

India: Maruti Suzuki and Haryana government mount vendetta against auto workers

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Maruti Suzuki of India (MSI), the Congress Party-led Haryana state government, and its police are mounting a vendetta against the 3,000 workers at the company's Manesar car assembly plant for daring to challenge a brutal work regimen.

Since July 21, India's largest auto maker has locked out the entire workforce at its Manesar plant and MSI Chairman R.C. Bhargava has threatened to shut the facility, which is located about 40 kilometers from New Delhi, permanently. At MSI's behest, police have arrested more than a hundred workers including all the leaders of an independent union the workers established last year in opposition to a company stooge union.

As the pretext for these latest attacks, the company and government are citing a violent altercation that erupted between workers and management on July 18 and ended in the death of a senior manager.

The company has alleged that union leaders planned the altercation and is seeking to have them charged with serious criminal offenses. It has also vowed to be rid of any worker that it says was involved in the July 18 incident.

In fact, as the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously reported, the July 18 altercation was a deliberate management provocation. Company officials suspended a worker after he protested against the abusive casteist remarks of a supervisor. Workers angered by the suspension began to protest, demanding that the supervisor be disciplined instead. While leaders of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU)—the independent union the company has resisted recognizing—were discussing the dispute with management representatives, hundreds of armed company-organized goons brutally attacked the

workers, provoking a major conflict.

During the altercation, the factory premises were set on fire causing damage to a part of the factory and leaving a senior manager charred to death. About 100 people, both workers and management personnel, were injured in the fighting and fire. (See: **India: Maruti Suzuki launches witch-hunt against workers**)

The police were immediately deployed and arrested dozens of workers, including MSWU Organising Secretary Yogesh Kumar. Subsequently, arrest warrants were issued against all the other officers of the MSWU and against other workers named by the company as participants in the altercation.

By August 1, the police had arrested 114 workers, including MSWU President Ram Meher and General Secretary Sarabjit Singh and all the other office bearers in the union.

The Haryana government, which over the past 14 months has staunchly supported MSI, has set up a "special investigation team," headed by an Assistant Commissioner of Police, "to probe the incident," signaling a broadening of the anti-worker witch hunt.

The Congress Party-led state government has also announced the permanent stationing of a special police battalion in Manesar, which is part of a large industrial belt that has repeatedly been the scene of militant worker struggles.

"Our government is pretty clear that any sort of violence in the garb of labour unrest would not be tolerated," declared Haryana's Industries and Commerce Minister Randeep Singh Surjewala. "We have issued a circular to all industries across the state promising safety [and] full support and are ready to go

any length to back industry.”

The Congress Party Minister then went on to specifically praise MSI: “Maruti does follow a good labour management practice. They pay well. Give adequate incentives.”

In reality the company’s brutal practices, including high-line speed and virtually no breaks and its hostility to any voicing of workers’ grievances, have been the source of repeated labour strife.

Haryana police have been deployed at three other Suzuki plants—Suzuki Powertrain India Ltd (SPIL), also located in Manesar, Suzuki Motorcycles India (SMI) at Kherki Daula, and Maruti Suzuki’s plant in Gurgaon. Last year workers at SPIL and SMI joined sympathy strikes in support of their colleagues at MSI’s Manesar plant.

The deployment of police to these plants is aimed at preventing any similar action in support of the now locked out Manesar car assembly plant workers.

Gurgaon District Court imposed Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which bans all gatherings of more than a handful of people, on the Industrial Model Township in Manesar and its surrounding areas to prevent a rally being held on July 25 to mark the Hero Honda workers’ strike of 2005. The ban was also clearly a pre-emptive measure to prevent the voicing of solidarity with the Manesar MSI workers.

During last year’s four-month long union-recognition struggle at MSI’s Manesar plant, the Congress Party state government repeatedly deployed police in support of the company, including both helping it impose a lockout and break a factory occupation. Its labor officials supported the company’s demand that workers sign a company-dictated “good conduct bond” and government ministers blamed the unrest at the Manesar plant on “outside elements” who it claimed wanted to “undermine the state’s economy”.

In a scurrilous attempt to justify its witch-hunt against the Manesar workers and legitimize further reprisals and state repression, MSI has alleged that Naxalites (that is Maoist guerrillas) have been involved in the unrest at the plant. The government has promised to investigate the allegation. A former Indian Home Secretary, G.K. Pillai, told *Economic Times*: “The government has had information that Naxals have been trying to infiltrate labour organisations in urban areas for a while now. That information was passed on to

states, and in some places action was taken.”

Last year the Manesar MSI workers waged a determined struggle against sweatshop conditions, including meager wages, contract labor, authoritarian work-rules and the victimization of militant workers, staging two plant occupations and weeks of strike action. On several occasions their struggle threatened to provoke a wider working class upsurge in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt, one of India’s largest concentrations of factories.

If ultimately the Manesar MSI workers were forced back to work without winning their principal demands, it was because the trade union federations active in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt—especially the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), affiliated to the Stalinist Communist Party of India (CPI), and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the union federation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM—isolated their struggle. The Stalinist-led union federations repeatedly pressured the MSEU to reach a “compromise” with the company and urged the Manesar workers to turn for support not to the working class, but rather to the Congress Party-led state government, its labour officials, and the courts.

The Stalinists continue to play the same treacherous role. Addressing a workers’ gathering in Gurgaon on July 27, CPI parliamentarian and AITUC General Secretary Gurudas Dasgupta demanded a CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) probe into July 18 incident. Similarly, the CITU issued a statement that demanded the government stop the “witch-hunt and terror” of the workers and “institute an independent inquiry” into the July 18 incident. The CPM Punjab State Committee, meanwhile, has demanded the Haryana Labor Minister “give up his anti-worker attitude” and “play his due role in its stead”.

Thus under conditions where the Manesar MSI workers are facing a savage company-state gang-up, the Stalinists are directing them to appeal to the very state and central Congress Party-led governments that have been at the center of this attack.



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