

# Tyler Morning Telegraph

## We shouldn't mourn manufacturing jobs

October 8, 2015

Donald Trump seems embarrassed his signature line of clothing is made in China. When CNN's Jake Tapper (who was even wearing a Trump-brand tie) asked him about it, Trump blamed currency manipulation and trade policies.

But here's the thing - Trump shouldn't have apologized. Westerners who decry "sweatshop labor" and the clothing companies that use it don't understand a basic fact: these jobs are lifting millions of people out of poverty and want.

"Garment factories in poor countries might look dirty and dangerous to westerners, but in fact, they are one of our best hopes for poverty reduction and human development," writes Johan Norberg of the Cato Institute. "The strangest thing about the debate about 'fast fashion' and garment factories in poor countries is that it carries on as if there were no research on the subject. Western activists rail against 'sweatshops,' but among researchers and economists from left to right there is a consensus that these jobs are the stepping stones out of poverty."

Two such countries are Bangladesh and Cambodia. In recent years, both countries have seen a surge in garment manufacturing.

"The number of extremely poor in Bangladesh fell from 44 to 26 million between 2000 and 2010, despite the population growing by 15 million," Norberg notes. "Since 2004, the level of poverty in Cambodia has more than halved, from 52 to just over 20 percent. It is 'one of the best performers in poverty reduction worldwide,' according to the World Bank."

In Bangladesh, the garment industry has helped revive the economy as a whole.

"The most important thing is that the new knowledge and technology these factories bring in facilitate the creation of new companies and industries," Norberg explains. "The garment industry in Bangladesh was kick-started in 1979 when a local entrepreneur and South Korea's Daewoo trained 130 workers in modern production. In 1987, Bangladesh had hundreds of garment-export factories, exports had surged and 115 of the original 130 workers had left to start their own businesses."

To Western eyes, these look like bad jobs. That's only partly true, Norberg adds.

“Obviously even the best jobs in very poor countries look bad compared to what we are used to in Europe and America, but that is not the alternative in an economy at a low level of capital and education,” he explains. “As a worker I interviewed in Vietnam once put it, the main complaint to management was that she wanted the factories to expand so that her relatives could get the same kinds of jobs.”

One more note: Trump and others who bemoan the loss of manufacturing jobs in the U.S. seem to forget that those manufacturing jobs were dull. They’ve been replaced, largely, with much better jobs.

Many of these same voices will soon be lamenting the jobs we lose to robotics. They’ll be ignoring the fact that a job that can be done by a robot is likely not a fulfilling, enjoyable job for a human.

So Donald Trump shouldn’t be embarrassed his ties are made elsewhere.