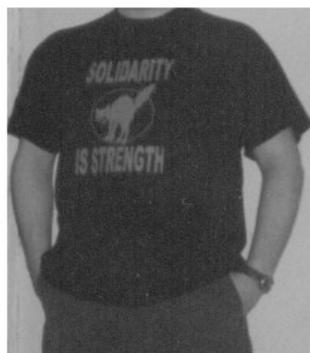


The Leveller Merchandise



Solidarity is Strength T-Shirts are available in black ink on a red shirt or red ink on black, and are available in small, medium, large and extra large.

The Leveller also have red and black flags, measuring 3 ft by 2 ft and hemmed for pole available while there are still sets of 16

commemorative postcards produced by Just Books in 2006 to mark the 75th anniversary of the start of the Spanish Revolution and civil war. Regrettably we only have room to show a couple of the images. The set contains 8 black and white images from photos and 8 full colour reproductions of



revolutionary posters from the period.

T-Shirts cost £8.00

Flags are £10.00

Postcard sets £6.00.

Payment can be made by cheque/postal order/IMO made out to 'Just Books Collective' in sterling.. Send your order and payment to: The Leveller, 9-11 Lombard Street, Belfast, BT1 1RB



these workers. Over 75 per cent of the country's foreign currency comes from RMG exports. This narrow economic dependency on one industry (the other main foreign currency earner is remittance - money sent home by migrant workers) makes Bangladesh particularly vulnerable to disruption of supply - especially as many contracts are dependent on tight turnaround/delivery times. So labour conflict in the RMG sector has far-reaching socio-economic consequences, particularly at a time when regional competition for a share of shrinking international markets is fierce. Drawing attention of the apparel industries' owners to a stark disparity, the prime minister said in many cases, the money spent on a day's shopping by an owner was more than the monthly salary of a garment worker.

'We do not expect such a reality. One thing you (owners) have to keep in mind that by oppressing the workers and depriving them, no industry can sustain,' Hasina said. (*New Age* - Nov 3 09)

There has long been a conflict of interest within the Bangladeshi ruling class on RMG labour relations. A substantial number of MPs in both main parties, the ruling Awami League and opposition Bangladeshi National Party, have business interests in the RMG sector - as investors or factory owners. Since the emergence of the industry in the early 1980s they have, despite recurring labour unrest, seen the profits roll in as markets expanded and have seen little need to concede any major concessions in the form of wage rises, working conditions or union representation. But the more far-sighted of the ruling class, aware of the potential vulnerability of the industry (and often with less immediate business

interests to protect), have long called for wide-spread trade union representation to be introduced as a stabilising institutional influence. If workers are paid less than the cost of their own self-reproduction something eventually has to give. The explosive anger of RMG workers is clearly expressed in recent news footage as they describe the hardships they endure and how they are cheated out of what are already some of the lowest wages in the world.

The unions have themselves admitted that their influence among RMG workers is marginal and that they have little or no influence over the regular disturbances; they have often functioned more like NGO's, providing charitable and legal services, international lobbying etc rather than actual negotiation/mediation of workplace conflicts between workers and bosses. (In fact some union-type organisations were set up by western NGO's - and NGO's have sometimes themselves taken on certain union-type functions.) But all this may be about to change. In the aftermath of the Tongi clashes and similar recent unrest, the government has announced it will introduce trade unions in the garment sector.

The class struggle and the forms it takes has developed largely autonomously in the industry, with little institutional mediation. This has contributed to the intensity and explosive character of garment workers' struggles; and as the economic recession forces further attacks on working class living conditions and workers with little left to lose express greater fury, it is this that the ruling class seek to contain with the introduction of trade unions. If the union reform is implemented, will it work? Certainly the

institutionalising of certain health and safety measures (deaths in factory fires are common, as are many occupational illnesses) as well as legal powers to enforce a living wage that is actually regularly paid would be popular among workers. But this depends on the garment bosses and the state showing a willingness to both grant reforms and then actually enforce them - which has never been the case so far. Promises have repeatedly been broken on these issues - and if there are no concessions on offer to win through union negotiation on behalf of workers, then unions will remain as largely irrelevant as they are today. (Another factor is that unions have often been as corrupt as most other political institutions in Bangladesh and have often been merely instruments of the political goals of one of the main political parties.) The unions have to try to establish credibility and take representative control of a workforce that has, over the past 25 years, shown itself consistently capable of a high level of self-organisation and solidarity. It is possible that the well-established current forms of mass struggle - regular wildcat strikes that then picket out neighbouring factories, roadblocks, riots and attacks on bosses' property - will prove hard to overcome.

Footnote

[1] **Asian textiles surge back**
ASIAN textiles, once considered a fading industry, are now showing strong growth prospects mainly due to demand from expanding middle classes, according to a recent AFP news agency report from Singapore. Development of 'latest technology' in this regard is also attributed for the growing success of the Asian textiles

sector. Known in the past as back-alley shops churning out cheap material, many Asian firms are shedding their sweatshop image as they move to compete in the global market. Stricter environmental standards required by Western countries are also prompting consolidation and innovation in the industry, according to one of the world's top suppliers of textile dyes and chemicals. One year after the global financial crisis exploded, Asian economies are rebounding faster than the West, boosting the textile industry's hopes. The Asian Development Bank recently upgraded its forecast for the region's 2009 economic growth to 3.9 per cent. China is forecast to grow 8.2 per cent this year and 8.9 per cent in 2010. The market is changing, customer taste and demand are also changing-as spectacularly visible from increased spending power in the Chinese provinces. In business, the future is in Asia and it is going to be driven from Asia, not from Europe and America, the media report said.

Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and China are the world's top textile producers as well as major consumers. Apart from apparel, a major driver for the industry is the demand for what is called 'technical textiles' or fabrics used in cars, mattress covers, bags, tents and parachutes, among others. As Asia's spending power grows, people want to buy different products and that is going to lead to the development of a whole new market for technical textiles which, in fact, did not exist before. (*The New Nation* - Nov 3 09)

