

Police and union officials mount frame-up of dissident textile workers in India

Our reporter
22 August 1998

The Socialist Labour League, the Indian organization in political solidarity with the Fourth International, is mounting a campaign to defend five textile workers facing frame-up charges after an altercation with union officials. Two days before the incident, local leaders of the Confederation of Industrial Trade Unions (CITU) threatened dissident union members with violence and struck one, a well-known supporter of the SLL.

Four of the five workers facing frame-up charges--E. Ramdoss, H. Anandhan, J. Srinivasan and A. Leela Nandhapushnam--were among 14 workers victimized for leading a strike last year at the Well-Knit garment factory in Chennai (Madras). The CITU, which is affiliated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist), assisted management first in suspending and now dismissing the 14.

Last year's strike began as a walkout by 60 workers to press for an increase in their piece-rate wages. It culminated, two weeks later, in a strike of Well-Knit's entire 2,000-strong work force. The Hong Kong-based company then suspended 23 workers, of whom 9 were reinstated after they renounced their role in the strike.

From July 1997 to last May, the 14 workers were on suspension, but after Well-Knit and the CITU agreed on a new contract the company moved to dismiss the strike leaders. The new contract, which increases the garment workers' base wage by just 125 rupees, or about US\$3 per month, has been widely denounced by the Well-Knit workers as a sellout.

On August 1 a group of some 40 workers went to the CITU office to ask when the union will hold elections, which according to its constitution should have been held last May. The bureaucrats responded by demanding that the workers give 125 rupees each to organize a union conference. The CITU joint secretary, Sivakumar, declared, 'If anyone opens their mouth

without giving 125 rupees I will kick you all out and there will be no union election.' He then turned to the SLL supporter and declared, 'It is you who is responsible for instigating all this trouble.' Sivakumar, who is also a leader in the Stalinist CPI(M), then punched the SLL supporter in the face and in menacing tones urged his fellow bureaucrats to 'put him in the auto and take him to our area.' But the crowd of workers stood their ground and the SLL supporter was able to leave with them.

Two days later there was a second altercation between Sivakumar and a group of dissident workers. The CITU official has now filed charges accusing five dissident union members of attempted murder and robbery. The fifth accused is K. Bakraj.

The police have used this incident to mount a terror campaign against the Well-Knit workers. One of the five, Srinivasan, was badly beaten by police from the Tambaram Police Station when he was arrested on the evening of August 9. The following day, police from the same station assaulted a group of workers near the Well-Knit factory, only to find that none of those they attacked even work at the garment factory. Four workers were injured in the assault.

The SLL is rallying support for the Well-Knit workers throughout the working class. It is also urging that messages of protest be sent to the police to protest their treatment of the workers and to demand the dropping of all charges.

Messages should be sent to:
Inspector of Police Sugumaran
Tambaram Police Station
Tambaram, Madras-3
Tamil Nadu, India
and to:
Chief Minister Complaint Cell

Secretariat

Fort. St. George, Madras-9

India

Please send copies to: editor@wsws.org

See Also:

Sri Lankan SEP holds protest to demand release of
Tamil socialists

[21 August 1998]

Crisis in South Asia reflected in Colombo summit

[4 August 1998]



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact