

Walmart Workers Will Rally in Ten Countries December 14, 2012

Sunday 16 December 2012, by [EIDELSON Josh](#) (Date first published: 13 December 2012).

The labor campaign confronting Walmart in the United States is planning an international escalation for tomorrow. In partnership with the global union federation UNI, the union-affiliated group Making Change at Walmart is supporting a “Global Day of Action,” with participation expected from Walmart workers in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, India, Nicaragua, South Africa, the United Kingdom and Zambia. The day’s main US protest will be a Miami demonstration featuring a street theater performance in the tradition of the United Farm Workers’ teatro campesino.

“When other countries and other states come together and help Miami, it’s louder,” said Hileah, Florida, Walmart worker Marie-Ann Roberty, a member of the union-backed group OUR Walmart. While “in the beginning, Walmart thought it was not a threat...,” said Roberty. “Now that it’s growing, and people are coming together, Walmart has to listen, Walmart has to come and sit with us as a group and say, ...What do you need us to do?”

Friday’s planned actions make good on a promise made two months ago. As I reported for Salon, as Southern California workers launched the first-ever coordinated US Walmart retail strikes on October 4, UNI staff and Walmart workers from abroad were in town to kick off a new Walmart Global Union Alliance. Workers from the UNI delegation rallied with strikers and escorted them back into work after the strike, carrying their countries’ flags into Walmart stores. They also pledged coordinated global actions in the months ahead.

Interviewed in Spanish during that visit, Argentinean union delegate Marta Miranda said, “It was an incredible experience, and a learning experience.” Miranda, who worked as a Walmart greeter for three years, said the visiting Walmart workers “shared stories” with their US counterparts. “We agree that it’s important for workers to have the basic right to stand up and speak out for themselves,” she added. “Everyone should have that. If they’re upset about their conditions, they should be able to voice that.”

Tomorrow’s global protests will call for an end to alleged retaliation against US Walmart worker activists. They will also include a moment of silence for the 112 workers who died in a November 24 fire at a factory that produced Walmart apparel in Bangladesh.

The website of the Corporate Action Network, a group that helped coordinate Black Friday protests in support of striking Walmart workers, also offers instructions from Making Change at Walmart for hosting actions on Friday at US stores. It suggests tactics including leaflets, delegations to management, flash mobs and prayer vigils.

Walmart did not immediately respond to a request for comment this morning. In statements to The Nation, the company has dismissed recent strikes and protests as publicity stunts, denied retaliating against activists, and said that it promotes fire safety in Bangladesh.

While entirely union-free in North America, Walmart has acceded to union recognition in several countries. One of the most dramatic struggles took place in the United Kingdom in 2006; as historian

Nelson Lichtenstein recounts in his book *The Retail Revolution: How Walmart Made a Brave New World of Business*, the union representing warehouse workers at the Walmart subsidiary ASDA won expanded rights to organize retail store workers by threatening a work stoppage that would have kept beer from reaching the homes of fans in time for the World Cup. Lichtenstein notes that some Walmart unions were inherited by Walmart when it bought existing retail chains, and that some are largely controlled by political parties and don't challenge management authority in the workplace.

In general, Lichtenstein told *The Nation* last week, "the lesson" from abroad "is that you need to bring the state in." While Walmart has resisted unionization wherever possible, he said, the retail giant has been "willing to abide by the laws of a country if the laws are there and they're going to be enforced." According to Lichtenstein, US labor laws have done little to restrain Walmart from union-busting.

Interviewed during the October UNI delegation, Head of UNI Commerce Alke Boessinger said that while the countries with unionized Walmarts generally have more pro-union legal systems than the United States, "that doesn't mean that it's actually easy for them to get organized at Walmart." In Argentina, for example, said Boessinger, "they still had to go through years of struggle and fighting with the company to make sure that they comply with the local law." "Walmart," she said, "will always only do the minimum, according to what they absolutely have to and are forced to do."

Josh Eidelson on December 13, 2012 - 9:45 AM ET

*For more on Walmart's role in the fire that killed 112 Bangladeshi workers, check out Josh Eidelson's coverage for *The Nation*: available on ESSF (article 27299), [From "The Nation": Documents Undermine Walmart Account on Deadly Bangladesh Fire](#).*

P.S.

*

<http://www.thenation.com/blog/171738/walmart-workers-will-rally-ten-countries-tomorrow?rel=emailNation#>