

Maruti Suzuki India sacks workers, hires strike breakers

Arun Kumar
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Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) Ltd., country's largest car maker, has intensified its threats against locked-out workers at company's Manesar plant, in northern Indian state of Haryana, and moves for replacing them with strike breakers. The company's aim is to break workers' opposition and force them to sign a 'good conduct bond' dictated by the company.

On Tuesday MSI management dismissed five more workers "on charges of attacking on three supervisors and a worker last Friday" and hired 100 strike breakers to replace workers who have refused to sign the 'good conduct bond'. A First Information Report (FIR) was filed against the dismissed workers at the Manesar Police Station.

An MSI statement issued on Tuesday said: "In the last two days, the company has identified a significant number of eligible and capable people. From among them, the first batch of 100 people has been issued appointment letters today." It stated that MSI will continue to recruit strike breakers in coming days.

Over 3,000 workers have been locked out by the company since August 29, as it tries to force them to sign a "good conduct bond." The bond requires the workers to declare that they would "not resort to go slow, intermittent stoppage of work, stay-in-strike, work-to-rule, sabotage or otherwise indulge in any activity, which would hamper the normal production in the factory".

Wednesday afternoon workers at three factories of two different Suzuki companies located in the same Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt—Suzuki Power train India Ltd and Suzuki Motorcycle India Pvt. Ltd—went

on strike in support of their colleagues at MSI's Manesar plant. Suzuki employs over 2,000 workers at its Manesar plant, where it manufactures diesel engines and transmissions for MSI. Suzuki Motorcycles India has 1,400 workers at its plant near Manesar, producing about 1,200 motorcycles and scooters a day.

Repeating its position, which is backed by the Congress party-led Haryana state government, the company said that it "will not enter into any dialogue with striking workers. It will focus on scaling up production levels by recruiting fresh manpower at Manesar plants."

Last Friday, Haryana Labour Commissioner Satwanti Ahlawat declared the government's support for the company, saying: "Whatever the bond that the management (MSI) is asking its workers to sign is as per rule and workers will have to sign it." She added that the state labour department was telling workers to return to work as soon as possible. On Wednesday, Haryana Labour department criticized MSI workers for not returning to work, threatening that the "problems of workers could worsen" if they continue to abstain from work.

Maruti workers face the threat of losing their jobs and attacks on working conditions and basic democratic rights under the joint onslaught of the company and the government. However, the leaders of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)—to which the workers' newly formed Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU) is affiliated, and which is aligned with the Stalinist Communist Party of India (CPI)—stubbornly refuse any broader mobilization of other workers in

solidarity with locked out MSI workers. Instead they are appealing to the state government to intervene in favour of workers.

Thus, they are trying to spread illusions among the workers on the government and its agencies, which has clearly lined up with the company.

Isolated by the AITUC bureaucracy and under pressure from the employers, over 100 locked-out workers have signed the good conduct bond.

Since imposing the lockout, Maruti Suzuki has dismissed 10 workers, suspended 26 permanent workers and discontinued the services of another 18 trainees on disciplinary grounds. Police complaints have also been lodged against many of the victimized workers. This is on top of dismissals of some two dozen workers in the period between the end of the sit-down strike on June 16 and the imposition of the lockout.

The Manesar plant, located about 30 kilometres from India's capital, New Delhi, employs 3,500 workers. Of these 900, or barely more than a quarter, are "regular" or permanent employees. 1,500 of the workers are designated as trainees and apprentices, and 1,100 are employed on a contract or short-term basis, meaning they have no job security and inferior terms of employment.

It is the AITUC's betrayal of last June's 13-day strike that has emboldened the management to step up its anti-labour offensive. AITUC leaders prevailed on the workers to end their sit-down strike on June 16 as support for their struggle was spreading to other factories in Manesar and the surrounding Gurgaon industrial belt, threatening to unleash a broader movement.

On June 10 thousands of workers from other auto mobile and parts manufacturing companies demonstrated in front of the Maruti Suzuki plant. This outpouring of support prompted the state government to impose a ban on the strike and the Stalinist union officials to enter into frantic talks with government labor department officials and management.

Locked-out MSI workers are disappointed with the Stalinist AITUC leadership's unwillingness to fight for broader defense and solidarity actions. Demands for a general meeting of the union are increasing. However those demands are dismissed with hostility by union leaders, who cynically claim it is not the time for debates.

The Stalinist AITUC and other unions mobilized a few thousand workers from the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt for a protest march to the deputy commissioner's office near Rajiv Chowk last Monday in the old city of Gurgaon.

In a pathetic conciliatory tone, Subhash Diwan, secretary of the AITUC in Gurgaon, said: "We don't want to strike work. We want to work with freedom and not violate the law. The company is forcing us to accept the bond. Indeed, the authorities don't want the factory to run peacefully."

The role of the Stalinist AITUC flows directly from the politics of its allied party, the CPI, which like the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, seeks to politically subjugate the working class to various sections of the bourgeoisie.

If the MSI succeeds in its strike-breaking operations, investors and companies across India would seize on it as a precedent to further attack the workers.



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