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3. Unique Strategies of Unionization of the Garment Workers in Bangladesh: Legal or Extralegal Adversaries

S. M. Anowarul Kayes Shimul

The Readymade Garments Industry (RMG) is the most important source of export earnings of Bangladesh. According to the World Bank's 2016 estimate, the export earnings of this sector was USD 28.14 billion which cover 80.7% of the total export earnings and 12.36% of the total GDP. However, the practice of trade union rights of the workers is extremely limited in the garments sector. Therefore, this study revisits and explores the unionization of the ready-made garment workers in Bangladesh which might help to improve our knowledge about the resilience capacity of the workers and what interesting responses are attempted by laborers to find new forms of power and leverage at present. To explore those objectives, 20 garments worker participants located in Gazipur at Dhaka, Bangladesh, were selected using a snowball sampling technique. In addition, 4 Key Informants including workers' leaders, government official, and labor study expert were selected using researchers judgment. The primary data was collected from March to June 2018, using interview guides for qualitative case studies; moreover, some secondary data sources and the Bangladesh Labor Act were included in the analysis. The study found that the Bangladesh Labour Act incorporated certain provisions in the name of participation committee which created scope for the owner to bypass trade union as participation committee has no bargaining power and includes members from both workers and employers. Besides, owners are manipulating the provisions of trade union creating "pocket unions" which serves the interest of the owners. On the other hand, despite the pressure from national and international sources, the registration of the plant level trade union is still very slow and riddled with problems. In the current situation, national level federations have designed a few innovative extralegal strategies like formulating local committees and factory level teams which function without any registration to mobilize the workers. The study enriches the existing knowledge about unionization in the backdrop of adversities constituted by different stakeholders and suggests that repression on protest leads to distortion of laws.

Key Words: Readymade Garment Industry, Unionization Strategies, Legal and Extralegal