

11 December 2012

To the Editor

Thanks for your thoughtful and thorough reporting on the most recent garment factory fire at Tazreen Fashion in Bangladesh, which killed 112 workers there. News of the fire was horrifying but certainly not surprising. Claims by Walmart and the many other American companies that contract with garment factories overseas that they were ignorant of the conditions that made this tragedy inevitable, are simply not credible.

It is fitting to compare contemporary garment factory fires to the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. But that event was memorable not simply for its horror but also for its extraordinary aftermath, when people from many walks of life—including union organizers, social workers, political leaders, fire fighters, and the workers themselves—strove to ensure that tragedy on such a scale would never happen again. They succeeded. To this day, the Triangle fire remained the worst work-related disaster in US history.

The Triangle Factories of today are often in countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan where local activists regularly risk beatings, imprisonment and worse. Just this past April, Aminul Islam of the Bangladeshi Center for Worker Solidarity was tortured and murdered for his advocacy on behalf of garment workers.

The products of Walmart and others are not cheap if they come at such a price. These companies—and those of us who shop there—have the power to make a difference.

Ruth Sergel

Founder, Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition
ruth@streetpictures.org