

exCHAINS



Internationale Solidarität zwischen Beschäftigten entlang der Textil-, Bekleidungs- und Einzelhandelskette

Workers Win Against the World of Big Corporations !

1,257 Workers Successfully Reclaim their Jobs at H&M Supplier Gokaldas Exports

It had been a struggle of eight months. Since June 2020, the 1,257 workers of H&M supplier Gokaldas Exports in Srirangapatna near Bangalore, India, has been fighting to get their jobs back. The company planned to use the Corona pandemic as a pretext to get rid of the factory and bust the factory union. Management declared a lay-off at the factory without prior notice, trying to cart off all its machinery in a nightly hush-hush operation. Workers, mostly women, occupied the factory grounds and not just prevented the removal of machinery but also staged a demonstration amidst the pandemic for over 50 days.



The struggle dragged on for months against the Gokaldas management, H&M, the primary sourcing multinational, and the labour department. Burdened with financial constraints, loans and intimidation from management goons, all but 21 workers, were forced to resign and accept a monetary settlement.

But after 8 months the struggle of workers and their trade union GATWU is finally over with the management signing an agreement with the union to reinstate all the 1257 workers who were illegally laid off and later forced to resign. Moreover, GATWU will also be a recognised trade union in the company's other factories as soon as

at least one out of five workers in that facility is their member. This agreement marks a huge success: Reinstatement of 1257 workers during a global pandemic through the sheer strength of workers' struggle and solidarity.

Solidarity Forever – Workers Joining from Production to Sale

The workers' persistence paved the way to this success. Over several months, they had been protesting day and night, setting up camp in front of the factory gate and organising rallies. At the same time, GATWU mobilised international support from the German ver.di trade union retail department,



activist retail workers at H&M, and works council members. They also included the global trade union federation IndustriAll, who have a global framework agreement with H&M.

Yet it soon became clear that workers can only rely on their solidarity among one another and along the supply chain: in spite of the framework agreement, H&M refused to deliver any serious support in the conflict. Still worse: the company wanted to cheat on the local union by holding their own survey instead of negotiating with workers and their trade union representatives.

New Ties between Workers

The cooperation of the local Indian trade union with German ver.di retail trade union and the H&M works council members goes beyond the forms of support practised so far. New ties between activists in Germany and in India were established through video live streams in social media and through short videos made by local workers. This enabled trade unionists, works council members, and workers in Germany to support GATWU locally by building pressure using statements, photo actions, and direct negotiations with H&M management. These ties were based on the ongoing struggle and mobilisation of local workers who not only delivered information on the situation, but also reported on their struggle, enabling the German workers to relate to the reported experiences and offer their support.

Our World, not the World of Corporations

The labour struggle and its final resolution by the agreement are of great importance. So far, conflicts in the global garment industry are mostly being governed on the basis of condi-

tions set by the transnational corporations. The corporations are recognising, to a certain degree, their responsibility for the working conditions at their suppliers, thus reacting to trade unions’ and NGOs’ criticism. Nevertheless the latter, within this setting, are settling for a role of mere warner, while the corporations are retaining the power to decide what is to happen and how the issue will be resolved – leaving the power relations along the supply chain intact, and the corporations’ business model unchallenged. The Transnational Institute, an international network of researchers worldwide, has termed this “multistakeholderism”: corporations incorporate their critics in order to keep control. This trend can be seen in many sectors.

The labour struggle and international solidarity at Gokaldas Exports have been able to show that alternatives to the world of corporations do exist. Workers’ cooperation along the supply chain, based on a strong local trade union mobilisation, opens the chance to speak about conflict in the words of workers themselves, to formulate and present workers’ own demands, and to press these at home and beyond. The workers won their victory by themselves, making the experience that they can do it. This is what the H&Ms of the world fear the most.

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video message from trade unionists from India

