

Rana Plaza

The Bangladesh Rana Plaza tragedy revived the old images of the exploitative capacities of unfettered capitalist production largely unthinkable in this information-driven globalized world. The images of more than 1,100 garment workers buried under the rubble of what once an 11-storey textile factory building bring into sharp relief the contrasts and contradictions of globalization. While seeing great advances in high-technology, high-fashion and the globalized production networks in some parts of the world, the low-cost, sweatshop-like production sites and labor intensive garment/textile industry exist to fuel the development engine of Bangladesh. Unequal development and lack of workers' power among and within countries drives many developing countries to risk the lives of workers in the 'race to the bottom' of the cheapest labor and hence competitiveness in the free global market. For a country desperate to generate income, the garment and textile industry of Bangladesh which comprise 80% of exports and employ around 3 million workers, supply the demands of transnational clothing companies of famous fashion brands. Some issues that arose out of the tragedy were the role of transnational clothing companies and fashion brands that demands quick and cheap garments yet oblivious of the labor conditions of workers at the bottom of the supply chain and the role of established trade unions in Bangladesh amidst a politically unstable and poor country. The garment and textile industry in Asia have numerous experiences wherein it is the earliest industrial strategy towards development and to integrate developing economies into the global economy and trade. Experiences in trade union organizing and workers rights campaigns have also been strong even to the extent that garment companies have moved around the region to avoid unionization, high wages and labor rights (i.e. the Philippines). The Rana Plaza as a case in point can be a good example in building skills and/or capacities of trade union and labor activists in organizing of informal/precarious workers, networking towards international solidarity, campaigns/advocacy of workers' rights and research/case studies writing, for example on global production networks, inequality, development strategies, etc.