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Jakir Hossain

REPRESENTATION OF BANGLADESH'S GARMENT WORKERS
INTERESTS, POLITICS, AND OUTCOME



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Development Synergy Institute

**REPRESENTATION OF BANGLADESH'S GARMENT WORKERS:
INTERESTS, POLITICS, AND OUTCOME**

Author

Dr. Jakir Hossain

Associate Professor, IBS, University of Rajshahi, and
Chairman, Development Synergy Institute, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Email: jakir1034@yahoo.co.uk

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ডেভেলপমেন্ট সিনার্জি ইনস্টিটিউট
Development Synergy Institute

3/19 Humayan Road, Block B,
Mohammadpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Email: dsi@dsibd.org;
Web: www.dsibd.org

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh's garment workers, undeniably, serve as an asset for the sector itself to be competitive and to support the economy. Surpassing country's traditional export items, the garment products have experienced a quantitative leap in both the volume and value (GoB 2012). Even the global economic recession could not perturb the growth; rather it kept on increasing, *albeit* at a slower rate. Here lies a paradox. Why then the garment workers always find the sector's pay and benefit structure unreasonable against the backdrop of spiralling prices of essentials?

The industrial and labour relations in the sector have hardly been harmonious. But the conflicting nature is most pronounced in the recent years. On an average during the last six years, there were over three workers' protests in each week. The demands were broadly work and workplace related, and largely in response to specific violations of rights such as non-payment or delay in payment of wages and overtime. Some of the protests were related to working hours, leave and rest, and freedom of association and collective bargaining. Lay-off or factory closure along with employers' misconduct and unlawful and too were the backgrounds to numerous protests.

These protests are indications of the sector that under-values its workforce, and lacks the regulatory frames, institutions and practices needed for making workers work not only for them but also for the economy. These too are of a sign that the riches as well as the gains of the sector are hardly shared equitably.

The result of the failure to be aware of the paradox has been successfully playing down the workers' interests. As such, it earned the workers, their representatives and supporters the bad name of rowdy troublemakers. The conspiracy argument is put forward to vindicate the good intentions of representatives and supporters in promoting peace in the sector as well as wining positive outcome for workers. The way the labour unrest issues are regularly framed and presented to the policy-makers and public, as in the case of Ashulia garment industry-wide shutdown, instil the sense that foreign currency earning and future inward investment could be in deep trouble. The industry-wide shut-down even involved warning from the BGMEA president that factory owners would shut all units across the country if the conflicting situation continued. Similar to the past, business leaders and policy makers have joined hands in expressing their grave concern over deteriorating law and order situation, and the need for immediate and stern action against the unruly. The government too has been blamed for its inaction in containing the agitation and violent protests.

Failure to address this paradox may continue resistance against violations of workers' rights. Because of the differences of interests, industrial disputes and conflicts are unavoidable parts of industrial and labour relations. The failure too may prompt garment employers and their supporters to quickly find, as always, foreign conspiracy of the rival countries—who they believe—are out to push Bangladesh out of global garment trade by tarnishing the image of this sector through some local help.

Since there is no single cause of the denial and shift of blames, there is no single solution. A systemic and sustained set of changes in regulatory frames, institutions, and practices will be needed to turn the rhetoric about the importance of garment workers into reality for the workforce and the economy. To do so, I argue that there is no quick fix, and propose that three key stakeholder groups—business, labour, and government—look further into garment work and

workplace governance to understand how the imbalance of power within the sector is liable to degenerating into labour unrest and disputes. There is a need to begin working towards a consensus on how to represent the workers' interests and aspiration better.

GARMENT WORKERS' INTEREST REPRESENTATION

Garment workers' interests groups are of both formal as well as informal types. There are thirty-two national-level trade union federations representing workers in various industry including garments. In the garment sector itself, there are sixteen national garment labour federations, and twenty Dhaka division based garment federations. As per official records, there are 7,297 plant-level unions in the whole industrial sector of which only 139 unions are in the garment sector (DoL 2010). These plant level unions are affiliated with the thirty-six national and division based garment federations. The garment factories in the EPZs are still exempted from forming trade unions, and instead, workers are allowed to form associations. A total of only 128 such workers' associations have until today formed in 282 enterprises at 10 EPZs of the country (BEPZA 2010). In view of the inadequacy of plant level unions and associations, the formal representation of the garment workers is carried out by multiple national and/or industrial federations (Ahmed, Hossain and Khan 2011).

Whilst multiplicity of these formal institutional groups is an important feature (Farooque 2009), it is also one of the weaknesses in representing workers' interests. The weaknesses span from autonomy, to legitimacy, and to efficacy. Proliferation and fragmentation of trade unions have been widespread, and have badly undermined their efficiency, representativeness and credibility (Ahmed, Hossain and Khan 2011, Rahman 2011). In parallel, the semiformal groups e.g., unregistered trade unions, loosely structured issue-based platforms of unions and union leaders and NGOs act to represent workers. The means of representation by both of these groups are through varied forms of continued public advocacy. They also use indirect means—addressing the public by petition, demonstrations etc., to gain publicity in the media and by doing so, gaining public support.

Garment workers' protest is primarily collective. The negative attitude of employers towards organising coupled with workers' economic vulnerability constitutes a powerful disincentive to mobilization. Numerous authors (e.g., Dannecker 2004, Mahmud and Kabeer 2006, Nuruzzaman 2009, Mahmud 2009) document the systematic exploitation of the workers as the ground for workers' movement to emerge. Mahmud (2009) even argued that workers failed to mobilize for their rights as workers and citizens due to barriers spanning from the cultural, social, and the economic spheres of the lives of garment workers. True, problem of poverty along with the lack of voice, and organization make the workers highly risk-averse. This is not to claim that no individual protest takes place. Workers' interests as exhibited in their agitations are of latent nature. The latent interests get manifested by workers themselves only when systematic exploitation becomes unbearable to them.

The reason of the interests being latent is that workers keep their grievances suppressed since they understand that expression to which might lead to abuse by mid-management or even to job loss. The workers identified fear of job loss as the main reason for lack of initiative for collective action. The cost of individual protest is individual— it is quite easy for management to fire one worker without creating

too much of a disturbing effect on other workers. Workers see moving to another factory as an easy and relatively less costly alternative to protests and mobilizations. I am not claiming that the garment workers do not make individual protests. Usually the individual protests, according to Mahmud (2009), are carried out by workers (a) who thinks that (s)he will be able to find new job quickly; (b) who thinks that her/his claims would be backed up by fellow colleagues; and (c) who is desperate. Thus, the interests are mostly covered and only get ignited with sudden outburst of a particular incidence e.g., humiliation and abuse, termination of job, or even sudden lay-off or closure of factories.

When conditions become too oppressive or there is no scope for bargaining, a worker either simply leaves the job (for good or for joining another factory) as a silent protest, or channels the demands through formal or informal interest groups. When managements arbitrarily dismiss workers or even keep workers wage and overtime payment unpaid, workers are often left with little option but to stage a public protest in the hope of forcing the employers to listen to them, or the government to intervene on their behalf. Whether the latent-general-workplace related interests of garment workers would be expressed individually or collectively by themselves, or if expressed in which form are, however, determined by how such interests are aggregated together and articulated.

The less confrontational struggles on the factory premises take place through workers coming together spontaneously to lodge a complaint with the factory management. In situations of extreme and prolonged violation of rights, protests spill onto the streets and to other factories. Along with the regular demand of due wage and benefits, compensation, wage and benefits hike, it often requires a sudden action by the owner/management to spark off an outburst that unites all the workers and moves outside the factory floor.

The triggers to which are chiefly harassment and abuse of workers, or closing factory, or sudden lay-off of the factory, or police cases filed against workers. With no mechanism within enterprises to alleviate labour-management tensions, worker dissatisfaction often builds up over a long period, and protests are sparked off by a specific incident. Protests are perceived to be ways workers can motivate employers and government officials to take their interests and aspirations seriously.

Both the formal and informal channels of representation lead to negotiation of interests. But, the consequence to the first strategy of public advocacy is less direct and not immediate. In contrast, the interest intimidation route provides direct and immediate outcomes.

The immediate consequence to individual protest ranges from the promise of consideration of demands by employers, to threats of job termination and intimidation, to abuse and job termination and falsified charges. Workers reported that the language is often so abusive that they are either ashamed to return to workplace the following day or forced to stage public demonstrations with the support of colleagues.

Garment workers' testimonies reveal that the costs of mobilization and participation in protests are quite high. The workers who do participate in protests have their salaries cut or even sacked causing resentment to workers to outburst, and for colleagues to express solidarity. There are numerous incidences in which workers were handed-over to the police on cases of alleged theft and misbehaviour with management consequent to complaints. The agitation cases over the last six years provide evidence to the fact that bitterness caused due to harassment and filing police cases against workers led to further protests. A number of agitation cases burst into out of proportion with the employers' handling of protests by hired

hoodlums. The harsh treatment of the management on issues of shared interests turns the individually articulated interests subsequently into a collective one.

The promise of consideration of workers' demands by the management/owner, in contrast, usually persuades workers to continue the work as usual. Nevertheless, "the promises to enhance wages and overtime, payment of arrears, and improved working conditions are hardly kept," says a workers' representative. Workers grievances pile up, and are kept suppressed until it finds suitable to vent out.

The unwillingness of employer to discuss and negotiate with workers, and not fulfilling the assurance of consideration of the demands turns into further agitation and protests. The failing to fulfil promises turns into further protests. Such cases over the years are numerous. The un-kept promises of employers are dormant reflexes waiting for a trigger to burst into strikes of different sorts.

After a strike breaks out, the employer often calls in security guards or law enforcing agencies to seal-off the main factory entrance and prevent workers from getting outside to the streets, and staging demonstrations or blocking roads. The sealing-off the factory gate hardly diffuses the grievance rather fuels it.

Intimidation through the security forces and hired hoodlums, and temporary shutdown of factories are often used strategies of the management to calm the agitation. Employers see such strategies as prudent to avert damage of valuables and continue production. However, such strategy to disperse agitation itself produces new grounds for further agitations. Particularly, this is the case when workers come to the factory for work but find out that the factory gates are locked for indefinite period, or information floats on the verbal and physical abuses of workers by mid-management or by their hired hoodlums, or polices cases filed against workers. Indeed, the issues related to arbitrary dismissal, verbal and physical abuses and intimidation through security forces give vent to resentment to outburst.

The mishandling of the labour disputes at the enterprise levels are the triggers to others protests and agitations. The sudden shut-down of factory is a particular case in point. Most factory closures do not even conform to the labour law provisions—advance notice to workers and/or their representatives, publication of notice in newspapers, and duly informing the labour inspector. The recent industry-wide shut-down of the factories by the BGMEA and BKMEA in whole of Ashulia testaments to the fact employer associations' decision is unilateral, and beyond the scope of labour law provision under Art 13.1 (BLA 2006).

With the intimidation, and closure of factories, many of the workers' protests turned out to be severe labour disputes spreading across factories and even to neighbouring areas. These cases at the initial level were either peaceful sit-in strikes inside factory or outside public demonstration.

When a blockade occurs, security forces are called in to persuade and if needed discipline the protesters to abandon the action. Occasionally, such actions are sufficed to temporarily stifle workers' anger and prevent escalation, but it also creates more tension. This is because, with the refusal to comply, law enforcing agencies forcibly disperse the workers only to be gathered elsewhere close to the factory unorganized. Such blockades have often led to confinement of authority, and civil disobedience leading to blockades of highways, torching of transport and property, and often to solidarity strikes. In most of these incidents, there were physical clashes between protesters and law enforcing agencies. These clashes led to injury or even to death of members of both sides. Consequent to the protests, police cases and mass arrests follows.

Over the years, trade union leaders and worker activists were not spared by the law enforcing agencies. Workers' leaders who could have mediated the conflicting interests of the employers and workers, they themselves have been under fear of prosecution or even arrested. The police itself filed over 50 cases against workers and trade union leaders during last couple of years in charge of destruction and vandalism. It shows that the authorities remain keen to press for punishment of protesters, including penalties for breach of public order and sometimes also criminal sanctions in suspicion of 'illegal assembly and staging demonstrations.' But rather than helping to resolve disputes, it actually created the conditions for other disputes to emerge and escalate into severe forms.

OUTCOME OF INTEREST REPRESENTATION

The analysis of the agitation cases over the years truly amplifies two outcomes. The first outcome, denial of interests, is that employers refute the workers' interests even the undisputable ones. Workers' demands are hardly accepted by the employers publicly. Accordingly, the outcomes are either of no action or handling of interests indiscriminately fuelling further grievances and resentment. And the second outcome is a coercive agreement. The employers are induced/ forced to sit and discuss to settle the difference of interests. The government too acts as mediator in the process. Of importance, both the outcomes are in one way or the other related to the power dynamics in representing interests. Also, in all these cases, the denial led to condemnation of interest articulation mode of workers thereby defaming workers and their interests.

The shift of blames is one aspect to defaming the representative interests. Employers and their association leaders argue that workers' agitation is not really workers' grievance centric rather a product of outsiders. Often cited arguments of the employers say, "Compared to wages and benefits in any other sector, the earning is reasonable enough for workers not to go on agitating for pay-hike". Despite that, a sort of induced acceptance of workers involvement in protests is there. An agreement amongst the employers that prevails is that "against the background of spiralling prices of essentials (this time non-food items especially housing), workers may not find the pay and benefit structure reasonable anymore."

The employers' public statements, however, are in the line of "workers hardly can torch the factory on which their livelihoods depend." Undeniably, the issue of ownership of work and workplace quite often had been overemphasized. This is particularly so, since workers had over the years known that there are hardly any fully functioning institutional mechanisms to express their grievances and settle disputes. More importantly, the sector's workers retention rate is quite low. A period of permanent employment in a particular factory sufficient to instil a sense of ownership is hardly the employment contract for most of the workers.

The employers are able to quickly generate politically useable information and move it to policy makers and public. Highlighting the enviable growth in exports as well as its role in Bangladesh economy, employers and their associational leaders are able to question the legitimacy of workers' demands and of the channels of interest articulation. The way the issues are regularly framed and presented to the policy-makers and public and the meanings and sentiments that are attached to the issues of competition and country's survival in globalized market really make things moving to the employers' desired direction.

Employers' strategy is also to win public opinion; thereby they even on occasion resorted to public demonstration against 'unruly' workers. These symbolic politics, as Keck and Sikkink (1998) defines, adds momentum to the direction. The highlights of employers' good intentions for the country and for the workers, in contrast to stories of workers' violent agitation in regular corporate media outlets—both print and electronic—play-down not only the mode of workers' interest articulation but also the demands themselves.

Employers' leverage over workers and trade unions is explicit in two forms, both material and moral. They effectively used material leverage by focusing on the sector's vulnerability to global competition. They are successfully able to instil the sense in the public and policy makers that Bangladesh faces significant competition both from countries higher up the value chain with higher productivity and quality, and better links with buyers, as well as from the countries with lower wages that are aggressively seeking to enter the same markets as Bangladesh. As, obvious, lamenting that foreign buyers are wary of the industry's reliability due to continual labour unrest, it is always accompanied by warning to the public and the government that the foreign currency earning and future inward investment in the country were in deep trouble. Moral leverage involved mobilization of shame—where the act of vandalism of workers is held up to the light of public scrutiny. Most importantly, they are able to hold government to their stated policies and principles conforming to establish industrial peace and competitive advantage through its industrial and labour relations.

In the backdrop of the politics of representation of the conflicting interests, the solution to the unrest in the sector has been propagated to install industrial peace by any means. As such, the series of escalating violence induced the employers to come to accepting or pledging to accept some of the workers' demands immediately after workers' protests only to restrict escalating the violence. During the 2006 to 2011, at least over half of the agitation cases were settled either fully or partly through pledges of settlement or actual agreements between the workers and employers. In such agreements, in most of the cases, government agencies were part to it, mediating through the labour inspectors or law enforcing agencies like police and RAB. During this period, two of the tripartite agreements on review of wage along with other issues were made. Trade unions leaders—who hardly have had any part in the agitation itself and also have any command over agitating workers—were co-opted too in the process of negotiation or in a later stage in the signing of the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between employers and workers.

Neither the employers nor the government try to understand the true nature and causes of the labour disputes and protests that have erupted across the country in recent years. Both the actors see labour disputes as conflicts that had to be managed and controlled. The quick fixes in the form of rushed bipartite negotiations between employers and workers representatives after every severe instance of worker's agitation, and subsequently coming up with some form of MoU between the two parties which hardly get to implemented is evidenced to the fact that the employers as well as the government by somehow want to keep the production process in order. The series of agitation and demonstration in same factories even after the minimum wage agreement in 2010 is proof to that.

The agreements often have elements that are priory known that it would not be implemented fully. Indeed, the evidences to sticking to the agreed MoU terms by the employers are not that widespread (Hossain, Ahmed and Akter 2010, Hossain and Islam 2008, Mostafa 2007, Hossain and Asaduzzaman 2006). This is true too in case of the tripartite agreements. The review of 2006-2011 agitation cases show

either an abundance of cases full of broken promises or at best dilly-dallying implementation of the terms—making workers only disillusioned and almost certainly forcing them to revert to the *tried and tested pattern* of wild-cat strikes and demonstrations in a bid to get what workers want.

In view of the employers' and also of the government's intention for a quick fix, the obvious actors to be negotiated are those trade union leaders whom they believe would be negotiation-worthy—ideally nearest political allies and with whom garment owners' associations have close working relations. This leads to exclusion of latent groups completely and part of associational groups partially. The cases reviewed during 2006 to 2011 show that in most of cases the bilateral agreement were represented officially either by trade unions which are closely related to party in power, or members of the employer associations' crisis management committee. None of the worker activists and labour leaders who suffered from threats, intimidation and attacks by employers, and the law enforcing agencies was ever made party to any negotiation and agreement.

The tripartite agreements are also no exception to that. Poor representation of workers' interests to last two minimum wage-boards established by the government and subsequent negotiation resulted in poor pay package for workers. The minimum wage of BDT 1662.50 per month in 2006 not only fell below the workers' and their representatives' expected minimum, but also was a step backward if yearly rate of inflation is added to its previous low level of BDT 930 that remained unchanged for over twelve years since 1994. Garment workers during the run up to new wage structure both in 2006 and 2010 had to go through unusual price hike of food-grains and essential commodities—affecting garment workers along with other working poor disproportionately since a very high percentage of their income is spent on food items and basic necessities for their survival (Hossain and Asaduzzaman 2006, Mostafa 2007, Hossain and Islam 2008, Hossain 2010). The demand from all the interest groups of workers in 2010 was even below the minimum amount, I calculated, to be BDT 5378 for a worker to live on or is sufficient to allow workers to support their families and maintain a safe, healthy standard of living in their communities (Hossain 2010).

The 2010 wage board set minimum wage at BDT 3000—having no way close to workers' demand of the minimum for a worker's subsistence living (BDT 5000). It too falls below the level promised by the government. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour and Employment during that time urged the government to declare “a time befitting minimum wage structure.” On July 21, 2010, the Prime Minister weighed in on the wage debate with a speech in Parliament, terming garment workers' wages “not only insufficient but also inhuman” and observing that “workers cannot even stay in Dhaka with the peanuts they get in wages.” Raising the hopes of garment workers, the prime minister argued that owners should also give a portion of their profits to the workers for their survival (The New Age, July 22, 2010).

The nominal minimum wage increase from 1,662.50 to 3,000 taka is 1,337.5 taka or 80 percent. But in real terms, the increase is much less. In view of the around 70 percent increase in cost of living since 2006, garment workers would need BDT 2,826.50 in 2010 wages in order to maintain the purchasing power that BDT 1,662.50 had in 2006 (CPD 2010). The real pay increase for workers is, thus, around 174 taka (around 10 percent). The current minimum wage is still a malnutrition wage. At current price, an income sufficient to graduate an average family out of the poverty line (1.25 USD in purchasing power parity terms) is around BDT 7141.

The amount set as minimum wage in last two boards has indeed been a poor way to help the workers. The amount even does not allow workers to live in a situation where they will be able to access food intake for her/ him along with family members similar to that of a person who is a prisoner or hospitalized (Hossain 2010).

There is no denying the fact that the employers had always been inflexible in listening to demands of the workers as well to calls from a broad range of civil society members and even from the buyers to enhance wage to a decent level. Government calls too for a decent living wage hardly were listened to. Nevertheless, the reasons for this inequitable outcome for garment workers go beyond the employers' unwillingness to acts of misrepresentation. The sector's wage is decided through the tripartite negotiations of government, employers, and workers. The unwillingness of the employers could have hardly deterred had the members in board acted in a representative manner. Indeed, the politics of representation determined the outcome from both the boards. Undeniably, the misrepresentation was not only related to participation in the wage board negotiations but also in the process of giving legitimacy to the inequitable outcome in the events that followed the declaration of new wage scale for the sector.

In sum, while, for the employers the immediate concern is to restore production process, for government, the workers' agitation and protests had been seen as a public order issue. Whenever workers stage strikes or engage in public protest, the primary concern of the authorities is not the cause of the dispute but maintaining social stability and political order. Therefore, when government officials intervene in labour disputes, they meet both sides and try to persuade or cajole them into resolving their differences for the common good. Very often the law enforcing agencies will be called in to uphold order at the scene, or even forcibly disperse the workers.

Given the hard-line stance, it is not surprising that conflicts arise when the law enforcing agencies are called in to deal with worker protests. The use of forces to break-up strikes, demonstrations and sit-ins in essence criminalizes the protests. This has increasingly encouraged workers to escalate shop-floor disputes into conflicts spilling into streets and to other factories around for want of alternative means of settlement.

The available evidence of the nature of employers' and government's intervention in the workers' agitation makes it clear that the policy is clearly focused on establishing peace—by tackling the phenomena of civil disobedience and disturbance not by getting deep into what bring workers in the street protests/blockades in the first instance. But rather than helping to resolve disputes, it actually creates the conditions for other disputes to emerge and escalate into severe forms. Indeed, this is a *vicious circle*.

The lack of effective workers' representation at the plant level leaves workers powerless to protect their own interests. The employers seek maintenance of stability, and accordingly intervene in a way only to establish industrial peace and to continue production. The means used subsequently to resolve disputes are pressure and persuasion to suppress workers' demands and interests only to be forced to vent out in some other forms at a different time. The form of outburst of the resentment is predominantly through the indirect means of addressing the employer, government, and public.

CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION OF GARMENT WORKERS

Indeed, the work and workplace governance in Bangladesh's garment sector is devoid of true representative participation mechanisms. Work and workplace decisions are left to employers and managers. Workers with least or no degree of autonomy and authority only carry out organizational decisions. The current industrial and labour relations hardly hold the employers responsible for the work and workplace they control. It lacks the measures to uphold the responsibility for violations of labour standards and rights, and accordingly devising strategies for evading legal obligations are quite often ignored. In contrast, often the onus is thrown onto the workers to abide rules and laws so that the production processes are not hampered by any means.

The presence of hierarchical power in the garment sector working relationship has been the key to workers' grievance and industrial disputes. The unfair balance of power is liable to be degenerated into disputes and unrest. The informal system of interest representation in the sector to constitute, aggregate, resolve and mediate diverse interests of individuals and groups is the outcome of the weak as well as heavily employers' leaning formal system.

The lack of formal avenues such as representative trade unions at the plant level to express workers' grievances or aspirations led to grievances to pile up, and causing disputes to escalate. When conditions become too oppressive, workers either simply leave the job in a silent protest, or channel the demands through formal or informal interest groups with the hope of forcing employers to take heed to demands, and government to intervene on their behalf.

Workers' interest groups' bid to influence the policy making process is done both through the advocacy and intimidation channels. The consequence of workers' resorting to both channels is negotiations of interests in some forms. However, the form of outburst of the dissatisfaction and resentment is predominantly through the interest intimidation route involving the indirect means of addressing the employer, government and public in the form of wild-cat strikes, demonstrations, sit in protests and protest marches, blockades, confinement of authority, and damage to factory and other property. The consequences range from the promise of consideration of demands by employers, job termination threats, and intimidation through law enforcing agencies. The means used subsequently to resolve disputes are pressure and persuasion to suppress workers' demands and interests. The authorities' keen interest based on the vision and logic of action of the current industrial and labour relation to press for punishment of protest leaders and participants, including penalties for breach of public order rather than helping to resolve disputes, creates the conditions for other disputes to emerge and escalate into severe forms of protests and agitations. Workers' interests hardly gets reflected in the negotiations since their interests are either not adequately represented or misrepresented by various interests' groups, and accordingly the outcome of the interest representation is inequitable for the workers. The failure to attain the desired outcome from the negotiations dis-empowers workers, and produces further coercive and induced participation in the interest articulations channels, notably through interest intimidation as against advocacy.

The institutional mechanisms in place to balance the conflicting interests of workers and employers fail to provide workers with access to rights. The prominence of the need to establish and monitor civil order come more in policy discussion than the issue of implementation of labour standards and workers' rights provisions. The regular layoffs and shutdowns of garment factories in and around the

major industrial belt following the agitation programs by the workers are showcases of country's industrial and labour relations that prioritize measures to stop industrial action and sources of disruption to production more than fulfilling the minimum needs of the workers for their well-being.

Indeed, the absence of direct institutional channels e.g., trade union activism at the plant level and continued policy advocacy led to the capture of Bangladesh's industrial and labour relations to the direction of industrial peace and competitiveness downplaying the needs of equitable share of riches and gains.

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