

News from Bangladesh



Workers' Rights Under Attack: Stop Union Busting !

As recently as October 2016, German trade unionists of the ver.di retail section, in the frame of the ExChains network, had joined a garment workers' demonstration in Dhaka, demanding the payment of a living wage. Now, employers and government are using peaceful workers' protests as a pretext to demolish the labour movement.

The prices of basic goods such as food and housing in Bangladesh have exploded during the last months. Therefore, tens of thousands of workers in Ashulia participated in strikes for a significant raise of the minimum wage in December. A raise is due, anyway, because according to the labour law, the minimum wage must be revised in line with basic commodity prices at least every 3 years. The last minimum wage revision took place in 2013.

Protests had begun at the Windy Apparels factory where a young woman worker had collapsed and died in October after her supervisors had repeatedly forced her back to the workplace when she felt ill and asked the permission to go home.

The factory owners with their employers' association

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An International Network
for the Right to Organise
along the Global Textile,
Garment, and Retail
Supply Chain

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(BGMEA) and the government reacted to the protests by jointly clamping down on the labour movement. In their attack, they are brushing aside workers' rights. Their tool is a law that originated from times of civil war, the „Special Powers 1974 Act“. In total, 16 trade union leaders have been arrested so far, 85 factories closed, several thousand workers dismissed, workers' homes searched, trade union local offices vandalised, and hundreds of legal cases lodged against workers involved in the strikes. The harrassment of workers and labour activists has grown into a huge threat, causing many workers to flee from Dhaka to the rural areas.

H&M and Zara/Inditex are among the buyers of the Ashulian factories concerned. For instance, the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) had to stop their organising activities in 24 Ashulian factories completely, owing to the current conflict situation. 10 out of the 24 factories are H&M suppliers.

H&M and Inditex, together with other buyer companies, wrote a letter to the Bangladeshi government on January 11, pleading that workers' rights should be respected. But writing friendly letters with smooth appeals is not sufficient: Today, 2 weeks later, 14 trade union leaders are still in prison, the dismissed without job, the legal cases not withdrawn, the trade unions' work suspended - and fear still reigns.

Dear companies, with all your concentrated buyers' power: Is this all the result you are able to yield for the protection of workers' rights ?

The H&M Germany National Works Council (GBR) is not impressed, nor is ver.di trade union. In a public statement, the GBR requests H&M to live up to the self-established image of a responsible company, and add actual deeds to hollow CSR words. ver.di union wants to see workers' rights respected and requests all buyer companies to live up to their social responsibility.

Together with Bangladeshi garment workers and their trade unions, we demand:

- Stop harrassment, Release arrested workers, withdraw legal cases !
- Reinstate dismissed workers and pay all back wages !
- Respect workers' and trade union rights !
- Revise the minimum wage !

ver.di union and the H&M GBR support the petition of the global federations IndustriAll and UNI, see: <http://tinyurl.com/ha7sfbv>

or:

