



Black Cat Moan

NATIONAL GARMENT WORKERS FEDERATION Leader Wins 2014 Nuremberg International Human Rights Award



Amirul Haque Amin, the President of the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) in Bangladesh is the recipient of the 2014 Nuremberg International Human Rights Award. Amin has been recognized for his 30 years of service to the struggles of garment workers. And he has been seen as a leader in health and safety issues in an industry that also discriminates against the mostly young women who cut sew and assemble the clothes that represent 75% of the export trade from Bangladesh.

Amin has had associations with the **IWW** for over a decade through the union's International Solidarity Commission (ISC) and with other groups and individuals who work on sweatshop issues.

Amin began his activism in the Dhaka City Tailor Workers Union in 1981. He had grown to see the role of labor in society as key to move toward the greater good and helped to form the NGWF in 1984. Although the International Conventions of 1972 established solid worker protections like freedom of association and the right to collectively bargain in Bangladesh, Amin knew that enforcement was lax and corruption between the government and factory owners rampant. Building code and safety violations were always a problem but have increased under the expansion of neoliberal trade policies of the last decade. Factories often close or shift location and leave workers in the cold. Labels subcontracted by the biggest suppliers like Wal Mart and The Gap allows them to sidestep responsibility for substandard wages and dangerous working conditions as well.

Amin has helped to grow the NGWF to over 27,000 members in this hostile environment. The union has been at the forefront of efforts to gain a week's vacation, May Day holiday and increases in the minimum wage.

"This is the time to fight", Amin told England's Trades Union Congress last year. He called attention to the fact that he saw the erosion of real wages, attacks on pensions and the struggle to attain a living wage was the same fight

in England, Bangladesh and everywhere workers were engaged in the struggle with their bosses under capitalism.

"We will help you, too", he told this reporter in 2006 at the Labor Notes Conference in Dearborn, Michigan. It was inspirational to hear Amin convey this message of a common need to unite for the advancement of labor rights across borders.

In the wake of the disasters at the Tazreen and Rana Plaza where the NGWF lost 42 of their members and over 1,100 others were killed, Amin was not stymied by grief. He went on to work on reparations, the International Safety Accord and another minimum wage increase. "It is not enough", Amin declared earlier this year when the raise to a \$68 (U.S.) monthly minimum was passed by the government. He and other activists had sought \$100 (U.S.). This past October he presided over the negotiations to regain pay withheld by a new factory owner at the Helicon facility in Dhaka. About \$800 was recovered for 625 employees who saw their wages slashed by the new operator. "These multinational companies pressure the local factory owners to decrease the price" of a garment Amin explained at his speech to the Trades Union Congress. They *"give lip service"* only to rights like a living wage and collective bargaining, he added. He described the kinds of protections the international agreements are supposed to provide as "extremely limited" for the workers of Bangladesh.

"Send a very clear message", Amin told the TUC audience. He wants unionists and consumers alike to join together to "end the deathtraps" in Bangladesh.



“Whatever it Takes” Fight for 15 AND a Union

Nancy Salgado had been working at Mc Donald’s for 10 years when she was arrested for daring to interrupt the hamburger giant’s President, Jeff Stratton, during his speech to Chicago’s First Friday Club on October 4th.

“Why?” Salgado asked Stratton as security personnel attempted to restrain her. She wanted to get his direct response to the question of low wages at Mc Donald’s after the company saw \$5.5 billion in profits in 2013. Salgado had given a decade of her life to the company and was only making \$8.25 an hour.

“I’ve worked there 40 years” was all Stratton said as Nancy Salgado was hauled out of the room and arrested.

Salgado and thousands of her co-workers are part of a growing movement among fast food and retail workers to demand a \$15 an hour minimum wage and the right to organize a union.

Fight for 15 or Lucha por 15 has staged strikes, demonstrations and sit-ins like the one in September at Mc Donald’s corporate offices in Peoria, Illinois. Coordinated actions also took place in Chicago, Indianapolis, Rockford and other cities. Workers voiced their displeasure toward a Mc Donald’s Corporate culture that requires hard work but fails to reward it fairly.

“You know you’re wrong”, Mc Donald’s employee Alvina Alvarez told Fight for 15 about the company’s low pay and intimidation and firings of those who attempt to organize at Mc Donald’s. She also pointed out that many of her co-workers are “not just high school kids” but moms and dads, even grandparents raising and supporting families.

“Whatever it takes to get \$15 an hour and a union” has been adopted by Fight for 15 as the rallying cry for what many view as the moral conscience of the low wage workers in the U.S. The Black Cat Moan editors would like to point out that garment workers in Bangladesh and other nations are engaged in the exact same struggle for a living wage and the union of their choice.

We are all in the same boat

IT'S MY RIGHT



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news**

***** Late Breaking News – Bangladesh *****

Ha-Meem and Windy Group factories in Bangladesh have instituted dramatic reforms for garment workers.

All overtime worked at Ha-Meem must now be paid at double time rate (82 cents per hour). The work week is now based on a 6 day, 8 hour per shift schedule. This is in stark contrast to the industry norm which usually forces 12 – 14 hour shifts, 7 days a week. Under the new arrangement, no worker can exceed 60 hours per week. Full maternity leave and benefits are now in place for the women in the factories. Physical abuse and threats are, hopefully, a thing of the past. Ha-Meem is one of the facilities which produces clothing for The Gap.

H & M, Europe’s largest importer of garments from Bangladesh, has entered into a new agreement that requires its Windy Group factories to implement similar measures, with overtime reductions and maternity benefits honored in their plants. - *Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights*

