

Government seeks to crush strike of Foxconn workers in India

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The government in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu is seeking, through a combination of mass arrests and intimidation, to crush a strike of thousands of workers at a factory owned by the Taiwan-based Foxconn corporation, the world's largest maker of electronics components.

Defying police repression, thousands of workers have been on strike since September 21 in the industrial city of Sriperumbudur. The more than 7,000 workers at the plant are demanding an increase in wages, increased health benefits, as well as recognition for the trade union Thozilalar Sangam (FITS), which is affiliated with the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Foxconn management, with the full support of the Tamil Nadu state government, has unleashed police attacks against striking workers, including repeated mass detentions. The state government is led by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a coalition partner in the federal United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

The government, the judiciary and the police are working together in order to guarantee cheap labor for capitalist investors like Foxconn.

On October 9 police arrested several hundred Foxconn workers who, in defiance of repeated police attacks, have continued the strike. A total of 319 workers, identified as leading activists, were remanded into judicial custody and transferred to Vellore central jail. Among them are two officials from the Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), affiliated with the CPM.

The remaining few hundred workers not arrested were laid off. When nearly 200 female workers were taken to a local bus stop and asked to leave, they refused and demanded to be arrested. They were abused and pushed off the police vehicle.

After being held for four days in jail, 307 workers

were released on bail on October 13. The remaining 10 workers and two union leaders were framed up on charges and confined to jail. On October 22, those 10 workers and two CITU officials were released on conditional bail. They have to report to the Kanchipuram police station daily.

All those arrested face prosecution under trumped-up charges—damaging company property, defying police orders and preventing police from carrying out their duties. The aim of this witch-hunt is to break the strike, which has now reached its second month. At the same time, through ill treatment, humiliation and intimidation, the government wants to prevent the emergence of similar strike actions and protests in the future.

On October 10, the day after the mass arrests, over 3,000 workers staged protest demonstrations on the streets of Sriperumbudur. They have been staging 'Dharna' (sit in protests) near the District Collectors Office. Police are preventing workers from staging any protests in and around the Foxconn plant.

Foxconn workers are paid 4,800 rupees (\$US106) per month. The workers are demanding a basic pay of 10,000 rupees (\$US221) and other additional bonuses, along with health checks and medical insurance.

Foxconn management has contacted some workers from distant villages who live in the Sriperumbudur area and forced them to report back to work. However, most of them defied that order. Now the factory is staffed partly by workers brought from villages through labor contractors, along with some workers who have given into management threats. However, only a few hundred are working in the factory now. Even the vast majority of the 6,000 contract and trainee workers have joined the strike.

In the face of the determination and militancy of the Foxconn workers fighting for their basic demands, the role of the Stalinist union is to subordinate workers to their opportunist alliances with various reactionary bourgeois parties. The unions are working to prevent a political mobilization of the workers against the government.

The CITU and CP have called for state-wide protests to condemn “the repressive attitude of the government” and “DMK government’s anti-worker policies,” and to demand “immediate release of the arrested leaders and Foxconn workers”. The protests were held on October 21, and were organized along with all other opposition parties in the state, parties that are as committed to an attack on workers as the DMK.

The Stalinists have shown their own commitment to the interests of big business through the record of CPM-led state governments in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. In Tamil Nadu, the Stalinist CPM has swung back and forth in alliance between the two reactionary parties that dominate state politics: the DMK and its bitter rival, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), headed by an actress-turned-politician, Jayalalitha.

The CPM has approached Jayalalitha to mount “joint struggles” on “people’s issues,” despite her rabidly anti-working class record. During her term as chief minister in 2003, Jayalalitha sacked hundreds of thousands of state employees after they struck to demand higher pay and benefits. The CPM is even seeking an electoral bloc with the AIADMK in the upcoming state assembly elections in 2011.

On October 19, CITU General Secretary Tapan Sen sent a letter to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi urging his “effective intervention to resolve the crisis” at Foxconn “in the best interest of the company and its 7,400 workers”. That is, the union leader is appealing to the chief minister of a government that has framed up striking Foxconn workers to intervene in the interest of the company.

For his part, CITU president A.K. Padmanabhan issued an appeal to the DMK government to pass legislation in the forthcoming assembly session, making it mandatory to recognise the trade unions and the rights of the workers to join trade unions. In fact, the principal concern of the CITU lies in its factional battles with rival trade unions, including those aligned

with the DMK.

The unions are working to promote the dangerous illusion that the parties of the ruling class—whether at the state level like the DMK or at the central level like Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA)—can be pressured by workers to give some concessions. Thus, they are working to suppress any independent political struggle of the working class against the government.

The current wave of strikes and protests in India coincides the eruption of working class struggles in France, China, South Africa, the United States and other countries. The resurgence of class struggle has taken an international character.

Hundreds of millions of workers around the world are coming to see the irreconcilable conflict between their own basic needs and the capitalist system. The growth of the class struggle is exposing bourgeois democracy as little more than a fig leaf for the dictatorship of the banks and corporations over economic and political life.

The fight for jobs, decent living standards, housing, education, health care and all other social rights is a political fight against the capitalist state. It is not a matter of pushing the state to the left, reforming it, or replacing one bourgeois government with another, but rather of replacing it, through the revolutionary mobilization of the masses, with a government committed to social ownership of the means of production.



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