's satisfactory to everyone." Chedly laughs and raises an eyebrow, mock-weary.

But this factory, this little community of workers, is not the beginning for our pair of jeans. In one sense it's the end. The destination. The place at which dozens of different components, materials, goods, chemicals and sprockets, come together in readiness for a transformation. Like the passengers on the train in Larkin's Whitsun Weddings, a "frail travelling coincidence - ready to be loosed with all the power that being changed can give".

Take that hard, dark-blue denim, for example. Kansas denim, to give it its proper name, is brought here by land and sea from Italdenim in Milan, 600 miles away, where it is spun and milled and dyed using synthetic indigo made 316 miles north of there in Frankfurt, Germany. At Ras Jebel it is cut, sewn and then altered again into a soft, wearable fabric in huge, industrial washers, using pumice from an inactive volcano in Turkey.

This stonewashing, by the way, is one of the dirtier processes involved in jeans production. Although the Italdenim factory has all the best environmentally friendly equipment, much of the dye is washed out at Ras Jebel, which does not. The indigo itself is benign, but when it finds its way into local streams it cuts out the light in the water and kills plants and fish. The pumice, replaced now by an enzyme treatment in modern European factories, is reduced to a powder and then discarded. A factory like this can produce several tons of powdered pumice every year.

And what of the cotton that goes to make the denim? Italdenim buys from several sources, but mainly from Benin in west Africa. So after travelling some 2,700 miles north, to Milan, this cotton travels several hundred miles back to Tunis before setting off north again on its journey to England.

Benin is one of several cotton-growing countries in west Africa, and there is a permanent carnival air. Here, parrot-bright robes make a blessed change from the drab American cast-offs that dress the rest of the continent. But a closer look at Benin's cotton industry, the mainstay of its economy, is not so cheering. Corruption and mismanagement keep most cotton-farmers here as poor as when France introduced the crop to the region 100 years ago. And where a little technology filters down, in insecticides and fertilisers, people are dying. During last year's cotton season here, about 100 people died from poisoning thanks to the pesticide endosulfan, one of a number of dangerous chemicals being dumped on west Africa's cotton-growers, despite being banned by some wealthier countries. Calliope, the French company that supplies the chemical, points out that endosulfan is widely used in Australia - where cotton is grown on vast prairies,

miles from other foodstuffs. Benin's cotton farms are of a different order.

On Nestor Zinkponon's three hectares in the village of Saklo Agoume, central Benin, Atingounon Desire Souo, 45, is hoeing cotton-drills in the heat of the day. Bent double, he inches along the field, ladling the soil aside to leave a shallow trench. Sandy, red earth covers him entirely, except where rivulets of sweat carry it away. Souo has two hectares of his own, but the soil has become so degraded through decades of cotton-growing that it no longer supports him and his three sons. He starts work before light, collecting discarded wads of cotton seed to fertilise his fields. At sunrise, he goes to work for Zinkponon in an effort to keep his boys at school in the nearby town of Bohicon. "I'd like them to be important men, not farmers," he says.

Between the cotton crop, there are spindly coconut and orange trees, and tiny plots of groundnut and cassava. It would be impossible to spray one crop and not the other. Zinkponon, 33, says a lot of people became ill after using endosulfin, but none on his land. All the same, he prefers to leave the spraying to his employees. At the busiest times of the season, sowing and picking, 48 people work in these fields for about 60p a day. This outlay leaves Zinkponon dangerously exposed by a poor harvest. Last year, the early rains failed and his freshly sprinkled fertiliser blew away. Consequently, he made just £15 profit from one-and-a-half tonnes of cotton - enough to buy one leg of a pair of Lee Cooper LC10s.

The only way to make cash out of cotton is to have plenty of family members working for free, says Zinkponon, who has two wives but only one son: "Some farmers have six or eight wives." According to the UN Children's Fund, the north-central cotton areas are the only parts of Benin from which children are not trafficked to the region's wealthier countries. They also have the highest school dropout rates in Benin. All the children are needed in the fields.

Benin's cotton marketing board, La Societe National pour la Promotion Agricole, is tailor-made to rob the small producer, Zinkponon says. Corrupt government officials routinely keep small farmers' payment for themselves. "Then when you can't pay for the fertilisers you've used, they seize your land or whatever you have, your bicycle maybe," he says. Back in Tunis, though, the denim that comes from Benin isn't the only cotton being used to make our jeans. There's the pocketing, grown in Pakistan or Korea, milled and heat-treated in Pakistan. There's also the cotton coating on some of the polyester threads, which is a whole story in itself.

Coats Viyella makes these threads and they may all look the same to you or me, apart from their orange, white or blue colouring, but there are different thicknesses, different strengths, for different parts of the job. They get made in

Lisnaskea, in Northern Ireland, as well as in Hungary and in Turkey. They get dyed in Spain and wound on to spools in Tunis before being delivered to Ras Jebel.

The polyester fibre which gives the thread its strength is bought by the company from Japan, where it is manufactured from petroleum products. As is the polyester tape for the zip, which coincidentally is made in France by a Japanese company, YKK. The brass wire that makes up the teeth of the zip comes from Japan, too.

Back, then, to Africa, to southern Africa this time, where the centre of the Namibian copper industry is at Tsumeb, in the north. Here the mine and smelter have just re-opened after a two-year closure that followed a strike. The town is breathing a sigh of relief at the return of its main industry.

But there is a downside, according to Derek Sherratt, a community centre manager from Chesterfield in Derbyshire who spent two years in Namibia as a VSO beekeeper and who now keeps a house in Tsumeb, visiting regularly with his Namibian wife Saima. The town could earn much more for its valuable mineral resource if it could make things from it, ornaments for tourists perhaps, instead of exporting it as raw "blister copper", he says.

And there's the vexed question of what's in the air. Sherratt passed on his beekeeping skills to a local family while he was living in Namibia, but the bees kept dying. After the mine closed, though, the municipality had trouble keeping them under control. They kept forming nests at the top of the lamp-posts, making bulb-changes a hazardous business.

"It seems they had been falling foul of the pollution from the mine. There are some strong pollutants such as arsenic," he explains. He hasn't checked on their welfare since the mine reopened, but already there are concerns about the effects of pollution on the human population. Some of the miners who worked in the mine before the closure are planning to sue its former owner for severe lung damage, according to the Namibian newspaper.

But despite this, Tsumeb is delighted to see its mine open again. Coincidentally, the town is twinned with Chesterfield, a town that knows only too well the effects of pit closures.

"It's a difficult subject because it's easy to be in the UK and to be concerned about environmental issues, which I am. But when hundreds of people are without jobs, and when that means they get no money whatsoever, considering the environment seems like a luxury," Sherratt says.

So, who will buy our jeans? Sherratt and the other members of the Chesterfield Tsumeb Association? Maybe, maybe not.

"I'd like to consider myself a spot-on sort of person, but sometimes, without giving it much thought, I just buy the cheapest," he says. "I suppose I don't really consider myself part of the designer jeans market."

Back in Ipswich it's 5.30pm and Cromwell's Madhouse is closing for the night, the sound of its grey metal shutters reverberating around the mall as they crash to the floor one by one. And inside, in the middle, on a pile under a sign saying "Famous Brands for £19.95", Ejallah's English stitch, Fasedj's pockets, maybe even a little of Zinkponon's cotton, sit silently waiting for their journey to end.

It takes about 1.6 meters of denim fabric, several hundred meters of sewing thread, 6 rivets, 1 or 5 jeans buttons, 4 labels (usually imitation leather), and optionally a zipper to make a pair of jeans. An average jeans factory can make about 2.500 pair of jeans per day.

A stonewash for 150 pairs of jeans takes 150 kilos of pumice stone and more than 750 liters of water. Depending on how faded the look will have to be, they will be washed somewhere between 30 minutes and 6 hours.



These images are from [http://www.jeansinfo.org/how\\_they\\_make\\_jeans.html](http://www.jeansinfo.org/how_they_make_jeans.html)

Brass rivets  
made from  
Namibian  
copper and  
Australian zinc

Zip teeth made  
in Japan

Thread from  
Lisnaskea in  
Northern  
Ireland

Dyed in Milan  
using synthetic  
German indigo

Cotton from  
Benin where  
pickers earn  
60p a day

Sewn up by  
21 year old  
Ejallah in  
Tunisia for  
58p per hour

Stonewashed  
using pumice  
from Turkey

You may think your jeans came from the high street but these ones travelled 40,000 miles before you were able to purchase them.

## WORKSHOP: THE JEANS GAME

It used to be that you just walked into a shop and bought something without sparing a thought for where it came from, or who'd made it. Now there is a growing awareness of working practices and ethics. To illustrate some of the environmental, social and economic factors that we should take into consideration when making purchases, we will look at the manufacture of jeans, in this case Lee Cooper LC10s: blue, straight leg, stonewashed denim with a zip fly. Bog standard, everyday, kicking-a-ball-about-with-the-kids jeans.

"Wash inside out separately", it says on the inside label, "100% cotton". But it doesn't say where they come from, which is perhaps just as well, for what would you put, if you really knew? "Made in Tunisia, Italy, Germany, France, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, Turkey, Japan, Korea, Namibia, Benin, Australia and Hungary"?

The shop you've just purchased the jeans from is the last stop on a journey which, if it were put end to end, would go round the earth one and a half times! At a very rough, conservative estimate, a journey of about 40,000 miles on which components and raw materials criss-cross the globe in a sort of jerky, deranged dance.

The jeans arrived here a few days ago in a container that came from Lee Cooper's warehouse at Staple's Corner, just at the bottom of the M1 in north London. There they had the shop label attached to them before being packaged up and posted off in plenty of time for the weekend rush. Before that, they came through the Channel tunnel on a lorry from a similar warehouse in Amiens, France and before that, by boat and train from Ras Jebel in Tunisia.

The factory in Ras Jebel, with its community of workers, is not the beginning for our pair of jeans. In one sense it's the end, the destination, the place at which dozens of different components, materials, goods, chemicals and sprockets come together in readiness for transformation.

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Back in Ras Jebel, though, the denim that comes from Benin isn't the only cotton being used to make our jeans. There's the pocketing, grown in Pakistan or Korea, milled and heat-treated in Pakistan. There's also the cotton coating on some of the polyester threads, which is a whole story in itself.

These threads may all look the same to you or me, apart from their orange, white or blue colouring, but there are different thicknesses and strengths, for different parts of the job. They get made in Lisnaskea, in Northern Ireland, as well as in Hungary and in Turkey. They get dyed in Spain and wound on to spools in Tunis, Tunisia before being delivered to Ras Jebel.

The polyester fibre which gives the thread its strength is bought by the company from Japan, where it is manufactured from petroleum products. As is the polyester tape for the zip, which coincidentally is made in France by a Japanese company, YKK. The brass wire that makes up the teeth of the zip comes from Japan, too.

Brass, of course, is an alloy made mainly of copper with a little zinc. And it is brass, again, that goes to make the rivets and part of the buttons. They come from Prym, a German-based firm that makes its own brass using zinc from Australia and copper from Namibia.

**THIS WORKSHOP MAKES YOU THINK ABOUT THE EVERYDAY ITEMS THAT YOU PURCHASE.**



# BENIN - COTTON MAKING

Benin is one of several cotton-growing countries in west Africa, and there is a permanent carnival air. Here, parrot-bright robes make a blessed change from the drab American cast-offs that dress the rest of the continent. But a closer look at Benin's cotton industry, the mainstay of its economy, is not so cheering. Corruption and mismanagement keep most cotton-farmers here as poor as when France introduced the crop to the region 100 years ago. And where a little technology filters down, in insecticides and fertilizers, people are dying. During last year's cotton season here, about 100 people died from poisoning thanks to the pesticide endosulfan, one of a number of dangerous chemicals being dumped on West Africa's cotton-growers, despite being banned by some wealthier countries. Calliope, the French company that supplies the chemical, points out that endosulfan is widely used in Australia - where cotton is grown on vast prairies, miles from other foodstuffs. Benin's cotton farms are of a different order.

## Key Facts

- The cotton industry is the mainstay of the Benin economy (70%).
- Corruption and mismanagement keep farmers like Samuel poor.
- The use of insecticides (banned in many countries) poisons people, their food and the local wildlife.
- Growing cotton requires a lot of water and the industry is particularly susceptible to climate change.
- Trees are removed to bring more sun to the cotton crop turning the land to desert.
- Last year because of a poor harvest he made just £15 from one and a half tonnes of cotton (enough to buy one leg of a pair of Lee Coopers)

*What external factors could affect the cotton industry?*

## SAMUEL OKETOLA

On Nestor Zinkponon's three hectares in the village of Saklo Agoume, central Benin, Samuel Oketola, 45, is hoeing cotton-drills in the heat of the day. Bent double, he inches along the field, ladling the soil aside to leave a shallow trench. Sandy, red earth covers him entirely, except where rivulets of sweat carry it away. Samuel has two hectares of his own, but the soil has become so degraded through decades of cotton-growing that it no longer supports him and his three sons. He starts work before light, collecting discarded wads of cotton seed to fertilise his fields. At sunrise, he goes to work for Zinkponon in an effort to keep his boys at school in the nearby town of Bohicon. "I'd like them to be important men, not farmers," he says.

Between the cotton crop, there are spindly coconut and orange trees, and tiny plots of groundnut and cassava. It would be impossible to spray one crop and not the other. Zinkponon, 33, says a lot of people became ill after using endosulfan, but none on his land. All the same, he prefers to leave the spraying to his employees. At the busiest times of the season, sowing and picking, 48 people work in these fields for about 60p a day. This outlay leaves Zinkponon dangerously exposed by a poor harvest. Last year, the early rains failed and his freshly sprinkled fertilizer blew away. Consequently, he made just £15 profit from one-and-a-half tonnes of cotton - enough to buy one leg of a pair of Lee Cooper LC10s.

The only way to make cash out of cotton is to have plenty of family members working for free, says Zinkponon, who has two wives but only one son: "Some farmers have six or eight wives." According to the UN Children's Fund, the north-central cotton areas are the only parts of Benin from which children are not trafficked to the region's wealthier countries. They also have the highest school dropout rates in Benin. All the children are needed in the fields.

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# NAMIBIA - COPPER MINING

The centre of the Namibian copper industry is at Tsumeb, in the north. Here the mine and smelter have just re-opened after a two-year closure that followed a strike. The town is breathing a sigh of relief at the return of its main industry. But there is a downside, according to Derek Sherratt, a community centre manager from Chesterfield in Derbyshire who spent two years in Namibia as a VSO beekeeper and who now keeps a house in Tsumeb, visiting regularly with his Namibian wife Saima. The town could earn much more for its valuable mineral resource if it could make things from it, ornaments for tourists perhaps, instead of exporting it as raw "blister copper", he says.

And there's the vexed question of what's in the air. Sherratt passed on his beekeeping skills to a local family while he was living in Namibia, but the bees kept dying. After the mine closed, though, the municipality had trouble keeping them under control. They kept forming nests at the top of the lamp-posts, making bulb-changes a hazardous business. "It seems they had been falling foul of the pollution from the mine. There are some strong pollutants such as arsenic," he explains. He hasn't checked on their welfare since the mine reopened, but already there are concerns about the effects of pollution on the human population. Some of the miners who worked in the mine before the closure are planning to sue its former owner for severe lung damage, according to the Namibian newspaper. But despite this, Tsumeb is delighted to see its mine open again. Coincidentally, the town is twinned with Chesterfield, a town that knows only too well the effects of pit closures.

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## Key Facts

- In Tsumeb copper mining is the main source of employment
- As local wages increase so do prices for goods.
- Pollution is a big problem because of the arsenic fumes given off by the process
- Many workers suffer lung damage
- Crops and livestock are also affected
- People can afford education and healthcare

***What if the mine was to close again?***

## **MUNA MBUTA**

He is a 29 year old, father of two who works in the mine in Tsumeb. When the mine closed, things were difficult but he managed to get work on a nearby farm, albeit for a lower wage than he was used to. Now that the mine has re-opened, he has went back to work there.

# TURKEY - PUMICE MINING



Üçler Mining, established in 1978, supplies pumice stone to the construction and textile industries. It is Turkey's biggest producer and exporter of pumice and holds the largest reserves of pumice in Turkey. They have a production capacity of 50,000 tonnes/year with a reserve capacity of 50 years.

At the jeans factory in Ras Jabel, Tunisia, the denim fabric is cut, sewn and then altered again into a soft, wearable fabric in huge, industrial washers, using pumice from an inactive volcano in Turkey.

This stonewashing, by the way, is one of the dirtier processes involved in jeans production. Although the Italdenim factory has all the best environmentally friendly equipment, much of the dye is washed out at Ras Jabel, which does not. The indigo itself is benign, but when it finds its way into local streams it cuts out the light in the water and kills plants and fish. The pumice, replaced now by an enzyme treatment in modern European factories, is reduced to a powder and then discarded. A factory like this can produce several tons of powdered pumice every year.

## Key Facts

- Pumice mining is a well controlled and important industry in Turkey
- This a 'good' company where conditions and pay are good
- The environmental impact of mining includes noise and pollution from the run off waste water which can pollute the water table.
- These factors have affected local wildlife habitats.
- There continues to be a good demand for pumice and the mine is unlikely to close

***What conditions could cause this to change?***

## HASAN ELMAS

He is a 49 year old who has worked for Üçler Mining since it opened in 1978 and has gone on to become a foreman. He earns a good wage and has a safe job.



# LINASKEA - THREAD MAKING

Northern Ireland had the largest textile industry in the world before the last industrial and technological revolutions, combined with outsourcing of labour, made production cheaper elsewhere. Two hundred jobs were lost when the Sir Richard Arkwright factory in Lisnaskea closed. The factory owned by Coats Viyella, the world's largest sewing thread maker, closed due to competition from Asia.

Polyester threads can be made with a cotton coating. These threads may all look the same to you or me, apart from their orange, white or blue colouring, but there are different thicknesses and strengths, for different parts of the job. They were made in Lisnaskea, in Northern Ireland, as well as in Hungary and in Turkey. They get dyed in Spain and wound on to spools in Tunis, Tunisia before being delivered to Ras Jebel. The polyester fibre which gives the thread its strength is bought by the company from Japan, where it is manufactured from petroleum products.

## Key Facts

- It may be cheaper to produce the thread abroad but what about the carbon footprint and air miles associated with distribution?
- The factory building has been derelict since the closure and there is a lot of anti-social behaviour on the abandoned site.
- Closure of the factory has had a significant impact on the local economy and there are now higher than average levels of unemployment.
- People have the skills but now have no place to use them.

***What impact does this have in NI?***

## MARY HUTCHINSON

She is a 42 year old, unemployed, single mum. She used to work in the Sir Richard Arkwright factory producing thread. Mary now has skills that are no longer in demand and doesn't have the time or financial backing to re-train. As a result, she now struggles to make a living to support her family and has to rely on state handouts.



# TUNISIA - THE FACTORY

You can see the red Perspex Lee Cooper sign as you approach the outskirts of Ras Jebel. A quiet, dusty, slightly faceless town of 3,000 souls with no fewer than three factories making Lee Cooper clothes; a presence that has drawn in other garment producers and spawned textiles and sewing courses at the local college. It has given the place a whole new dimension, according to Chedly Chtourou, managing director of Lee Cooper Tunisia.

When the first factory opened 25 years ago, he says, women here used to dress from head to foot in black cloth. Now they have their own incomes. Some of them even wear jeans.

Our jeans come from that first factory, where everything is made for export and there is a customs post on the gate. The others manufacture under license for the local market and make a variety of other Lee Cooper clothing. Through double glass doors, past the receptionist and into a corridor lined with cool, white-painted offices with tiled floors, where computers hum contentedly, the ringing of telephones seems muted and men in open-necked shirts smile politely as they pass back and forth with sheaves of paper. Burst through this protective layer, though, through more double doors - heavy wood this time - and there is an eyebrow-scorching blast of activity, heat and noise. For here in one huge, grey, shed-like room is the nerve centre of the Lee Cooper Empire; the engine room; the furnace. Here, 500 women work furiously, eyes down, every muscle clenched. Each has her own small part to play; zips, pockets, side-seams and hems. Each functions like an automaton, pulling a garment from a trolley by her side, throwing it on to her sewing machine, roaring down the seam at full throttle, ripping it off, throwing it back. Over and over, bonuses depend on it. There are no safety guards on the machines and the women concentrate hard, keeping their fingers from the pounding needles. If they slip up, they can visit the factory nurse.

Trained machinists here take home 220 dinars a month - about £110, or 58p an hour. Comfortably above the legal minimum of 47p per hour before tax, but well below the Tunisian garment industry average of 92p per hour, according to a study published a few years ago. If they meet their targets they can make another 30 dinars, or £15, per month.

Eight lines, each of more than 60 people, each producing 2,000 garments a day. More than three tasks per worker, per minute, on average. From 7.15am until noon, 1pm until 5.45pm, an hour for lunch, a maximum of two 15-minute toilet breaks. Between the lines is a sea of trolleys draped in hard, dark denim which stains the workers' hands blue. Nowhere for a leg-stretch, but then again everyone is too busy to get up or walk around. Fortunately, there has never been a serious fire.

Fasedj Sihem, who sewed the pockets on our jeans, is a chatty, forthright 30 year old, married to a policeman and has a 15-month-old son, Iheb. She has done lots of different jobs in her 14 years here, but pockets are a new departure for her and she isn't fast enough to earn a bonus. "If I could I'd like to have my own business, a small business making dresses for women. But I need more money to start it. And we're going to build a house, so I have to work to earn money for that too," she says. Although the factory-gate cost of these jeans is just £5 and the cost of transport to France only 10p, Fasedj isn't a bit surprised that their standard price in the UK is £29.95. Her brother lives in France and there they cost £30-£50. "You can't compare our salaries with the salaries in France and you can't compare the prices. It isn't the same," she explains with mild exasperation, as if speaking to a small child.

Most of the factory's 900 workers are members of a trade union, the Federation of Textile Workers, which is part of the Tunisian General Workers' Union. Its representative is Grundi Armor, who says it's not a bad place, really. Although some of the workers in the finishing area, where there are two shifts, are angry that they sometimes have to work until 11pm when 10pm is the legal limit, and some say the toilets are too far away for them to get there and back in a 15-minute break. "I act as an intermediary," he says. "We always find a solution that's satisfactory to everyone." Chedly laughs and raises an eyebrow, mock-weary.

#### Key Facts

- Factory workers earn 58p an hour or £110 per month stitching jeans in a textile factory in Tunisia. This is above the legal minimum but below the Tunisian garment industry average of 98p per hour
- Employees work long hours and the work is difficult as the fabric is heavy and hard to work with. They finish work later than the legal limit.
- There are no safety guards on the machines and she and her co workers must concentrate hard on keeping their fingers from the pounding needles. If they slip they can visit the factory nurse.
- Due to working practices it is difficult for staff to achieve their bonus.
- People need to work in Tunisia, there is no welfare state.
- If the factory closed people would have to think about migrating to find other work.

***If the factory closed what would be the consequences?***

#### **EJALLAH DOUSAB**

She is 21 and has been working in the Lee Cooper factory in Ras Jebel for four years. At the minute she does the "English stitch", the most difficult part, racing down the back seam, under the crotch and up to the zip, holding the legs out in her stretched hands like the reins of a galloping horse. Does she like it? She laughed shyly under Chedly's gaze and says yes, but maybe one day she will marry and leave.

## WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

Is it right that this happens?

What should be done about it?

What can we do about it?

## BELOW ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW TO IMPROVE THIS PRACTICE.

- Get together with some friends and write a Fair Trade Code of Conduct for your school and make sure that all sports equipment, uniforms, stationery and other materials are bought from Fair Trade or sustainable forestry sources and don't use sweatshop labour.
- Look for and buy Fair Trade when you shop.
- Find out whether your favourite clothing labels are ethically manufactured. If they're not, write a letter to the managing director of the company explaining that you love wearing their clothes but that you won't unless they commit to Fair Trading practices.
- Petition your local supermarket to stock (more) Fair Trade goods. You can do this by writing letters, getting up a petition, filling out comments cards and talking to the manager. Be persistent.
- Hold a fashion show of ethically produced clothing. (the adverts in magazines like The Ecologist are a good place to start).
- Organise a Fair Trade debate at the school.
- Email Oxfam about becoming a Fair Trade Campaigner.
- If you are time rich and money poor, grow your own, make your own, cut up old jeans to make shorts, etc, search for good second hand shops.
- If you are money rich and time poor, be grateful and pay that little bit extra for ethically produced goods.
- Stop throwing away clothes and other goods just because they're not the latest gear. It's the world you'll have to live in that has to produce all these goods. We're already using the equivalent of 3 planets to keep ourselves in the manner we are now. It can't go on this way.
- Work for social change in your community. Form a group that will give talks to others about ethical trading. It's your world everyone is using and abusing. It's no longer just a greeny thing. It's serious and will affect your life.
- Understand what's happening – search the net for articles to inform your decisions. Take responsibility for your actions and decisions.
- Look at labels and buy as locally as you can. Ask yourself how shops can sell those jeans for £5. Who is being exploited? What environment is being damaged?