

## Highlight Negotiating with the Brands for a Living Wage



On 22 December 2012, more than 20 people who were trade unionists, labour activists and CAW members in Sri Lanka met to discuss what actions can be taken to follow-up on the Peoples' Tribunal in March that called for a Asian Floor Wage for the garment sector in Sri Lanka. The meeting began by an update on the Sri Lankan garment workers sector. It was reported that workers face grave challenges because of present government policy that proposes a new pension scheme that will not work for the interests of the workers. Wage increments have been stalled and protesting workers were beaten and cases pressed against them. There have been retrenchments even in the Free Trade Zone factories. Under such challenging circumstances the meeting planned strategies to get brands to commit to increasing wages and paying a basic minimum wage.

There was a brief sharing about some of the successes of garment workers in India and Indonesia in getting brands to improve their working conditions. The meeting resolved to continue with collecting information about the situation of workers producing for the major international brands. This coupled with active and effective organising of the workers will lend an edge to a strategy of negotiating with the brands for a basic living wage for garment workers in Asia. CAW is actively involved in these struggles of the garment workers in Asia.

### FORMAL ECONOMY

#### Workplace Rights for Women Urged in Pakistan

Muttahida Labour Federation Secretary General Muhammad Hanif Ramay said that the government should enforce laws protecting the rights of working women, at a seminar organised by the Women Workers Union with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung at Township on December 11, 2011. Civil society activists and working women from Lahore, Khushab, Jhelum, Faisalabad and Gujranwala attended the event.

Mr Ramay said that scores of working women faced problems such as underpayment, sexual harassment, overtime and denial of medical and social security covers. Though the constitution and workplace rules ensure provision of all legitimate rights to the workers, law enforcement institutions do not properly monitor the workplaces. The participants unanimously passed a resolution demanding the implementation of minimum wage of Rs7,000 to workers and other rights.

[More Details](#)

#### For the First Time in 50 years, NTUC Gets A Woman President

Veteran unionist Diana Chia was elected president of the National Trades Union Congress, making her the first woman to do hold the post in the union's 50-year history. At the NTUC's National Delegates Conference on December 8, 381 delegates elected by secret ballot a new 21-member Central Committee to a four-year term which ends in 2015.

With a global economic slowdown expected next year, the general-secretary of the Healthcare Services Employees Union has her work cut out for her. The 55-year-old acknowledged that the labour movement will need the "stamina, the endurance to see (its) members through". With 10 new members replacing veterans in the committee, Ms Chia told reporters that one of her first tasks is work with the new team to "execute the mandate of a stronger labour movement in terms of voices for everybody".

Among the goals the labour movement has pledged by 2015 is to be an effective voice and secure better jobs for all workers in all sectors, from contract and casual low-wage workers to back-to-work women, mature workers, professionals, managers and executives.

[More Details](#)

#### Trade Union Strike Called in February as PM Will not Talk to TUs

Trade unions in India have called a 24-hour nationwide strike on February 28, 2012 as Prime Minister Manmohan Singh did not hold any discussion with them on their demands, AITUC General Secretary Gurudas Dasgupta said December 6, according to IBN News. "For two years we are agitating, but the Prime Minister has not called a single meeting to discuss our demands. We resorted to different other forms of agitation, but as these did not get any response from the government, we were forced to call the strike," Dasgupta told a press conference. "Since 2009 all the trade unions came together to safeguard the rights of workers, but not once the Prime Minister called us for discussion," he said. He also claimed that this was the first time that all the 12 recognised all-India trade unions, including BMS, INTUC, AITUC and CITU were taking part in a strike to press for common demands. The main demands for which the strike has been called on the day before the Union Budget were "no contractual agreement for work of permanent nature, amendment of Minimum Wages Act and assured pension for all."

[More Details](#)

### INFORMAL ECONOMY

#### Panel Wants Domestic Workers Brought Under Bill Against Sexual Harassment

A parliamentary panel in India has recommended that domestic workers be brought under the purview of the Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill, 2010. The comprehensive legislation seeks to protect women against sexual harassment at workplace and lays down a complaint and redress mechanism, according to the NTUI news.

Domestic workers, who make up 30 per cent of the women workforce in the unorganised sector and who are most vulnerable to sexual harassment, should be assured of their right to work with dignity, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development said in its report on the Bill, which was tabled in the Rajya Sabha on December 8.

The panel has strongly recommended that the title of legislation be changed to 'The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill,' so that it could reflect the preventive aspects in line with the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in 1997 in the Vishaka case.

[More Details](#)

#### Women Working Home-Based Seek Their Rights

The Home-Based Working Women 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference was held in Ankara on from December 2 to 4. Women from various cities who are working at home gathered in Turkey's capital and said "We are here" to make their work and lives visible, according to the BIA News Center.

At the conference, topics related to development in the field of home-based work were discussed as well as the public's responsibility and the results of related researches. Experiences and information were shared on working conditions and organisations in different countries. The conference was opened by Assoc. Prof Aşkın Asan, Deputy Minister for Family Affairs and Social Politics. It was attended by home-based working women from 24 different locations and representatives and personnel from different organisations.

[More Details](#)

### MIGRATION AND LABOUR

#### After Floods Recede, Thai Unions Rally around Migrant Workers

Thailand is still grappling with the aftermath of the historic October 2011 floods that swamped 1,500 factories in more than 20 provinces, killed 700, and left hundreds of thousands of workers jobless. Natural disasters are especially hard on migrant workers and may increase their vulnerability to exploitation such as human trafficking. With support from the Solidarity Center, the State Enterprises Workers Relation Confederation (SERC) has organised transportation, food, medical assistance, and relief for migrant workers in several Thai provinces.

With support from the Solidarity Center, SERC purchased a motorboat, medicine, transportation, and food for flood victims housed at several donation centers/shelters in Greater Bangkok. In cooperation with the Thai labour movement, SERC also opened a flood relief center in Samut Songkhram province, a tourist destination about 40 miles southwest of Bangkok. The center aims to protect both Thai and migrant workers from being taken advantage of during the crisis. It serves as a shelter for those who lost their homes in the floods. It also provides food, clothing, and medical services for the displaced. In addition, it offers assistance to migrant workers who would like to leave the country, helping them obtain the necessary transportation and documentation. So far, SERC staff has been on more than 10 trips to distribute flood relief items to flood victims and affected SERC members in four provinces, including Bangkok.

[More Details](#)

#### Migrant Workers Get Help Collecting Wages in China

The ministry has asked grassroots authorities to improve handling of labour disputes to ensure the country's 240 million migrants are paid before the Spring Festival, which falls on Jan 23, 2012.

The All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the top trade union organisation, released a statement on Thursday December 29, asking nationwide unions to make efforts to provide legal assistance to help migrant workers get their wages, according to China Daily.

A spokesman of the federation said there are increasing cases that migrants' wages have been delayed by employers this year because some export-oriented and labour-intensive enterprises are facing financing problems, decreasing orders and rising costs due to the debt crisis in the United States and the European Union as well as the appreciation of the RMB. Unions will work with law firms and law experts to offer legal aid volunteer services to help address the problem.

[More Details](#)

### RIGHTS IN CONFLICTS AND SUPPRESSIONS

#### Women and the Egyptian Revolution

The year 2011 is ending as it began: with images of thousands of Egyptian women and men standing up against a Western-backed military regime – from a 10,000-strong march of women on December 21 to another mass Friday march on Dec 23. These make it clear that the Egyptian revolution is ongoing, and that women continue to play a central role.

The Western media is used to depicting Arab and Muslim women as passive victims in need of forced liberation (justifying the war in Afghanistan). While the Egyptian revolution busted this and other myths, the *New York Times* was still puzzled by the active participation of women against the regime – and claimed they have been otherwise peripheral to the political process. While official political structures have excluded women, they have been at the heart of the revolutionary process – from the movements leading up to the January uprising, to the strikes and protests that have kept it going.

[More Details](#)

### NEW YEAR GREETINGS FROM

#### CAW EXCO CHAIRPERSON

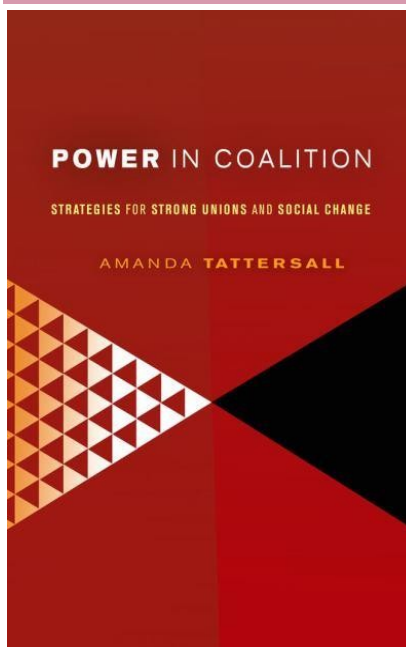
Dear Friends and Partners in CAW,

On behalf of the staff and Exco of CAW I want to wish you a very good 2012. It is going to be a challenging year for women workers all over the world. It is also a year when the CAW Secretariat is facing challenges of financing. However we have survived 2011 and look forward to more work in 2012. In the face of challenges our response will be as it always has been in the past - we will struggle collectively and overcome. Long Live the Women Workers of the world. Happy New Year!

Menaha Kandasamy

### BOOK RELEASE

#### Power in Coalition: Strategies for Strong Unions and Social Change



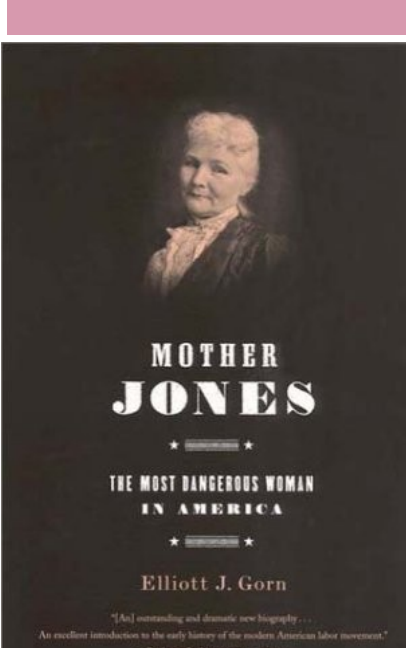
By Amanda Tattersall

The labour movement sees coalitions as a key tool for union revitalisation and social change, but there is little analysis of what makes them successful or the factors that make them fail. Amanda Tattersall—an organiser and labour scholar—addresses this gap in the first internationally comparative study of coalitions between unions and community organisations.

Tattersall argues that coalition success must be measured by two criteria: whether campaigns produce social change and whether they sustain organisational strength over time. The book contributes new, practical frameworks and insights that will help guide union and community organisers across the globe. The book throws down the gauntlet to industrial relations scholars and labour organisers, making a compelling case for unions to build coalitions that wield "power with" community organisations. (209 pages paperback)

Click [here](#) to order.

#### Mother Jones



By Elliott J. Gorn

Her rallying cry was famous: "Pray for the dead and fight like hell for the living." A century ago, Mother Jones was a celebrated organiser and agitator, the very soul of the modern American labour movement. At coal strikes, steel strikes, railroad, textile, and brewery strikes, Mother Jones was always there, stirring the workers to action and enraging the powerful. In this first biography of "the most dangerous woman in America," Elliott J. Gorn proves why, in the words of Eugene V. Debs, Mother Jones "has won her way into the hearts of the nation's toilers, and... will be lovingly remembered by their children and their children's children forever." (408 pages paperback)

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### ABOUT CAW

Committee for Asian Women (CAW) is a regional network of 46 women workers groups in 14 Asian countries that aims to empower women workers to protect, advocate, and advance their rights. CAW is part of the global movement advocating workers' rights for over 30 years.

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