

India: Maruti Suzuki presses ahead with workforce purge

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With the full backing of Haryana's Congress Party-led state government, Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) is pressing ahead with its campaign to purge the workforce at its Manesar car assembly plant and smash the independent union that the workers established last year.

For over a month, 134 MSI Manesar plant workers have been held in jail on frame-up charges arising from a management-provoked altercation on July 18 that led to the death of a senior corporate executive and the injury of dozens of workers. The jailed include the entire leadership of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU), which was formed in opposition to a company-backed stooge union.

Under a massive police gauntlet, Maruti Suzuki lifted its month-long lockout at the Manesar plant August 21. But it allowed only a small portion of more than 3,000 permanent and contract workers to return to work.

In the days preceding its "lifting" of the lockout, India's largest car maker had arbitrarily sacked 546 "permanent" workers, that is more than a third of the plant's 1,500 strong "permanent workforce." And, MSI has announced that starting this week it will screen the almost 1,900 contract workers and expects to purge the majority of them.

In effect, MSI is creating a new workforce at its Manesar plant comprised of the most subservient of the existing permanent and contract workers and new hires.

The new hires are being brought to the plant from out of state, one of the victimized Manesar car assembly workers has informed the *World Socialist Web Site*. The company, which has long sought to use the division between permanent and contract workers to manipulate and subjugate the workforce, no doubt calculates that it will be better able to isolate and control workers who are not native to the region.

Management is well aware that there is widespread support for the victimized MSI workers both from fellow workers in the burgeoning Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt and in the workers' native villages.

When the Manesar plant was reopened last month, MSI Chairman R.C. Bhargava warned that the dismissed workers would seek to convince those who remain employed by MSI to go out on strike and said that the company needed to be prepared to confront further unrest among its workforce.

MSI's attack on the MSWU and its purge of its workforce have been supported in both word and deed by the state's Congress party government, which has repeatedly praised MSI's brutal work regime and blamed the labour strife at the Manesar plant on a covert campaign to undermine investment in the state.

The government and police have invoked management's lies about the July 18 altercation to incarcerate the MSWU leaders and many of the most militant workers and threaten others with similar treatment.

According to the victimized worker interviewed by the WSWS, because of the police witch-hunt, "The workers live in fear and they are scattered. The police are also harassing Maruti workers' families. Many of us don't know what to do. Our leaders are in jail."

He also noted that a key reason MSI was able to impose such a brutal worker regime at the plant was that it could "just ignore or not bother about labour laws, because the government supports the company."

While management claims the union led a violent attack on management personnel, the WSWS has learned from workers at the plant that the altercation was sparked when management disciplined a worker for protesting against a supervisor's casteist remarks. Subsequently company goons set upon the workers for

having stopped work to demand the immediate reinstatement of their victimized workmate.

When local (panchayat) officials sought to raise the issue of the firings at the Manesar plant with Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda last month, he refused to even discuss it. But when Suzuki Motor Corp. Chairman Osamu Suzuki visited New Delhi on Aug. 26, Hooda rushed to meet him. At the conclusion of their meeting, Haryana's Chief Minister pledged fresh state attacks on the Manesar workers, vowing that the state will "punish" those responsible for the July 18 altercation.

The state-corporate witch-hunt of the Manesar MSI is meant to send a message both to the working class—the plant is situated in one of India's largest industrial belts—and to investors. The Congress Party, which leads India's national government, and the Indian state apparatus are determined to forcibly uphold sweatshop conditions and will act as the employers' enforcers in stamping out worker resistance.

If the Manesar MSI workers have been singled out, it is because the plant has been a center of militancy. Last year, they waged a six-month struggle, during which they twice occupied the plant and endured a month-long lockout.

Their determined stand led to sympathy walkouts at other Suzuki and auto-related plants, threatening to give rise to a broader movement of the working class. If this did not happen and the Manesar workers were ultimately corralled back to work without their chief demands being met, it is because the trade union federations active in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt worked to isolate the Manesar workers and politically disarm them. The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), which is affiliated with the Communist Party of India (CPI), and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the union federation of the CPI's sister Stalinist parliamentary party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, were especially active in directing workers to appeal to the Congress state government and its Labour Department to "intervene" on their behalf.

After failing to organize any significant action in support for the Manesar workers in the six weeks since the July 18 altercation, the union federations are now claiming that they are going to take up their cause.

On August 31, leaders of the CITU, the AITUC, the

Congress-affiliated Indian National Trade Union Centre (INTUC) and the "nonpolitical" Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) called a meeting of sacked MSI workers and their families. The meeting formed a 16-member committee comprised of four sacked workers, three workers currently employed at the Manesar plant, and nine trade union representatives with the purported aim of mounting a struggle against the victimizations.

The committee is not proposing, however, any job action in defence of the victimized workers. Rather it is advocating an impotent protest campaign. Moreover, the Stalinist union officials are urging the workers to place their confidence in the reactionary alliance that the CITU and AITUC have formed with the union apparatuses of India's two principal big-business parties, the Congress-affiliated INTUC and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, the union arm of the Hindu supremacist BJP.

"The issue would be raised at the All Indian Convention of Trade Unions September 4 in New Delhi," claimed the Haryana state president of the CITU Satbir Singh. "We will fight legally and through mass struggle."

The victimized worker who spoke with the WSWS said he declined to participate in the committee, because he has no confidence in the official union federations. He said that as a result of the bitter experience the Manesar MSI workers have passed through over the past year and a half, "I have started to understand the pro-management role of the unions. The government, meanwhile, is totally supporting the management. All workers should unite for a common struggle."



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